

# DOKTORI ÉRTEKEZÉS TÉZISEI

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*„The little mirror is broken”*  
**Subject, Language, Remembrance in the Classical  
Hungarian Lyric  
(Vajda, Czóbel, Kosztolányi)**



DE Bölcsészettudományi Kar  
2008

*a. Aim of the dissertation, description of the theme*

The need for rereading and reinterpretation arises at the same time, when the reader tries to place the literature of the second half of the 19th century, and especially the lyrical creations into the horizon of the ever-questioning perception. We immediately run into difficulties, if we try to talk about this time period as a distinct era, as the terms entitling this period given by our literary history writing have not become dominant, the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been mostly referred to as being pre or post compared to something, so we can attempt to deal with the problems of periodization, then after these canonization.

But we not only have to talk of canons and canonization in the horizon of the contemporary (present day) perceiver: the reception of the writings, the interpreting strategy of the transmitting canons and not least the encounter of these two: the most important question will be, if we are able to address the given piece of literature (currently the lyrical writings of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), and if so, which are the questions that could rearrange, or at least start to move the supposedly concrete “system”. At the same time, many elements of this system are part of our own reading experience too, as considering those interpretation strategies is inevitable, which provide the reader with the text, so the usage of the period concept – in the new discourse-order – will be almost inevitable.

However, the discussion of the periodization and canonization makes the application of such recent points of view, which really make the restructuring of the so far developed models possible, inescapable. In my dissertation, I would like to establish new ways, first of all by proposing the problems, questions and possibilities of the subject and individual, referring primarily to the thinkers of the German philosophy and literature history (especially Manfred Frank and Anselm Haverkramp). While summarizing the subject concept of the modern Europe it is worthwhile to think about the theses of Descartes, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, then Foucault, Derrida and Manfred Frank, who – sometimes contradicting, sometimes complementing each other – create the methods and theories, which can help us to understand the texts of the mentioned time period. Though even the number of names show that we do not have an easy task: many questions may arise from many directions, more directions can prove to be correct, and our goal in this case is to find paths, which are – mostly – untrodden, but still effective. So, the subject theory questions lead us to the scattered, never (again) unified subject’s problem, which could have been the most important experience of the era.

For the reader of the present the greatest challenge could be, whether we are able to read this experience of the end of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a dialogue, and accept that peculiar thesis, according to which – I think – the modern human (who we could call modern subject or homo modernis) can only exist in its own tragedy and incomprehensibility from the day of its birth, and by the time we could talk about its era-marking force (generally by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from where we can derive the formation of the classic modernity), it already eliminates itself. The self has to strive for self-definition and self-construction in this slightly schizophrenic state, which is not helped at all by the fact that although from a subject-theory point of view, we can talk about the elimination of the romantic subject at its height, and about the existence of the (maybe pseudo-)modern subject, the periods and period borders have still not marked the place of this approximately forty years in literature history, so we do not have sufficient and certain aspects to grasp the subjects created in the writings of this period. The conceiving as the modulation of late romanticism or early modernism only tries to interpret the texts as compared to something, but for us the real importance could be that they can speak in their own reality, what questions the texts themselves are able to transmit to us, and what could aid us most in understanding these works: how a subject constitutes itself in the world providing it neither with unambiguity, nor certainty.

Further on, we will strain after finding the answers to these questions, and we will examine the different variations of manifestations and reading possibilities of the self in the works of three authors, János Vajda, Minka Czóbel and Dezső Kosztolányi from a postmodern perceptive point of view.

After marking the place of the works of János Vajda in perception-history, addressing and advocating the texts will be drawn into the foreground. One of our most promising aspects could be the examination of the subject of the Gina-poems, which texts grow out of the dynamism of remembrance techniques and own- or self-creating manners of speaking. The works create a female character, which exists in hundreds of forms, is never the same, but still something binds these forms together: the subject remembering them, who recreates himself in the again and again reborn texts. Aside from the act of remembering the texts often contain the metaphor of mirror and reflection so the collapse of the world surrounding the subject is reflected in the “small world”, the individual, and will inevitably lead to its collapse. “The metaphor that distinctively made the modern subjectivity speak, and has given it language is the metaphor of the mirror.” – writes Konersmann in his *Lebendige Spiegel. Die Metapher des Subjekts*. The metaphor of the mirror in Vajda’s poetry becomes one of the

possible representations of the (created) subjects: the narrator of the poems offers his/her own self, soul, eyes, etc. sometimes for the beloved, sometimes for the Sun, so they can catch a glimpse of themselves – *differently*, and from the viewpoint of the pragmatic level, self-interpretation of the writings, this *other image* becomes relevant, or even the truth.

The individual interpretational possibilities of truth and reality offer a new possibility of creating and interpreting the subject: Through the notion of irony, the idea of the world and subject afore believed to be uniform becomes untenable, everything that could be relevant and essential this far will be reinterpreted. In Vajda's analyzed (and many times misunderstood) works (among others *A kárhozat helyén (On the place of damnation)* and the *Alfréd regénye (Alfred's novel)*) we can search for the answers to the questions of how we can live to see the disappearance of romanticism, what opportunities does the "de-romanticized romanticism" offer for the subject, as well as how the irony itself can organize the text itself and the world, the self created in the text.

The chapter concerning about the works of Minka Czóbel discusses similar problems: how the subject spread on grammatical and pragmatic level constitutes the text of the poem and the in it manifested self, and a new question can be added to the ones this far: Can there be a female speaking, female writing, and female reading at all. Examining the highly rich metaphor system of Czóbel too, we find a phenomenon of such oddness that could be really unique in Hungarian literature: the works born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offer valuable answers to the reader awaiting understanding and interpretation approaching from the contemporary questioning horizon. The creation of the subject in Czóbel's works (in poetry as well as lyrical prose) sheds light on the phenomenon of dissemination, which is valid approached from hermeneutics as well as deconstruction and in the meantime can create exciting readings. The Czóbel-texts apart from the odd perception-history open to the rhetoric, psycho-analytic, metaphoric or feministic manner of reading, and these experiments prove that even the writings outside of the canon are able to speak, if our questions are adequate.

Following the phenomenon of self creation and dispersion, we arrive at the next chapter of the thesis, in which the emphasis is on the re-reading of the possibilities lying in one of Dezső Kosztolányi's collections of poems, *A szegény kisgyermek panaszai (The poor child's grievances)*. The child's voice – similar to the phenomenon discussed at Vajda – is on one hand created through the remembrance and recollection, and on the other hand through the tension lying in the space and time between the man's and child's world, more precisely recreated, so generating a really multiple faced and multiple voiced world.

*b. Outlining the applied methods*

In my dissertation, I have relied on multiple trends of literature theory and science: at all times it was important for me that the comprehension and interpretation centered methods of hermeneutics would have a role, which is that they would be able to ask valid questions of the texts (at present we could say that they are old texts), and with this bringing the horizon of the writings closer to the horizon of the perceiver. I have largely relied on the theories of Gadamer, Jauss and Manfred Frank and Anselm Haverkamp, which could constitute the philosophical background of the thesis. Furthermore I have tried to give a role to some phenomena of deconstruction embedded in these theories, while reading I have especially tried to use the possibilities of rhetoric reading. The studies and theories of Paul de Man, Jacques Lacan, Jonathan Culler or Elaine Showtaller were to my help equally in evermore extending the text-worlds, and so making the interpretation game more exciting.

*c. Thesis-like listing of the results*

As could be seen at the raising of the questions, the authors and works of the time period offer the possibility of re-reading for the contemporary reader, and this re-reading could lead to the re-structuring of the canon. I will try to separate not the eras, but the canons from each other, as in my opinion it is more worthy to talk about canons rather than eras from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (especially thanks to the simultaneous unsimultaneousnesses).

The canon discussions can at the same time raise the problems of subject interpretation and creation too, which to rethink is also the duty of the perceiver: the modern subject is not able to interpret him/herself as a whole, as the certainty that could constitute a whole has disappeared. So the self can only be selves, and this experience we must accept as evident, not a defect.

While reading Vajda's works, it shows that we are facing an exceptional phenomenon, as the speakers and created figures of the Gina-poems (or even Gina-novel) exist in the dynamics of the constant recreation and reinterpretation, thus disintegrating the world view of romanticism. Both remembrance technique and rhetoric construction of the texts are irregular, and if we try to read them from the figure of irony, they indeed ask and can take a new place in the Hungarian literature canon.

We can come to similar results when perceiving Minka Czóbel's works too, as one of the (not altogether hidden) goals is to canonize a non-canonical author, naturally through

keeping her works in motion and raising their value. The greatest result is by all means the experience that these writings may be addressed, and may be addressed to speak, moreover with the help of the most varied methods and questioning horizons.

One of our most important questions concerned the establishment of the self: how is an in-text subject able to create himself/herself, in what relations, according to what canons it constitutes, and through this how it separates itself from the ruling compositions or canons of contemporary literature. We could see in both Vajda's and Czóbel's case that the self could not imagine itself as a whole, either the ever divergent force of irony and remembrance makes this impossible, or the pragmatic level itself calls the divergence and collapse forth, or the feminine voice and the silence arising from it makes the self-identity of the subject in the text uncertain, so moving both writers oeuvre further away from the official canons of the era, and becoming almost an in itself closing metaphor.

Dezső Kosztolányi takes his place at the other pole of the canonical order: he does not need to be introduced to the reader, the aim of the thesis is rather the enclosure of an indicated volume to a tradition before the periodical review, the *Nyugat* (*West*), so proving that – in this case – the unified and hypertrophic self is not an absolute ruler among the authors of the *Nyugat*, and divergence is not only the product and experience of the late modernism. The Kosztolányi-works were placed among the classic compositions of the *Nyugat*, so their reinterpretation has not been seen to be relevant. But because of the relocation of poetic functions and identity creating strategies, the need for reinterpreting the classics appears, consequentially these works can be addressed from a different angle, new questions can be asked, and the manner different from the usual can exceptionally differentiate, as every new question can divide the until then steady and unidirectional perception. In the present case it could be surprising that Kosztolányi's lyrical poetry would converse with the works of the authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, moreover not in the usual predecessor-follower context. The already outlined subject-theoretical starting point could designate the direction of our questions, and furthermore divert the Kosztolányi-perception from its current way of viewing, if it wants to interpret certain text as being cusanus and nolanus at the same time: so the language interpreting the subject is not only drawing from the experiences of the classic modernism, but it can also build its speaking from the already established, but its priority only in postmodernism achieving poetic lyre language.

- d. *List of the publications of the author which are in the area of the thesis and which are either under publication or are already published*

Papers:

- *A szubjektum problémája Czóbel Minka lírájában*, Irodalomtörténet, 2000/3., 435-462. (28 lap)
- *A beszéd írhatósága és olvashatósága (Babits Mihály: Beszélgetőfüzetek)*, Szép literatúrai ajándék különszám: „nem használ komolyan semmi, csak rövid időre”, Pécs-Szeged, 2000, 24-30. (7 lap)
- *Barta János és a Vajda-kutatás = Emlékezés a száz éve született Barta Jánosra*, szerk. Imre László és Gönczy Monika, Szenci Molnár Társaság, Budapest, 2003, 63-71. (8 lap)
- *Ha a pókháló szövedéke fölfeslik valahol – Czóbel Minka: Pókhálók*, (az anarcsi Czóbel Minka Emlékezés szerkesztett kiadványa, megjelenés előtt) (12 lap)
- *A mindenható ironia – Alfréd regénye*, a VI. Nemzetközi Hungarológiai Kongresszus szerkesztett kiadványa, megjelenés előtt (12 lap)

OTDK-(National Scientific Student Conference and Competition)-work:

- *A szubjektum problémája Czóbel Minka lírájában*, XXIV. Országos Tudományos Diákköri Konferencia, Pécs, 1999. március 31., Magyar Irodalom tagozat, II. helyezés

Reviews:

- *Műfajok összjátéka (Nyilasy Balázs: A konzervatív–modern költő. Arany János verses epikája)*, Irodalomtörténet, 2001/4, 636-640. (5 lap)
- *Szakíts, ha bírsz! (Szili József: „Légy, ha bírsz, te »világköltő«”)*, Irodalomtörténet, 2002/2, 305-310. (6 lap)
- *Női vonal – Levelek Héra és Aphrodité maszkjában*, A Part, 2006/9. (2 lap)
- *A bűvölet jegyében (Nympholeptusok. Test, kánon, nyelv és költőiség problémái a 18-19. században)*, Alföld, 2006/12, 88-92. (5 lap)

Talks:

- *A beszéd írhatósága és olvashatósága (Babits Mihály: Beszélgetőfüzetek)*, JPTE által szervezett konferencia: „Nem használ komolyan semmi, csak rövid időre”, Sellye, 1999. július 28-augusztus 1.
- *A szubjektum problémája Czóbel Minka lírájában*, Eötvös Konferencia, Budapest, 2000. március 24-26.

- *Barta János és a Vajda-kutatás*, Barta János konferencia, Debrecen, 2001. október 3.
- *Az emlékezetben megteremtődő szubjektum (Vajda János költészete)*, Fiatal tudósok fóruma, DAB-székház, Debrecen, 2002. december. 10.
- *Az irónia identitásképző szerepe Vajda János műveiben*, VI. Nemzetközi Hungarológiai Kongresszus, Debrecen, 2006. augusztus 21-26.
- *Az emlékezés magánya – Czóbel Minka prózája*, Czóbel Minka Emlékülés, Anarcs, 2007. április 14.