

JUDIT GÖRÖZDI – MAGDOLNA BALOGH (eds.): Külországi könyvespolcokon. Tanulmányok Esterházy Péter idegen nyelvű recepciójáról [On foreign bookshelves: The reception of Péter Esterházy in translation]
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The volume *Külországi könyvespolcokon. Tanulmányok Esterházy Péter idegen nyelvű recepciójáról*, edited by Judit Görözdí and Magdolna Balogh, offers a comprehensive examination of the international reception of Péter Esterházy, one of the most renowned contemporary Hungarian authors. Released in 2022 by Reciti Publishing, the book was supported by multiple research projects conducted at the Institute of World Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. In the preface, Görözdí articulates the central inquiries guiding the collected studies: “How does this literary artistry, which operates by exploiting and sustaining a single language (and by extension, a single culture and tradition), appear in foreign-language cultures? What elements can be transferred through translation? How is it read by the receiving audience? What factors contribute to its publication abroad, and what traces of this presence can be discerned in the host literary traditions?” (9) Following the editorial introduction, the volume is divided into three main sections, albeit not of equal length. The second section is the most extensive, comprising over 300 pages. This is both understandable and justified, given that it contains 18 studies addressing the reflections and presence of Esterházy’s works in various linguistic and national contexts. These contributions are framed by the first section, an essay by the Slovak aesthetician Peter Michalovič, and the third section, a roundtable discussion featuring translators Mari Alföldy, György Buda, Renáta Deák, Heike Flemming, Péter Rác,

Vyacheslav Sereda, Judit Szöllősy, Robert Svoboda, and Teresa Worowska.

Michalovič’s study, “Esterházy – az intertextualitás stilsztikája” (Esterházy: The stylistics of (inter)textuality), provides a foundational analysis of the defining characteristics of Esterházy’s prose and style. These include postmodernity, irony, textuality and intertextuality, as well as generic and stylistic hybridity. Drawing on textual examples, Michalovič elucidates Esterházy’s literary strategies, which, in opposition to Roland Barthes’s notion of “reality effect”, construct meaning through autoreferential literary text. He identifies Esterházy as “a paradigmatic figure of textualism” due to his text-building strategies: his works are composed of highly diverse textual fragments, sometimes without explicit reference to the original sources, and sometimes with deliberate authorial markers, thereby enhancing the playfulness of the text as a space of interaction. Michalovič cites Esterházy’s *A szív segédigéi* (1985; Eng. trans. *Helping Verbs of the Heart*, 1992) as an example, demonstrating how the typological classification of intertexts aids reader comprehension.

The second section of the book opens with Csongor Lőrincz’s chapter, “A fehér tér kétségessé tevő ereje” (The doubting power of white space), which explores the German-language reception of Esterházy between 1996 and 2017. This approach omits the earlier phase of reception, even though translations of Esterházy’s works have been available in German-speaking territories

since the 1980s. Lőrincz bases his analysis not on literary studies but on “German-language (Federal German, Austrian, and Swiss) cultural journalism”, seeking to articulate “the dual literary-critical articulation of regional and world-literary perspectives alongside historical and linguistic-artistic considerations” (33). He concludes that comparisons with other potential regional and world-literary writers and works are relatively rare, and that the depth and rigor of comparative analyses remain insufficient. Instead, the critical discourse surrounding Esterházy focuses primarily on “the historical archaeology of the region” and “the linguistic-artistic achievement” (40) of his works.

Szilvia Szarka’s study, “Az európai irodalom ünnepnapja” (The celebration of European literature), takes a narrower focus compared to Lőrincz’s broader overview, concentrating specifically on the German reception of *Harmonia Caelestis* (2001; Eng trans. *Celestial Harmonies*, 2004), the work that, upon its German translation in 2001, secured Esterházy’s place as a European and even world-literary figure. A similar approach is evident in Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó’s essay, which navigates the critical discourse’s various focal points (such as questions of genre, historical narrative, and self-narration), evaluating them through points of contention within the German-language reception.

One of the most intriguing contributions is Zsuzsanna Varga’s study “Esterházy Péter recepciója Nagy-Britanniában” (The reception of Péter Esterházy in Great Britain), which engages with Adam Levy’s hypothesis regarding a division of labor in the international reception of Hungarian literary works: the German-language sphere provides aesthetic recognition, whereas the English-language sphere offers popularity. Varga examines this claim with a focus on the United Kingdom. While her study does not entirely fulfill its ambition, it does effectively illuminate two key aspects: the channels through which Hungarian literature enters English cultural consciousness and the reasons for

Esterházy’s minimal British reception. These include the British audience’s lower receptivity to translations and the role of embedded translators within the British literary scene, who foster a more active critical response through direct professional networks. Esterházy’s English translator Judit Szöllősy addresses the American dimension of the English-language reception in her chapter, “Esterházy Péter fogadtatása és jelenléte Amerikában, avagy: Egy fordító elmélkedései az Esterházy-jelenségről a tengerentúlon” (The reception and presence of Péter Esterházy in America, or: A translator’s reflections on the Esterházy phenomenon overseas). She identifies precisely the factor that Varga finds lacking in the British case: the role of professional and network-based connections among publishers, translators, critics, and distributors.

Beyond these two primary linguistic spheres, the volume also explores Esterházy’s presence in the literatures of neighboring languages, in the chapters by Jutka Rudaš (on Slovenian), Kornélia Faragó (on Serbian), and Éva Bányai (on Romanian). The Slovak reception is discussed by Judit Görözdi and Mária Kusá, with the latter situating the relevant works within the broader context of contemporary Slovak translations of Hungarian literature. Anita Hutková analyzes both Slovak and Czech translations, complemented by Marta Pató and Jenő Gál’s articles on Esterházy’s Czech literary presence. Additional contributions include those by András Kányádi (on French), by Antonio Sciacovelli (on Italian), by Vjacseszlav Szereda (on Russian), by Vesa Lahti and Kristóf Fenyvesi (on Finnish), and by Mika Waseda (on Japanese).

The book concludes with the transcript of a roundtable discussion held in Bratislava in September 2021, moderated by Gábor Németh and Judit Görözdi. The conversation addressed the challenges of translating Esterházy’s complex linguistic style, the presence (or absence) of “natural allies” in the target languages, and the impact of linguistic innovations on translation. Several translators

noted the difficulties posed by Esterházy's intertextual and self-referential writing, with some highlighting the lack of comparable literary traditions in their languages, while others saw this as an exciting opportunity. The discussion underscored the collaborative nature of translation and the ways in which literary transfer is shaped by cultural and linguistic constraints.

Although a number of studies have explored the international reception of Péter Esterházy's work across various cultural and linguistic contexts, the Bratislava conference volume remains unique as the first – and to date only – comprehensive scholarly work

dedicated solely to this topic. Its multifaceted approach enriches critical engagement with Esterházy's oeuvre by presenting a wide array of thought-provoking perspectives. Importantly, these insights are also made available to an international readership through the volume's English-language summaries, further underscoring its value as a bridge between Hungarian literature and global scholarship.

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