

University of Szeged  
Faculty of Arts  
Graduate School of Literature

# **Printers' and Publishers' Devices in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

Theory and Practice

Theses of the PhD dissertation of  
**Melinda Simon**

Supervisor: Judit V. Ecsedy, DSc  
National Széchényi Library

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## **The premises and the boundaries of the research**

My dissertation focuses on the modern descendants of a long tradition of printers' devices. I confer the printers' and publishers' marks from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but every now and again I discuss some representations from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, too, because some of the examined modern phenomena root in this period.

There is a considerable European literature on printers' and publishers' devices from the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the German and Italian research in particular is very advanced. Beyond the wide range of source-books we find lesser studies on their visual elements and typology or their historical development. That is no wonder considering that the author of a work of this kind has to overlook a great amount of sources and needs to have serious routine in the history of arts, symbols and artistic techniques.

There are even fewer studies on devices dating from the 18<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries (we can find a few source-books but no analysing treatises whatsoever). That is not an incidence either, while the industrial editorship has brought a rapid increase in the circulation and therefore in the number of visual sources, too. Hence the lack of research offers excellent opportunities but imposes great difficulties as well. One of these consists in the deficiencies of the published data on 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian publishers, another one in the bulk of the books printed in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century without indication of the date, which renders very difficult the definition of the period of the use of the devices, too.

During the analysis of modern printers' marks I have found that part of these show the same phenomena as the classical printers' and publishers' devices. Such are the puns referring to the printer's name, Renaissance symbols or the gods of Antiquity and their attributes. Likewise, the modern printers' marks mirror the

artistic style of their time as their predecessors did. As the well-known baroque and rococo devices dominated the front pages of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century editions, we can find marks in a classical style on a book edited in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or Art Nouveau representations in books printed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In my dissertation I concentrate exclusively on phenomena which are totally new and had not been observed previously. To illustrate these I bring several Hungarian devices but to draw a parallel I use many European and American examples, too. This way the analysed phenomena can be traced out more clearly and the study avoids being narrow-minded. New sources will surely emerge but I trust that these will not modify the essence of my conclusions.

## **The results**

In the first part of the dissertation I review the foreign and Hungarian source-books and analysing studies on printers' and publishers' devices emphasizing their virtues and defects. I trace the trends of publication on this matter, their contents and the citations between them. I discuss more in detail the accomplishments of the Hungarian literature and the uncertainty of the Hungarian terminology. I pay attention to the existing specialized databases on the Web and the digitised literature as to the compilations published on compact disks.

In the following I analyse some modern phenomena of the use of printers' marks. First I deal with an efficient technique of visual marketing used by publishers: the copying of historic devices or the imitation of their style. It is rarely based on legal continuity, we can rather speak of „borrowing” or sometimes adapting them. When choosing a historical device the analysed publishers rely on the visual memory of their future readers. They hope that the silhouettes impressed

in the minds of people will feel familiar when they see a book and therefore they will most likely buy it. But there are only a few educated readers with such a visual subconscious, hence we can generally find such historical devices in the case of bibliophile publishing houses with high standards.

Secondly I handle the case of printers' devices used as ornaments on library buildings. All the 24 buildings included in the survey were inaugurated between 1890 and 1940, therefore the phenomenon can be well delimited in time. This "vogue" can be observed almost exclusively in the United States of America (mostly along the East Coast), hence its geographical limits can be easily drawn, too. Eventually, the use of printers' marks as ornaments is not related with the style of the building and it shows a great technical diversity. The builders' aim was exclusively the decorativeness, therefore the devices are not always depicted realistically, they are often adjusted to the possibilities of the given building or technique. These representations have lost their original function (and often their original shape, too) but they have gained a new function: they find their place easily between the decorations of a building of any style and always create a pleasant atmosphere.

Thereafter I examine a phenomenon which seems to have begun in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it is still present nowadays: the printers' and publishers' devices featuring recognizable buildings or townscapes. This practice has in my view two separate explanations. The first one is the profound faith of 18<sup>th</sup> century publishers in the morality and knowledge disseminated by their books. They were not using some abstract symbols as a device but they depicted instead their generally newly built premises. In these cases the building itself bore such a symbolical value which was telling everything about the publisher's intentions.

The publishers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are using recognizable buildings for a totally different reason. They want to identify quickly and unequivocally the location of their business. Early printers did the same thing by using the crests of the cities they were working in (this practice was very common in Hungary in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries). But as the knowledge of classical heraldry became the privilege of a more and more restricted circle we can only see sporadically the coats of arms of cities in 18<sup>th</sup> century printers' and publishers' marks. But the intention of the producers of books remained the same. Their previous use of crests was exclusively utilitarian: it served the quick definition of their cities. If the coat of arms is not recognized anymore it has to be replaced by something that creates the same quick association. The idea of the practical printers and publishers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was that well-known buildings of their cities would be just suitable for this purpose. Hence this type of devices has to be seen as a modern transformation of heraldry.

In some of the cases certain pieces of art hold the same function but the publishing houses generally choose to represent on their books artworks that characterize them from a political, a professional or a qualitative point of view. They use for their purposes sculptures, plaquettes, medallions etc that visualise a mental content revealing their aims. The portrayal of political objectives through specific works of art can be observed in the socialist period in particular, the "vocational" artwork devices occur throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

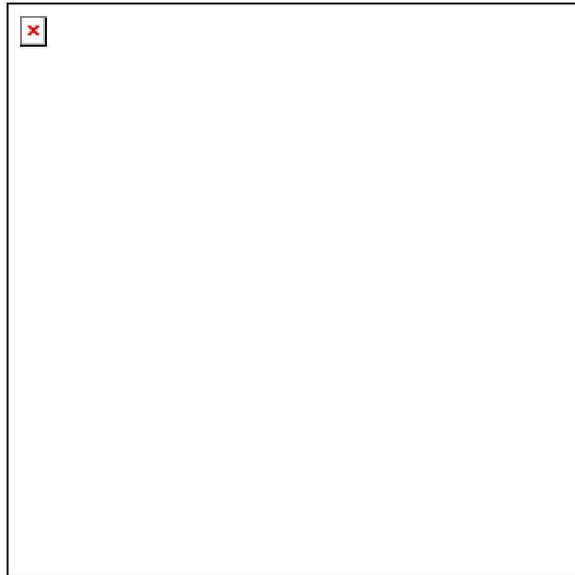
The work of art chosen by an editor is generally a worldwide famous one (like the creations of the classical Antiquity for example) or at least well known by every member of a national community (like Constantin Brâncuși's *Endless Column* or István Ferenczy's *Shepherdess* for example). We know of very few cases involving an inverted process, such as the medallion featuring Kelemen Mikes made by Fülöp Beck. This representation became famous due to its frequent appearance on the

title-pages of the review *Nyugat*. I discuss shortly the misuse of illustrious creations, when the generally fugitive publishers try to benefit financially from the attraction raised by the familiar image. We cannot find an organic relation between the content of their books and their devices.

In my work I cannot aspire to the completeness of the data of the researchers of classical printers' and publishers' marks, because by the time of modern industrial publishing that would be very hard to achieve. In the case of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the completeness can be reached – at least for the moment – in the case of particular publishing houses. I had to choose a publisher which existed for only a short period of time and with a relatively low number of books printed for this purpose. I opted for the Transylvanian Guild of Arts (Erdélyi Szépművés Céh) in Kolozsvár and the periodical *Erdélyi Helikon* published by them. The complete review made by the personal examination of every single book resulted that their use of devices was far more comprehensive and diversified as we could think of, based on the sporadic publications which appeared so far. Károly Kós tried several types, sizes and placements during the twenty years of existence of the Guild. He also refined the numerous versions of the device of the Helikon-movement until the final result of a classical simplicity. These printers' marks have never been reviewed by nobody until now and their extreme diversity did not occur even to those involved in the period's literary history. The artist of the linocuts, Károly Kós was aware of the strong influence of the symbolic devices and therefore he applied them in the most possible places and in the most conceivable forms. He considered important the use of devices even in his personal life and, when at home in Sztána, he wrote his letters almost always on paper adorned with the impression of this symbolic building. These images linked to one of the most important literary enterprises between the two World Wars are partly impressed in our minds. They

constitute a living part of our visual culture – but on the other hand, the second part of the devices are unknown even to professionals.

In the end I try to present the changes in the signification of a classical symbol (the sower) with a survey of the utmost printers' and publishers' devices from the first centuries of printing to our days. I follow the figure from the rare representations of the biblical sower through the more frequent symbols of hope to the allusions of the publisher's professional (mostly educational) orientation. The sower is represented mostly as a solitary central figure and rarely as a figure in the background. In this part of the dissertation I also present the change from a publisher's device to a modern company logo in the course of an ever stronger simplification.





## Publications in the field

### Books

Ecsedy Judit, V. – Simon Melinda: *Kiadói és nyomdászjelvények Magyarországon a kezdetektől a 18. század végéig = Hungarian printers' and publishers' devices between 1488 and 1800*. Budapest : Balassi, 2009.

*Kiadói és nyomdászjelvények : szakirodalmi szöveggvűjtemény I.* Szeged : Juhász Gyula Felsőoktatási Kiadó, 2009. (Habent sua fata libelli 5.)

### Studies

*Stratégies de publicité visuelles. Historisation dans les marques d'éditeurs européens et américains des 19<sup>e</sup>–20<sup>e</sup> siècles.* In: Pour une étude des bibliothèques conventuelles, bourgeoises et aristocratiques IV. Prague, 2009. (under publication)

*Vizuális stratégiák. Historizálás 19–20. századi európai és amerikai kiadók jelvényeiben.* In: A 2008. évi Kari Tudományos Nap válogatott tanulmányai. Szeged, 2009. (under publication)

*Civilizatorikus hitvallás és modern heraldika. Az épített környezet szerepe a 18–20. századi kiadói és nyomdászjelvényekben.* In: Deé Nagy Anikó jubileumi kötet. Marosvásárhely : Teleki-Téka, 2009. (under publication)

*A magvető alakja a kiadói és nyomdászjelvényekben.* In: Monok István, Nyerges Judit szerk.: A MOKKA-R Egyesület 2007. december 17-i felolvasóülésének anyaga. Budapest : Argumentum, 2008. (A Magyar Könyvszemle és a MOKKA-R Egyesület füzetek 1). 79–110.

*Funkciótlan vagy funkcionális? Nyomdászjelvények, mint könyvtáráépületek díszítőelemei.* In: Apró cseppekből lesz a zápor. Bakonyi Géza emlékkötet. Szeged : Juhász Gyula Felsőoktatási Kiadó, 2008. (Habent sua fata libelli 4.) 95–116.

*Elektronikus források a kiadói és nyomdászjelvények tanulmányozásához.* In: Apró cseppekből lesz a zápor. Bakonyi Géza emlékkötet. Szeged : Juhász Gyula Felsőoktatási Kiadó, 2008. (Habent sua fata libelli 4.) 159–178.

## Lectures

*Civilizatorikus hitvallás és modern heraldika. Az épített környezet szerepe a 18–20. századi kiadói és nyomdászjelvényekben*

University of Szeged, Faculty of Arts – Scientific Conference  
(Szeged, 29 April 2009)

*Stratégies de publicité visuelles. Historisation dans les marques d'éditeurs européens et américains des 19e–20e siècles*

Pour une étude des bibliothèques conventuelles, bourgeoises et aristocratiques IV.  
(Prague, 26–29 October 2008)

*Vizuális stratégiák. Historizálás 19–20. századi európai és amerikai kiadók jelvényeiben*

University of Szeged, Faculty of Arts – Scientific Conference  
(Szeged, 23 April 2008)

*Funkciótlan vagy funkcionális? Nyomdászjelvények, mint könyvtárépületek díszítőelemei*

University of Szeged, Faculty of Arts – Scientific Conference  
(Szeged, 18 April 2007)