

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LITERARY STUDIES

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INTERTEXTUAL CONNECTIONS IN THE PLAYS
BY SÁNDOR WEÖRES

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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1.

The Hungarian literary history considers Sándor Weöres (1913-1989) as one of the most outstanding Hungarian poets, however, he also wrote several plays which were first collected in a volume in 1983. Another collection of his plays was published in 2005 which contains a number of other dramatic texts, plans and synopses which have not been examined yet, hence I aimed at studying these new texts, as well as the previously known and already examined dramas, and I have also used the plans, fragments and drafts of his dramatic texts published in his letters and interviews. The critics of the author's plays have not dealt with his puppet theatre and fairy tale plays yet (except for the *Holdbeli csónakos* ['Boatman on the Moon']), and my dissertation is trying to fill up this gap, as well. Those who have worked on this subject (e. g. Imre Bata and Attila Tamás in their monographs, or Zsuzsa Radnóti, Tibor Tüskés and Tamás Bécsy in their essays) have not dealt with all the plays, and many of them have primarily approached the dramas from thematic and institutional viewpoint, or from the perspective of world view or the history of origin, and some of the writings have not taken into consideration the rules of dramatic genres and structures.

The earliest play of the 2005 anthology, the opera libretto of *Theseus* was written in 1928, and the latest dramatic text, the ballet synopsis of *Hanyistók* was written at the end of the 1970s, hence the period of playwriting lasted about five decades. During that time, he experimented with many genres, e. g. with opera fragment, historical waxworks, absurd musical play, mythological drama, oratorio drama, drama trilogy and pieces for the puppet theatre, and he also had several unfinished plans. The sources for his experiments involve a wide variety of themes and textual forms of the Hungarian and world literature, traditions of drama history, myth and religion, history and folklore. T. S. Eliot wrote about the so-called 'mythical method' that it uses the myth as "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" because the ancient paradigms might order, give a shape and a significance to the futility and anarchy of contemporary history.¹ Sándor Weöres also used the paradigms of myth and other narratives of literary history both in his poetry and in his plays. Therefore, I have chosen a system of aspects for the analysis of his dramas, which makes it possible to demonstrate their thematic, structural and intertextual complexity, their architextual relation to certain genres, and their ties with numerous texts in Hungarian and world literature, and to reveal their connections with the texts in his oeuvre.

¹ ELIOT, Thomas Sterne: 1975. *Selected Prose* (Ed.: KERMODE, Frank) London, Faber & Faber Ltd., 177-178.

The complex approach of drama theory, narratology and intertextuality enabled me to explore how the genres and intertexts modify the possible interpretation of the plays, which have not been examined with this approach before. I have used the theory of transtextuality by Gérard Genette (which involves intertextuality, architextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality and hypertextuality), and I have examined not only the general intertextual ties between the texts of different authors but the limited intertextuality between the texts of the same author, as well. I analysed the thematically or structurally similar plays within groups: the plays written under the influence of Greek and Roman mythology or Greek tragedy, the puppet theatre plays, the historical dramas based on myths, an absurd drama text and the synopsis of a ballet performance. One of the examined plays is *Theomachia*, for instance, and the comparative analysis has revealed its similarities to dramatic poems and oratorios, its intertextual ties with theogonical myths (e. g. with the epic poems of the Hittites, that is with the Kumarbi myths, and with *Theogony* by Hesiod), with the lyrical drama of Percy Bysshe Shelley entitled *Prometheus Unbound* and with the plays by Aiskhylos. Furthermore, *Theomachia* has intertextual connections to the author's planned trilogies, *A diadalmak* ['Triumphs'] and *Az önzés háromsága* ['The Trinity of Selfishness']. These relationships have not been revealed, hence the primary aim of the dissertation is to point out the manifold intertextual connections of the dramas by Sándor Weöres, and to add possible interpretations to the observations.

The modernist literary texts are often written as montage texts, which means that a pretext used in another text involves the expectation that the reader should interpret the meaning of the rewritten text, however, a postmodern collage text does not expect the reader to interpret the new function of the rewritten pretext. The examination of the plays by Sándor Weöres revealed that his plays can be read as montage texts, because the difference between the pretexts and the rewritten texts can have a special interpretation and meaning. Writing montage texts is usually characteristic of essentialist and metaphysical conviction and world view, so the idea of 'essence' and 'centrality' belongs to this interpretation, and this perspective is also inherent in the poetry and plays of Sándor Weöres.

Consequently, I have approached the plays basically not as performance texts but as dramatic (or literary) texts, that is not from a theatrical or institutional perspective. However, I have also taken into consideration that the dramas are performance texts and they have plurimedial nature, hence the code system of the dramatic texts refer to theatrical performances, as well, and some of the plays by Sándor Weöres are musical plays and/or puppet theatre texts. I have not examined the rewritten performance text versions of the

dramas, but I have used some critiques written about the theatre performances of the plays to support my arguments. Many of the literary critics who have written about his dramatic texts ignored their dramatic and plurimedial nature, as well as most of the paratextual elements (e. g. the titles, forewords, mottos, or peritexts; and interviews of the author or epitexts; and the *dramatis personae*, stage direction, the division of acts and scenes) that I have analysed where relevant.²

According to the methodology of poststructuralist drama theorists, the underlying four elements of a drama is the character, the plot, the time and the place. In the first place, I have chosen to examine the character because it is an outstanding element which can be found everywhere from Greek tragedies to postmodern dramas³, although I have also taken into consideration the plot structure and the other two structural elements of the plays. Sándor Weöres wrote an absurd musical play entitled *Tyunkankuru*, which neither has a plot, nor place and time relations, hence only the characters can be examined in that play.

I have used the notion of ‘character’ as an umbrella term, because dramaturgy, drama theory, narratology, the structuralist and poststructuralist theories have created several notions of the character depending on their perspectives and the types of discourses from which they examine the dramatic character. Moreover, the character typologies used are influenced by the dramatic genres of the given plays, because the categories of genres in drama theory might determine the construction of dramatic characters. Furthermore, the characters of the plays in Sándor Weöres are connected with a number of myths and mythologies, therefore, I have used the results of comparative mythology and myth critique.

2.1

The dissertation contains seven parts. The first part reviews the connections between the lyrical and dramatic texts by Sándor Weöres, his relationship with roles and subjectivity, the major structural features of his dramaturgy, which was called “extraordinary dramaturgy” (together with the writing methods of a number of other contemporary Hungarian playwrights) by Zsuzsa Radnóti. The author’s correspondence and his interviews contain several drama plans, thus, I enumerate them, and I draw attention to the aspects of analysis which the critics have not dealt with.

² ALLEN, Graham: 2000. *Intertextuality*. (New Critical Idiom). London–New York, Routledge

³ JÁKFALVI Magdolna: 2001. *Alak, figura, perszonázs*. Budapest, Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet

In the second chapter of part one I write about ‘mythical method’ used by many authors of modernism, and this method is used in many writings by Sándor Weöres, and it gives form to the texts on the basis of an ancient mythopoeic world model, and the contemporary text creates ties with the perspectives of the ancient texts, with their plot and character types. The mythical method is in connection with montage texts. As I have written above, modernist literary texts are often written as montage texts, which means that a pretext used in another text involves the expectation that the reader should interpret the meaning of the rewritten text (as opposed to the postmodern collage text). In this chapter I also write about the significant masters who influenced the author’s mythical world view, and I review the features of the mythopoeic world model, mythic paradigms, symbolic structures and archetypal patterns, because they have a significant role in many of the author’s plays. Next, I briefly summarise the connections between myth and drama, myth and legend, myth and fairy tale, because these types of texts are among the sources of the plays, as well.

Finally, the third chapter of part one shows the relationship between the author’s poetry for children and his plays written for children, that is his fairy tale and puppet theatre plays, because these texts contain children’s poetry, and the world view, the plot and the characters of these plays have similarities with his poems written for children.

2.2

The first chapter of the second part I show the difference between the theories about modern and postmodern subjectivity in connection with dramatic characters, and the relationship between the view of modern subjectivity and essentialist perspective, because these questions arise from the dramatic texts by Sándor Weöres.

The second chapter deals with the difference between dramatic and performance texts, and with the summary of the historical process during which dramatic characters and their theoretical interpretations have changed in modern world literature and Hungarian dramas. At last, I review the definitions of dramatic character, which is the basis of the analyses.

The texts, the plots and the characters of the author’s plays are in connection with other texts, therefore, in the third chapter I write about the theory of transtextuality by Gérard Genette, because I have applied it to the dramatic texts.

The examined plays, fragments and synopses include the texts of a number of musical plays (opera fragment, oratorio, musical fairy tale play, ballet synopsis), hence the second

chapter is a brief review of the significance of music of the plays, because musicality is outstanding even in the poetry of Sándor Weöres.

2.3

I have examined the plays within thematic groups in which the analyses primarily follow each other chronologically. In the third part I examine the plays whose pretexts are Greek or Roman mythical stories or Greek dramas: *Theseus* (1928), *Theomachia* (1940), *Endymion* (1943) and the trilogy entitled *A diadalmak* ['Triumphs'], which might have been written in about 1974, and it includes allusions to the characters and events in *Psyché*, a significant lyrical novel by Sándor Weöres. The trilogy consists of a play with the characters of *Psyché*, the *Theomachia* and *Nárcisz* ['Narcissus'], which is a tragedy by László Ungvárnémeti Tóth, the nineteenth-century poet and writer whose writings were discovered and popularised in the twentieth century by Sándor Weöres. In connection with the trilogy, I compare a text by Mihály Csokonai Vitéz (entitled *Debreczeni Magyar Psyché* and it was written for a wedding ceremony) with *Psyché* and *A diadalmak* to point out important similarities, because I suppose that the Csokonai-text was a pretext of the two other texts.

In part four I examine an absurd musical play entitled *Tyunkankuru*, which was written at the end of the 1940s, and it includes ironic allusions to two characters of Shakespeare's two tragedies. This is the only absurd play among the dramas by Sándor Weöres, and it is one of the first Hungarian absurd plays.

Part five examines the puppet theatre and fairy tale plays: *Holdbeli csónakos* ['Boatman on the Moon'] (1941), *Ilók és Mihók* (1950's), *Csalóka Péter* ['Peter Deceitful'] (1950) and *Rapsóné* ['Mrs. Rapsó'] (1952). The sources of the first play are several myths (Finno-Ugrian, German, Greek, Hindu), the puppet theatre tradition and the Sanskrit plays, and the sources of the other three texts include Hungarian folktales, fairy tales and legends.

The pretexts of the plays in part six are myths, historical or pseudo-historical plays. The pretexts of the play entitled *Szkiták* ['Scythians'] (1944) might have been twin myths and legends, and this play was unfinished, only the synopsis and two acts are written out of the planned three acts. *Octopus* ['Octopus or Saint George and the Dragon'] (1965) is a five-act-tragicomedy with pretexts from the Shakespearean era together with the Saint George legend and fertility myths. The pretexts of *A kétfejű fenevad* (1972) ['The Two-Headed Beast or Pécs in 1686'] (1972) are writings of the baroque era and eschatological myths.

And finally, the last part deals with a ballet synopsis entitled *Hanyistók*, which was written for a piece of music by Béla Bartók. It might have been written between 1977 and 1981, and the story was based on a Hungarian legend.

3.

The poetry of Sándor Weöres recreated a wide variety of thematic and structural traditions of Hungarian and world literature in his poems with the tools of modernist poetry, and similarly, he created his plays rewriting the dramatic, poetic and prose traditions of several ages of Hungarian and world literature. It shows that he attributed great significance to bequeathing literary texts by rewriting them, and hence he is often named as poeta doctus. His poetic methods invite the reader to develop new interpretive methods and ways of reading, and in this case the complex approach of drama theory and intertextual comparison seemed to be the most appropriate method to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of his plays. The intertextual reading destroys the linearity of the text, because the bifurcations of the text expand its semantic space, as the intertextual reference offers to the reader to continue reading or to turn to the source text, and these two processes can operate simultaneously.⁴

The intertextual comparison have revealed that the pretexts of the plays are different kinds of myths (e. g. initiation rites, the myths of dying and reviving gods, creation, fertility, cosmogonical, eschatological, theogonical, anthropogonical and totem myths), fairy tales, legends, philosophical and historical texts, prose and poetry, Greek tragedies, absurd, baroque and Elizabethan English plays. The structure of some plays (e. g. *Holdbeli csónakos*, *A kétfejű fenevad*) shows that the mythical number symbolism can influence the interpretation, and in the latter play, for instance, the paratextual elements refer to a religious-mythical text, the *Book of Revelations*, as the scenes are called ‘revelations’, and the plot is connected to and eschatological myth. Furthermore, the mottos of a number of plays also reveal the relationship between the dramas and their pretexts.

The results demonstrate that the elements of certain plays (the *Theomachia*, the *Holdbeli csónakos*, *A diadalmak*) would be incomprehensible without the examination of general or limited intertextual ties of the texts. Many of the plays have an allegorical structure enriched with symbolic meaning, and the allegorical interpretation of the historical plays has proved (similarly to previous research results) that the characters are depicted as puppets of historical

⁴ JENNY, Laurent: 1982. The Strategy of Forms. IN: TODOROV, Tzvetan, ed. *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 44–45.

events. These plays, as well as some other drama texts by the author, use epic theatre forms when some characters turn to the audience as narrator, or they reflect on the performance, and the modernist theatrical tool of estrangement can also be found in the texts.

Archetextuality has shown the relationship between the texts and certain genres, and these connections have revealed the underlying structure of the text, and the possible interpretations of the characters and plots. The plays by Sándor Weöres are lyrical dramas, which are written either in a lyrical language, or in both lyrical and prose language, and in *Theomachia*, for instance, the language of the ancient poetry is used when the written incantation, magic song and work-song imitates the oldest poetry of the history of world literature. *Csalóka Péter* and *Holdbeli csónakos* contains the children's poetry of the author, and in the latter one the imitation of the ancient Greek Sappho-song can be found.

There are metatextual elements in the play entitled *A diadalmak*, and there are estranging allusion in *Holdbeli csónakos*, *Ilók és Mihók*, *A kétféjű fenevad*, because there are narrating characters in these pieces who draw attention to the theatrical illusions, or they reflect upon the dramatic characters of the dramas.

Some of the dramatic characters in the plays are created as coherent, referential, realistic, mimetic and Cartesian subjectivities (e. g. in *Szkiták*, *Octopus* and *A kétféjű fenevad*), however, the characters of *Tyunkankuru* are unusual, not realistic, not mimetic, and show a decentred subjectivity. *Tyunkankuru* was published in the 2005 anthology of the plays by Sándor Weöres, and it is a remarkable play by the author because it is the only absurd drama text in his oeuvre, and it is situated in the mind of the Shakespeare heroine Ophelia, and it demonstrates a decentred subject without a coherent personality as opposed to his other plays. In *Holdbeli csónakos* the puppets used together with man-like actors also destroy the view of the realistic and mimetic subjectivity. The characters of *Theomachia* are abstract creatures, like the shepherd protagonist and Luna in *Endymion*. Although the characters and the plot of *Csalóka Péter* and *Ilók és Mihók* are realistic and mimetic, the puppets reinforce the fact of theatrical illusions. There are several inactive characters among the protagonists: e. g. Pávaszem ['Peacock's eye'] in *Holdbeli csónakos*, Saint George in *Octopus* and Ambrus Bornemissza in the play entitled *A kétféjű fenevad*, and in the two latter plays the inactive function shows the passive roles of the individuals in the historical situation.

Saint George and Endymion belong to the characters whose monologues have intertextual connections with the philosophical and religious writing by Sándor Weöres entitled *A teljesség felé* ['Towards Totality']. Most of the characters are one-dimensional, coherent, homogenous, but there are some manifold characters (like Endymion, Inganga and Lauro)

who can be characterised with a broader stock of features. Edit Újvári has drawn attention to the significance in the poetry by Sándor Weöres⁵, and the hundred-year-old Inganga is also a central character of *Octopus*, and it is probable that her name and features are in connection with Inanna or Istar who was a goddess in the Sumerian-Akkadian mythologies. The protagonists of *Szkiták* are also female character, a couple of identical twins, and the protagonist of *Holdbeli csónakos* is a young woman, as well.

The symbolic-intertextual interpretation reveals the dramaturgical layers and the allegorical structure in *Holdbeli csónakos*, *Endymion*, *Octopus* and *A kétfejű fenevad*, which are called double-layered dramas by Tamás Bécsy, while Béla Bíró has called them parables or symbolic plays.

All in all, the analysis has emphasised the significance of the intertextual nature of the dramatic texts by Sándor Weöres, and has proved that the comparison of the pretexts with its rewritten version of the dramatic texts reveals a change in meaning, hence most of the author's plays can be read as montage texts.

⁵ Vö. ÚJVÁRI Edit: 2004. „A mindenség hullámzó nászruhád”. *Istennői mítoszmotívumok Weöres Sándor költészetében*. Szeged, JGYF Kiadó

The results of the dissertation were published or presented in the following articles:

Essay

- Ócsai Éva: „száll a világ lepkeszárnyon” - Weöres, a lélekvezető (Weöres Sándor: *Psyché*) *Forrás*, 2003/6. 12-23.
- Ócsai Éva: Archetípusok a Psychében (Weöres Sándor: *Psyché*) *Somogy*, 2003/11-12. 548-566.
- Ócsai Éva: Janus két arca (Csokonai és az őt olvasó Weöres Sándor). *Forrás*, 2005/10. 101-106.
- Ócsai Éva: Pokoljárás Pécssett, avagy Egy fenevad Sok feje az eszkatologikus és alvilágmítosszá váló történelemben (Weöres Sándor: *A kétfejű fenevad avagy Pécs 1686-ban*) In: Kolozsi Orsolya és Urbanik Tímea, szerk.: *magyar – irodalom – történet*. Szeged, Tiszatáj Könyvek, 2006, 72-96.
- Ócsai Éva: Mese a legyőzhetetlen sárkányról és egy megváltatlan Pusztországról (Weöres Sándor: *Octopus avagy Szent György és a sárkány históriája*) *Tiszatáj*, Diákmelléklet, 2006/5. 1-12.
- Ócsai Éva: Wersek, báb- és mesejátékok 4-696 éves gyerekek számára (Weöres Sándor a gyerek(b)irodalomban) *Forrás*, 2006/7-8, 118-135.
- Ócsai Éva: A Lyrical Novel and its Filmic Adaptation (Sándor Weöres: *Psyché* and Gábor Bódy: *Narcissus and Psyche*) - In: *TRANS. Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften*. No. 16/2005. WWW: http://www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/04_3/ocsai16.htm

Critique

- Ócsai Éva: Régi és újonnan felfedezett színdarabok (Weöres Sándor: *Színjátékok*) *Tiszatáj*, 2006/4. 100-104.
- Ócsai Éva: „szívom az iskolai álbölcsesség pipáját” (Lócsei Péter: *Szombathelyi emlékpohár. Weöres Sándor és Szombathely*) *Élet és Irodalom*, 2007. április 27.

Conference lecture

- Kaposvár, Kaposvári Egyetem Csokonai Vitéz Mihály Pedagógiai Főiskolai Kar „Csokonai a rengeteg Somogységban” 2005. május 14. (Ócsai Éva: Janus két arca - Csokonai és az őt olvasó Weöres Sándor)
- Bécs, IRICS konferencia (Innovations and Reproductions in Cultures and Societies) 2005. december 9-11. (Ócsai, Éva: A Lyrical Novel and its Filmic Adaptation – Gábor Bódy: *Narcissus and Psyche*; Sándor Weöres: *Psyché*)
- Piliscsaba, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, HUSSDE/3, „A Room with a View: Theatre in Time and Space” 2006. május 26-28. (Ócsai, Éva: The impact of the Elizabethan dramas upon the plays by Sándor Weöres)