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The Poetry of Árpád Tőzsér

Thesis booklet

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Budapest
2025

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1. Background to the research, problem statement

Reading and interpreting Árpád Tőzsér's poetry is an extremely honorable and challenging task. His career as a poet, which began in the 1960s with the publication of several volumes of poetry, and the development of his poetry have preoccupied me for years. I am convinced that this is not merely a remarkable body of work, but also one that makes it possible to approach many fundamental questions of 20th-century modern and postmodern Hungarian poetry.

Whether we examine his oeuvre in terms of changes in his poetic voice, shifts in his approach, or the re-evaluation of poetic roles, we encounter a perplexing, yet fertile eclecticism. In Árpád Tőzsér, we honor not only a significant Hungarian-language poet of the second half of the 20th century, but also a central, always noteworthy, exemplary figure of Hungarian literary life in Czechoslovakia and later Slovakia, capable of mobilizing great intellectual energy.

A monographic treatment of his oeuvre is still pending; critical attention – which, incidentally, varies in intensity from volume to volume – and the collections of studies discussing his work have not covered his entire oeuvre, which is understandable given its size and scope.

This thesis therefore pays particular attention to the history of reception that can be constructed from the interpretation of secondary writings, in addition to the primary texts. The oeuvre is valuable, and

the directions in which its reception has developed have been extremely instructive in reflecting the changes that have taken place in critical discourse, the understanding of poetry, and the interpretation of literature over the past decades. I therefore attempted a critical analysis of the cross-readings of the multidirectional and divergent theoretical considerations that drive reception – reception in Hungarian-speaking communities beyond Hungary's borders and the history of reception in Hungary.

The migration of lyrical texts from volume to volume makes the oeuvre a dynamic entity, the exploration of which became comprehensible and analyzable through a close rereading of the volumes and the detection of text movements and rewritings.

The oeuvre offers a wealth of reading possibilities, and the knowledge that can be gleaned from it not only constitutes a summarized, clarified set of results from the volumes of the lyrical oeuvre I have examined, but can also be utilized and converted by describing and examining the development of poetic craft, the development of lyrical forms, and the description and examination of 20th and 21st-century literary history and poetic models.

2. Research methodology

Due to the multifaceted nature of his oeuvre, a broader framework for interpretation can be provided; therefore, starting from the poetic and aesthetic characteristics of the texts, I have subordinated the strategies of interpretation and reading to the primary texts. The challenge and benefit of reinterpreting the reception was to determine how the oeuvre could be placed on the palette of modern and postmodern poetry, and to what extent a vertical reading of the poems could contribute to a more complete understanding of the oeuvre.

In Árpád Tózsér's poetry, we can identify the minority situation and the fate of Central Europe as a unique pattern, while at the same time, the demanding, highly ambitious, and self-critical personality of universal Hungarian-language poetry unfolds before us. When writing this thesis, we also had to take into account that his oeuvre is not yet complete.

Árpád Tózsér is an author who always wanted to remain intellectual, preserving his integrity and constantly seeking to draw the perspective of the present from a past he considered memorable. He turned his attentive gaze to certain elements of tradition. As a result, this poetry, deeply embedded in European intellectual traditions, arranges its own position, its possibilities for articulation and communication, from time to time into a dialogical situation. The metareflexive, often metapoetic discourse is a defining feature of the internal development of his oeuvre.

The thesis primarily dealt with the poetry of Árpád Tózsér. Since his oeuvre began in the second half of the 20th century, it was necessary to take into account the determinants that may have arisen due to the paradigm shifts in modern poetry, the neo-avantgarde, and postmodernism.

Árpád Tózsér's poetry is, in a metapoetic sense, a series of parables; individual pieces of his lyrical oeuvre constantly reflect on the process of writing as it revolves around the self, the individual. His poems engage in an active, meaningful dialogue with changing worldviews, while at the same time operating with self-reflexive solutions, taking into account the role of the poet and the possibilities of lyrical expression.

I wanted to follow and systematize the processes of the development of the lyrical oeuvre. This process is by no means linear; rather, it can be grasped along the lines of concentricity, recurring, repositioning, recursive gestures. This can be understood both in terms of the compositional structure of the poetry collections and the migration of the texts that comprise them.

The stages of Tózsér's poetic career represent the current trends in lyrical expression across entire volumes. We cannot identify a volume with a unified poetic approach in relation to the entire oeuvre; heterogeneity, the possibility of diversity in lyrical speech, and current considerations follow each other in parallel and appear in synchrony in the volumes. At the same time, the anthologies attempt to reverse linearity and traditional chronology on several occasions. Therefore, in addition to mapping individual periods and eras, this thesis treated

the entire oeuvre as a dynamic collection of texts, describing and reflecting on changes in poetics and perspective, as well as monitoring the migration and transformation of the texts.

Regarding the centricity and circularity of the oeuvre, it can be said that the nature of the oeuvre could give rise to a constellation of texts organized around key moments, epicenters, and themes (such as *Mittelszolipszizmus*¹ as a series of volumes, *Körök*² as a selected and/or collected volume, as well as *Négy negyed*³ and *Erről az Euphorboszról beszélük*⁴ could have been structured in this way), but this possibility has remained just that until now.

The selections published so far are either linear in structure: regardless of whether they progressed forward in time (*Körök*; *Négy negyed*) or backward (*Genezis*⁵; *Mittelszolipszizmus*) *Erről az Euphorboszról beszélük*, intended to be the most complete, found itself in a position on several occasions where it was forced to interfere with the cycle and text order of the original volumes, taking into account the modifications to the texts, the self-collages that had been created in the meantime, and the contaminated text collections. However, this publication did not bring about circularity or even thematic arrangement.

The concept is therefore a moment in literary history that must be examined in the case of every Tózsér volume, for which the interpreter

¹ Tózsér Árpád: *Mittelszolipszizmus*. Széphalom Könyvműhely, Budapest, 1995.

² Tózsér Árpád: *Körök*. Madách Könyvkiadó, Pozsony, 1985.

³ Tózsér Árpád: *Négy negyed*. Nap Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 1999.

⁴ Tózsér Árpád: *Erről az Euphorboszról beszélük. Összegyűjtött versek (1963–2012)*. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 2015.

⁵ Tózsér Árpád: *Genezis*. Madách Könyvkiadó, Pozsony, 1979.

must find a strategy. I am convinced that both linear and reverse chronological readings, as well as circular readings (mapping themes, nodes, and poetic solutions) can form the basis for a fruitful dialogue.

The compilation and compositional arrangement of the volumes, and the temporality of the oeuvre, thus repeatedly confront linearity in such a way that it relies on it throughout. Reception therefore reads the oeuvre as a succession of volumes, as a series of one-off constellations, where the title of the volume, the order of the cycles, and the reading of the texts together give rise to the current pattern.

Linearity is undoubtedly an orientation when determining career stages, but at the same time, poetic tendencies transcend volume boundaries and represent the emerging corpus. The migration and rewriting of texts can also shift the interpretation in the direction of viewing the moments of the oeuvre as a synchronous constellation, the collection of texts arranged under a single volume title as a set of current statements, mainly from the perspective of the relationship between the title and the texts, as well as the internal connections and readability of the texts, and their poetic benefits.

With regard to textual migrations, we must recognize the crucial difference between simple relocation, correction, title change, partial rewriting, and, in extreme cases, self-palimpsest, or self-collage and contamination affecting the composition.

The two monographic studies of the oeuvre, by Györgyi Pécsi⁶ and Zoltán Németh⁷, can be compared in that both authors consider the

⁶ Pécsi Györgyi: *Tözsér Árpád*. Kalligram Könyvkiadó, Pozsony, 1995.

⁷ Németh Zoltán: *Az életmű mint irodalomtörténet*. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 2011.

positioning of the lyrical self to be an important factor implying change in the lyrical oeuvre.

The lyrical transformations and the creation of lyrical masks can be examined in close relation to developments in content and form. Applying this perspective to the poetic changes, they can be described as a series of changes, intensities, turns and shifts. The temporal extent of Tózsér's oeuvre and its richness in themes and forms provide an opportunity to reflect on the defining poetic concepts and trends of the second half of the 20th century in relation to his oeuvre.

If we relate the development of modern poetry to the oeuvre, examining the combination of influences that shaped Tózsér's poetry, then in addition to the 20th century, we can also understand the potential influence of 19th-century poetic tradition on the 20th century. In a broader sense, the characteristics of modern, post-modern, neo-avant-garde, and postmodern poetry can also be the subject of examination.

The central themes that preoccupy Tózsér can be discerned in the constant changeability of his poetry: his connection to Hungarian and world literary traditions, texts that thematize the lyrical self-position and reinforce its unity with poems, elegiac poems detecting the absence of metaphysics, a continuous, affective attitude towards mythology and history, and, last but not least, the re-mapping of his Gömör origins and writing them into verse are the central sources of his poetic endeavors over the last two decades.

In terms of literary history, his writings on Czechoslovakian and later Slovakian Hungarian literary history are naturally considered an

indispensable corpus of the second half of the 20th century. Taking into account both literary history summaries and collections of studies⁸, we find his work in a strong, central canonical position.⁹

At the same time, among Hungarian literary histories, his oeuvre is mentioned in Volume X of *A magyar irodalom története*¹⁰ (The History of Hungarian Literature), and András Görömbei's book, *A csehszlovákiai magyar irodalom 1945–1980*¹¹ (Hungarian Literature in Czechoslovakia 1945–1980) also devotes special attention to Tózsér. However, he is not mentioned in the literary history written by Ernő Kulcsár Szabó,¹² nor does he appear in Tibor Gintli's work.¹³

In my work, I therefore placed particular emphasis on researching and describing the parallels in the literary history of the second half of the 20th century. I am convinced that, from an aesthetic and poetic point of view, Tózsér's poetry ranks among the significant achievements of Hungarian-language literature, and due to its variability, it can be assigned to several poetic models and trends. His posthumous canonization and presence in future literary histories must therefore always be given serious consideration, emphasizing once

⁸ Grendel Lajos: *A modern magyar irodalom története. Magyar líra és epika a 20. században*. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 2010.

⁹ Lásd *A mittelszolipszizmus terei. Tózsér Árpád életműve (poszt)modern kontextusban*, szerk.: Cseh Zoltán – Polgár Anikó. Media Nova Kiadó, Dunaszerdahely, 2017, illetve *A kontextus végtelensége. Tanulmánykötet Tózsér Árpád 80. születésnapjára*, szerk. Csanda Gábor – H. Nagy Péter. Szlovákiai Magyar Írók Társasága, Dunaszerdahely, 2015.

¹⁰ *A magyar irodalom története*, X. kötet, szerk.: Béládi Miklós – Bodnár György – Sötér István – Szabolcsi Miklós. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1982.

¹¹ Görömbei András: *A csehszlovákiai magyar irodalom 1945–1980*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1982, 302–319.

¹² Kulcsár Szabó Ernő: *A magyar irodalom története 1945–1991*. Argumentum Kiadó, Budapest, 1994.

¹³ *Magyar irodalom*, szerk. Gintli Tibor. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2010.

again that, in terms of the quality of his oeuvre and considering his poetic work over the past decades, this has become almost exclusively a dilemma of selection.

3. The new results

In my dissertation, I examined the development of Árpád Tőzsér's poetry. I traced his lyrical corpus from the publication of his first volume (*Mogorva csillag*, 1963) to the end of the 2000s (*Csatavirág*, 2009). I was interested in the organization of the poems into volumes and the dynamics of the texts. The philological, typographical, and poetic examination of the poems in the volumes revealed the considerations and driving forces that played a decisive role in approaching, mapping, and understanding the lyrical oeuvre, and may also open up further horizons of interpretation in the direction of the texts of the Tőzsér corpus that are not analyzed in detail here.

The size of the oeuvre made it possible for my work to be limited to the development of the lyrical works and the poetic modifications. Therefore, I did not deal with the texts of the six volumes of *Diaries*, nor were Tőzsér's thematic volumes (essays, journalism, criticism, studies) within the scope of my interest on this occasion.

I have attempted to highlight the predominantly 20th-century literary and poetic trends (from classical modernism to the historical avant-garde, late and postmodernism, neo-avant-garde, and postmodernism) and to identify the textual connections that influenced the development of his oeuvre. I did this in order to draw attention to the cultural background that played a decisive role in the creation of his lyrical works, as well as to the possibilities of cross-reading his oeuvre, which is part of both contemporary and traditional literature. In this way, my work revealed the poetic considerations that can be

grasped in their variability and that determine the development of Tózsér's poetry.

I tried to abstract trends from the texts and poetic achievements. I therefore moved from the texts toward generally formulable literary-historical and theoretical considerations, and I hope that my own analyses—based on a close reading of the texts, an evaluation of the poet's craft, and an examination of the mechanisms of poetry—have helped to reveal not only a horizontal overview of the oeuvre, but also its metatextual, cultural-historical verticality.

I relied heavily on the reception of the oeuvre. A complex, comprehensive analysis of the oeuvre has not yet been undertaken, so I relied on studies and critical apparatus in addition to monographic analyses. In processing the reception, I made no distinction between the results of reception beyond Hungary's borders and those within Hungary, just as I considered the Tózsér corpus to be part of universal Hungarian literature, taking into account, as appropriate, those determinants that proved significant due to his position as a member of a minority.

Contributions of the thesis: I conducted a complex poetic analysis of the first two volumes, tracing the migrations between the texts of the volumes and the textual, typographical, and positional modifications.

I have raised new perspectives on the reception of the volume *Érintések* (Touches) to date. Through a close reading of the texts, I have unraveled the intentions behind the formation of the Tózsér

poems, which play a decisive role in shaping the text and organizing the available experience and knowledge into poetry.

Through a wide-ranging analysis of the volume *Faustus Prágában*, I sought to answer the question of what textual background a volume that also functions as a dramatic text has. I identified the place where Árpád Tózsér enters Madách's text. Similarly, I traced the poem *Keresztút* (Crossroads), which advanced from the closing monologue to become an independent poem.

I reinterpreted the poetry of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s comprehensively and in detail. In relation to the poems of the 1980s, I was interested in text organization and the typographical layout of the poems, while in the 1990s, I was interested in geopolitical changes, the transformation of the literary milieu, and, in relation to this, the re-situation of lyrical speech, the multiplication of alter egos, and the development of multiple identities. In the poetry of the 2000s, I explored the textual connections between Hungarian and world literature, and I also examined poems that draw on antiquity (myth, history, literature). I also interpreted the anthropological experience of the works of art appearing in the Tózsér corpus, analyzing the relationship between the works of art and the text.

4. Publications related to the thesis

My research focuses on contemporary Hungarian poetry. I examine the phenomena that shaped the development of lyric poetry in the 1990s and 2000s following the modern/postmodern paradigm shift in poetry.

Through the poetry of Imre Oravecz, Ottó Tolnai, and Árpád Tózsér, I have sought and continue to seek answers to the question of what larger mental and narrative structures (anthropological horizon, cultural memory, microhistory) lie behind these oeuvres. I therefore examine individual oeuvres in light of these criteria, seeking answers to the question of how the many models of Hungarian-language poetry at the turn of the millennium relate to time, space, memory, and history. My publishing activity began in the early 2000s. My commitment to literary criticism was combined with the examination of contemporary lyrical works.

Since I have been working as a university lecturer since 2005, I have had the opportunity to represent Hungarian-language poetry; I have taught numerous courses on contemporary Hungarian literature and contemporary Hungarian poetry (Sándor Weöres, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, László Villányi, György Petri, Sándor Kányádi, Imre Oravecz, Ottó Tolnai). In addition to criticism, I have also published studies; below are my writings on modern and postmodern Hungarian-language poetry. Since my dissertation deals with the poetry of Árpád Tózsér, touching on the canonical and reception-aesthetic

contributions of his lyrical oeuvre, the experiences gained from these writings have been of great help in its realization.

Publications

Studies – contemporary Hungarian poetry

Sütő Csaba András: *Bohóctréfaról – komolyan. Petri György: Amíg lehet című kötetének recepciója*. Új Forrás, 2004/8. 34–39.

Sütő Csaba András: *Térey János* (íróportré). Szépirodalmi Figyelő, 2004/4., 126–132.

Sütő Csaba András: *Kányádi Sándor* (íróportré). Szépirodalmi Figyelő, 2006/1., 102–110.

Sütő Csaba András: *Deák László* (íróportré). Szépirodalmi Figyelő, 2007/4., 14–22.

Sütő Csaba András: *A distancia poétikája. Megvalósítási és megvalósulási módozatok Jenei Gyula Ha kérdenéd című kötetében*. Új Forrás, 2007/1., 96–104.

Sütő Csaba András: *Referenciális és figurális beszéd Radnóti Miklós korai költészetében*. Műhely, 2009/6. (Radnóti Miklós különszám), 55–59.

Sütő Csaba András: *Et in Arcadia ego (László Noémi, Király Zoltán, Farkas Wellmann Endre és Lövétei Lázár László válogatott és új verseiről)*. Szépirodalmi Figyelő, 2009/6., 40–49.

Sütő Csaba András: *Tolnai-triptichon. Romeltakarítás és restauráció Tolnai Ottó újabb könyveiben*. Műhely, 2010/6., 60–65.

Sütő Csaba András: *Permanens transzparencia. Szöveg, test, fény, árnyék. Turczi István erotiko-lírájának megközelítése szöveg- és képzelméleti támogatással*. In: (Radvánszky Anikó – Sütő Csaba András szerk.) *Tények melankóliája. Írások Turczi István műveiről*. Ráció Kiadó, Bp., 2012, 126–134.

Publications related to Árpád Tőzsér

Tőzsér Árpád: *Lélekvándor*. Napkút Kiadó, Budapest, 2019. A kötet szerkesztője voltam.

Sütő Csaba András: *Tőzsér Árpád pályaképe*. Digitális Irodalmi Akadémia (<https://pim.hu/hu/dia/dia-tagjai/tozser-arpad#eletraiz>, utolsó letöltés: 2025. november 11.)

Sütő Csaba András: *Tőzsér Árpád Mogorva csillag című kötetéről – hat évtized múltán*. Szépirodalmi Figyelő, 2023/1., 101–109.

Sütő Csaba András: *Adalékok az „Adalék”-hoz. Tőzsér Árpád Faustus Prágában című kötetének alakulástörténete*. Filológiai Közlöny, 2023/4., 95–108.

Sütő Csaba András: *Adalékok az „Adalék”-hoz. Tőzsér Árpád Faustus Prágában című kötetének alakulástörténete, II. rész*. Filológiai Közlöny, közlésre elfogadva, m. e.

Sütő Csaba András: *Keresztút, kereszteződés (Tőzsér, Goethe, J. A.)*. Eruditio–Educatio, 2024/1., 135–149.

Sütő Csaba András: *A vers formai alakváltozásai. Tőzsér Árpád Mogorva csillag és Kettős ürben című kötetének verstani megközelítése*. Partitúra, 2024/2., 65–88.

Sütő Csaba András: *A vers formai alakváltozásai a Tőzsér-líra első évtizedeiben. Az Érintések kötet poétikai változásai.* Bárka, 2025/1., 78–84.

Sütő Csaba András: *Eleai Zénón, Homérosz, Heidegger, Wittgenstein és a többiek (Tőzsér Árpád: Akhilleusz beéri a teknőst).* Bárka, 2024/4. 107–109.

Sütő Csaba András: *Vers, forma, kifejezés, eszkaláció. Kibontakozás az 1980-as években Tőzsér Árpád költészetében (Adalékok a Nyolcadik színhez; Történetek Mittel úrról, a gombáról és a magánvalóról).* Bárka, közlésre elfogadva, m. e.

Sütő Csaba András: *A Tőzsér-vers poétikai alakulása a Leviticustól a 2010-es évekig.* Eruditio–Educatio, közlésre elfogadva, m. e.