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Immatures, Fragments, Poems of Doubtful Authenticity
(The Poems of the *Szerelmes énekek* Booklet from the Madách–Rimay Codices)

Summary of PhD Thesis

SZTE BTK
Irodalomtudományi Doktori Iskola

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Szeged, 2016

1. The subject of the dissertation

In my dissertation *Immatures, Fragments, Poems of Doubtful Authenticity. The Poems of the Szerelmes énekek Booklet from the Madách–Rimay Codices* I set out to put fifteen love poems from the early 17th century under a level of scrutiny that hopes to surpass (even) previous attempts. The relevance of the discussed corpus for literary history lies in its unique position within the canon, insofar that while these poems are at best marginal from a literary perspective, yet they reveal a direct influence of Bálint Balassi's and János Rimay's oeuvre (which is considered the pinnacle of contemporary poetry).

The *Madách-Rimay codices* are haunted by a number of philological questions which have been still not answered. The three volumes consist of booklets bound together in recent times, and it was used by a poet active in the first third of the seventeenth century, Gáspár Madách, who tried to copy, besides his own verses and translations, his uncle János Rimay's literary heritage. However, the subject of the collection emphasised in the title, the *Szerelmes énekek* [*Love songs*], is radically different from the otherwise heterogeneous material which is often antithetical to love. On the other hand, the fifteen poems also reflect variability: besides the dominantly practical gallant poems (which are often written in a letter form), there are a number of moralising poems, and even parody and obscenity is represented in the group. And this is closely connected to the question of attribution.

The discoverer of the poems, Béla Radvánszky attributed the poems to János Rimay in the beginning of the twentieth century. Later in the century, Sándor Eckhardt questioned the validity of Radvánszky's position on palaeographical and textological grounds, and considered the *scriptor* Gáspár Madách as the author of the poems. The debate was revitalised in the late 1960s by László Bóta, who devoted an extensive study to the fifteen songs, and indicated a high number of stylistic-phraseological parallels between the love poems of the Madách-Rimay codices, and Balassi's and Rimay's authentic poems. Based on this, he drew the conclusion that the only possible author is the eminent disciple of Bálint Balassi, that is, (once again) János Rimay. Imre Varga, who arranged the critical edition of the source could not accept the exclusivity of this approach, therefore, the 12th volume of the Régi Magyar Költők Tára lists the love songs among the poems of the batch with unknown authors.

By and large I can accept the scholarly consent drafted above. At the same time, it must be noted that because of the mentioned heterogeneity of the booklet, it is inevitable to give voice to a suggestion that has been curiously lacking from previous discourse: is it absolutely certain that the discussed songs were composed by the same single author?

2. Methods applied in the thesis

The primary purpose of my paper is, however, not to uncover the author(s) of the poems, although I would like to believe that the results of my thesis contribute to a picture of previously unavailable details about the inspirations, practices and ideas (which we could call the poetic habit) reflected in the composition of these poems. I was more interested in a peculiar moment of intellectual history which was pointed out by Ferenc Zemplényi in his work about the possibilities of the transmission of European courtly culture into Hungary. Zemplényi's monograph, in an outlook paragraph, identifies the rapid dissolution of the top level achievements of Hungarian poetry from the late sixteenth-early seventeenth century, which he explains with the underdevelopment of contemporary institutions, and his most obvious example is precisely the mentioned poems of the *Madách-Rimay codices*. In my dissertation, I perform a detailed investigation of the process Zemplényi calls 'dissolution'.

My main questions were the following. How can we establish a context for the poems under inquiry? What is their attitude to their textual predecessors? What devices and solutions do they borrow from them? How do they apply them? As for the answers, I found that a rhetorical-poetical reading is the way to explore them. Naturally, the reminiscences from the fifteen love songs (most of them identified some time ago), direct the interpreters' attention toward the source material, that is, the works of Bálint Balassi and János Rimay. Besides a reevaluation of this, I also tried to take a look at the wider context, therefore I extended the comparative analysis to the whole of contemporary occasional poetry, including the potential predecessors and the available foreign language patterns, too.

Finally, in order to make the partial results and consequences extracted from the close reading more visible and manageable, it seemed necessary to establish and distinguish certain categories, and to classify the poems in question according to these (*verse form, function, verse type, rhetorical genres, organising tropes, topoi, reminiscences, borrowed rhyme groups*); that is, the results of the naturally more liberal interpretation were subjected to a more rigid classification, too.

The experiences gained this way are summarised below.

3. The structure of the dissertation, results

The introductory chapter of the dissertation contains, besides a case for the subject and the methodological foundations, an overview of previous research results, too. This is followed by a close reading according to the original order of the songs in the booklet, the results of which are summarised based on the previously mentioned categories.

[*Length*] The most striking formal feature of the poems in the booklet is their brevity. The songs are on average 4.5 verses long, compared to Rimay's 7.2 and Balassi's 8.8 average. It is remarkable, though, that the different blocks of the Balassa codex significantly differ in terms of structure: the average length of the poems composed until his marriage is cca. 10.6, of the poems composed after his marriage cca 8.9, whereas the average length in the Célia cycle is only cca. 5. In their length, the practice of the fifteen love poems is close to Balassi's late works.

[*Verse form*] In their rhythm and rhyme forms, the poems of the booklet follow three basic strophes: 9 are composed in the 'Hungarian alexandrine' (twelve syllables, four-beats, divided by a caesura), 2 use the rhythm of the "Palkó-vers", while 4 use the Balassi-stanza. At the same time, the corpus under examination is aware of two different versions of the Balassi-stanza: one poem (*Hárfa ...at valahova...*) is written in the original, three-lined verse used by Balassi, while three (*Ércnél, kösziklánál...; Szerelmesétől vált...; Én édes jobb kezem...*) use what is known as a later development, the nine-lined version. This textological observation suggests that the poems of the booklet are not from the same single author.

[*Verse types.*] As mentioned before, the examined poems are without exception love poems, however, based on their basic attitude, a further distinction can be made between gallant poems and didactic-moralistic works, while one of the latter group (*Szerelemtől csak kár...*) is in fact, a "counter-poem" containing harsh parody. The poems written in the 9-lined Balassi-stanza are without exception gallant poems, different types can only be identified among the other poems. Further, it is also remarkable that the poem written in 3-lined Balassi-stanza, although didactic in nature, reflects no moralistic tendencies at all, contrary to the other poems of the collection which are of the same type but use different forms (*Nagy példát adhatok...; Ki-ki terhét vállaln...*).

[*Function.*] The booklet *Szerelmes énekek*, compared to other collections of similar subject, contains a remarkably high number of works which serve as love letters. The formal structure of these follow several different traditions. The opening piece, *Ne gondold, szerelmem...* reveals this function by the closing formula which derives from fifteenth century

German salutatory poems, where the basic unit is a wish that the addressee might live x time multiplied by several x or y times. Another subgroup is formed by the poems sent with a present of flowers or jewels (*Egy szép rózsaszálat...; Látod ez gyöngyszemet*). Items in the third subgroup (*Ércnél, kösziklánál...; Szerelmesétől vált...; Én édes jobb kezem...*) differ from the previous two in that they openly talk about the fact that they are letters. All in all, one third of the poems in the *Madách-Rimay codices* are love letters.

One of the commonplaces about Balassi's works is that the poems (at least in the sequence of the Balassa codex) shorten with time, while the other is that the character of the late poems change. The sending of presents seen in the Great Cycle, for example, completely disappears from the pieces written to Célia. In connection with the examined corpus, this means that while certain formal aspects (brevity, complete lack of acrostics and colophons) might refer to the Célia poems as their pattern, the fundamental practical nature invoked the ideas of Balassi's earliest poems.

[*Rhetorical genres.*] The interpretative chapters of the dissertation classify the poems not only according to the basic schemes of *tria genera dicendi*, but also according to its different sorts. According to general experience, while the rhetorical length of verse texts are most frequently simple (*simplex*), from the perspective of rhetorical genres (independently from any other qualities of them), they hardly ever reflect homogeneity. This experiment brought no breakthrough. It only showed that while the modes of judicial discourse have their own legitimacy in love poetry, courting can still be best articulated through persuasion (argumentation in such cases is usually causal, since it aims at the achievement of something good), and it also turned out that in the course of verification, it is useful for the orator to give a detailed description of the external and internal properties of the subject of his love.

[*Organising tropes.*] While in the course of registering rhetorical genres, I tried to map all kinds of them, in the tropes and figures related to *elocutio*, I selected only a handful of basic forms which, based on previous rhetorically-stylistically informed readings, are decisive to the whole of the verse texts. An evaluative comparison of the organising tropes proved to be more productive than the previous aspect because it finally revealed significantly different creative techniques and qualities within the corpus. Based on this, it seems ever more urgent to somehow record tropes and figures on a more general level, which might enable research related to a preferentially segmented internal corpus or to the totality of old Hungarian poetry from the perspective of events in the history of tropes and functions.

[*Topoi.*] From among the topoi found in the love poems of the *Madách-Rimay codices*, I only considered the one used by critical literature as an argument for attribution: the

experience of being away. In fact, the idea of distance appears in only four of the poems, and this makes up less than half of the gallant poems. Furthermore, even some of the poetic letters lack this topos; but when it is there, it is not always in those poems with letter function. Therefore, the microcorpus thus formulating is connected by two features: they are not written in halved 12-syllabled verse, and they are characterised by a relatively unadorned rhetorical structure.

From the fact that most of the revealed (but here not detailed) topoi are found in the inventory of the predecessors (Balassi and Rimay) who are thought to be the most influential, direct borrowing, of course, cannot be established. The difference in the methods of application observed in the oeuvres used as a control material and the examined poems, however, is significant: the topoi are used in a less refined way, and they are integrated in the poems in a less organic manner; they are more like additional panels in the ornamental part than elements of the basic concept.

[*Reminiscences.*] From among the various types of guest texts, I mainly focused on the reminiscences recalling Bálint Balassi's of János Rimay's authentic poetic oeuvre. Such intertextuality can only be observed in three songs of the examined booklet of the Madách-Rimay codices. These are characterised by a different imitational technique in all the three cases. In the order of the collection, the second item (*Nagy példát adhatok...*) is the first that contains a part resembling a sententious part of Balassi's *De mit gyötresz engem...* The disposition of the two variants is analogous with each other: both serve as a closing strophe within their own complete poems. The same is more or less true to another intertextual place within the examined material: the poem *Ércnél, kősziklánál...* contains a maxim which also occurs in the Vásárhelyi songbook's *Piros rózsá színű...* song. Based on this, a practice can be reconstructed according to which it is evident to borrow certain ornamental commonplaces as part of the *peroratio*'s illustrative formula. A different relationship with the heritage of Balassi can be observed in the song *Szerelmesétől vált...* The speaker of this makes use of the figure of *hypolepsis* in order to start where his predecessor finished in the poem *Azmely keresztyén hű...*, that is, he alludes to its conclusive ending in his opening sentence. As it is discussed in the related subchapter, this method moderates the radical exaggerations of the predecessor's text, and thus, it can be legitimately compared to the methodology of palinodes. There is no doubt that the only textual allusion to Rimay is a parody: the short poem *Szerelemtől csak kár...* subverts the moralistic teachings of the poem *Encomia et effecta virtutum* by relying largely on the same vocabulary. The basic idea of this parody is also something of an allusion: in another work (*Valjons de mi haszon...*), Rimay refers to precisely

the same Ovidius passage which is, again, distorted into a grotesque passage in *Szerelemtől csak kár...* All in all, it can be claimed that the integration of the reminiscences surpasses the compilation techniques of popular poetry, and suggests the application of a more complex system of rules.

[*Rhyme groups.*] In examining the rhyme words, I paid attention exclusively to the reutilisation of basic units serving the purposes of harmoniousness. However, since a shared but independent use of a given rhyme pair among poets close in time and space is hardly unimaginable, I only registered those combinations where incidental similarity was minimal. I considered rhyme groups of at least three words, and two-word rhyme groups with multiple occurrences as such.

The most striking feature of the last two categories (reminiscences and rhyme groups) is that the influence of the text of the predecessors which can be taken granted is altogether not as exceptionally high as previous critical opinions suggest. Out of the fifteen poems, there are only four reminiscences where the memory of certain Balassi poems can safely be identified, and out of these, three belong to the Célia cycle. Based on formal aspects, we already suggested that the collection seems to regard the Célia poems as its ideal to follow. The familiarity with the text of the cycle's 6th, 9th and 10th items seems to reinforce this suggestion.

In connection with Rimay's oeuvre, the list can be extended with only two items: *Encomia et effecta virtutum*, and *Leges Mensales*. Both survive exclusively in the direct proximity of the examined corpus, in the pages of the first volume of the batches, in booklets nr. 4 and 5, following the *Szerelmes énekek* booklet.

Previous critical literature noticed that the items of the examined material which follow Balassi's lead in their rhythm are usually irrelevant in terms of intertextuality. This can be extended with the observation that the two longer poems written *not* in Balassi-stanza (*Ne gondold szerelmem...* and *Beborult, fölhözött...*) which surround the poem collection understood in its present form are both characterised by an ending which expresses good wishes based on the rhyme words of two respective Célia-poems.

The examined posterior texts do not attempt at recycling rhyme topoi.

[*Conclusion.*] In the final part of my dissertation, I tried to answer the question what gave birth to the collection *Szerelmes énekek*. It turns out that the only organising principle in the contents of the *Madách-Rimay codices* is the areas of interest of Gáspár Madách. The central question, therefore, is why did the poet who constructed his own poetic persona as a defender of morals choose to preserve precisely these love poems?

If Madách's purpose was to collect his uncle's poetic heritage, it is possible that he copied each and every piece available for him. However, on one hand, it is clear from preliminary inquiries that the discussed poems often fail to reach the standards of Rimay's authentic poems. On the other hand, even it is uncertain that the verses derive from one single author. However, there is no precise answer as to the question of the number of authors involved. Based on the classification of certain poetic features in the songs, different text groups can be established within the corpus, but a simultaneous interpretation of these categories helps in certain cases not to reinforce the boundaries, but to eliminate them altogether. Therefore, the more likely hypothesis is that Gáspár Madách copied the material of this booklet as a not or not entirely authentic part of Rimay's heritage. Thus, the fifteen poems show a level of difference and multidirectional permeability at the same time because they are not the early works of one single poet at the start of his career, but the products of a school formulating around one single poet (most probably János Rimay).

For there must have been a literary circle operating around the poet who was primarily known for his attempts at institutionalisation, although he might have wanted to refrain from admitting and transmitting those works which were insufficient for his elitist standards, even if he was involved in their production, or at least, knew about them. In my belief, the fifteen poems in the *Szerelmes énekek* booklet of the Madách-Rimay codices represent the primary document of an entirely occasional practice which transposed the predecessors' rhetorical-poetical achievements onto the wide scope of popularisation.

The paper attached to the dissertation as an appendix (The Rimay heritage on Gáspár Madách's pen) I review some of the early twentieth century commonplaces which serve as the basis for the estimation of Gáspár Madách. These are the following: (1.) Madách was a poet-disciple of János Rimay, (2.) he is a caretaker of Rimay's literary heritage, (3.), he was actively trying to get this heritage printed.

The last two of these are usually inferred to from letters of literary historical relevance. One of these is András Ráday's letter dated 25 March 1629 (*Rimay János államiratai*, 320–321.). Here Ráday asks Rimay to send the songs which Madách also possessed, together with all their arguments (“minden argumentomival”) and good corrections (“jó corrigálással”) to the Viennese printer Ferenczffy. Another is a draft by Gáspár Madách (*Rimay János államiratai*, 358–359.), where Madách contacts the unknown recipient in connection with the publication of the works of the deceased Rimay.

However, the quoted parts of the Ráday-letter can refer not only to a desire of collaboration, but also to the desire of avoiding the amateur editor. On the other hand, Madách addresses someone in the draft about whom he has to make inquiries, with whom he is not on familiar terms, and who does not really take him into account. Furthermore, he tries to prove his exceptional relationship by sending a poem by Rimay (*Az Úr engem sanyaríta...*), which is only preserved as his own autograph in the Madách-Rimay codices. Whatever the reason behind, it is certain that Madách should be seen as a devoted, but at the same time isolated and weightless successor.

Another commonplace is that just like János Rimay could not surpass his master, Bálint Balassi, so could Madách not compete (“mérkőzhetik”) with János Rimay. (The Hungarian term, understood as a Hungarian equivalent for rhetorical *aemulatio* is taken here from Béla Radvánszky, cf. *Sztrigovai Madách Gáspár versei*, ItK, 1901, 130.).

The most direct inspiration for Madách, which can be textually proven, were the sententious distichs from the vulgar-ethical handbook *Libellus Elegantissimus*, published in 1591. He developed some of these multiple times, usually in different verse forms. The motivation for the reutilisation of the texts in this case is always the changing occasion, and thus, his practice can be compared to the methods of popular poetry – and this is something that is rather far from the poetic ideals represented by János Rimay

The questions related to some of the poems from the batch of uncertain authorship (like *Bendő Panna komáromi asszony éneke*, *Balassa János éneke sólymcskájáról*, and *Szodomához hasonló paráznák hajléka...*) are not entirely independent from the above-mentioned phenomena. In the case of *Bendő Panna éneke*, the attribution is complicated by the function of the text, as a “latrican” poem never tries to help the reader in establishing its author. This is why it is virtually impossible to measure the extent to which this poem reflects Gáspár Madách’s poetic practices. The text permeates several registers, though: in some of its elements, it is comparable to the Vásárhelyi songbook’s female song *Tudod-e, miért jöttem élédben...*, whereas some of the more thundering expressions reflect phrases and structures which are borrowed from János Rimay.

Bendő Panna éneke as a “latrican” poem and *Balassa János éneke* as a song by the man as the whoremonger are usually treated as a pair since Rabán Gerézdi’s famous article ((„*Balassa János éneke sólymcskájáról*”). It was, however, not until Imre Varga’s observations (*Tallózások Madách Gáspár körül*) that similarities in content and style between *Szodomához hasonló...* and *Balassa János éneke* have been recorded. In these two cases, a parallel can be observed with the previous cases: besides the similarities in motifs, the

“Sólymocska’s” first person demonstration is turned into an indictment speech against errant people in *Szodomához hasonló...* Furthermore, *Balassa János éneke...* can be interpreted as an aenigma in which the identity of the subject is overwritten line-by-line, and therefore, the meaning of the discourse remains unfixed (cf. Szilasi László: *A nyúl és a sólyom*), whereas Madách, always willing to follow authorities, tends to restrict the scope of such games with the poetic space. Therefore, in my opinion, *Szodomához hasonló...* follows in the steps of *Balassa János éneke*, but its pattern is *Bendő Panna éneke* – the author takes the *thema* from the former, the *causa* from the latter.

Thus it is clear that like the others, the third commonplace too can only be accepted with reservations, since while Rimay tries to surpass his predecessor by further improving the inherited poetic devices, Gáspár Madách seems to make no attempt whatsoever at surpassing any kind of tradition.

4. Publications related to the subject of the dissertation

1. „*A Rimay-örökség Madách Gáspár tollán.*” In *Stephanus Noster: Tanulmányok Bartók István születésnapjára*, szerk. Jankovics József, Jankovits László, Szilágyi Emőke Rita, Zászkaliczky Márton, Bp., reciti, 2015.
2. „*A romlás alakzatai: Adalékok Rimay János Tiszába esett könyvének tartalomjegyzékéhez*” In *Előzetes kérdések: Rohonyi Zoltán emlékkönyv*, szerk. Milbacher Róbert, Pécs, Kronosz, 2014.
3. „*Szegedi kísérlet a 17. századi magyar vers gépi feldolgozására.*” Társszerzők: Bognár Péter, Hevesi Andrea, Sinka Zsófia. In *Filológia és textológia a régi magyar irodalomban*, szerk. Kecskeméti Gábor, Tasi Réka, Miskolc, ME BTK Magyar Nyelv és Irodalomtudományi Intézet, 2012.
4. „*Apró madár hálóban? A Balassa-kódex első Rimay-verséről.*” Társszerzők: Jankovits László, Pap Balázs. In *Septempunctata: Tanulmányok Petrőczy Éva hatvanadik születésnapjára*, szerk. Pénzes Tiborc Szabolcs, Bp., rec.iti, 2011.
5. „*Panna bendője.*” In *Acta Historiae Litterarum Hungaricarum*, Tomus XXIX. (*Ötvös Péter Festschrift*), szerk. Font Zsuzsa, Keserű Gizella, Szeged, 2006.