

THESES OF PhD DISSERTATION

SOÓS SÁNDORNÉ

„fonjunk rózsafüzért szép Üdvözetébül”

The Rosary-prayer and Rosary Inspired Poems in 19-21st Century
Hungarian Literature

UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN FACULTY OF ARTS

2008

I. Subject of the Dissertation

The prayer literature of the Catholic Church is a part of Hungarian literature, that has played an important role in the cultural history of the country, though it hasn't been a frequented topic of research work yet. The studies of the Rosary-prayer are rare and its scattering throughout the country hasn't been investigated either. We haven't got full results here, even the theological literature on the prayer is rather poor in Hungarian. The aim of the dissertation is to follow the history of the Rosary-prayer from its beginning in the 16th century and especially from the 1880s to our days. The dissertation tries to clear up the contact among the genre of the traditional Rosary texts that break down the structure of the prayer, forms that occur in pulp literature, religious literature, literary paraphrases and texts that have got back into religious practice.

The Rosary is a type of adoration, the history of which goes back several centuries, and its use, function, features which are reflected in its traditional structure can't be regarded separately from the prayer practice of the Catholic Church. Prayers of Biblical origin (The Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary) give a frame to the contemplations about the life, suffering and resurrection of Christ in about one sentence each.

This traditional type of prayer had developed for several centuries and the reverence to the Virgin Mary that came to life in the 12th century contributed significantly to its getting around quickly. At the inspiration of religious orders it became part of the religious practice of the individual and of the community as well. The use of the Rosary was supported by the Church as it didn't only show the reverence for the Holy Virgin but showed the right way to it too. It focused on Christ by using the great events of history of Salvation and Redemption from a historical and eschatological aspect, and called for repentance and conversion.

In order to help to get nearer to the secrets of the Rosary-prayer contemplations and breathed prayers were added to the „secrets” from the earliest times on. The additions broke down the strictly bound form of the prayer and as a consequence of it, several variations of the basic prayer were written.

Later on several other types of Rosary-prayers appeared always according to the need of the given community. In these new variations the structure of the original prayer is the same. However, new content is added. From the second part of the 19th century on Rosary Associations were organized, and thus local worship was given new frames. Several very richly varied rosary-texts with songs and contemplations were constructed in these associations. These texts are special variations of the original Rosary and show that if the community wishes, a prayer can always be renewed.

The Rosary-prayer popularized by the Church in several ways became the pattern of genre for religious literature in different periods. Imitation of the text of the Rosary always meant the conservation and creation of values in devotional literature from the 1880s on. At the same time it kept on the reverence to the Holy Virgin and helped to create community as well. Poems that spoke about the teaching and tradition of the Church gave religious Catholic readers the possibility of belonging to the community. These texts are either partly or fully paraphrased versions of the Rosary-prayer transmitting its content sometimes even literally quoting it. They can be called Rosary-poems, though this term isn't known in literature and it doesn't refer to literary genre either. It refers to texts that can be connected to the Rosary-prayer or to each other from the point of view of content, topic, function and form. With regard to all these, we feel to be entitled to speak about a canon from this aspect, referring to the period that had started in the 1880s because these texts got a special respect among religious literary pieces representing the faith of the community and the values the community observed. They were patterns and measures for one another as well, and the common background of the texts made their interpretation easy. For the authors and interpreters, and for the people they were addressed to the value of the text and its estimation was the same as they were all members of the same religious group. The time when these poems were written is important too, as it was a period when Rosary Associations flourished supported by the Church which resulted in those approximately 130 poems that were published in 60 volumes of the religious periodical *Queen of the Most Sacred Rosary – Queen of the Rosary* in 1885-1944.

The birth of Rosary paraphrases in religious literature is in connection with the activity of Rosary Associations in the given period. It urged for participation in Christian public life and its press. The poems in this study served this aim as the Rosary-prayer gave form to the actual message and the intention that aimed to get the spiritual content nearer to people thus helping them in identification and imitation. Rosary inspired poetry made it possible to set up parallels between the ideal of the Gospel and that of the personal sphere on one side and that of the community and nation on the other, radiating spiritual and moral energies in critical periods during the 18-20th centuries of Hungarian history a time of ideological pluralization and secularisation.

Rosary-prayer gave inspiration to lots of writings of high aesthetic value along the history of our 20th century literature. The prayer itself is a means of religious contemplation and some poems of the worship poetry became part of religious practice too. Anyway, individually toned poems that otherwise enrich literature didn't have the same role, though

their effect on several people was a call for conversion. It is proved that in modern literature the theme of „sacred”, the genre, the tone and form can inspire profanization, language games, and in extreme cases even ironical imitation. No religious thought can be found in these new texts, even the original one gets a basically different interpretation. This means that the connection to the sacred text is replaced by variations of deformity.

In this dissertation the texts are generally interpreted on the basis of their connection with the content, structure, motives and genre of the traditional Rosary. Elements of the poem and its relation to the Rosary and connections among the poems are analysed. Elements of content, structure, and motives of a net of relations were collected, ones that summarize the most essential features in the development of the Rosary-prayer and thus clarify the interesting relationship between constancy and variability. I tried to show how the ecclesiastic genre of the sacred text can become in several cases an inspiring pattern even in 20th and 21st century Hungarian literature.

I didn't attempt complex analysis. Fundamental analyses were written about poems, the poems of „secrets” which could be studied from many different aspects at the same time. Most of the dissertation contains independent and individual thoughts according to the original aims.

The theme of my investigations and the period dealt with is Hungarian literature of the last third of the 19th century and the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The poems inspired by the Rosary in the period were published - with the exception of pulp literature – from 1885 on in a periodical edited by the Dominican Order under the title *Queen of the Most Sacred Rosary*. Between 1909 and 1944 the title was *Queen of the Rosary*. I thought it important to introduce authors, editorial ambitions, the background of these writings, and I had to refer to their diversity and their acceptance too. There are approximately 150 Rosary paraphrases discussed in this dissertation among them pieces of worship literature and poetry. It seemed to be a very promising task to clarify the connections among the prayer and its paraphrases in religious literature, prayers in pulp literature, and texts in poetry. It was interesting to see what influences the text that had been a standard during centuries had and still has, and how the world-concept of our time, the change in our contact towards the sacred (God and the Holy Virgin) is reflected even if in the phenomenon of deformity.

II. Methods Used in the Dissertation

The four types of interpretation, though rather difficult to distinguish can be used in our case too. From the historical point of view we must find the answer to the question who these texts were written for. In most cases Christians – Catholics were addressed first, the texts were written in order to console and to teach them. Actualities and the sacred content are bound together in them because the poems had their political and social background and questions of a given period can be answered only on the basis of faith. Most of the poems were written in the first four decades of the 20th century, a period full of crises in Hungarian history, the time of secularization when religious values were questioned and secular culture spread. As a consequence of this poems are strongly didactic because the intention of transmitting the message of the Gospel in a clear and simple way was dominant. The second way of interpretation is that of ecclesiastical history. This stresses the importance of the faith in Mary standing beside Jesus Christ who is the centre of history. The reverence towards her has always been present in the history of the Church. The destiny of the Church is the destiny of Christianity as well. Joyful, painful and glorious ages follow each other till the End of Times, just like in the life of Christ and that of humans too. Poems of „secrets” born at the inspiration of items of the Rosary-prayer reflect the relationship between the two. The third – escatologic – interpretation looks upon community, individual and the universe as if from the aspect of the Last Times that effect our deeds as well as our hope for the future. From the point of view of this spirituality it is very important that man who has been offered eternal salvation should agree to build the Kingdom of God here and now with all the love he has facing sin and damnation at the same time. Regarding this we must realize that the Rosary-prayer is preparing us in an active and contemplative way for this. The poems inspired by the prayer help us remember the Kingdom and man’s God-seeking vocation in serving his fellow-men, the order of things that comes from God and the joys and pains of life as it is revealed in the mystery of the Last Times. The fourth spiritual dimension reflects the historical present, our meeting the Gospel in the actual contact of man and God. The most important feature of Christ-centered Christian spirituality is shown the way we realize that everybody has to take part in God’s anxiety and care for man every day. It means active, self-sacrificing love in all territories of life. Its message is that art and poetry are a way of service, something that has nothing to do with human performance, it is a selfless reflection on God’s calling us. In poems inspired by the Rosary we meet joys, pains and struggles of man seeking God. They are examples of faith – sometimes the struggle for faith.

Beside literary aspects in cases of Rosary paraphrases theological ones are especially important as the prayer and other sacred texts that appear on a motivic-structural-rhetorical level point out the spiritual-mental surroundings of the literary pieces that depict the context of a background reality which contains the roots of authentic interpretation of the text.

The contemporary poetic context and horizon of the actual writings and their relation to the national canon must be taken into consideration too. Beside them there are other canons chosen by other communities in use too, to which other authors, writings, genres belong. It seems that Rosary inspired poems that were used by religious associations and by the Church show the features of a canon and were a measure in the Catholic literature of the first half of the 20th century. This was a kind of pre-determinedness that had meant acceptance and criticism at the same time. It seemed to be important to show what effect the life and social position of the writer had on the reception of a writing and through that on the opinion of the addressed, that is to say how the relation of real value and the prestige of the writing could be defined. In most poems the religious and moral message are stressed compared to form, and thus literary clichés and style of low standard appear. Differences in opinion about this had started a debate that concerned the basic questions of Catholic literature. The main point of this problem had to be discussed in the dissertation too.

Summarising the above written it must be stated that the threefold relationship of genre, age and tradition are as important as their interpretative horizon and aesthetic context are. On the other hand definition of what genre the given text belongs to is indispensable as different expectations can be raised in cases of different genres. Neither can a literary piece be interpreted independently from the content and surroundings of its being written. Another indispensable aspect is the author's intention and aims because they are determined by the writer's personality, his view of life and social position. As the cult of Rosary is strongly bound to contemporary tradition, answers must be found to the question how writers who wrote their poems inspired by the prayer interpreted the Rosary themselves. There were – and there still are – individuals and communities who accepted and followed the theological content of the prayer, but there are examples where the sacred text is used only for producing deformity or for purposes that tend to confront conventions.

Repeating the text or its motivic or structural elements in different ways is a question of paraphrasing it. Different forms of paraphrasing have always been characteristic to poetry though they had different roles in different ages. In most of the poems studied in this dissertation the paraphrasing of the prayer means adherence to tradition, it means recomposition of long forgotten truths in the sense of the Greek word *aletheia*, and is a way of

treasuring and creating value. In poems of „secrets” evangelical sentences concerning Redemption are stressed in order to help people get nearer to the mystery.

It is rather interesting what the intention of the poet was in choosing parts or motives of Rosary texts. It is possible that the sacred and structurally bound text expresses the author's respect and by the traditional Rosary fragment which is in transtextual connection with the supertext the poem will be filled with sacred, religious content. On the other hand the supertext may create such a context for the liturgical and sacred fragment of the prayer that deforms its dominant sacred features. Sometimes it even occurs that the prayer is transcribed, its message is turned into the opposite. As a result of it the poem that has been deprived of its sacred surplus is turned against the original source expressing opposition to Transcendence. In the literature of the end of the 20th century we can find some examples that belong to the above category. These are poems in which connection to texts that had been a measure before is changed for the intention of deforming the original message.

III. Theses of the Dissertation

1. In our 20th century literature the reception of several genres of Hungarian spiritual literature was pushed into the background. The Rosary-prayer and its paraphrases together with literary pieces published in periodicals of religious associations belong to this group. The dissertation tries to focus on this subject.
2. The complexity of the theme the strength the creative power of the prayer has in creating culture made it necessary to involve aspects of theology, ethnography, history of art and linguistics too. I didn't intend to write a detailed history of prayer, but the far-reaching part of the introduction on history of culture and spirituality is necessary because without knowing anything about the role of the Rosary in Catholic religious life the symbols, images and references of the poems can't be understood. That's why the first part of the essay deals with the beginning and the most important parts in the history of the Rosary with the help of the bibliography in Hungarian and German in a summarized form.
3. Following the genesis and spreading of the Rosary in Hungary was necessary from the point of view of lots of references to cultural and spiritual history that occur in the poems.
4. A great part of the dissertation deals mainly with the relationship between the Rosary supertexts and traditional prayers. This relationship has several interesting points. The adoption of complex structures (elements like symbols, bound structure, threefold items) usually means closer relationship to the prayer-text that serves as a standard and explains

similarities as well. There are examples that show that not only some supertexts serve as patterns for those that are inspired by them, transcripts are written rather weak imitations too.

The poems analysed in the dissertation belong to two different groups. There are Rosary-poems in the strict sense which means that they have preserved essential features of content, language, rethoric, motives and the bound features of the genre (3x5 secrets referring to the New Testament, built into 3x10 Hail Mary-s, divided by the Lord's Prayer). The structure of the text that have been approved of by the Church for centuries appears in several varied forms: the number of stanzas (3,5,15) and their thematical grouping (3x5 groups), the arrangement of them, the visual form of the text, (the way the threefoldness appears in it) are all imitations of the structure accepted by the Church. In Rosary-poems the prayer-frame is usually left. Prayer-texts that would be the background contemplation aren't there either, only references to them are present. There are those ones among Rosary-poems that speak about „secrets”. They reveal or explain a secret or a group of secrets, and teach the truth hidden in them. There are lots of examples for image-like free composition and for several forms of paraphrasing here. As for genre, poems can be prayers, hymns, songs or lyrical images. Among writings on secrets that help contemplation we find epics, epical poems or even ones that were dramatized and transcribed for the stage. I have payed special attention to giving detailed description of stylistic solutions and methods as these are determined by practical aim, effect and intention. Features that always reoccur are the teaching intention, demonstrative description and comparing characterisation of time and values. The texts are organised by symbols on different levels.: the rose-motif, colours (white, red, gold), numbers (3,5,15); they may stand independently but more often they are generally present in the whole text.

There is a great number of Rosary inspired poems which aren't so very strictly bound to the structure of the prayer. The speciality of these poems is given by adoption of some elements or motives of the religious atmosphere. They form a synthesis between two paralels: The first pair is between the personal and the evangelical, the second between the evangelical and the patriotic (this one includes community too). It is suggested that the personal sphere and that of community can be regarded, understood and interpreted best from a transcendental view.

There are several forms of relationship between the achitext and the supertexts. The architext can be a source of inspiring thoughts and can refer to genre too. Some motives, elements of the text of the Rosary-prayer can be built into the new text where it serves usually as a code that refers to the original in the background. It may become the theme of the new text or it may be an organic, montage-like part of it. Its features can appear in semantical, pragmatial,

structural, grammatical and stylistic levels. Its effects may reach out to the whole of the new text or can just touch some parts of it and appear on the above mentioned levels. On analysing the poems I refer to these aspects too. The way Rosary-texts are written is characterised by Gérard Genette's categories from the point of view of intertextuality.

Even modern man who lives in the 20th century among rather static metaphysical surroundings is the heir of the very prolific Christian-Catholic tradition. The paraphrases of other sacred texts known in the Christian world (The Lord's Prayer, Credo, Te Deum, Hail Mary) occur much more frequently in in works of our poets than paraphrases of the bound form of the Rosary. Among those texts that imitate the Rosary we can find some poems that have high aesthetic values. In this dissertation these are discussed from the point of view of their very rich relationship to the prayer.

5. The dissertation discovers the dynamic relationship among different types of texts: among the sacred genre, texts that loosen the strictly formed structure of the prayer, pulp literature, religious literature, literary paraphrases and texts that have got back into religious practice.

IV. Publications on the Subject of the Dissertation

1. A ferences források pedagógiai vonatkozásai. Vác, 2006. 91.
2. Assisi Szent Ferenc és a kereszt. In: „Te vagy a szépség...” Ferences lelkiesség – ferences örökség. Tanulmányok. Vác, 2006. 1-32.
3. A rózsafüzér imádsága és rózsafüzéres versek a XIX-XXI. századi magyar irodalomban. Megjelenik az Apor Vilmos Katolikus Főiskola kiadványaként 2009 tavaszán. 200.