Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

PhD DISSERTATION
THESIS

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Poetry Volumes of Seventeenth-Century Hungarian Poetry

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The subject of the thesis

In my thesis I examine Hungarian authorial poetry volumes from the seventeenth century. My focus is on non-religious collections where the poems (or the majority of the poems), as well as the larger units made up of the individual poems were composed by the same person. The main questions are: what methods did the authors use to create a composition spanning over individual works, and what can be regarded as a “poetry volume composition” in the period? My thesis offers details about the poetry of Ferenc Wathay and István Koháry, rather neglected in literary history.

I also touch upon terminological and technological questions of digital scholarly editions. Besides an overview of the recent half decade of international and Hungarian digital philology, I call attention to general problems of digital editing, with special focus on the online critical editions of text compositions (in most cases, poetry volumes).

Objectives, historiography

Hungarian literary history provides examples for the study of individual authorial oeuvres from a non-chronological perspective from the 1970s on. This is the time when the philological inquiry about the circumstances of the birth of the poems and their biographical references was replaced by a textual criticism and interpretation that gave primacy to the source itself. As a consequence, both textology and hermeneutics shifted its attention to the compositions and structures above individual texts, namely the cycles and volumes. The objective of my dissertation is to synthesize the most important critical results of the last fifty years with regards to seventeenth-century Hungary poetry volumes. A comparison of the examined texts with a focus primarily on typology, and secondarily on the history of tradition also yields a more comprehensive view of the processes involved in the composition and the editing of poetry volumes.

My dissertation discusses the poetry of Ferenc Wathay and István Koháry with special emphasis, a corpus which, although forms a part of the early modern Hungarian literary canon, was rather neglected in literary studies, especially when it comes to the structure and composition of their respective volumes of poetry. Besides, I also offer an overview of (and in some cases, some additions to) the critical literature on the poetry volumes of Miklós Zrínyi, László Listius, Péter Beniczky, István Gyöngyösi and István Fráter.

The works of Bálint Balassi, which are important from the perspective of both the mentioned philological turn, and the question of poetry volume composition, will be discussed in the comprehensive introduction of the dissertation, as well as in the section on digital philology.
examined seventeenth-century corpus is connected to Balassi’s volume in different ways, and as such, his works will permeate the chapters of the dissertation, however, Balassi’s poems are not my primary concern here. Just as questionably, the two planned volumes of János Rimay which were never completed, are only briefly discussed here.

According to the typological approach employed in the dissertation the range of tools used to create a given composition can be broken down into its constitutive elements, and these elements can be identified in the analysed texts. The following compositional elements can be abstracted from the corpus under investigation: paratexts; layout, calligraphy and typography; visual elements; motifs and numeric symbols; narratives that extend over the verses; features of prosody. The dissertation shows with examples how such elements (besides other features) contribute to the linking of individual poems within the composition.

The use of terms from literary theory, the manuscript layout and the calligraphic solutions, together with the typographic elaboration are important manifestations of poetic awareness. The creation of authorial poetry volume compositions testifies to a similarly advanced poetic consciousness. Therefore, in my discussion, I focus on the layout and the typography of the poems and the volumes, as well as the paratexts, which are rich sources of reflection, and terms from rhetoric and poetics.

The solutions of digital scholarly editions to record and represent the connection between the text and the composition above the texts are useful for conventional textual studies, too. The dissertation addresses definitional problems of network-based text editions previously neglected in Hungarian critical discussion, and I analyse web editions which publish volume compositions with critical apparatus.

Achievements and new results of the research

1. The simultaneous strength and weakness of the research is its attempt at a synthesis. My purpose was to map the recognisable rules in poetry volume compositions within a clearly demarcated corpus. During my research, based on the observed patterns, I defined a set of tools characteristic of the selected poetry volumes. My approach also offers an opportunity to bring diverse concepts of literary theory (like Philippe Lejeune’s and Stephen Greenblatt’s theories of self-representation or Gérard Genette’s paratext-theory) into a synthesis. The resulting compositional elements abstracted from the corpus (paratexts; layout, calligraphy and typography; visual elements; motifs and numeric
symbols; narratives that extend over the verses; features of prosody) are by no means universal, however, the approach might inspire future research.

2. Several case studies within the dissertation discuss the poetry of Ferenc Wathay. Wathay’s songbook is crucial for my research, because this is the first autograph volume of poetry that was completely preserved and can be regarded as a finished volume, which contains drawings and a prose autobiography as well. In my analysis, I treat the different elements as part of the same concept, and come to the conclusion that the drawings and the paratexts constructing a fictionalised biography are parts of the biographical narrative overarching the volume, further expanded with each verse.

3. The other body of works in the focus of my dissertation is the poetry of István Koháry, in case of which I argue that the playful verse mongering, and the apologetic formulas together comprise a metaphor system that can be interpreted as a poetic programme. A programme that becomes an organic part of Koháry’s cycles, but at the same time, seamlessly integrates with contemporary traditions of poetry (Miklós Zrínyi, István Gyöngyösi, Péter Beniczky) and religious polemy (Péter Pázmány, Zsigmond Csúzy). Like in the case of Wathay, the subject of prison life is dominant in the biographical narrative. A comparison between contemporary sources, previous critical opinions and Koháry’s verse cycles suggests that the captive life, as represented in the poem bears minimum reference to reality. Instead of finding correspondences with the author’s biography, I try to show how corporal and spiritual incarceration emerges as a decisive motif in the whole oeuvre of Koháry.

4. From the further smaller observations of the dissertation, I would like to emphasise those concerning the works of Miklós Zrínyi and László Listius. There are a number of connections between the Syrena-volume and *Magyar Márs*; Listius imitates Zrínyi’s poetry volume in the composition of the volume, the paratexts, and the visual elements as well. Imitation of the progenitor, however, also means competing with him: while battles, love and poetry are equally important parts of Zrínyi’s poetic concept, *Magyar Márs* clearly promotes historic-military values, and singing about the ideal military leader and important military events is its main focus, which is further emphasised by the cover illustration and the preface, too.

As for Zrínyi’s Syrena-volume, I emphasise the presence of number symbolism in the preface *To the Reader (Az Olvasónak)*, and analyse the unnumbered stanzas of *Szigeti veszedelem* as important paratextual elements.
5.
An important result of the dissertation is the terminological and technological review of critical/scholarly electronic text editions with reflections on the Hungarian and the international context. Terminological problems touch upon fundamental textological questions: what is to be regarded as scholarly? what is electronic/digital? what does edition mean in a web context?

The technological overview is also used as a foundation for the discussion of encoding textual compositions. The connection between smaller individual units and the whole volume can be defined in different ways in both the encoding and the representation of the text. The overview focuses only on electronic, primarily network-based sources, because of the paradigm shift elicited by the medial shift, which opened up new ways to process texts from multiple perspectives, representing its plurality and multiplicity, in opposition to conventional paper-based editions. An overview of such editions reveals that with the medial shift in the processes of textual criticism, the compositional connections between texts are often not represented explicitly in the scholarly editions, which tend to offer texts as individual units. This also highlights that the digital turn did not bring about a complete move from visual thinking to a data-focused approach – the dissertation also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of this.
Essays published in the subject of the dissertation

MARÓTHY Szilvia. „Szerelmes, bujdosó és futosó elmék: belső lelki párbeszéd vagy önmegszólító vers?”. [Amorous, Hiding and Running Minds: Dialogue with Soul or Self-Apostrophe?] In A dialogus formái a magyar régiségben (1450–1750), szerkesztette Farmati Anna et al., Kolozsvár: Bolyai Társaság, Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó, megjelenés alatt.


