

Loránd Eötvös University
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**HUNGARIAN COMEDY FROM AN ITALIAN PASTORAL:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BALASSI'S *A FINE
HUNGARIAN COMEDY* AND CASTELLETTI'S *AMARILLI***

**Theses associated with the doctoral dissertation of
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TOPIC

The thesis, written at the Italian Literary and Cultural Studies Programme of the ELTE Doctoral School of Literary Studies, is concerned with the history of Hungarian literature, more specifically, with Bálint Balassi's *Fine Hungarian comedy*. Although a contribution from a researcher of Italian literature to that topic might be considered unsurprising (as it is well known that the Hungarian Comedy is the adaptation of a pastoral play by the contemporary Cristoforo Castelletti), the dissertation offers an approach which is somewhat different from the ones followed by researchers of the *Fine Hungarian comedy* until now, since, instead of examining its subject by looking back from Balassi and the Hungarian literature, it makes Castelletti and the Italian literary context its starting point, and, at the same time, attempts to arrive at new conclusions by a systematic study of Balassi's textual modifications. As a consequence, the thesis provides useful background information for researchers of Balassi and, not least, the history of Hungarian drama, while not being without interest from the point of view of the history of Italian literature either, as Cristoforo Castelletti's *Amarilli* is one of its undeservedly neglected chapters.

STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

The first part offers an overview of the *Fine Hungarian comedy*'s research history, presenting the most important experts in the field from Pál Erdélyi, who discovered a print fragment in 1899, to József Waldapfel, who identified Balassi's Italian source (1937), and from Sándor Eckhardt, the first publisher of a manuscript

(found in 1958) containing the *Comedy's* complete text, who undertook research on Balassi's Italian sources as early as 1913, to the most recent papers of Amadeo di Francesco, who devoted an entire monograph to the *Comedy* (1979) and Péter Kőszeghy, who published the modern reference edition (1990) with Géza Szabó, and wrote its Afterword.

The goal of the second part is to locate the *Fine Hungarian Comedy's* source, Castelletti's *Amarilli*, in the wider context of contemporary Italian literary theory. The discussion focuses, in particular, on the predecessors of the pastoral subgenre, especially on the eclogue and satyr-play subgenres and their place within the literary genres. The first chapter examines the division of genres in connection to Antonio Minturno's *L'arte poetica*, which is a representative, comprehensive work on poetics, while the second and third chapters discuss the eclogue and satyr-play subgenres respectively, and the fourth and fifth ones the relationship between these concepts and that of the pastoral drama. The definition of the terms “egloga” and “satira” in the contemporary tract literature raises a number of difficulties: while the former was an umbrella term, the latter was used with several meanings, frequently without drawing a precise distinction between them. Nevertheless, these terminological problems gradually disappeared in the process of the codification of pastoral drama. The last chapter of the second part emphasises the central role played by Giovan Battista Guarini in the establishment (*Il pastor fido*) and codification (*Il Verrato, Il Verato secondo, Il compendio della poesia tragicomica*) of the pastoral drama subgenre, but does not discuss the term „tragicomedia”, which was introduced specifically by Guarini, because it is irrelevant to the thesis's topic.

The third part is devoted specifically to Balassi's source, the *Amarilli*, and its author Cristoforo Castelletti. It offers a short assessment of Castelletti's role in the history of Italian literature, and a glance at the modern research of Castelletti, which has become remarkably active in the last four decades, its main topic being – beside the *Amarilli*, – the comedy *Stravaganze d'amore*, which is highly important both for the use dialects (among them Roman, which makes its first appearance in a comedy) and its musical intermedia. After a recapitulation of the few known facts about Castelletti's life and works, the main topic of the third part is Castelletti's one and only pastoral play, the *Amarilli*, which was published in three different versions in his lifetime. Similarly to the second part, which studied the Italian pastoral subgenre on the basis of the contemporary tract literature, the third part follows a literary theory-based approach by interpreting the *Amarilli*'s genre, features and roots in the light of Castelletti's self-definition in the first edition's dedication (1580).

The chapters of the fourth part contain summaries of tendencies that are observable by comparing the texts of Castelletti's *Amarilli* and Balassi's *Fine Hungarian Comedy*. The first chapter provides a general overview of Balassi's modifications on the level of scenes, the second shows in detail that Balassi systematically removed those features of the original drama that made it specifically a pastoral play, the third presents some important tendencies in the changes of poetic imagery, while the fourth demonstrates how, in marked contrast to the ancient pagan tradition characteristic of Italian pastoral dramas, the christian God of Balassi and the Hungarian dramatic tradition got integrated into the text of the *Fine Hungarian Comedy*.

RESULTS, AND PROBLEMS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the research history of the *Fine Hungarian Comedy*, the present thesis is the first to pay serious attention to the Italian literary and, more importantly, literary theoretic context of Balassi's source.

I. With respect to the research on the contemporary Italian literary theory (more precisely, that on the contemporary theory of pastoral drama) the thesis's novelty is that – compared to the chapter summarising the theoretical debates on pastoral drama in Bernard Weinberg's *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (1961), but partly on the basis of Weinberg's own four-volume edition, the *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento* (1970–1974) – it also examines tracts much earlier than Denores's and Guarini's treatises, and in more detail than, for instance, Emilio Bigi's classic study *Il dramma pastorale del Cinquecento* (1971), which also contains a discussion of the theoretical background of pastoral drama.

- In connection with the interpretation of these texts, the thesis stresses that the terminological problems are in part caused by the fact that the classification of certain umbrella terms – especially that of „egloga” – was controversial already at the level of genres.
- In contrast to other researchers of the satyr-play, who usually consider the resurrection of the subgenre a dead end closed by Giraldi Cinzio's *Egloga* in 1545, the thesis argues that the satyr-play in fact influenced the pastoral drama both from the practical and theoretical point of view. On the theoretical level, the satyr-play was replaced by the pastoral drama as

the third subgenre beside tragedy and comedy (this tripartite division was well known long before the resurrection of the satyr-play because of the three *scenes* – tragic, comic, satyric – of Vitruvius, who was very popular starting from the Quattrocento). On the practical level, the descriptions of satyrs as special, imagination capturing beings, the *Egle* itself, and Poliziano's *Orfeo* – which, according to the interpretation of Tissoni Benvenuti, was intended as a satyr-play –, and perhaps directly Euripedes's *Cyclops*, had an influence on the pastoral plays (first of all in Ferrara).

- In addition to the twofold (theoretical and practical) influence of Poliziano and Giraldi Cinzio, the thesis emphasises the practical role of Trissino, who justified his theory about the eclogue by the poetry of his own two eclogues. He wrote in rhymeless hendecasyllables; and his pioneering eclogues and tragedy had a formative influence on later pastoral plays (at least indirectly).

II. Concerning Castelletti's *Amarilli*, the most important novelty of the thesis is a thorough analysis of the first edition's (1580) Dedication.

- Drawing on lessons learned in the part on tractarian theories, the thesis argues that the “egloga” term, which occurs both in the Dedication and in the subtitle, is a somewhat antiquated synonym of „pastorale”, which was omitted from the subtitle of the *Amarilli*'s second (1582) and third (1587) edition (Balassi's source was the latter).
- Concerning the “grave” attribute of the word “egloga” in the Dedication, the thesis draws attention to the somewhat later

technical term „commedia grave”, one of the early occurrences of which is related to Castelletti's comedy the *Torti amorosi* (as Louise George Clubb has already observed, although independently of the *Amarilli's* Dedication). The expression „gravità” occurs, even if not as a technical term, in the Prologue of the *Stravaganze d'amore* as well.

- The word “ridicolosa” attached to another eclogue type defined in the *Amarilli's* Dedication is used – also on the basis of a later technical term, the compound „commedia ridicolosa” – in a sense which, in addition to referring to comicality in general, also contains an element of specifically dialectal comicality.
- Since, according to Castelletti's self-definition, the *Amarilli* mixes “serious” with “ridiculous”, that is, „grave” with „ridicolosa”, and since – as we have seen in the previous two paragraphs– later both adjectives became attached to the word „commedia”, the genre of the *Amarilli* (at least that of its first edition) can be construed as falling between pastoral drama and comedy, as if Castelletti had subconsciously used these two adjectives because he did not consider his work definitely a pastoral drama but rather a comedy.
- The thesis points out certain similarities to Tasso's *Aminta*, which is mentioned by Castelletti in his Dedication, and also to dramas by authors of the Rozzi Academy in Siena.

III. Most of the thesis's new findings concern the *Fine Hungarian Comedy*.

1. The newly observed structural modifications are the following:

- Regarding the differences between the manuscript and the print fragment, it is pointed out that the printed version probably contained extended arguments, in Hungarian instead of Latin, before every scene,
- and conjectures that the different numbering of scenes is due to the tendency – already observable in the manuscript – that Balassi tries to close every act with a poem.
- The manuscript's numbering of scenes is already different from that of Castelletti's original, which can be explained by the fact – already noted by the literature in a different context – that Dienes's character is pushed into the background.
- It is remarkable that, in contrast to the usually abridging modifications of the *Fine Hungarian* comedy, the first scene of the first act is also extended (in addition to the poems).
- At several places, Balassi connects non-consecutive scenes in which the same character appears.

2. A thorough examination of Balassi's removal of pastoral elements, which has already been pointed out in the literature, leads to the following observations:

- Balassi does not translate the Italian term “Ninfa” in the arguments preceding scenes, and in other contexts he replaces it with the word „asszony”, or the corresponding

name or pronoun. The words “kegyes” and “virág”, which are integral parts of Balassi's vocabulary, are also used as replacements. The emotional intensity (and reinterpretation) of the recognition scene is emphasised by the exceptional translation of “Ninfa” as “szerelmesem” and „istenasszonyom”.

- Balassi is averse even to the stylised connotation of the word “pastor”; it occurs only in a single Latin argument, and at one place – where it refers specifically to the occupation – he translates it as “juhászember”. The remaining occurrences are either omitted or translated as „férfi”, „legén”, or, less often, as „ember” or using pronouns; when it is used to address a character, it is translated as „társ”.
- Balassi readily uses the word „juhász”, but always as corresponding to the word „capraio”, and, in the case of Dienes, sometimes at places where there is no Italian source. At the same time, the occupation, which Castelletti considered inferior, is treated as having a positive value.
- The kinds of animals are adapted to the Hungarian environment.
- The bucolic-Idyllic periphrastic descriptions are either omitted or simplified.
- Adynata are (i) untranslated , (ii) partly omitted in enumerations, (iii) transformed into Hungarian proverbs.

3. In the case of poetic imagery and figures, the following tendencies can be observed:

- they become more expressive;
- Balassi tries to eliminate those words and images that are commonplaces in contemporary Italian literature,
- he frequently uses verbs instead of nouns.
- avoids using commonplace rhetoric, climax and repetition,
- and instead of stereotypical phrases, which are rejected in general, Balassi often uses short questions and exclamations, which are emotionally more authentic.

4. From the point of view of future research on the *Fine Hungarian Comedy*, the most important issue raised by the thesis is God's continuous presence in the play (which becomes especially noticeable when the comedy is compared to the *Amarilli*):

- in the Prologue, which closes with an Amen;
- in the greeting and farewell formulae;
- in exclamations;
- by replacing the concepts of „ventura”, „natura”, „cielo”, „stelle”, which have a pagan inspiration, and thereby frequently rendering the content of entire sentences christian and moral.

Christian morality

- plays a central role in the presentation of the suicide scene,

- and is also manifested in the exploitation of certain words' („kegyesség”, „hit”) ambiguity, which is taken from the Italian tradition („pietà”, „fede”).
- The figure of the salvation bringing woman also appears in the spirit of that tradition when Balassi calls Licori Angelica and goddess. It will be the task of Balassi researchers to decide whether God's emphatic presence has a real moral reason, or it serves only the practical purpose of convincing the desired woman, or perhaps it is simply a necessary consequence of the *Comedy's* adaptation to the contemporary Hungarian conditions.