

CSONGOR LŐRINCZ – PÉTER L. VARGA (eds.): Herausforderung der Literatur: Péter Esterházy [The Challenge of Literature: Péter Esterházy]
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ANDRÁS KÁNYÁDI (ed.): Péter Esterházy et le postmodernisme [Péter Esterházy and Postmodernism]
Paris: Éditions PETRA, 2020. 228 pp. ISBN 978-2-84743-276-3
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According to the introduction by Csongor Lőrincz in *The Challenge of Literature* (*Herausforderung der Literatur*; in the following referred to as *HL*), one of the core characteristics of Péter Esterházy's literature is to point to the expression of the unachievable, and to be explicitly kept open. Moreover, the last sentence from *Simple Story Comma One Hundred Pages – the Mark-Version* (*Egyszerű történet vessző száz oldal – a Márk-változat*) "Nincs vége, ez a befejezés" ["There's no end, that's the ending"], was the title quote of a scholarly volume about Esterházy's literature published in Hungarian in 2019, after his death. The important text of reference here is Esterházy's voluminous book *Introduction to Literature* (*Bevezetés a szépirodalomba*) published in 1986. In András Kányádi's introduction to *Péter Esterházy and Postmodernism* (*Péter Esterházy et le postmodernisme*; in the following referred to as *PM*) that same book bears a similarly comprehensive importance in the author's earlier oeuvre, "redefining the concept of literature itself", and what is more, bringing about a "turn in literature [...] by his pen" (10–11). Furthermore Kányádi's volume raises and critically discusses the question of Esterházy being a postmodern author, a description which has been applied to him in the simplistic perspectives of feuilletonistic texts in order to "handle" his work and his writing, and only to make it fit the technical framing of the journalistic style. Esterházy himself has cleverly, yet frankly outplayed this (knowing very well how as a skillful football player!): "Amúgy ősi, futballista családból származom" ["Anyway, I come from

an ancient football player family"]. It might thus be of importance that both collections include studies on Esterházy's football writings: Péter Fodor in *HL* about *Voyage to the End of the Penalty Area* (*Utazás a tizenhatos mélyére*, 2006) and Piotr Bilos in *PM* on the football metaphors in *Not Art* (*Semmi művészet*, 2008; Eng. trans. 2010).

The year 2016, when Esterházy passed away on July 14, shortly after his friend Imre Kertész had died on March 31 at whose funeral Esterházy had spoken – "Silence, restlessness, passion – these could be the big Kertész-words [...]; out of them we learn something new about the world. I could start again: about us, about our country, about the world, about God" – can be seen as a year profoundly marked by these losses in the literary sphere – explicitly not only in Hungary. Looking upon Esterházy József P. Kőrössi has expressed this "shock" of his death asking in perplexed fright, "Hová is?" ["Where to now?"] (*A megrendülés segédjei. EP 1950–2016* [Auxiliaries of the Shock. EP 1950–2016] Budapest: Norán Libro 2016, 7).

The confusing moment of Esterházy's death as well, at least latently, (re)shaped the point of reference, the perspectives and interpretatory and analytical approaches to Esterházy's literary work, yet to his legacy in both the volumes edited by András Kányádi in French and by Csongor Lőrincz and Péter L. Varga containing articles in German and in English.

Both books pay much attention to the translations of Esterházy's literature into German and into French – only two of the about thirty languages Esterházy can

be read in – the German-speaking world being in a slightly more comfortable position having a choice of about 25 Esterházy titles compared to about 12 in French. (In the bibliography in *PM* 14 titles are mentioned, because *Le Journal du pancréas* [Pancreas Diary] and *La Version de cape et d'épée. Histoire simple virgule cent pages* [Simple Story Comma One Hundred Pages – The Duel Version] are forthcoming at Gallimard.) Thus in both volumes some articles focus on the translatedness and (un)translatability of Esterházy's works. Moreover, these translation studies or essays are written by Esterházy's translators, thus offering a detailed insight into their "workshops". Agnès Járfás from 1990 onwards literally became *the* translator of Esterházy into French. Looking at different examples, her contribution discusses the problem of how to translate the quotations the author included in a quite large number in his books. She also mentions the exchange of thoughts and solutions with Esterházy which whets the appetite for more such intriguing analyses of the Esterházyian co-work on language. Zsuzsanna Gahse's "Der Sprachspieler" in *HL* may be seen as a further response to this interest. Having started translating Esterházy in the 1980s (eight books translated), when, as she says, he was rather "popular among insiders" (31), she also had to solve the problem of rewritten quotations, incorporated in the texts, and also frequently communicated with the author about the translations of his texts. Heike Flemming (translator of three of Esterházy's books since 2013) adds an appealing essayistic account of the "happiness of translating Esterházy" (36), in which she highlights his vivid awareness of the inbetweenness of two languages.

However the status of translation is crucial for philological approaches to Esterházy's works from contexts outside Hungary – as these two volumes demonstrate, transmitting a very profound, well informed, and widely documented specialist discourse of a high scholarly level that mirrors comparable works in Hungary and has the fol-

lowing foci partly conversing with each other. In *PM* Judit Görözdí convincingly shows the Central-European poetics of *The Book of Hrabal* (*Hrabal könyve*, 1990; Eng. trans. 1994). Tibor Gintli's account in *PM* of the anecdotal narration of *Production Novel* (*Termelési regény*, 1979) corresponds with the great importance of that book, as demonstrated in detail in *HL* through the studies by Csongor Lőrincz (providing a comprehensive analysis of silence in Esterházy's texts), Péter Szirák, Gábor Palkó, Tibor Bónus (the only contributor appearing in both volumes), and Ernő Kulcsár Szabó. *Introduction to Literature* is mentioned in several studies (widely contextualized in Esterházy's work by Kulcsár Szabó), some of them concentrating on parts of the book having been published separately: László Bengi on *Indirect* (*Függő*, 1981) in *HL*; Jean-Pierre Liotard-Vogt and Éva Sziklai on the historical context(s) of *A Little Hungarian Pornography* (*Kis magyar pornográfia*, 1984; Eng. trans. 1995). Danijela Lugarić provides a challenging comparison between Danilo Kiš and Esterházy in which she also probes the concept of world literature. The articles by Ágnes Balajthy (*HL*) and Henri de Montety (*PM*) both focus on the image of the Danube in Esterházy's work. In *HL* Hajnalka Halász provides a comparative reading of Kosztolányi's and Esterházy's *Esti* (2010). *Celestial Harmonies* (*Harmonia Caelestis*, 2000; Eng. trans. 2004) and *Revised Edition* (*Javított kiadás*, 2002) are analyzed in detail in studies by Csongor Lőrincz and Gábor Tamás Molnár in *HL* and by Zoltán Z. Varga, Paul-Victor Desarbres, Jean-François Laplénie, Anna Keszeg, András Kányádi, Jean-Léon Muller, and Dorothea Szávai in *PM*. In *HL* Ágnes Hansági traces Esterházy's critical understanding of traditional codes, while Péter L. Varga develops the (silent) importance of language for Esterházy's perception of Central Europe. Györgyi Földes analyzes the corporeality of *A Woman* (*Egy nő*) in *PM* where Anne-Rachel Hermetet also gives an account of how Esterházy has been perceived

in the French press. Finally, the important late prose works (translated into both languages) in *HL* are the subjects of studies by Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy, Róbert Smid and Mária Barta and of the contributions by Tibor Bónus and Sándor Kálai in *PM*.

Both these collections contribute to (re)initiating and establishing a discourse about Esterházy's aesthetics, his poetics and literature, his subjects, his cunning anecdotalism, in brief: about his works outside Hungary; these two volumes also lead to invite and to include scholars from other philologies or from comparative literature – that (in the West) very much needs to be “re-freshed” and enlivened by Esterházy's and many more writers' (women writers, too!) works from East Central European literatures – because they assemble prominent voices and essential scholarship on Esterházy and

point the way ahead. Well-chosen different approaches thus highlight poetical, narratological, and comparative perspectives, both volumes showing the indispensable and sustainable importance of Esterházy's writing.

Both books examine almost the complete works of Esterházy, or at least aim at giving such a critical, yet comprehensive overview. Offering such high ranking discourses about the aesthetical, poetical and thematical importance and of the literary impact of the author's works, both volumes present freshly challenging approaches to Esterházy by connecting his texts with region-specific, literary-theoretical, world literary and cultural questions.

STEPHAN KRAUSE

Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture
of Eastern Europe
Germany

KATARÍNA BEŠKOVÁ: Súčasná egyptská literatúra: Dystópia, cenzúra a Arab-ská jar [Contemporary Egyptian Literature: Dystopia, Censorship and the Arab Spring]

Bratislava: Veda, vydavateľstvo SAV, 2020. 256 pp. ISBN 978-80-224-1829-4

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Recent years have seen a marked interest in the works of contemporary Egyptian writers, as readers both inside and outside of academia have awaited the literary interpretation of the events of the Arab Spring to emerge, following the much-needed period of reflection and processing that allowed the writers to impart their lived experience, express their views and render their testimonies by weaving literary narratives of *their* revolution.

It is within this framework that the monograph entitled *Contemporary Egyptian Literature: Dystopia, Censorship and the Arab Spring* came into being to bridge the gap in Slovak and Czech scholarship on the topic as well as to move the understanding of modern Arabic literature more into the present moment. This monograph, written in Slovak, is also a continuation of earlier scholarship

on the topic as it draws on research conducted by Stephan Guth, Teresa Pepe, Samia Mehrez, Richard Jacquemond or Benjamin Koerber, among others.

The book under review focuses on the works of both men and women authors of the so-called “Tahrir Generation”, a term used by the author and inspired by Ayman El-Desouky's “the 2011 Generation” and modelled after the iconic square. “Tahrir Generation” denotes the group of predominantly young and emerging authors whose lives were “affected by the economic, political, social and cultural specificities of Ḥusnī Mubārak's regime” and who have shared the hopes and disillusionment of the revolution of January 2011 (24). Katarína Bešková views Tahrir as a unique *chronotope* in the Bakhtinian sense (echoed also in one