

**THESES OF THE PHD DISSERTATION**

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*The Rondeau Form in Contemporary Hungarian Poetry*

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## Topic and Objectives

“The most neglected topic in Hungarian books on prosody is Western European verse forms” writes László Négyesy in his 1982 monograph on the history of Hungarian metrical poetry. According to Erika Szepes, contemporary Hungarian poetry exploits the metrical possibilities of almost all major poetic forms present in world literature, and applies the whole range of European forms; moreover, the way it domesticates these forms of foreign origin is outstanding. However, this richness in forms of contemporary Hungarian poetry is rarely discussed in secondary sources on prosody, and hardly any comprehensive studies on particular Western European or other foreign poetic forms have been published except for some essays on certain strict forms e.g. the sonnet that has long received intensive scholarly attention.

In Hungarian secondary sources there is a terminological confusion over the various verse forms related to rondeau, and, consequently, it is difficult to define and distinguish its various forms, more precisely the rondel, rondeau and triolet. This difficulty also highlights another unexplored field in the history of Hungarian literature, which is the seemingly unprecedented emergence of the rondeau form in twentieth century Hungarian poetry.

Realizing both the central role of the rondeau and its related verse forms in contemporary Hungarian poetry and the lack of their discussion in secondary sources on prosody, the dissertation aims to show the historical, theoretical and interpretive context of the rondeau form and explore its productivity and significance in contemporary Hungarian poetry.

In order to achieve this aim, first, I set a more or less unified conceptual and theoretical framework by describing the three most significant variants of the rondeau and also the function of the refrain, its most determinant part. Then I offer an outline for the origin and development of these verse forms, and show how they could have entered and become part of Hungarian poetical tradition.

These theoretical and historical findings serve as the basis for analyzing a selection of poems in the second part of the dissertation, which could shed a new light on a rarely studied segment of contemporary Hungarian poetry. The selection of poems is meant to represent the most significant forms of the rondeau and also its wide variability as it appears in modern Hungarian poetry.

## Approach and Method

The dissertation conforms, on the one hand, to the theoretical framework known in Hungary as “discursive poetics”, which is based on Russian formalism and Humboldtian language philosophy, and, on the other hand, it also benefits from the influence of the reception of modern Western European and American literary theories on Hungarian literary studies over the last decades. These theoretical works share the tendency to reinterpret poetic texts in a dynamic, innovative, text and language-centered manner that involves the latest findings of relevant international scholarship on basic poetical issues for instance rhythm or the lyrical self.

All the interpretations presented in the dissertation rely on the methodological presumption that language is by nature *energeia* and that the language of poetry is different from the language of prose due to the semantic power the sound of words and verses create. The detailed study of the formal peculiarities of these poems regarding their form, rhythm and sound correspondences seems highly reasonable as their authors share similar ideas on the nature of language and literature. It is particularly true in the case of Sándor Weöres, György Petri and Flóra Imre, whose emphatically reflection on their own poetry and the way form, rhythm, language and sound determines their texts is voiced in their *ars poeticas* and interviews. For instance Flóra Imre explains in an interview that the form is prior to the content, or to recall her words “the form gives birth to the idea”. Meanwhile Sándor Weöres calls the form “the poet’s collaborator” and vividly describes how the formal elements of poetry disturb the “dominance of the linear line of thought” that is typical of prose works.

These poetic ideas and the premise that words operate as tropes in poetry imply that the interpretations in the dissertation ultimately depend on the linguistic arrangement and acoustic qualities of the poems. Thus the dissertation assumes that the form, rhythm, rhymes and acoustic arrangement of poems are the distinguishing characteristics of poetry and thus they provide the starting point for understanding the internal semantic construct of the text. For instance, in György Petri's poem entitled *Csak egy személy* (Only a Person) the source of unique and particular meanings is the new rhythmical structure that emerges from the combination of triolet and rondeau provided that the form of poetry semantically reflects the problem of the poetic self. Lóránd Ármos' poem entitled *Triolett* [Triolet] offers an excellent example for the thematic interpretation of the rhythm as in this work the breaks and divergences from the almost uniform rhythm generate particular semantic elements. For the interpretation of János Dénes Orbán's poem entitled *Lebeg az ékezet felett* [Floating above the accent] the main line of thought follows the phono-semantic repetition of sound correspondences and its particular rhyme-scheme, which in the case of Western-European verse forms always bear special significance. Besides the prosodic analysis, the dissertation also lays emphasis on exploring the tropological and intertextual matrix of these poems within the corpus of contemporary Hungarian literature.

## Academic Achievements

The dissertation sets the aim of comprehensively exploring the rondeau and its related verse forms that, regardless of its central role in contemporary Hungarian poetry, has hardly received academic attention in works of prosody. Its most significant achievements could be summarized as follows.

First of all, the dissertation offers a clear definition and distinction of the rondeau and its related verse forms as well as a functional analysis of their determining formal element, the refrain based on the theoretical works of Renate Hausner and Mihály Szegedy-Maszák. Thus it dissolves the terminological confusion present in Hungarian secondary sources on prosody and also provides general but precise and useful definitions for the most important verse forms related to the rondeau, i.e. the rondel, triolet and rondeau, while also considering the historical aspect of the formal development.

With its prosodic background, the dissertation studies the reception and domestication of the rondeau in Hungarian poetry since the emergence of this verse form. While it explores a historical dimension, it also highlights the first occasions when these forms could have entered Hungarian poetry. Unlike it has been generally agreed that the first Hungarian rondeau was László Tóth's poem *Rondeau*, which appears also in Sándor Weöres' *Psyché*, the dissertation argues that it was preceded by Ferenc Vályi-Nagy poem *Rondó: El ne felejts* [Rondeau: Remember me] published posthumously in 1820. As it confirms, the appearance of the rondeau form in late twentieth century Hungarian poetry is not exceptional and unprecedented since it had more than a hundred and fifty year history during which it occasionally surfaced in particular poems for instance the triolet form is used in Károly Kisfaludy's poem *Szem hatalma* [The Power of the

Eye] or Sándor Petőfi's *Triolett* [Triolet]; whereas the rondeau shapes Attila József's *Dal* [Song] and Gyula Illyés' *Rondeau* [Rondeau].

The second part of the dissertation comprises the realization of the rondeau, rondel and triolet verse forms in contemporary Hungarian poetry through explicit textual interpretations. These interpretations also explore the formal as well as the rhetorical and semantic background of the various forms related to rondeau and all the patterns of rhythm emerging from their combination. Significantly, the textual analysis also brings results relevant to the oeuvre of individual poets. In the case of György Petri and Sándor Weöres, it amends with new and fruitful insights the studies that have evaluated the historical significance of these poets. On the other hand, the interpretation of poems by Flóra Imre, János Dénes Orbán and Gábor Schein contributes to the ongoing research on these poets' oeuvre and shades the understanding of their poetry within the context of literary history. As for Lóránd Ármos and Melinda Varga, who are young and hardly known poets with very little critical reception, the interpretations the dissertation offers evaluate the beginnings of the oeuvre.

Regardless of the difference between the ways these poets treat the form, the textual analysis also surfaces the characteristics they share. It seems that the poets whose poetry adopts these strict forms also recall the poetic paradigm of late modernity and often even thematize it.

While studying the formal and acoustic characteristics of the poems, it became obvious that the semantic elements repeatedly appearing in these works prove that the rondeau form involves some (role)play as well as erotic and autopoetic features. In fact these features could be traced since the birth of the verse form as the earlier versions of the rondeau had a close connection with music and dance, which has provided grounds not only for playfulness and

eroticism but also for artistic self-reflection. Although it cannot be asserted that these features perfectly cover the semantic field of the rondeau form, whose history goes back to hundreds of years, but, as the chapters of the dissertation prove, they share a considerable part of it.

The interpretations and the anthology of contemporary Hungarian poems written in the rondel, triolet and rondeau form that supplements the dissertation, intend to prove the productive presence and continuity of the rondeau form in contemporary Hungarian poetry. I hope that the arguments supported by the analyses of these poems confirm that the dissertation achieved its aim and also managed to facilitate the deeper understanding of Hungarian literature and refine its reading strategies.

## Relevant Publications

1. BÉRES Bernadett, *Személy és szemantika, versnyelv és szubjektum viszonya Petri György Csak egy személy című versében = Személyiség és változás.* HORVÁTH Kornélia (ed.), Piliscsaba, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem BTK, 2004, 113-132. (Pázmány Irodalmi Műhely – Opuscula Litteraria II.)
2. BÉRES Bernadett, *A költő munkatársa: a forma. Weöres Sándor versszemléletéről,* Mester és Tanítvány, 2005/6, 162-166.
3. BÉRES Bernadett, *A versformától a versszubjektumig (Petri György: Csak egy személy) = Vers – hangzás – metafora: Versértelmezések a XX. századi magyar líra köréből.* HORVÁTH Kornélia & SZITÁR Katalin (eds.), Budapest, Kijárat, 2005, 465-483.
4. BÉRES Bernadett, *„Áthallások” Weöres Sándor Rondo című versében = Vers – hangzás – metafora: Versértelmezések a XX. századi magyar líra köréből,* szerk. HORVÁTH Kornélia & SZITÁR Katalin (eds.), Budapest, Kijárat, 2005, 421-433.
5. S. BÉRES Bernadett, *A rondó verstípus meghonosodása a magyar költészetben,* Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények 2009/5, 518-538.
6. S. BÉRES Bernadett, *Versforma és hagyomány (Ármos Lóránd: Triolett) = Ritmikai és retorikai tradíció a kortárs magyar lírában.* BOROS Oszkár, ÉRFALVY Livia & HORVÁTH Kornélia (eds.), Budapest, Ráció, 2011, 51-61.

## Relevant Conference Papers

1. *Személy és szemantika. Versnyelv és szubjektum viszonya Petri György Csak egy személy című versében*

XXV. Országos Tudományos Diákköri Konferencia – Humán Tudományi Szekció  
[25th National Scientific Student Conference – Humanities Workshop]

SZTE – JGYTFK, Szeged, April 9-11, 2001.

2. *Nyelv és mítosz között: a metafora és a vers eredete (Ernst Cassirer: Sprache und Mythos)*

A megértés útjain (Irodalom- és világmagyarázatok a XXI. század elején) – Irodalomelméleti konferencia [Ways of Interpretation: Exploring literature as world-view at the beginning of the 21st century – a Conference on Literary Theory] Berzsenyi Dániel College, Szombathely, November 8-9, 2006.

3. *Versforma és poétikai hagyomány (Ármos Lóránd: Triolett)*

Ritmikai és retorikai tradíció a kortárs magyar lírában – Irodalomtudományi konferencia [Rhythmical and Rhetorical Tradition in Contemporary Hungarian Poetry – a Conference on Literary Studies]

Pazmany Peter Catholic University, Piliscsaba, November 27-28, 2009.

The dissertation is available for public viewing at the library of Pazmany Peter Catholic University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

