

**The Doctoral School of the University of Theater and Film**

**THE RECITER PREPARES**

lyric poetry - interpretation - performing arts

English doctoral (DLA) dissertation theses

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**2022.**

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## The structure of the doctoral dissertation

In my dissertation, I examine the task, possibilities, tools and individual elements of the reciter's practice in the postmodern era, divided into three large units.

### I. The concept of lyric recitation and its historical background

During the historical introduction, I focused on the ancient origins of lyric poetry and recitation, supplementing the research published by Dr. Edit Némethné Böhm, Ph.D. of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences under the title *A Magyar versszavalás története*, during which she goes through the Hungarian history of recitation with exhaustive precision. My historical research includes my previous studies, which I also publish in the appendices of my thesis, and in which I summarize, based on interviews, performance analyses, criticisms and my own experiences, the theory of Oszkár Ascher, László Mensáros, József Gáti, András Bálint, Tamás Jordán, Géza D. Hegedűs and Tamás Fodor (famous Hungarian performers).

During the conceptual clarification, in addition to many other quoted studies and the works of the already mentioned Edit Böhm, my guideline included Imre Wacha's theory of communication, György Székely's play typology, Simon Gábor's cognitive lyric poetics and Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory of performativity.

### II. Theory of recitation

In the second large subsection of my thesis, based on my research and practical experience, I summarize my own theoretical thoughts on recitation by applying the historical antecedents and concepts recorded in the first subsection. In this section, I mostly use the conceptual trinity of lyrical poetry - interpretation - performance art indicated in the subtitle.

First, I unfold my ars poetics, which integrates the thoughts of the great figures of the history of Hungarian poetry and recitation as well as the studies of the significant authors of the turning points in literary theory of the twentieth century.

After that, based on my pedagogical experience, the long-established Összproba camp, and the poetry recitation courses offered within the framework of SztalkerSuli, I will summarize my experience in poetry analysis methodology from a performing artist's point of view.

Finally, using the examples of the previous chapters and applying Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory of performativity, I present a new approach to the practical work of the performer during poetry recitation.

### III. Practice of recitation

In the last major sub-unit, I present my doctoral work of art, *Szívlapát – a participatory poetry theater performance* presented in 2018. In the mosaic-like structure of the presentation, I analyze the practical realization of the previously recorded theoretical research based on the experience of twenty-seven sessions held with different participants, in different locations.

#### The results of the research

I draw the following conclusions from the historical and socio-biological (coevolutionary) investigation of the ancient origins of poetry and, by comparison, the ancient origins of recitation. The reciter's task is not merely to faithfully repeat the traditional texts, but to interpret them and to update and edit them according to the current problems and main issues of the community. The balance of writing and speaking is sensitive and depends on changing social processes. The growing importance of written communication, the culture of letters, and its ever-increasing role in school education (and in all other areas of life) mean that the importance of recitation is decreasing.

The coevolutionary theory of the formation of poetry and recitation, as well as the poetic language that forms the basis of both, can be discovered in the ritual connection between the inner world of the individual and the external world. Lyric poetry identifies reality with the sounds, words, and sentences and forms a verbal miniature of reality. With the help of poetic devices based on linguistic constructions, the poet creates a *more relaxed state of alertness*, and in this way he reaches and brings the receiver *into the possession of secrets inaccessible to ordinary language*.<sup>1</sup> This is the place where symbols are born with the use of ritual tools on an *intersubjective horizon* where they become perceptible, relatable, and connected to a subjective experience for the receiver.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fónagy Iván: *A költői nyelvről*. Corvina Kiadó, Budapest, 1999. 491–492.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Gábor: *Bevezetés a kognitív lírapoétikába*. Tinta Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2016.

From my research on the theory of reciting poetry, which is rich in practical examples, I conclude that reciting poetry is a creative work, during which a speech work is created based on a written work formulated in poetic language, the poetry of which is caused by its own incompleteness (*funktionelle Vollkommenheit – functional perfection* a concept introduced by Eugenio Coseriu).<sup>3</sup> Using his own material of being, the reciter creates an autopoietic work of art together with the audience, the basis and purpose of which is the collective, ritual connection, the shared experience, the striving to realize a common point of view, the *transcendence of the immanent self* (a concept introduced by Gábor Simon).<sup>4</sup>

Lyrical expression builds its own function according to its own laws with the participation of the recipient. The implicit goal is to expand the possibility of linguistic communication, to push its boundaries, to expand the available opportunities for dialogue, expression, and sharing the experiences of the subject, that is, to approach the idea of intersubjective communication. As a basis for this, he defines the subject of the recipient, who “has no history, biography, or mental makeup, and is merely someone who collects all the traces that make up the poem.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the parameters of it are undefinable, but the lyrical work becomes a pledge for freedom of art that transcends cultures - and power systems. The results of my research have made me believe that the reciter is able to adapt the mechanism of cognitive reception of lyric poetic devices and scaffolding structures to his art, while reciting the poem, he does not simply convey his own heuristic interpretation as the true meaning of the poem in a naive (self-serving) way, but realizing the poem together with its diversity, free association systems, personality and intersubjectivity.

During the recitation of a poem, ideally, what the poem's text surrounds on a conceptual-formal level is realized in a performative way. This is supported by the performing artist adapting lyric poetic devices and scaffolding structures. These include, for example, the incomplete use of language tools (*paradox, coherence, deixis*), (*posthumous or acute disorientation*)<sup>6</sup>, which is resolved during the recitation of the poem at the level of the performative presence between the performer and his audience, and *lyrical time*, which represents the experience of subjective time model (present-time experience that includes both past memories and future assumptions). But it also includes verse rhythm. Taking advantage of the rhythmic disposition of the relationship between the performer and the audience, the

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<sup>3</sup> Eugenio Coseriu: *Thesen zum Thema „Sprache und Dichtung“*. in: Wolf-Dieter Stempel, Wilhelm Fink Verlag (szerk.): *Beiträge zur Textlinguistik*. München, 1971. 183–188. 185.

<sup>4</sup> Simon i.m. 252.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes: *A szerző halála*. (ford. Babarczy Eszter), in: Roland Barthes: *A szöveg öröme*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2001. 50–55. 55.

<sup>6</sup> Simon i.m. 83–88.

reciter directly exerts an effect on the level of the most elementary operations of the learning mind with the help of the poem's rhythm, and thereby helps the process of acceptance in understanding the condensed lyrical world experience by making this world experience *common and mutual*.<sup>7</sup>

The creation of the *lyrical self* is one of the most complex lyrical poetic tools, which poses serious challenges for the reciter. In the case of lyricism, we can speak of a fictitious subject existing on a spiritual plane, whose situation, time, personality, state of mind, and life experience are formulated with the help of lyric poetic devices as an intentional deficiency coded by the poet-sender, which becomes, due to the receiver's imagination, an independent entity (*contextual turning point* – a new concept introduced by myself). The matter of the lyrical self is the coherent linguistic formulation of the lyrical poem, and its subject is the *transcendent self* of the recipient at all times. This allows for a possible state of the poet's subject in a definable (fictitious) situation as well as an independent entity. Similar to the poetic manipulation of the poet, the performer also interprets the work as his own speech - so he pretends that the entity speaking in the work and the *simulated/imaginary context*<sup>8</sup> of the speech take shape for him on an experiential level - causing incoherence on the part of the receiver. The resolution of this incoherence accompanies the subjective reception process of the lyrical speech, during which the audience as receiver must supplement the missing parts by drawing from their own inner world.

This process takes place in a performative way during the recitation of the poem in the joint presence of the performer and the audience, the key concept of it is the *autopoetic feedback loop*, introduced by Erika Fischer-Lichte.<sup>9</sup> The materiality of which the *co-subjects* present at in the same place and time, as part of the event that melts those present into it, are equally the creators and receivers at the same time.<sup>10</sup> In the case of live poetry recitation as a performative act, the artifact of poetry recitation is therefore not the lyrical work, but the current feedback tape created jointly by the poet and his audience and existing only from a subjective point of view, the creator of which is not the poet, nor the reciter per se, but a joint creation of the reciter and his audience.

During each repetition of the poem, the performer shapes and changes his work by connecting with the audience, even against his intentions, creating a new *first final form* (a

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<sup>7</sup> Simon G. i.m. 94–95.

<sup>8</sup> Simon G. i.m. 85.

<sup>9</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte: *A performativitás esztétikája*. (ford: Kiss Gabriella). Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte: *A performativitás esztétikája*. (ford: Kiss Gabriella). Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 2009.

concept introduced by József Gáti).<sup>11</sup> The communication situation of reciting poetry can be described as a closed circle, in which the formation of the lyrical self - realized subjectively by some members of the audience - can be shaped not only by the audience's own participation, but also by the influencing factor of the audience's presence through the reciter. The task of the performer is not merely to learn and understand the text and meaning of the poem, but to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of the spiritual processes initiated by the poem.

The reciter's body represents himself: the player focused on the poem. His tools are knowledge based on a the poem's text, the elaborated, easily applicable speech technique, and the present-time shaping of his own self during the time of the dialogue with the audience. Openness and the use of helpful coincidences are one of the biggest opportunities when reciting poetry, but also during preparation. The audience perceives the performer's *unusually intense present-tense existence*, which enables them to feel their own present-tense existence especially intense.<sup>12</sup>

#### Experiences of my doctoral artwork

- Pedagogy with an objectivist approach can only be applied to the transfer of lyrical acceptance at the cost of serious compromises. One of the most important elements of contemporary lyric poetics is the participation of the recipient as an active meaning-forming subject.
- Resolving the fearful respect felt for poetry – typically resulting from the education of literature based on historical and philological foundations – can be a problem, especially in the case of poetry performances attended with school groups. We found the presentation of contemporary poems to be an adequate answer to this, and the often surprising experience that their language and themes can cause compared to the works included in the (secondary) school curriculum.
- Getting to know poetry and developing acceptance can be achieved in a performative way (primarily through contemporary poetry), as opposed to positivist, historical literature education.

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<sup>11</sup> Gáti József: *A versmondás*. Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest, 1973. 75.

<sup>12</sup> Fischer-Lichte i.m. 134–137.

- Continuous maintenance of interaction and participation – also according to the experiences of the performances – significantly facilitates the creation of an intersubjective connection between the performer and his audience, who helps with poetry recitation and reception. The performer has to go through the vulnerable arc of thought while reciting the poem in such a way as to remain open to even the most extreme improvisation from the direction of the audience, who become a partner player.
- Poem teller and receiver become interchangeable from the point of view of the lyric subject speaking in the poem. The possibility of intersubjective connection realized by lyrical poems does not lie in the materiality of literary texts, but in personal, present-tense acceptance, presence.

List of other previous publications and works related to the topic

***Introduction to the methodology of poetry analysis for performers***

Study in *SZITU kötet 2019*, Eötvös József Collegium, Budapest, 2020. ISBN 978-615-589-736-8 MTMT identifier: 31837077

***The reciter's inner world***

Study in the study volume entitled *X. ANNIVERSARY INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL STUDENT CONFERENCE 2021*, Pécsi Tudományegyetem Doktorandusz Önkormányzat, Pécs, 2022. ISBN 978-963-429-819-9 MTMT identifier: 32746060

***Madárka sír, madárka örül...***

A performance compiled from the philosophical lyrical poems of Sándor Weöres, which was presented in 2015 at the Ódry Színpad with the participation of the actor Zsigmond Emőke and the composer-pianist Adrián Kovács.

*A színész harmonizál. The stage approach to the poetry and thinking of Sándor Weöres in the form of a planned chamber theater new circus performance. University of Theater and Film Arts, 2015 (thesis)*

***VerShaker***

Poetry-themed cultural marketing program from April 11, 2020 continuously. On VerShaker's YouTube channel, I have published series of videos, with an average length of 40-50 minutes, in which well-known actors perform a poem of their choice, which means a lot to them at the moment, analyzed in the context of the studio conversation.