

2012

Dear Duke of Arenberg,

Dear General Assembly,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an exceptional moment for me, standing here in front of you at the famous University of Göttingen, which has a great, rich and fascinating history, so please overlook my embarrassment.

After I received the first notice about the prize, the only thing I was sure of that I would love to travel to Göttingen by train. Travelling by train means a concentrated, intensified journey for me, like a moving study in which I have no other task than to look, to see, to learn and to make Europe my own.

Spending a semester in Leiden as an Erasmus exchange student was quite similar to travelling by train. Being there was like owning a moving room, an amazingly equipped, fabulous study where I received every conceivable help to work and to become absorbed in my research. But, at the same time, my room, my imaginary study was moving, bringing me around all those wondrous scholars: my professors, and all the libraries, collections, concert halls, and texts, of course, lots of texts, and my only task was to collect as much knowledge as possible.

In his novel *Esti Kornél* the Hungarian writer Dezső Kosztolányi stated: to travel is to be. One might say then: to be a European is to travel constantly, and yet, while travelling, always to be at home. A never-ending journey at home.

Thus, the Coimbra Group and the Arenberg Foundation fulfil the noblest duty: they make travelling possible in its literal and figurative sense, as well, and the member universities help young scholars to learn how to return, again and again, and how to return properly, with due respect, to these ever-new, but still, always already familiar cultural spaces. This is one of the greatest values, the greatest assets to transmit. I am deeply grateful for that.

Dear Duke of Arenberg, dear Coimbra Group. I am honoured that you decided it was me who deserved Arenberg-Coimbra Group Prize this year. I hope I can earn your trust by becoming a both physically and spiritually inexhaustible, respectful and committed traveller of Europe and European culture.

Thank you very much.

Speech given on  
30 May 2012 at  
University of Göttingen by  
Júlia TÓTH-CZIFRA

In 2010 I spent five months in The Netherlands as an Erasmus student. Since I have been working on a specific project for several years, my most important aim was to spend a semester in a research orientated university where I could finish my research project, the preparation of the critical edition of *Kornél Esti*, one of the most important works of the well-known Hungarian author, Dezső Kosztolányi. I was in an extraordinary situation, since my thesis was only a part of a much more significant work, editing a critical edition. Thus, now I have much more to be grateful for than the support to finish my thesis.

The University of Leiden is a research university of high prestige. As its motto (*Praesidium Libertatis*) suggests, this university provides a first-rate infrastructure for individual research. In view of the high reputation and more than three hundred year old tradition of the University of Leiden, I looked forward to my stay there. All my expectations were fulfilled.

The exchange semester added greatly to the successful completion of my master studies, and helped me to make a progress in both the technical and the theoretical aspects of my project.

As a student of Professor Richard Todd's research seminar '*Editing Donne*', I could gain an insight both into the international research on John Donne's texts and into the potential ways of editing. The technical background of the so-called *Donne Variorum* was very impressive: the database and the complementary software, as well as the inventive ways of drawing the stemmas of the manuscripts proved to be highly illuminating. They helped me to outline the concept of 'virtual manuscript', one of the distinguishing features of the critical edition of *Kornél Esti*, published in 2011.

The discussions of the seminar, the analysis of the fundamental differences between the textual corpus of *Kornél Esti* written in the early 20th century and John Donne's poems composed three hundred years earlier shed light on general theoretical problems, questions of textual theory, and ways of editing practice. Differences in terms of history and language were the starting points for the comparison of the works of the two authors. While collating variations of Donne's poems, I became familiar with new methods of preparing critical editions. Thanks to this, I could change the profile of the critical edition of Kosztolányi's work. I have a firm conviction, that without this I would never have thought of these new methods I built in the critical edition after all.

Under the mentorship of Professor Todd the seminar paid several visits to the Manuscript Archive of the Royal Library in The Hague. This was an experience of exceptional value.

Aside from completing the critical edition of the above-mentioned work, I could also write and submit my thesis on *Kornél Esti*. In that work I could develop a new interpretation, focusing on nonverbal communication, a field neglected by earlier critics.

It is safe to say, based on the remains of documents like letters and announcements, that on the eve of 1931 Kosztolányi was surely planning the *Kornél Esti* that was published in 1933. There are several traces of the volume-arranging work. It is clear after the critical-work that based on certain criteria the writer integrated, and adjusted according to his own liking, the selected chapters.

However, this only concerns the integrity of the volume. Yet, following from the unique forming and festoon-likeness of the *Kornél Esti*, the volume's structural formation deserves attention in itself, in particular the things that keep the eighteen chapters – that were included in the *Kornél Esti* – intact. As there are no surviving documents on the criteria that Kosztolányi used to pick and arrange the chapters of the volume, this remains an interesting task of the interpreter.

My thesis attempts to enrich the list of the possible interpretations of the potential elements of probable chapter-interlinks with a new approach that is a core-issue in technical literature for decades: one that, beside Esti's relationship with language, also investigates the related issue of body language.

At the time I was arrived at Leiden, I had already had an intuition that the key issue was the body.

While studying in Leiden, I also attended the lecture course entitled '*Anglo-American Film*', given by Professor Michael Newton. This lecture offered a great chance to give proof of my intuition, or, even more, to discover the exact key issue: the 'sight'. The seminar gave me the idea of concentrating on the presence and aspects of the observer and the observed, the alterations of vision. The importance of reading the other's face and gestures, and, in parallel, trying to write one's own, which is characteristic of *Kornél Esti*, bears obvious resemblance to the medium of film. I was particularly impressed by Professor Newton's analyses of films as visual texts, focusing on sight, image as such, and aspects of the human body. I could reach the conclusion that our ideas about the decipherable or undecipherable face have been changed by the medium of film. With all the different angles and lenses motion pictures reveal details (for instance reactions of the face) we never would see with the naked eye. In my thesis I paid special attention to the impact of silent film on the literature of the early 20th

century<sup>1</sup> and the various discursive techniques of representing the performative acts of the human body.

As an exchange student of the University of Leiden, I could get free access to other libraries in The Netherlands, including the rich collections of the University Library and the Film Museum in Amsterdam. Reading literary and film theory simultaneously, studying Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic investigations into the mirror effect and the concept of gaze were also of great use for my thesis, since sight, facial message, and the *mise en abyme* play important roles in Kosztolányi's works.

The creation, untenability and elimination of the illusion of "bodily reading and writing", as well as Esti Kornél's attitude towards bodies are described in a detailed close reading in my thesis. My interpretation attempts to find a thread among the festoon-like chapters that would strengthen their intertwinement and uniformity.

Having majored in comparative literature and intermedial studies, I take a serious interest in interart studies. It was amazing to see, how these related arts can really hold dialogue with each other, and throw light on one another.

As is well-known, The Netherlands has an extremely rich heritage in art. I was lucky to visit the wide range of museums, art galleries, concert halls, and libraries in Leiden and Amsterdam (Het Concertgebouw, Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum, Van Gogh Museum, etc.), as well as all the public collections of The Hague (especially the Mauritshuis), Rotterdam, Utrecht that are within reach. Amsterdam had the status of *Art City* at that time. The programs organized on this occasion continued to the end of 2010. This gave me an exceptional chance to become familiar not only with the important museums of the city but also with the art collection borrowed from the Hermitage of Saint-Petersburg. A single example could say more: Rene Magritte's painting '*The Reproduction is Forbidden*', which I saw in Rotterdam, became an expressive demonstration of mirror-structures and reflection in my thesis.

Not to mention, that after arriving back to Budapest, I completed some of my courses by the knowledge and experiences I gained by these collections. Therefore, it may be firmly declared that the exchange semester added greatly to the successful completion of my master studies not only regarding my thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Proust deals with this occurrence and the philosophical aspects of the illusions caused by using binocular or other optical media in the second volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu, À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*.

The magnificent infrastructure of education, the research orientated atmosphere gave me the perfect surrounding to work not only on a diploma project, but to manage to face an even bigger challenge, making a critical edition. My visit to Leiden in 2010 helped me with finishing both in my graduation year.

Last, but not least, I felt honoured that I received two great letters of recommendation to PhD application from my professors in Leiden. This gesture means a lot to me, showing how successful my exchange semester was, and how it has influenced not only my graduating, but my further professional life.