

**ERNŐ KULCSÁR SZABÓ – ZOLTÁN KULCSÁR-SZABÓ – TAMÁS LÉNÁRT (eds.):****Verskultúrák. A líraelmélet perspektívái**

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If we think in a historical context, it seems plausible that the proliferation of postmodern perspectives in literature has been more favourable to prose than to lyric poetry. The revaluation of the role of lyric poetry in modernity, however, does not mean that verse techniques are exhausted, but rather that the post-Pynchon media technology shift of the novel attracted more attention. On the other hand, it is undeniable and very telling that in the period in question, the strategies of interpreting poetry were hardly affected by the media and cultural theoretic turn of literary criticism. Accordingly, the professional reception of the lyric poetry remained at close reading that meant the monomedial refinement of the technology. However, the fact that the abovementioned turn has not left lyric poetry culture untouched proves best the inadequacy of the interpretations reduced exclusively to linguistic codes; in fact, it actually made us aware of all the things lyric poetry is in contact with. Theatre, music, film, video clip, performance, prose (the latter through intertextual poems) are just a few examples of the inter-media pattern of which lyric poetry is a part.

As an introduction, let me show an extreme example of this. William Gibson's composition *Agrippa: A Book of the Dead* is a book packed in Kevlar with a computer disk inside, the latter containing the poem, but the file is deleted while it is being read, making it impossible to re-read. The actual pages of the book consist of a series of letters from the fruit fly genome. The parallels between language and genetics are very interesting: in a technological sense, the DNA chain is similarly structured as any language, but the set consists of just four elements. The

relationship between alphabetisation and genetics therefore implies an exciting similarity that the number of possible genomes is astronomical, as are the sentences of a single language, but not all of them will be meaningful. (Put together the DNA of any creature in an arbitrary combination, only one will be operational, so a genome assumes a sequence that is surrounded with the non-viable, dead or rather to say: non-living mass.) *Agrippa*, therefore, is not exclusively a bibliographical code but it is also unique in terms of the functioning of the DNA, similarly to the book of the dead, it recalls the already existing ones as well as those not yet living. At the same time, it is, of course, subject to a specific tension with the biblical code, insofar as it is contradictory to the planning. The lyric poetry appears here in such a stratified media configuration that indicates the termination of the book's archiver monopoly, and the ontological position of the poem starts to compete with the computer. The examples can be continued.

From this point of view, the publication of the rather large volume of *Verskultúrák* (Verse Cultures) is definitely welcome and counts for a timely enterprise. The foreword of the book speaks about the validity of the concept as follows: "It can be assumed that interrogation aiming at the cultural, social, medial, anthropological or cognitive performance of the lyric poetry gains more useful starting points if it approaches the poetry rather as a function completeness, perhaps the unique manifestation of a language's function completeness, instead of reducing it to a particular function" (11). This approach may prove to be productive as it opens up the reductive perception of poetic function in the direction of the verse texts understood as

media configuration or as the culture technical medium, thus exceeding the dogma of total self-referentiality of the poetic language. At the same time, this leads to the opening of literary theoretical closeness, the essays of the volume do not write into a broad framework presumed in a preliminary position, but they use many smaller, autonomous approaches. In this way, it really creates the cultural-scientific mosaic of lyric poetry. Let us briefly summarize the mode of interrogation of the four chapters.

The writings of the first block “Keretezések – Műfaj, intézmény, önprezentáció” (Framings – Genre, institution, self-presentation) primarily reveal the image of poetry in the tradition of lyrical interpretation that touches upon the interconnection and network of language and institutions. The study by Tamás Molnár Gábor, “Ars/poetica: a költőiségen kívül és belül – Poétikai vázlat a modern költészet önreprezentációs lehetőségeiről” (Ars/poetica: inside and outside poetry – A poetical sketch on the possibilities of self-presentation of modern poetry), may be highlighted in the block examining the figure of *ars poetica* in a world literature context. The train of thought deploys many examples of the figurative function of *ars poetica* from Quintilian’s genre denomination through various poetics and Hungarian aspects (for example János Arany, Dezső Kosztolányi, Attila József, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, György Petri, Ottó Orbán etc.) to contemporary poetry. The author’s rhetorical analyses not only promote the deciphering of fine structures but also provide a continuous insight into the metapoetic paradigms of historically changing theoretical frameworks.

The second block of the volume, entitled “A költői szó igazsága – (Ön)megértés és (ön) megszólítás” (The truth of the poetic word – (Self)understanding and (self)addressing), comments on the phenomenon of poetic performativity understood as linguistic event and truth in progress in a way that affects modernity too (for example, the studies by György Eisemann, “A ‘létezés poézise’ Arany János lírájában” (The “poetry of existence”

in the lyric poetry of János Arany), and Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, “Honnan és hová? Az ‘önmegszólító’ vers távlatváltozása a kései modernség korszakküszöbén” (From where and where to? The perspective change of the “self-addressing” type of poem on the threshold of the period). Following the case studies, we may read “Hívás, megnyilatkozás, visszatérés – A költői szó ‘igazságának’ kérdéséhez – a hermeneutikai változat” (Calling, manifestation, return – to the question of the “truth” of the poetic word – the hermeneutical version), the final study of the block by Péter L. Varga, that speaks in detail about the components and argumentation system of the hermeneutical-philosophical discourse commenting on the forms of lyrical manifestation (discussing the relevant works of Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer). Particularly interesting is the fact that the subheading “the hermeneutical version” implies that the line of poetry’s philosophical approach may be supplemented with the argumentation technique of other discourses (e. g. of science).

The third block, entitled “A líra antropológiája – Kognitív-, bio- és posztumán poétikák” (The anthropology of the lyric poetry – Cognitive, bio and posthuman poetics), addresses the question of lyrical approaches connected to human existence, starting from a varied repertoire. The stake of the writings here is to expose the interventions of those kinds of border areas and the perspectives through which the human consciousness as a constituent force is restricted and loses its central position with the appearance of the posthuman (or inhuman) dimension. Perhaps the most complex piece of the block is Csongor Lőrincz’s study “A ritmus némasága?” (The silence of the rhythm?), providing the interpretation of Attila József’s poem “Téli éjszaka” (Winter Night). The interpretation starting from the mediality of rhythm and from the self-representing code of “measurement” in the poem, convincingly draws a parallel with the scientific results (i. e. quantum mechanics) contemporary with the poet’s point of view. The

meticulously presented poetic mnemonic in this reading seems to diverge from the physical world view where it locates the difference between time and out of time, referring to the poetical mode of existence of lyric poetry.

The fourth and final block of the volume, entitled “A líra médiuma – A médiumok lírája – Írás, tér, ritmus” (The medium of lyric poetry – The poetry of media – Writing, space, rhythm), concentrates on the mediation capacity of the poetic language. Finally, among the studies of the block motivated by media theory, it is worth referring to Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó’s “Író gépek” (Writing Machines). Traversing the typewriter-poetics, the train of thought opens up new horizons on the correlations between lyric poetry and recording-techniques through the poems of John Ashbery, Dezső Kosztolányi, Heiner

Müller and Dezső Tandori. It is important, however, that the study ends by relating to Tibor Papp’s project titled “Disztichon Alfa” in that writing and lyrical language is a kind of software that mediates between unspeakable data and meaning-bearing discourses. And it does so by trying to disguise this mediation with the most sophisticated techniques. At this point it can be assured that *Verskultúrák, in the light of the aforesaid*, is the most prominent volume on the subject that has been published in Hungarian, because it motivates the reader to medial and reflective rethinking of lyric poetry in such a way that in a theoretical sense, it gets synchronized with the international elite of cultural science; repositioning the culture of verse.

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**JEFFREY R. DI LEO (ed.): American Literature as World Literature**

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