

University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE)

Doctoral School

The biopic

- problems and solutions, creative decisions

based on the process of writing the biopic

by the working title *Hon, Vágy (Memories Are Made of This)* -

Theses

Krisztina Esztergályos

2019.

Supervisor: dr. Éva Schulze

The chosen subject of my thesis is the presentation of the process at the end of which I, after a long period of research, finally wrote the first draft of my script by the working title, *Hon, Vágy (Memories Are Made of This)*. The problem proved to be complex and before being able to start the creative work, I faced several theoretical difficulties. My basic idea, which is the story of the tragic love affair between the pop singer, Erzsé Kovács, and Sándor Szűcs, a footballer and full-back of the Hungarian national team, required a biographical approach. While I was looking for bearings with the help of which I could map the real events, I felt more and more clearly that I do not know enough about the form of film I needed to work with. In vain did I set off in various dramaturgical directions and tried to make first Erzsé, then Sándor my protagonist, I found myself up against recurring theoretical barriers. How can the obscure elements of life and reality be presented on film? Can the details of reality be changed? If so, to what extent and if not, what is the solution? These and similar questions, which constitute the fundamental problems of films based on the life and biography of well-known people weighed down on me so hard that they almost blocked my thinking even about the material to be used. That was when I decided that before beginning the process of writing, I would map how others, authors and aestheticians managed to solve or resolve in theory and in practice the problem of 'reality versus fiction', inherent in biopics (biographical pictures) because of their very nature. My research, therefore, began where the creative work came to a halt.

The structure of my doctoral thesis follows the process outlined above. In the first chapter, I write about the period before my 'writer's block' when the idea found me and when I tried to find myself in the idea. That was the first time when I had had to face the dilemmas hidden in the material and when I tried to find solutions to them, in vain, by changing the point of view of the story. I couldn't make either Erzsé Kovács, or Sándor Szűcs the protagonist of a biopic.

In the following two chapters, I describe the biopic form which I believe cannot be considered an independent genre. At the same time, I strive to probe the validity of the starting points (basic hypotheses) of my thesis, according to which (1) biopics can be classified as adaptations, they represent a special kind in which reality is the main force behind dramaturgy, and at the same time and consequently (2) during the film adaptation of a biography every dramaturgical tool can and must be used, very much like in the case of other kinds of adaptations despite the fact that this way one must alter the details so they do not in every respect represent the true facts of life. However, even in such a subjective way of adaptation, these films that are inevitably fictions can treasure the truth, the lesson and the parable of the adapted life, if the

moral compass of the writer/director works in a healthy way. I am continuously seeking answers to the question of what valid solutions to these dilemmas can be found by the creators. I also touch upon the question of responsibility and examine the validity of my hypotheses from that point of view as well. I outline the difficulties the categorization of biopics entail. Using film adaptation theory (principle of adherence) as my starting point I also describe a possible definition where aspects of dramaturgy are the determinants. I state that the typology I use (transposition, individual interpretation, borrowing) does not mean a hierarchy in the adaptations but it can help the creative process in general and in my case in particular in that it gives a guideline to make dramaturgical decisions and choose the right way of approach.

In the fourth chapter, with the help of practical examples and biography adaptations I intend to provide support for my theoretical findings.

In the last chapter, I return to the creative process. This is where I can test in my own practice, in relation to the dramaturgical answers I have given to my own dilemmas all that I have ascertained during my research. I describe my final dramaturgical decisions which push my story, constrained by the limitations of reality before, into the direction of borrowing. I hope that the results of my research can provide some help and ideas for script writer/directors in similar situations. I may even say although it might be slightly out of ordinary but at the same time a definitive result of theoretical research that it resolved my 'writer's block' and thus the screenplay of *Hon, Vágy (Memories Are Made of This)* chosen as the subject of my thesis could be written.