

Abstract

Photography in the Contemporary Hungarian Literature

The present volume discusses the ways photography appears in contemporary Hungarian literature. It overviews the characteristic settings and contexts in which literature encounters photography and sets the landmarks of the Hungarian photoliterature. The analysis focuses on image–text relations that enable intermediality as a possibility of creating artistic value: works emerging from the combination of the photograph and the literary text (media combinations), as well as works that integrate photography into literature’s system of tropes and poetic structure (intermedial references.)

This analysis deals with a scientific-theoretical paradigm built upon the fruits of shifts in humanities defined as medial, cultural, and visual turns. Therefore, the theoretical and methodological premises of the volume are based on concepts of intermediality developed by W. J. Thomas Mitchell, Irina Rajewsky and Jean-Pierre Montier.

As a first step, the book maps the scientific, technical and social context in which photography appeared, as well as the cultural and aesthetic effects of the medium. This is followed by an overview of some seminal theoretical works on photography. In the artistic theoretical discourse of the second half of the twentieth century and the very beginning of the twenty-first century the theory of photography is dominated by the works of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag. Furthermore, Vilém Flusser’s *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* sets the medium in the context of our age’s information society.

The main chapters focus on a great variety of case studies discussing both prose and poetry. Here I analyse works by Lajos Parti Nagy and Bruno Bourel, Virág Erdős, János Térey, Pál Závada, László Márton, Gábor Schein, Krisztina Tóth and Márton Simon, as well as the online project and literary anthology called *InstaPoetry (InstaVers)*.

After a close reading of the abovementioned works, it can be stated, that these texts no longer display the competition of the visual and the verbal media, neither do we see

attempts to defeat (with linguistic instruments) the fear generated by the power of images. By surpassing the opposition between text and image, contemporary photoliterary works presented here offer potential answers to the crucial questions of the age of the Image: what can we do with the inherited pictures amassed in archives? what do these pictures tell about our individual and collective past? how is it possible that, in the golden age of the easy and quick manipulation of photographs, we still fall for the illusion of verosimilitude promised by them? in a world of shocking images and linguistic aggression, what pictorial and linguistic instruments do we still have for authentic (artistic) expression?

As Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, as well as Vilém Flusser argued regarding the massification of photographs, the man of our age needs a new kind of knowledge based on visual literacy and critical view to be able to navigate this world. In the creation of this critical, self-reflexive view, literary works play a key role by transcending the competition between the two media, and bring about a fruitful dialogue between text and image. Such works act against the passivity of the receiver (consumer), and create a reflexive perspective on both media.