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The Poetics and Politics of the Periphery
About the Works of Pál Böndör and János Sziveri

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The methodological background of the dissertation

The topic of the dissertation is the complex analysis of the works of Pál Böndör and János Sziveri. Therefore, a complex methodological framework is needed, which determines the artistic identity within its social and communal dimension. That's why the discourse also contains contextual, historical aspects and national or transnational questions, as well as problems which are connected to genre theory, theory of lyric, rhetoric and stylistics. The selection of the two poets was preceded by a research which has been in progress for years, and which consists of comparative analysis of the South Slavic and Hungarian literature, publications that examine the significant characters of the Hungarian literature in Vojvodina and translations of theoretical texts.

Nobody has written a monograph of the poetry of Pál Böndör yet, while the opus of János Sziveri has wider reception and a cult with some remarkable polemics. Consequently the influence from friendship and respect, the critical-reflexive autonomous speaking practices, the experience of intermediality, the connection to modernity, and the canonic position need a more detailed and profound research in both cases. However, the prose works of Böndör will be also examined in the dissertation, and Sziveri's texts linked to visual theory could be found as well within the references, primarily we are talking about two poets, who defined their social-communal attitude and creed within the options given by poetry. In their lyrical forms there are also ethical meanings beyond the esthetics that is conceptualized due to their relation to the poetical predecessors and contemporary authors (Milán Füst, Lajos Kassák, Attila József, János Pilinszky, István Koncz, Ottó Tolnai, István Domonkos, Magdolna Danyi, Dezső Tandori, György Petri, Szabolcs Várady, Vasko Popa, Slavko Mihalić, Jovan Zivlak, Vojislav Despotov and so on), the actual cultural paradigms and the collectivity (such as artistic assemblages or generational and national questions), while the universal tradition (for example Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) should be mentioned as well.

The base of generational appearance and continuity could be found in the history of *Új Szimpozium*, which was featured as an artistic-critical journal. As a consequence, we are able to learn about the emancipating efforts of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia and their attitude towards the existing institutions and discourses if we read the reflections that were published by the journal and the declarations of its editors. The aim of these analysis is to identify the social position of poetry during the different phases of the oeuvre of Pál Böndör and János Sziveri. In both cases, during the progression of their poetry, an authentic poetical language

and form was developed, while they shaped their up-to-date variations of classical verses, iambic lines and sonnets. Behind their strictness toward poetical forms such philosophical and authorial vocation could be observed which results, by the presumptions of the dissertation, could be placed into the contemporary Hungarian, as well as the South Slavic artistic movements.

Being a member of a minority group means that the poet's identity has multiple layers. We are likely to claim that duality is one of the characteristics of the poetry of Pál Böndör and János Sziveri: avantgarde and classicism, antipoetical and poetical structures, modernity and the postmodern state, changing and remaining, locality and universality. These peculiarities of their best poems prove the generality of the unreconcilable tension between the form and the content.

The structure and the aim of the dissertation

As the research deals with two poets, following the introduction of the methodological background, the dissertation is composed of two major parts, which consist of further sub-chapters.

The second chapter (*Lingual Communities and Modification Practices*) focuses on the early lyric of Pál Böndör, within a comparative analytical framework. The similar characteristics will be analysed between his artistic techniques and the attitude of the Serbian poet and editor, Jovan Zivlak: the backwashes of the avantgarde, (the lack of) generational appearance, the deep interactions between the banality of private sphere and the critical contemplation. Beyond the mentioning of the well-known Serbian and Hungarian translation culture of Yugoslavia, this comparison may be fruitful in the field of the contemporary literature, the engagement of poetry and the cogitation about the opportunities of art.

After the conceptualism and reductional poetry that characterized Pál Böndör's versification in the 1960's and 1970's, he turned towards a kind of formal expansion, which will be analyzed in the second chapter (*Paradigm Changing, Expansion, Ornamentation*). His turn was indicated by his book *Vígeposz (Merry Epic)* that was published in 1982. Even in the term of the new Böndör works it is well-founded to re-examine this forgotten turn, because a similar shifting occurred in 2019 when the poetry book *Vásárlási lázgörbe (The Fever Curve)*

of *Shopping*) was issued. In both cases the short forms were followed by an autobiography based long poems, briefness and concealment. The critics of *Vásárlási lázgörbe* haven't paid attention to the similarity between these works. Therefore, it hasn't been realized yet that the significant questions and the poetics of *Vásárlási lázgörbe*, such as the problem of canon and the free form of automatic writing has appeared in *Végepsz* in the most striking way. It would be significant to compare his work between 1960 and 1990 to the so called post 1968 poets, such as Imre Oravecz or Szabolcs Várady.

The fourth chapter (*Three Books about the Elaborated and Automatic Speech Practice*) deals with the less appreciated period of Pál Böndör's opus which followed *Végepsz*. The books *Jégverés (Hail, 1985)*, *A krupié kiosztja önmagát (The Croupier Distributes Himself, 1986)* and *A gázló (The Wading, 1989)* could gain some new perspective in a retrospective examination. They show the heterogeneous scale of the speaking efforts of the lyrical I, enumerate the specific schemes of alter egos, while they foreshadow Pál Böndör's autonomous style in his late poetical period. The artistic mapping transforms his poetry toward hermeneutics in the verse forms which are sometimes rampant and voluble and in other cases scheduled, direct, intended and short.

In 2017 the book *Finis* was published which consists of selected poems of Pál Böndör, who determined the works which were written since the 1990's as his second authorial period. This phase will be analyzed in the chapter *Variations for total poetry (The Late Lyric of Pál Böndör)*. The moral stand, the dignity and anti-opportunism, the tone that interacts with feeling of the 1990's Yugoslavia, the wise and philosophical versification, the fruitful dialogue with the tradition performed the representation of the Hungarian Literature in Vojvodina, the depicting of the universality of the subjective metamorphoses and the contrasting of the biopolitics. The analysis starts with his excellent book *Tegnap egyszerőbb volt (Yesterday Was Easier, 1993)* and chronologically moves toward Böndör's last work *Vásárlási lázgörbe* in which case the poet's identity was overshadowed by the intense and intentional critic of the consumer society. Therefore, it is well-founded to define the position of the epic within the opus by the self-reflection.

Although the dissertation is based on the theory of lyric, the sixth chapter (*The Chronicles of Cultural Hybridity*) will analyze the prose of Pál Böndör. It seems to be justifiable to talk about the three novels (*Tadpoles, 1987; In the Shadow of the Moonlight, 2011; Bender & Partner, 2015*) in the current discourse, because there is a lot of connection between his poetry and prose, such as the questions dealing with poetics of genre,

autobiographical aspects, critical and reflexive observations, contextual peculiarities. The dissertation claims that the prose of Böndör in terms of its poetics and representation features a much profound value than what most of its critics have written about. The reception, and even the poet himself, sees the novels as secondary creations, and states that they don't reach the aesthetic level of his poems. In aiming to re-examine these works, attention should be paid to the contextual characteristics of their publishing, the autobiographical aspects, the motives known from his poetry, the attitude of creation, along with the intertextual and intermedial peculiarities.

From the seventh chapter (*Form Seeking and Existential Ontology in the Poetry of János Sziveri*) the dissertation deals with the oeuvre of the Mužla-born poet. His poetical lyric is similar to the style of György Petri: will the critical, lingual discourse of the previous system remain valid after the regime change, within the new cultural interpretational horizon? The poet's rebellion and critic were aimed against the Hungarian institutional system in Yugoslavia, so the socialist self-management system should be examined. The poetical and political continuity in his early works and his generational belonging will be surveyed within the traditions of *Új Symposion*. His first free verses will be presented beside his visual affinity, the perspectives toward the local relations, the symbolism of being East-Central-European and the social sensibility that creates the epistemological aspects of his communal frames.

The eighth chapter (*The Allegories of the Eternal Metamorphoses*) focuses on the second book (*Hidegpróba*, 1981) of János Sziveri. The searching for proper roles is still emphatic, but this time I will approach his early poetry by the means of valuation of figurative tropes and with the laudation of the openness toward spiritual and profane territories. Two great literary traditions have been addressed in these poems, and both of them will remain significant till the last period of Sziveri's poetry. The Christian motives based on the Bible, as well as the narratives of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have become the figural tropes of his lyric, which are interpreted in the same way as in the theory of Paul de Man. The aim of this chapter is identifying that desired relational system related to the environment and the community which has never gained its final forms in the oeuvre, we can only contemplate its eternal metamorphoses, and the chaos which represents it many times.

The upper mentioned Jovan Zivlak intensively influenced János Sziveri as well. The ninth chapter called *Crisis Analysis in Lingual-poetical Mirror* interprets the only book of the Serbian poet which was published in Hungarian by the title *Penge* (*Blade*, 1984). The approach of the examination deals with the poetical view of the translator, János Sziveri, the context of

the publishing, and the translation culture of the journals *Új Symposion* and *Híd*. The transformation of some tropes will be interpreted in a way that makes an effort to map the cultural network which determines the view of the national identity and its transgression with poetical strategies and overwriting of self-reflective motives.

The tenth chapter contains such remarks, similar to the previous part, which haven't been noticed by the reception yet. Although we are dealing with the representative verse form of the late poetry of János Sziveri, his sonnets haven't gained much attention before. The dissertation states that they have representative value in Sziveri's oeuvre. They brought the breakthrough in the tension which has seemed to be undissolvable, that the poet could not choose between poetics and antipoetics, traditional verses and subversive parodies of genre. In order to the proper valuation we should see both the political, and poetical premises: the sacking of the editorial staff of *Új Symposion*, the total banishment of János Sziveri, and the language philosophy formed by the poems which were written in that period and supported his ironic-outsider attitude. His first sonnet appeared in the collection of *Dia-dalok* (1987), then the book *Szájbarágás* (1988) presented a sonnet cycle. *Mi szél hozott?* (1989) has similar structure, while within *Bábel* (1990) the more than 700 years old poetical form seems to become regular.

The eleventh chapter primarily focuses on the famous poem, called *Bábel*, within the late poetry of János Sziveri. The dissertation offers some complements related to the cultural connections and the Hungarian simultaneous versification, in order to deepen the intertextual allusions in the case of the Vojvodina-born poet, that were already detected, with the Central-European existential-ontological engagement, which was presented by Orsolya Kálec-Simon. Søren Kierkegaard was writing about being leftover related to tower of Babel, and this category faithfully mirrors the theology of János Sziveri: the state when there is no esthetic or ethical justification.

The theoretic base of the dissertation, while it mixes the aspects of comparative studies and critical cultural theory, could create such an up-to-date, complex methodological framework, which could become significant in the scope of examinations which investigate the connection between art (primary lyric) and society, together with the current comparative studies of the South Slavic and Hungarian literary relations. Additionally, with the expansion of the reception of Pál Böndör and János Sziveri, who are located in Cultural In-Betweenness, their peripheral position could be modified within the Hungarian canon. Furthermore, the projected complex theoretical analysis could open new perspectives for the understanding of the cultural relations and affections which have reached across borders.

Publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian Diary Writing in Vojvodina during the NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia, in LOSONCZ Márk–RÁCZ Krisztina (eds.), *A vajdasági magyarok politikai eszmetörténete és önszerveződése (1989-1999)*, Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2018, 189–201.

Linguistic Communities and Practices of Modification (Analogies between the Early Poetry of Pál Böndör and Jovan Zivlak), *Híd*, 2020/5, 93–112.

Post-war Poetry: Fragment, Myth, Mask (The (Yugoslavian) War as Paradigm), *Híd*, 2018/12, 45–57.

The Chronicle of Cultural Hybridity (The Prose Works of Pál Böndör), *Acta historiae litterarum hungaricarum*, 2020/4–5, 117–139.

The Light, the Symbolism of Fire and the Revolutionism of Neoavantgarde contexts (The Comparative Analyses of the poem 'Kislányom: Görögország' by István Domonkos and the short story 'Térkép, repedésekkel' by Miklós Mészöly), *Philos*, 2016/2, 26–31.

The Role of Writers and Poets during the Formation of the Sziveri-phenomenon, in BOLDOG-BERNÁD István–SZABÓ P. Katalin–SZUPERÁK Alexandra (eds.), *Nyom-követés 3. (Tanulmánykötet)*, Budapest–Subotica, Association of Hungarian PhD Students and Researchers in Vojvodina, The Association of Hungarian PhD and DLA Students, Literary Studies Section, 2018, 249–259.

Visual Experiments in the Hungarian Literature in Vojvodina (Ottó Fenyvesi's Collage Technique), in TERNOVÁ CZ Bálint (ed.), *Ingenia Hungarica I. (Tanulmányok az I. Kárpát-medencei Szakkollégiumi Konferencia előadásaiból)*, Budapest, ELTE Eötvös József Collegium, 2015, 331–341.

Conference lectures related to the dissertation

Experimental Poetical Characteristics of the Hungarian Poetry in Vojvodina during the 1960's and 70s, Novi Sad, 13th VMTDK, Human Sciences, Literary Studies Section, 2014.

Hungarian diary writing in Vojvodina during the NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia, Novi Sad, Conference 'A vajdasági magyarok politikai eszmetörténete és önszerveződése (1989-1999)', 2017.

Linguistic Communities and Practices of Modification, Budapest, Conference 'Modernity and National Identity' organized by Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Serbian Academy of Sciences, 2019.

Poetical Traditions and Innovations in the book Finis by Pál Böndör, Budapest, Conference 'Tradition and innovation' organized by Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Serbian Academy of Sciences, 2017.

Post-war Poetry: Fragment, Myth, Mask (The (Yugoslavian) War as Paradigm), Szeged, Conference 'ÉLŐLÁNC – the Young Literary in Vojvodina and the (Yugoslavian) War', 2018.

The Exercise of Otherness in the Poetry of János Sziveri, Szeged, PhD-Conference (Balassi Institute), Literary Studies Section, 2017.

The Light, the Symbolism of fire and the Revolutionism of Neoavantgarde Contexts, Subotica, 14th VMTDK, Plenary Session, 2015.

The Role of Writers and Poets during the Formation of the Sziveri-phenomenon, Subotica, Workshop Conference for Literary Studies 'Nyom-követés 3', 2017.

Visual Experiments in the Hungarian Literature in Vojvodina (Ottó Fenyvesi's Collage Technique), Csíkszereda, Conference of Colleges from the Carpathian, Philos section, 2014.