

THESES OF A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Nemes Rita

MODERN DRAMATIC HUNGARIAN TEXT PATTERNS

University of Debrecen

Programme of Hungarian and comparative letters

**Auxiliary programme of the literature of beyond the borders and the newest
Hungarian literature**

I. Objectives of the dissertation, definition of the subject matter

Despite the attacks against theoretical literature, this dissertation attempts to elaborate a newer terminology of drama theory, because it seems to be necessary to apply the modifying theatrical discussion for the analyses of modern Hungarian plays with recent dramaturgy. The results of dramatics, which has been existing as an individual discipline for not very long, transform text-reading methods. The simultaneous appearance of different points of view, that is to say, the extinction of the constant borderline between the text and the performance, and the theory and the history of dramatics or the theatre, broadens the horizon of interpretation.

The examination aiming at dramaturgic changes and at the methods for structuring texts raises the following questions:

- How can dramatic character be qualified?
- What term can substitute for the category of drama, in order that the interpretation opportunities can be enlarged, and theatrical reading can be realised in the texts?
- A dictionary of which theoretical bases is suitable for describing the dramatic character and the dramaturgic solutions of the texts?
- How can text patterns be generated in a modernity, which moves in the attraction of grotesque and absurd?
- What drama traditions do the plays take from, which they also destroy at the same time?

The birth of the literature of the new linguistic behaviour can be set to the examined period of time. The start is the middle of the sixties, where, partly upon the influence of a freer view on world literature (when, for example, the periodical “Nagyvilág” publishes plays called absurd one after the other) there is a change in Hungarian cultural life. The start of the eighties, the change of modern and post-modern means the closing. The turn of dramatic modernity into post-modern shows and interval where the ways of viewing and speaking transform.

In the focus of this dissertation, there are plays, which constitute models with their recent dramaturgy, thus, which present the innovative elements of dramatic modernity:

- Örkény István: *Tóték, Macskajáték, Vérrokonok, Kulcskeresők, Pisti a vérzivatarban*
- Páskándi Géza: *Haljon meg bután, Önkéntes tűzoltók, Őszinte pillanat, Külső zajok, A bosszúálló, Az ügy, Kalauz nélkül, A sor, Vendégség, Tornyot választok, A rejtekhely, Távollévők, A haladék*

- Sütő András: *Egy lócsiszár virágvasárnapja, Csillag a máglyán, Káin és Ábel, A szuzai menyegző*
- Csurka István: *Szájhős, Ki lesz a bálánya?, Deficit, Döglött aknák, Versenynap, Házmestersirató*
- Spiró György: *Hannibál, Balassi Menyhárt, Káro király, Kőszegők, A békecsászár*
- Nádas Péter: *Takarítás, Találkozás, Temetés*

The limit points of the examination are the plays of Örkény and Nádas. There is a bibliography of library-volume, which covers the topics of the absurd and the grotesque, but its dramaturgic comparison is pushed to the background. Besides the differences between the dramaturgy of the grotesque and the absurd, there are also important parallelisms:

- The personality is decomposed by the loss of self-identity and the result is deficit.
- The transmitting strength of language becomes questionable and the limits of governability of the language become conscious.
- The larger association-space results in a closed situation.
- The traditional management of space and time is modified; the space-time is generated, which is compacted like a film and which allows sudden leaps.
- The value of action becomes equal to the value of manifestation.
- Objects and vegetative functions become stressed. Objects may transform depending on the perspective, thus, they can be alienating, the resources of humour, or just deadly frightening. Speech is mainly around biological needs (metabolic processes, sexuality).

The first night of *Tóték* in 1967 shows the grotesque as an epoch-making dramaturgy. The modern Hungarian dramaturgic efforts may not be limited to the interpretation horizon of the grotesque, but they undoubtedly result in recent dramaturgy by evoking the interplay of tragedy and comedy.

Thus, the basic objective of this dissertation is to set up paradigms by reading dramatic texts at the same time, which can be marked as the dramaturgic versions of the grotesque. The lack of panorama-like presentation comes from the set interpretation position, thus, all the authors of the period in question and the whole life work can not be found in this dissertation.

II. The structure of the dissertation

The opening chapter contains the set objectives, the questions in connection with them and the theoretical and historical summary.

In the next six chapters texts, which focus on dramaturgy, are analysed.

- The dramaturgy of grotesque
- The dramaturgy of absurdity
- The dramaturgy of biblical grotesque
- The dramaturgy of analytical grotesque
- The dramaturgy of meta-historical grotesque
- The dramaturgy of agnostic grotesque

The further six chapters follow again the set corpus to the end from the point of view of the relationship between the language and the personality.

- Multiplication, re-interpretation, self-sacrifice in Örkény István's grotesque-dramatic texts
- The role constraint in Páskándi Géza's absurdity dramatic texts
- The behaviour constraint of fate-undertaking in Sütő András's dramatic texts
- The supplementary action, the self-destruction, the self-surrender (self-selling) in Csurka István's dramatic texts
- The puppet-changes in Spiró György's dramatic texts
- Part-changing, part-losing (part-mistake) in Nádas Péter's dramatic texts

The closing chapter elucidates the process in how the Pirandello-like "theatre in the theatre" configuration transforms into the post-modern situation of "theatre

about the theatre”, that is to say from the time when stories can not be told, but text mosaics answer to the functioning of theatricality. The dramatic modernity supposes the series of games coupled back by the closing to the start of the play yet, and under post-modern thinking the end as the experience of the start refers to the unresolvability from the game.

III. The theoretical background of the research

For avoiding the paradox of the un-dramatic drama it is inevitable to think over again drama poetic systems. Acknowledged theoreticians have talked about the crisis of drama from the separation of action and personality. The fading of the borders of personality and the dilemma of action moving start clichés, which emit the fragmentation into epic and lyricism. The crisis, the end, the revival, the fixation of saving attempts can be prevented if not the accountability of the traditional genre characteristics of the drama is expected.

The dramatic text, which replaces the uniform notion of drama, depends on the usage.

The pre-conditions of characterising modern dramatic texts are categories where the system of relations receives an accentuated role. The texts, for their functioning as dramatic, must contain the quality of being made dialogical. That is why the re-interpreted categories of Name and Dialogue can be found in the questions asked from the texts. The Name, which is the speaker of the Dialogue, is who is just manifesting itself. In plays with recent dramaturgy naming is based on states and functions, thus, there are identical denominations, or, the Names can be exchanged with each other. And texts showing various behaviour forms may belong to one Name. It is against the unanimous identification that the motivation, which can be concluded from the personalities, is supplemented by the linguistic action, which is realised by an associative way of speaking. The Dialogue is the diverging talk, which is connected to the Name.

The character bedded into the tradition of drama justifies the contemplation of literary history, as tracking. From the point of view of the objectives of the dissertation it is a basic question how the dramaturgic changes, which start from avant-garde, can be set off in their dramatic modernity. This is because, in spite of its peripheral character, the classical Hungarian avant-garde has procedures, which also affect late modernity:

- The increasing of the transformation ability of the role (player)-construction.
- The playing of archetypal puppets, or moving the players like puppets.
- The repeated appearance of fiction.
- The fragmented structure, which gains space by applying the non-cause-consequence logic of the dream and / or the wonder.
- The effect of the special attention towards the sight of the performance on the forming of the text.
- The questioning of the idea of the unique completeness of meaning.
- The fact that self-reflexive text forming becomes characteristic.

The grotesque mainly receives a new drive by the transfer of Polish cultural tradition, which accepts the avant-garde. As a result of this, the dissertation provides the schematic presentation of the evolution of Polish mythological theatre by looking for the possible points of connections. The expressionism also fits the main line of the German literature; thus the alienating effects can rest on the technical innovations of the avant-garde. The epic theatre of Brecht, which provides an alternative against contradiction and the perspective-less empathy, can only bring late aspectual and dramaturgic breakthrough mainly because of the unrecognised status of Hungarian avant-garde dramaturgic trials. Some characteristics are inherited into dramatic modernity, however:

- The rhythmical repetition of senseless words, syllables and rhyming verses and songs take over the function of the songs of Brecht.

- Manipulators also play the part of the narrator, they are the executors of (re)interpretation.
- Leaps and lacks interrupt the linear flow of the game.
- The activity of the receiver becomes part of meaning making.

IV. The list of research results

The plays with recent dramaturgy of the dramatic modernity can hardly meet the traditional expectations of the drama. The irreversible transformation of poetic formation can be undoubtedly tracked in the corpus limited from the plays of Örkény to the plays of Nádas. Individual and changing receiver-expectations and interpretation mechanisms may make the new norm creation problematic, but it is, however, the habit-system of the reader that qualifies the texts. Thus, theory focuses on the habit-system, the characterisation of dramatic quality, which is just the consequence of historicity, but which is also considered as a task to be realised, or, they are what theory generates. The dramatic quality is the advanced and (re/de)constructed way of interpretation of the texts. By using the category of dramatic text the theatrical aspect can also be involved into the interpretation.

The characterisation of dramatic quality by the dialogue-making character provides opportunities to form dramatic text patterns. Instead of focussing on the conflict, the flow of actions, the reading of dramatic texts concentrates on the specific way of speaking. The analyses applying the shapes of the Name and the Dialogue visualise the functioning of kinds of dramaturgy. Linguistic constructions replace the individual. The action of Names, that is to say, the interaction, which takes place in the Dialogues, can be considered as the variant of the action.

The grotesque is undoubtedly a very complex phenomenon: it is an aspect, , a style, a tendency, a genre, and it is also dramaturgy at Örkény. The dramaturgy of the grotesque considerably modifies the scenic habitude of the dramatic texts,

because it codes the opportunity of the open and mutual evolution of the meaning in advance.

The grotesque dramatic texts are tragifarces, that is to say, they turn the tragic and the comic quality by *spät* into each other. The continuous changes of aspect make the play unfinished (interminable), and give way to concentric reading.

Several metaphorically named techniques can be built into the recent kinds of dramaturgy:

- one-minute
- mosaic
- stations
- trick
- track
- idea
- puppet
- lack
- epic
- poetic

The most important characteristics of the modern Hungarian dramatic text patterns:

- **Örkény István** defines the essence of **grotesque** as the scene that can be seen if we look back between the two legs in straddle-stand. The grotesque dramatic texts evolve and turn over an arche-situation into various aspects. They are generally distributed into two parts, the sequence of which makes the colour-change much sharper. Walking around the basic situation can bring to the end-point, but to the restart, actually. The concentric structure shapes the arena of the canvas-opera, the self-introductions and the clown-freaks can also be

interpreted as canvas-opera stunts, they start by the easiest exercise by following the enhancing order of the scenes, and they go towards the most difficult trial, while the grotesque offers the same aspect as the role-player who turns pin-wheels. The scenes are played in the stiffened and extended moments of space-time. The fact that the oppositions, which can be imagined in one relation, turn up in pairs of players, however, by a constantly changing composition, defines the construction of situations.

Multiplication, re-interpretation, self-surrender come from the lack of self-identity, the permutability and the possibility of substitution. The position of “the man does not equal to his value but he equals to what he can do” even provides the opportunity of acting and choosing when it is already senseless. The reduction of manifestations into commonplaces actualises the ambiguity of evidences and shows that can not be got used to in the routine.

- The **absurdity** applies double inversion, differently from the grotesque: it parodies both tragic and comic elements because of the faulty relation to time on the inverted horizon. In the absurd dramatic texts of **Páskándi Géza** an absurdity is presented by the basic situation, then it turns to its reverse side. The plays with multiple starting end by repeating frame-like a game. Time-leaps enlarge and stylise the closed space. The character above time is alloyed with bonding to the historical moment of time in question, simultaneous and chronological orders appear at the same time. The literary or historical discussion (polemics) form results in the conflict of players, who represent the same matter, but are in contradictory situations, but who can be interchanged because of their same behaviour.

The **constraint of role** defines a position, but it makes the undertaking of the behaviour accompanying this eligible. While playing for prolongation, man is worth as much as he risks. When talking about

something that is not named (that can not be named) the rule of survival is stressing what has been invented instead of the first thought.

- The **biblical grotesque** applies the double vision of Örkény, burlesque elements, but paradoxes are evolved by a sacred phraseology, citations from the Bible are mentioned as arguments, which support controversial statements. The dramatic texts of **Sütő András** provide interpretation alternatives by analogies with the different biblical text explanations, which were born in the period of polemics. The dramaturgic characteristic of the biblical grotesque is the insertion of a prelude or a narrator voice, and if it is missing, the exposition of the first act receives a projecting, commenting function, which potentially contains all the later actions until the anagnorisis. But the hazards, which become inevitable, evolve delayed from basic situations of model-like density, and the chance of the advantageous solution remains for a long time. The closing, which affects against the resolution, is characteristic, which further circulates the contradiction. The quality of the chronicler is unsettled by the leaps in space and time because the moments of time intervals, which are even worth epic, and which bring behaviour changes, can only be digested. The brothers (brethren) struggle for their common matter as one another's oppositionists.

The **behaviour constraint of undertaking the fate** is generated in determined situations. The man is worth as much as his absence is missed. The expressions, which become commonplaces, the saint citations interlacing into litanies, are the asylum of utterance by their quality above personality.

- The dramatic texts of **Csurka István** supplement the grotesque of Örkény by an analytical method. The retrospective quality inset into

immoderately played relation games shows the necessity of repetition. The players talk about the past, while they game away their last chances. The dramaturgy of **analytical grotesque** visualises also the invert of the starting situation, but by a delay, which encourage the twists of gambling. The change of aspects is a happening, which is left to the intervals between the acts. The theatrical run-out couples back to the impressive *in medias res* start. In the prison-like narrow space the players define their own time for themselves. Within the four-people-groups the contradiction games played in pairs accentuate the situations. The interchange of the struggling parties makes the duels complex plots. The selections of “serious” and “hollow” manifestations are similar to the radio programmes, which mix classical music with operettas.

In gambling, where life is at stake, there is **supplementary action, self-destruction and self-surrender (self-selling)**. The man is not worth as much as he could be. In the games, which are based on delusion and chance, the participants apply double eloquence.

- The characteristic of **meta-historical grotesque** is that the aspect changes between the various aspects of the “big mechanism”. The totality of the principle of the Evil creates a meta-historical surface. **Spiró György** takes the luridity and monumentality from operas for his meta-historical grotesque dramatic texts. The basic situation is not like a point, but it is the part of an endless series of movements where what will happen can be predicted, but its way remains hidden, and the tug of war is also jumped. The frequent changes of spots make the passing time, the fate spectacular. In fights similar to cat and mouse games the “brother-like” friends with the same logic are compelled to contradicting positions. The loser and the winner are categories, which can be played into each other, only the risk (gambling) is sure.

During **puppet changes** the victim can resurrect in its counterpart as the delusion of the death. The man is worth as much as can be won by his betrayal (by that he is betrayed). The way of speaking invokes opera librettos, where banality is so sophisticated that it already becomes evidence, but it does not become unambiguous at all.

- The redemption is generally brought by acknowledging, the gnosis. The starting point of the **agnostic grotesque** is the certainty of the lack of knowledge. **Nádas Péter** clears the agnostic way by the grotesque reflex, because the story of origin can not be searched. His basic situations, where everything has already been played, evoke Passion plays where what can be expected, must happen, in a predictable way, that is to say, the death. But the language resembling to operas or ballets also allows the supervention of *deus ex machina*. The play is always regularly incessant, but the composition part of the text is the interval in the theatre, which prepares the ritual turn. The peak, which seems that it can not be keyed up any more, turns out not to be the end, but it is the start of a newer, endlessly long waiting. The time co-ordinates provide the measurable passing of time by a length of a different dimension. The players are closed into an unchanging space as manlike and womanlike principles.

As a result of **the change of parts, the loss (mistake) of parts**, the players dissolve into one another or they are equal to a life-size picture or puppet. The man is worth as much as he can reach by his movements. The statements have already been uttered in mythical contexts, which they refer back, but at the same time, they are the tools of forgetting or delaying the utterance. But the lacks of texts, silences are more emphatic.

V. Publications from the topics of the dissertation

- A színház mint vigasz, Alföld 1998/9. 108-111. (The theatre, as comfort)
- Mentsük a menthetőt?!, Hítel 1999/2. 95-102. (Should we save that can be saved?)
- A szavak varázsa, Hítel 1999/11. 101-104. (The wonder of words)
- Vitairatok a Romlás ellenében, Hítel 2000/10. 101-108. (Pamphlets against the Decay)
- A sorsvállalás magatartáskényszere Sütő András dramatikus szövegeiben, (The constraint of undertaking the fate in the dramatic texts of Sütő András)
Hítel 2002/6. 30-41.
- A biblikus groteszk dramaturgiája, Tiszatáj 2002/7. 66-76. (The dramaturgy of the biblical grotesque)