

The Possibilities of Plant Vocalization

Attila József's "Trees" [Fák] and Lőrinc Szabó's "In the Black Forest" [A Fekete Erdőben]

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Abstract. The poetic possibilities of plant vocalization take new directions in the poetry of Lőrinc Szabó and Attila József, feeding on the traditions of romantic and modern poetry, but also renewing them, as we see in the translations and reading methods. They come into contact with the poems of Percy Shelley, Charles Baudelaire, and George Meredith. The study focuses on two poems: Attila József's "Trees" [Fák] and Lőrinc Szabó's "In the Black Forest" [A Fekete Erdőben] contextualized with other poems in the oeuvre, the antecedents of the poetic forms, and the comparative influences. In the case of "Trees", plant thinking and biological operations are paralleled, creating the sound effects of the poem together; in the poem "In the Black Forest", the equivalence of human and plant life is emphasized through sensual-poetic communication.

Keywords: modern poetry, metapoetics, biopoetics, plant vocalization, Lőrinc Szabó, Attila József, Percy Shelley, Charles Baudelaire, George Meredith

Only in the past decade have biologists started to find evidence for the possibilities of plant vocalization. For example, it has been discovered that not only do trees hear in the ground, which easily conducts sound with the help of mechanoreceptors in their roots, but a 2012 research in Italy also revealed that they communicate with each other with clicking sounds.¹ With these sounds, plants clicking at a frequency of 220 Hz direct the growth of their roots to each other.² Berlin researchers have also reported that pine and oak trees emit ultrasound. The vibrations are caused by changes in the water content of the water-transmitting xylem cells.³ Furthermore, the 2019 results of the Faculty of Life Sciences of Tel-Aviv University show that

1 Mancuso and Viola, *Brilliant Green*, 58–61.

2 Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 12–13.

3 Chamovitz, *What a Plant Knows*, 97.

tobacco and tomato plants respond to stress with a sound similar to crying at a frequency inaudible to the human ear.⁴ From these results, scientists have deduced the existence of a communication channel, a signal exchange that works both below and above the ground. Biologists explain the operations of the plant organism in relation to the human body.

If natural sciences make use of the anthropomorphic point of view in botanical investigations, the question arises to what extent poetic language is able to de-anthropomorphize speech in favor of plants in the case of plant vocalization. “Trees” and “In the Black Forest” give voice to fear through the relationship between plant and human organicity by speaking the unspeakable. The unspeakableness reflected in the semantics of the poems sheds light on linguistic articulation being dependent on biological functioning, the living nature of the lyric, the role of the body working in unity with it, and the appreciation of plant life. The two poems accomplish the plant sound emission through the relationship between the equally significant *melos* and *opsis*, and embed it in the semantic sphere. “Trees” implicitly transforms the unspeakable into human language, while “In the Black Forest” displays the poetic method also semantically. Through the conduction of the anthropomorphic voice organs and the sensory system, the plant acquires sound and language expression, and in the sensual entanglements it is metaphorized and made visible by light effects. In both poems, the poetic representation of nature conveys observations at many points, which can be supported by natural science, and the mode of action of poems that have infiltrated through the poets’ reading and translation can also be demonstrated. In addition, there are examples where the poetic instances of the development of plant sounds are displayed. The poetic adaptation of the perception of nature cannot be ruled out, but the improvement of the romantic aesthetic paradigm and the conscious adaptation of lyrical language are on more solid ground than the representation of the observation of nature.

Trees [Fák]

If examined from the point of view of plant sound emission, the central, most important line of Attila József’s “Trees” is the shortest and most concise sentence in the text: “Murmuring, these trees are thinking of a bud” [Rügyre gondolnak mormolva e fák].⁵ There is a causal relationship between thought and sound emission in the construction unit of “gondolnak mormolva”. The two words are intertwined, the similar vowel placement makes one the source of the other, as

4 Khait et al., *Plants emit informative*.

5 Unless indicated otherwise, translations are by the author.

if the modal modifier “mormolva”, the murmuring sound developed or grew out of the expression “gondolnak”. In the interpretation of “Trees”, my aim is to trace the function of the plant’s thought and the related sound emission throughout the entire poem, and its articulation through the lyrical voice.

In “Inspiration and Nation” [Ihlet és nemzet], József gives the example of a debate for showing the relationship between thought, or understanding, and speech. He argues that it is not necessary to formulate verbally the idea in advance for a party who unexpectedly joins a discussion to reflect on it. At another point in the aesthetic fragment, he contends that “we understand without the understanding appearing in our minds in the given form of spoken words.”⁶ At this point, philosopher István M. Fehér connects József with Heidegger and the insight of the hermeneutic turn, according to which understanding and interpretation are not bound to the development of linguistic form. The action of understanding-interpreting also extends to everyday activities, just as—using Heidegger’s example—when using a hammer, the linguistic expression is not needed to be able to perform the action.⁷

Already before the birth of *Trees* in 1932, József had experimented with transforming the mechanisms of nature into poetic language. Examples of this are the poems “All Things Human” [Minden rendű emberi dolgokhoz] and “Wondering about Life” [Csudálkozunk az életen] in the volume “No Shriek of Mine” [Nem én kiáltok], as well as the 1926 poem “Two Poems about Gardens” [Két vers, kertről].

In the poem “All Things Human”, plant growth starts from the location of thinking, the forehead. The flowers identified with the flame are combined with a sound effect to gain a decoded linguistic statement: “Three flames grow from his forehead, a resounding, deep flower / And they sob, they sob the litany” [Három láng nő homlokából, zengő, mély virág / És zokognak, elzokogják a litániát]. Musicality can be translated into human language through the sobbing of plants in the third stanza, where the voices of the flowers trace their origins back to a human “mood”, to some immaterial content: “I just existed!—Alas, I exist!—And me, I’ll just exist / I was cut down, planted, held in bad hands, / Our life is the will of man, but where is he, / Where is man? Did he create me in vain?” [Én csak voltam! – Én, jaj, vagyok!—Én meg csak leszek / Leszaggattak, elültettek, fognak rossz kezek, / Életünk az ember kedve, hanem hol van ő, / Hol az ember? Hát hiába teremtett elő?]. A deeper examination of the poem would have its merits, but for the relation to “Trees”, I am highlighting three stages of translation in the poem “All Things Human”: the human spirit is medialized into the organism of flowers, which are then transformed into language through speech in order to refer back to the anthropomorphic emotional

6 József, “Ihlet és nemzet,” 95–127, 101.

7 Fehér M., *József Attila esztétikai írásai*, 45–48.

sphere, marking themselves as its medium. This is also supported by the unity of language, music, and light effects: “And the man, the poor man, is just hiding inside, / The lightning of resounding words flying around his head.” [És az ember, szegény ember, csak lapul belül, / Feje körül zengő szavak villáma röpül]. Through the flaming light effect of the flowers and the adjective “resounding”, the plant can be identified with the language, the three “resounding flowers” with the “resounding words”.

In another related poem from the volume “No Shriek of Mine” [Nem én kiáltok], “Wondering about Life” [Csudálkozunk az életen], “our word” [szavunk] is associated with the unit of the lyrical self and the “he”, i.e., the “sweetheart”. The deitic “so much good” [annyi jót] from “A field can dream so much good” [Mező álmodhat annyi jót] refers back to the physical sensation hidden in the language, “A kiss is hidden in the nook of our words” [Szavunk zugában megbuvik a csók], to the kiss, so in the relation of “our word” [szavunk], “kiss” [csók] and “A field can dream” [Mező álmodhat], i.e., language, physical sensation, and a dream similar to thought (as a mental operation), the invisible triple unity of the field can be localized in the metaphorically represented “sweetheart”, i.e., in the “heart of grasses [füvek szíve]” from “My sweetheart is the heart of grasses” [Az én kedvesem a füvek szíve]. In this way “our word” [szavunk], i.e., the origin of language can be determined by the end of the line, as the voice of the poem is made possible by the content of the heart, the decoding of the dream. The dream, appearing as the activity of the “field”, includes the “kiss” and (along with it) the possibility of speaking. The deixis of “so much good” makes it possible to unfold the thought content of the “field”. This thought content can be derived from the heart, which anthropomorphizes plants, thus connecting their existence, including dreaming, to this organ that plays a role in the overall organic functioning. The heart of the sweetheart and the grass merge, so the dream of the field is influenced by the content of the heart (the kiss). The thought material of nature, the dream, is integrated into language “A kiss is hidden in the nook of our words” [Szavunk zugában megbuvik a csók]. The poem self-reflexively indicates that its words (in the meeting of “I” and “she”: “our word”) contain the feeling of a kiss and, in relation to this, the dream of nature: the voice of nature is realized.

In the first piece of “Two Poems about Gardens” [Két vers, kertről], plant thinking is also coupled with the sound effect “The garden thought up a new shudder” [Új borzongást gondolt ki a kert]; through the sound mimetic phrase “shudder”, which implicitly includes the kinesis of plants. However, in contrast to “Trees”, this poem also explicitly requires the subordination of the lyrical self, as if it were controlled, or the medially functioning poetic language as a medium for conveying thoughts “a shudder for me that makes me sing” [hozzámvalót és énekeltetőt]. For anthropomorphic language, he transposes plant thought and sound into an anthropomorphic biological organism. “Two Poems about Gardens” thus places the source of the

sound up the hill, at the semantically highest point of the poem, saying “he sent his most beautiful trees up the hill” [legszebb fáit dombra küldte fel], which is on the same level as the height of the forehead in relation to the human body “so that they roar when it wakes on the forehead” [hogy zúgjanak ha kél a homlokon]. The upward movement in nature creates the lyrical voice and enables liberation from the forehead, as in the last three words of the line “in the valley road do I reach the sky” [völgyi úton érek égbe én] the lyrical self, identified with the voice of the poem, in the process of reaching represents not only the completed arrival, but also includes the process of maturation (which can also be interpreted at the level of a plant organism), while the anagrammatic inscription of “song” is also realized in the three words. The poem makes the existence of the garden a dependent of the mediation of the self. In contrast to the past tense of the previous two stanzas, the last one moves into the present, directing attention to the presence of the voice, and destroys the “garden” with a performative act (“here the garden is destroyed on my heart”; *itt pusztul el a kert a szívemen*);), while also deictically (here; “*itt*”) points to the language, to the end of the poem. The garden ceases to exist at the same time as the sound.

As the three examples show, the silence of thought is connected to the silence of plants, and the transmission becomes possible by operating different senses through the codes of musicality and light effects. In the process of verbalization, the poems use partial units of anthropomorphic organicity for medial transport. The transformation mechanism of thought is implicitly intertwined in the poetic language with the various poetic methods that create relationships. The piece entitled “Trees” realizes the possibilities of plant thought and speech in a way similar to these factors, with the difference that the distances used by the avant-garde are softened: plant and human contacts and sensual effects become more unified and implicit. The plant sound effects are written into the poetic language at the level of the *melos*, they are not separated in the utterance, and the poem does not contain any explicit self-reflection in which the image of the language or poem would also appear semantically: the poetic language and the plant utterance are blended in the deep layers of the poem.

In the semantic sphere of “Trees”, utterance proves unsuccessful compared to the articulation of the human language, since the thought is realized only as a sound effect. Nevertheless, the manager of the mechanism of the plant organism, namely thought, appreciates nature in anthropomorphic terms. The thought activates the life process of the tree in the same way as the sound. The two can be connected if we can interpret the thought not only as the cause of budding, but also as the trigger of water circulation. The way the lines “Their fluid circulates rapidly, their lungs / still rattling, still sighing” [Nedvük sebesen kering, tüdejük / még zörren, még sohajt] lines are followed by “Murmuring, these trees are thinking of a bud”

[Rügyre gondolnak mormolva e fák], as if they were a subsequent cause or explanation of the circulation. It is a proven botanical fact that during budding trees move water faster between the roots and the developing leaves. This produces a humming, audible sound.⁸ In the poem, the idea of budding accelerates circulation. However, just as budding does not materialize, the utterance is no more than a mere murmuring sound, which can also be identified as the murmur of water. Water moved by thought also starts evaporation, just as the foliage identified with the lungs is “still sighing”. According to botanical knowledge, there are mouth-like openings on the leaves of trees which move and evaporate water in the metabolism of photosynthesis.⁹ This representation of breathing with an anthropomorphic perspective by using the terms “lung” and “sigh” latently contains the possibility of speaking, just as the flow of air in the human body is necessary for the use of sound-producing organs.

At this point, József’s “Trees” may be related to his “Ode” [Óda], also in the “Bear Dance” [Medvetánc] volume, in which the lungs and the bushes merge from an inverse perspective compared to “Trees”, i.e., from the human side to the plant side, thus breathing becomes a common feature. Like the water-flowing organicity of the trees, the circulatory system of blood also plays a role in this, which, mirroring the human body, enables flowering, rooting, and the sound of the lung-like breathing mechanism of leaves. Gábor Mezei designates nature, the movement of the human lungs, and plant bushes as the source of sound, to which the materiality of language, the accumulation of the “s” sounds contributes. The sound resulting from the movement of the two organisms can be described as an involuntary action, which parallels the automatic activity of language. Not only do the dynamics of the two organisms refer to the physiological processes of sound and speech formation, but in the acoustic compression of the language, in addition to the self-functioning of the body, there is also the self-functioning of language.¹⁰ In “Trees”, plant and human sound formations are intertwined in the articulation of the poem. It is as if the plant assumed the human organism in order to speak. It requires a biological and linguistic medium that expresses the thought. In the recitation, the poem requires the circulatory system of the speaking medium. The lungs operate the exchange of air with the help of blood flow, so reciting the poem can also be used as a self-reflection of life. Life speaks in language, the whole body is needed to produce sound, just as a tree uses its entire circulatory system to express a thought. The role of language is semantically overwritten in “Trees”, because attention is directed to the unspoken, not yet linguistically shaped thought that operates biological processes. At the same time, the poem also reflects on the mutually presupposing reciprocity

8 Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 56–59.

9 Mancuso and Viola, *Brilliant Green*, 67–68.

10 Mezei, *A test kitettségének biopoétikai következményei*, 87.

of the organicity of life and language, as the tree's organization works in the hope of utterance in the metaphor of anthropomorphized air exchange and speaking. In the recitation, "Trees" uses the human lungs to achieve the performatively that, in the semantics of the poem, the trees only accomplish at the thought level: the circulatory system of the lungs, like foliage, promotes the functioning of audible language and represents the life encoded in words.

Full-fledged sound formation could be achieved through the effective circulation of the entire tree, but the semantics of the lines "their fluid circulates rapidly" [nedvük sebesen kering] and "standing there, having wept" [kisirtan állnak] prevent the perfection of the circulation, in the same way as the utterance and budding. In terms of polysemy, it can also be interpreted as the thought trying to flow out through the wound as an opening, through the mouth, in the organic functioning of the water identified with the thought, thus the circulation of the water would avoid the breathing through leaves. An attempt to do this could be avoiding the difficult-to-understand manifestation of murmuring. On this basis, the glistening of water may allude to communication through light effects. The word "sebes" as a homonym meaning both "fast" and "wounded" is also used in the third stanza of József's 1928 "Cherry on the Weed" [Meggy a kórón]: "Alas, like fever-beaten fast/wounded lips / weakly panting they snap out / around the cherries on the trees" [Óh jaj, mint lázvert sebes ajkak / gyengén lihegve kicsattannak / a meggyszemek körül a fákon]. In this context, "fevered" explicitly emphasizes the double meaning, i.e., the dynamic of the fever moving the mouth rapidly in trembling and the damaging nature of the beating. The "sebes" nature in relation to plant organicity also creates the possibility of utterance in the sense of movement and a fast opening similar to a mouth.

The difficulty of speaking is also manifested in the way silence and fertility come into opposition in "Trees": "In place of their bright fruit, a silent, / stocky crow broods" [Fényes gyümölcsük helyén hallgatag / zömök varjú borong]. The third stanza of the poem implies the paradoxically impossible possibility of speaking. The words "vágatlan" (uncut) and "hántatlan" (unpeeled) anticipate the image of death, thus they are opposed to the present life. The gloom of "ter(e)m(t)és" (*termés* = fruit; *teremtés* = creation), i.e., the silent crow in place of the fruit, hides an emotional state in the same way as the thought is present in the tree despite the lack of an explicit statement. The rhyming pair of "dorong" (bough) relating to wood and the emotional state of "borong" (brooding) may evoke the Jew's harp, an instrument originally made of wood. This association game is strengthened by the use of the same words in the 1932 "In the Sparse Woods" [Ritkás erdő alatt]: "...in the fields broods the aspen. / In the seed-filled foxtails snores on its belly / a hollow bough, with mushrooms on its end" [...a szántón borong a nyárfa. / Magos muharban hasán horkol / odvas dorong, a végén gomba]. Brooding refers to the emotional

state of the tree, and the bough acquires the ability to produce a sound through snoring. The word “borong” (broods) is anagrammatically disseminated into the words “horkol” (snore), “dorong” (bough), “hordó” (barrel), and “donga” (stave). The deconstruction of the affective “borong” (broods) in the sound can be followed along the latent inscriptions of snoring, wide-open mouth, and airflow. The phrase “magos muharban” (in the seed-filled foxtails) sounds like a murmur due to the duplication of the ‘m’s. This sound associated with the “muhar” (foxtail) puts the tree in a communicative environment. Snoring is included in the sound effect of the grass [muhar] with the triple rhythmic iteration (“muharban hasán horkol”; in foxtails snores on its belly), as if making audible the intake of air for snoring. The lip-rounded ‘o’ of “horkol / odvas dorong” (snores / a hollow bough) also forms the hollow at the speech organs level and is phonetically encoded in “dorong” (bough). And the presence of the barrel seems to foreshadow the fate of the tree (as bough also connotes the semantics of a wooden club), it being cut up, just as the “borong” (brooding) is also cut into sections, thus the “donga” (stave) (along with other pieces of the deconstruction moment) appears as an anagrammatic complement. “Donga” (stave) is in the same m-murmuring sound environment as “dorong” [“moha meg zsíros donga”]. The emptiness of the barrel is paralleled by the emptiness of the hollow, and the sound spreads through the empty gaze as the barrel becomes an eye. It is as if, through the notion of being cut up, “borong” (brooding) was connected to snoring, which, in the recursive rhythm of breathing, cuts the wood into pieces.

Similarly to snoring, the wind is also a melodic sound effect, as the sound-producing [“zümmögő”] buzzing activity of the wind identified with combing is created in the rhythm of the comb’s teeth. Syntactically, this is indicated by the composition of “késő” (late) and combing, which frames one line each: “késő, szép délután ez, késő” [it’s a late, nice afternoon, it’s late] and “a levelet / fésüli zümmögő fésü” [the buzzing comb combs the leaves]. The alternation of the consonants ‘z’ and ‘sz’ and ‘s’ implies the sound effect of the wind as it whistles undulating (“fésülve”; combing), and with the phoneme ‘z’ the poem conveys the interaction of the wind and the foliage. The “zümmögő” (buzzing) effect is formed when the wind meets the leaves. The “fésülése” (combing) is also reinforced by the visual rhythmicity of the image of the “fodor” (frill): “fodraiból a levelet / fésüli zümmögő fésü” (from its frills the leaf is combed out / with a buzzing comb). During the “fésülés” (combing) of the foliage, the falling of leaves also contributes to the downward movement, as the multiplication of “le” (down) features in the words “levelet” (leaf), “lebeg” (floating), and “lebontva” (broken down). In the line “Lebeg a hosszú szél lebontva” [Floats the long wind, broken down], the interplay of liquids and the ‘s’ consonants reflect on the sound of the wind, the continuity of which contrasts with the previously noted fragmentation, but in relation to the tree, the phenomenon acquires a rhythmicity similar to the teeth of a comb, like the air flowing when one snores. “Lebontva” (broken

down) may refer both to the wind and the wood that comes into contact with it. The way the wind is present in the poem with a continuous sound, “lebontva” (broken down) from everything, and/or the way it breaks the leaves off the whole by coming into contact with the foliage, and the rhythmic sound of the process is triggered and controlled by the wind.

In “Trees”, the relationship between the rhyme pair “konyul” (drooping) and “alkonyul” (dusk is coming), the poem-encompassing effect of the affective dimension of “csüggeden” (dejected) comes together, which may evoke a similar droop in the word form, as its semantic relevance is confirmed by the state of the leaves: “Sárga levelük lefele konyul” [Their yellow leaves are drooping]. The fear of the trees and the resulting dejection affects the whole circulatory system just like the thought. The fear of frost is associated with dusk, as it latently anticipates the object of fear, the approaching frost. The most expansive visual element of “Trees”, the threat of dusk, defines the atmosphere of the poem and enters the circulation through the trees’ air exchange: “konyul” (drooping) appears as an inscription in the plant reaction (“lefelé konyul”; drooping down). This is how the outside and the inside are reflected: the time of day that causes fear outside is mirrored with the emotional state through the rhyming technique. The poems “The Storm Approaches” [Jön a vihar...] and “Our Poet and his Age” [Költőnk és kora] repeat the rhyme pair supplemented by a third one (“lanka nyúl”; “this grassy down’s tilt”¹¹) but despite the repetition of the theme of plant speech, the poems make available different semantic and tropological conditions.¹² “The Storm Approaches” also uses the affective power of fear: “szegény fűszál lekonyúl, / fél, hogy örökre alkonyúl” [wretched blades of grass droop and wilt, / mourn the sun’s descent into silt.]¹³ “The Storm Approaches” replaces the last short ‘u’ with a long vowel compared to “Trees”, thus with the additive element of “lanka nyúl” (this grassy down’s tilt) it gets a triple rhyme unit of lanka nyúl-lekonyúl-alkonyúl. The spread of grass is mirrored by the vastness of the sky: fear adapts to the size of the dusk. The fear may be put into a causal relationship with drooping, and the drooping may be identified as the cause of this relationship. Causality is realized in a closer relationship in the explanatory subordination than in “Trees”, and bringing to the surface the plant utterance is not realized through the mechanisms of the plant system, but in the process of a step-by-step medial

11 Attila József, *The Storm Approaches*, translation by József Váradi. https://www.magyarulba-belben.net/works/hu/J%C3%B3zsef_Attila-1905/J%C3%B6n_a_vihar/en/83762-The_Storm_Approaches?tr_id=10773

12 Csongor Lőrincz writes about this topic in relation to “The Storm is Approaching” and “Our Poet and his Age”: “The quoted series of rhymes and its figurative environment in ‘Our Poet and his Age’ differ considerably from the earlier poem’s tropologic condition, the texts do not offer a united semantic motivation for the repetition effect.” Lőrincz, *Beírás és átvitel*, 186–209, 188.

13 Attila József, *The Storm Approaches*, translation by József Váradi.

transformation as its end point. Fear comes from plant organicity, from the dynamic expression of trembling and shivering, to the possibility of saying it (“vallana”; would confess) with multi-step medial changes.¹⁴

In “Our Poet and his Age”, the connection is revealed even more explicitly, since the change of colors appears as a reversible reflection of the connection and fusion of the stubble and the sky.

The rhyming lines [...] convey the foreign sound wedged between them in the same way that the “nature-lyrical” codes of “The Storm is Approaching” are connected with the symptomatic description of the staged mortification (red blood → blue clotting → corpse stains). The sunset, constructed as the death of an unobjectifiable organism—similarly to the irrevocability of the passing that halts the continuous cycle of the seasons - [...] in a peculiar way finally de-naturalizes the poetics of the “natural” image by the allegorical fusion of two incompatible natural processes.¹⁵

Compared to the tropically used dusk of “The Storm is Approaching”, “Our Poet and his Age” uses it as a referential code, with the last line summarizing in one word the six preceding lines.¹⁶ This referential code is written into the drooping, and thus the tragic tonality expressed through the six lines is heard in the sound effect of the lawn, in the crying and parallel to it in the drooping.

In “Trees”, the instrumentalization of the existence of the tree hides within itself the vocalization and, with it, the maintenance of life and fertility, in the same way as vocalization would make budding possible. Autopoiesis—in the case of trees, the self-creating growth in the plant sense, the budding, and in the absence of the last stage of the life cycle, the transmission—is not fulfilled, because the vocalization of the instrument is incomplete or partial, as the vocalization of the thought begins the process. The fruit is also semantically withdrawn in the absence of sound (by listening), but its image still appears in abstraction, which can strengthen the chance of speaking, of externalization, filling the space through sound, and ripening.

In the way the trees are able to sustain life and continue to grow through vocalization connected to thought, they themselves are rooted in sound and alliteration, more precisely in the “eroding ground” [elmálló talaj]. In the same way, the poem locates the trees in the consonance of the ‘s’ sounds, in the flow of water: “Puha szántások, esővert, leves / gerezdjei között” [In the rain-swept, / wet grooves of soft

14 Csongor Lőrincz talked about this complex poetic construction in his lecture given at the conference *A lírai hang túloldalai – József Attila-olvasatok* (*The Other Sides of the Lyrical Voice – Reading Attila József*) at the Petőfi Literary Museum, on 26 March 2021.

15 Kulcsár Szabó, *Csupasz tekintet*, 61–80, 66.

16 Lőrincz, *Beírás és átvitel*, 189, 204.

ploughs]. This poetic solution may be rooted in József’s avant-garde poems that preceded “Trees”, where plants grow from music, thought, or the head designated as the location of thought. Citing just one example from the 1923 poem “In Male Words” [Férfiszóval], which is relevantly connected to “Trees”, if we interpret plowings as wounds due to their cleft-like appearance, the violent presence of the adjective “esővert” (literally: beaten by rain) and the rhyme pair “leves”–“sebes”: “From our singing, eternal wounds / even violets are sprouting!” [Zenélő, örök sebeinkből / kihajtanak még violák is!]. In “Trees”, however, this process appears implicitly through the melos rather than being stated in the semantic sphere: the water gushing from the ground flows in the poem’s repeated ‘s’ and ‘l’ sounds. With the water delivered to the salinizing leaves, the liquid alliterates like this: “Sárga levelük lefele konyul” [Their yellow leaves are drooping].

Rooted in water, existing through sound and thought, however, closes the trees to themselves. This also applies to the adjective ‘solitary’ [magányos] as if the term included the secluded state of the ‘seed’ [mag]. Existence is rooted and can survive only in the unity of thought, water, and sound. This triple unit can also be directed to the implementation of a defense mechanism through the act of sighing. The idea of the bud also includes the moment of evaporation through the leaves. This appears anthropomorphically as a sigh in the poem, as a barren form of utterance. From a physical point of view, this silent speech would allow for the fog expected at the beginning of the poem, since vaporization is the basis of fog. Speaking *with* life and *for* life could invoke the fog as a defensive mechanism to avoid permanent silence and continue the growth that has begun. It is as if the unspoken word would still contain the possibility of autopoiesis, but similarly to how the utterance does not take place, which could summon the fog or the fruits and the bud according to the name magic theory,¹⁷ so is the perpetuation and sustainability of life also interrupted, since the frost arrives first to the trees before the protective mist. It is a botanical finding that as winter approaches, the tree reduces the amount of liquid in its circulation, which is why it drops its leaves so that water does not have to flow between them and the roots.¹⁸ This defense mechanism prevents water from freezing in the plant’s circulatory system, and the tree does not die. In József’s poem, however, the trees act against silence by circulating water. The final word “fagy” [frost], on the other hand, not only ends the thought and, thus, life but also *puts an end to* the silence of the poem. The existence of the tree is determined by the unity of thought and sound. As soon as the flow of thought is stopped by the freezing of the water, life ceases, and so does sound. The tree in the poem can only exist through the poetic voice; as soon as it is broken, the lyrical tree dies. Lyrical life is frozen by silence.

17 Nothnagel, *Szómágia és marxizmus*, 155–74.

18 Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 137.

For a deeper understanding of the silence of the trees, we may look back at Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances",¹⁹ which is related to "Trees" and later also to Szabó's "In the Black Forest". From the translation by Lőrinc Szabó, the effect seeps into "Trees" with words and the constellation-organizing methodology covering the entire poem. The mechanism of influence between the Szabó's translations and József's poems can be confirmed at other points in his oeuvre.²⁰ The impact of the Baudelaire translation is significant because, just as Baudelaire's poem is poetically connected to "Trees" through Szabó's translation, József's poem is also echoed in "In the Black Forest". The process is complicated, but confirms the notion of reciprocal poetic development.

Having started the interpretation with the line "Murmuring, these trees are thinking of a bud" [Rügyre gondolnak mormolva e fák], now we are returning to the central role of "mormolva" (murmur), which is related to Szabó's translation of "Correspondances". The encyclopedia of the Hungarian language associates two kinds of meanings with the word "mormur": the monotonous monologic act of speaking, which the speaker reads to themselves barely audibly or only to themselves; in a figurative sense, the term can also be used for the flow of water, for the soft, murmuring sound.²¹ Both meanings validate their mechanism if we interpret the poem as a self-contained monologue of the trees speaking to themselves, which functions as a condition of existence, which takes place as the speaking performance of the already expressed notions of thought—water—sound, liquid circulation. The difficulty of hearing the murmur is reinforced by the sound that is written into the language and the organic functioning rooted in the poetic constellation: it requires a receiver who does not just hear the poem in the act of reading, but by reading more closely, as if by leaning in, listens to what is difficult to understand from a distance, comprehensible in the interplay of *opsis* and *melos* to murmur.

The part "szavakat mormolnak" (they are murmuring words) in Szabó's Hungarian translation of "Correspondances", entitled "Kapcsolatok" [Relationships], combines the sense of "confuses" (confused, mixed, jumbled) and "paroles" (words). Confusion and the possibility of intelligibility are staged in the intonation and meanings of the verb "mormur". Szabó's use of words seeps into the central line of József's "Trees" ("Murmuring, these trees are thinking of a bud."). In addition, the whispering, not included in the original "Correspondances" "mormolnak összesűgva";

19 The original "Correspondances" title's English translation is "Correspondences".

20 Csongor Lőrincz gives an example of this: in the translation of Baudelaire's "Élévation" [Fölemelkedés] by Lőrinc Szabó, the poem's last stanza is used along the verticality implied in the image, and the transgression, the border crossing emblemized in József Attila, *Hidd el...* Lőrincz, *Élet, közösség, szubjektum*, 47–48.

21 Bárczi, ed., *A magyar nyelv értelmező szótára*. Vol. V, 26.

murmuring together), in the Hungarian translation strengthens the connection of the unity of sounds, and also plays on the difficulty of understanding, as in the act of whispering, the sound-producing organs work partially only, unlike the clearly intelligible sound of speech. “Trees” brings this to the scene in terms of the air function with a similar sound, the sigh: “Their fluid circulates fast, their lungs / still rattling, still sighing [Nedvük sebesen kering, tüdejük / még zörren, még sohajt]. In fact, sighing can be created by the circulation of the water, that is, as an interplay of sounds in the *melos*. “Correspondances” puts the sound and the resulting (symbolic) imagery into a causal relationship: “The pillars of Nature’s temple are alive / and sometimes yield perplexing messages; / forests of symbols between us and the shrine / remark our passage with accustomed eyes.”²² [Templom a természet: **élő** oszlopai / időnkint szavakat mormolnak összesúgva: / Jelképek erdején át visz az ember útja / s a vendéget szemük barátként figyeli.] The sign system of the forest (“symbols”) spreads in the direction of visuality and language decoded from sound. This method of communication prevails in the following stanzas: “Like long-held echoes, blending somewhere else / into one deep and shadowy unison / as limitless as darkness and as day, / the sounds, the scents, the colors correspond”²³ [Ahogy a távoli visszhangok egyberingnak / valami titkos és mély egység tengerén, / mely, mint az éjszaka, oly nagy, és mint a fény / egymásba csendül a szín és a hang s az illat]. The light is created from the interplay/harmony of the different senses, which illuminates the forest positioned in the dark. The feelings encoded in the language of the poem make the semantic sphere visible and readable from linguistic signs.

“Trees”—albeit in a more complicated poetic constellation—brings the material and immaterial unity to fruition with the harmony of the plant’s organic functioning and thought, just as “Correspondances” is semantically related to the joint sound of body and soul: “as incense, amber, benjamin and musk, / to praise the senses’ raptures and the mind’s.”²⁴ [mint az ámbra, mosusz, tömjén és benzoé: / test s lélek mámora zeng bennük az ég felé]. “Trees” also puts the voice in a broad perspective by directing it towards the sky, just as it expands the poem’s semantic layer towards the sky after the connection between thought and murmuring. Then it terminates the sequence of the sound with a hyphen, actually marking the change as a caesura, as if preparing for the presence of a new sound. In the way the poetic language is created by the idea of plants, the organic circulation of water and the associated sound, the linguistic coding draws imagery that can be visualized on the semantic level. This may also be referred to by the lines “Their yellow leaves are drooping, / their trunks are wet, shining.” [Sárga levelük lefele konyul, / törzsük

22 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 15.

23 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 15.

24 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 15.

vizes, ragyog], in which thought and water operate the plant life, the withdrawal of chlorophyll from the leaves,²⁵ which is indicated by the alliteration of the ‘l’ and ‘s’ sounds is also heard in the “yellow” river and made visible by the color. Also, the liquid form (water) appears as a light effect on the surface of the body, appearing as it were, indicating that visibility is its merit. After the caesura of the last stanza, the spirituality of the trees confronts another spirituality; after the plant’s organic, sensuous function, the last two lines convey a new unity with a spiritual theme: “in the morning the cool, blue iron of morality / is flashed by the frost” [reggel az erkölcs hűvös, kék vasát / megvillantja a fagy]. An anthropomorphic, conventional spirituality (*erkölcs*; morality) comes into opposition with the thought that operates the plant. The immateriality of “morality” receives a light effect through the interplay of sensations (appearing in “*hűvös*; cool” and “*fagy*; frost” related to temperature, as well as in the color “*kék*; blue” and the material “*vas*; iron”); thus, it is put on the same level as plant organicity, creating a freezing effect.

In the Black Forest [A Fekete Erdőben]

Compared to “Trees”, Lőrinc Szabó’s “In the Black Forest” creates sharper boundaries between the plant and the anthropomorphic points of view. Thus, interweaving and disanthropomorphization are more pronounced in the contrast. Due to the objective poetic principle used in József’s poem,²⁶ there is no single, centrally positioned self (with human characteristics). Although the anthropomorphic way of seeing cannot be excluded, as it has been shown, it is placed further away (or rather implicitly written into the plant existence), as in the case of “In the Black Forest”. The separation of the self from nature and the emergence of the trees as a medial speaker provide a more stabilized, human point of view. From the anthropomorphized point of view, nature is objectified, which implies the appearance of guilt, just as the trees appear as living masts and arrows in the first lines: “The forest surrounds / and accompanies me as his actions surround the guilty. Live masts / shoot towards the sky” [Mint bűnöst a tettei, körüláll / s kísér az erdő. Élő árbocok / nyilallnak ég felé]. The self moves from the human to the plant sphere with a mirrored structure, the poem changes perspective by reversing the syntactic structure. After the line “Like silent guards, they are standing, black” [Mint néma őrk, állnak feketén], the self comes into contact with the mushroom as a light signal: “Before my feet / a white mushroom glows, and the earth / shimmers like the bottom of the sea” [Lábam előtt / egy fehér gomba világít, s a föld / csak dereng, mint a tenger fenéke]. Subsequently,

25 Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 137.

26 Bókay, *Líra és modernitás*, 271–91.

the inverted structure emerges, triggered by the presence of the mushroom: “My terrible guards are standing, black” [Feketén állnak szörnyű őreim].

Along the identification of the pine forest and the sea, we can explore the poem’s antecedents in a comparative manner. The relevance of this is confirmed by Szabó’s 1945 diary entry saying: “The effect of the pine forest: seabed. See “In the Black Forest”. And Meredith’s poem! And Shelley’s, not even only once... And certainly many others: the perception is obviously ancient.”²⁷ Philology has discovered that the title of the Meredith poem is “Dirge in Woods”, whose mirror translation by Dezső Kosztolányi is called “Gyászének az erdőben”, but Szabó probably read it in the original, since “In the Black Forest” reflects the influence of the English poem more dominantly than that of the translation.

Meredith’s and Szabó’s poems are connected along such poetic solutions as the placement of spatial oppositions, the role of the associated sound, the registration of plant sounds in the language, as well as the amplification of sound in silence through the simile of the sea. The communicative role of moss (“gomba”; mushroom for Szabó) through light is written into their interplay. Meredith’s *Dirge in Woods* begins with a similar spatial opposition as “In the Black Forest”: it directs attention towards the sky, then with a caesura of silence (In Meredith’s poem “Not a breath of wild air”, and in Szabó’s there is this caesura of sound: “Most csöndjük ijeszt”; Now their silence scares me.) moves in the direction of soil organisms [“Still as the mosses that glow / On the flooring and over the lines / Of the roots here and there”, with Szabó: “Lábam előtt / egy fehér gomba világít”; Before my feet / a white mushroom glows]. Both plant life forms (‘mosses’ and the mushrooms) help the exchange of signals between the trees²⁸ by enmeshing the forests, in the same way as with Meredith where the moss grows along the lines of the roots, like a pillar of a system, a sign of communication. With two deixes, Meredith even points to the moss, suggesting that the two locators stand out like bulging pillars: “here and there”, (here in the language of the poem, and figuratively there in the forest).

Both poems continue the silence with the effect of light appearing in the dark, as if directing attention to engagement in communication, exerting power over the senses: in the dark and silence, only what nature allows the audience to perceive becomes visible and audible. After the downward position, the image of the bottom of the sea appears in both poems (For Meredith, “They are quiet, as under the sea”. For Szabó, “s a föld / csak dereng, mint a tenger feneke”, and the earth / shimmers like the bottom of the sea). The sound effect of the falling pine-needle occurs at different points in the two poems. The reason may be that *Dirge in Woods* defines the falling

27 Szabó, *Vallomások*, 344.

28 Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 11–13.

pine, death (which still speaks through sound) as the cause of silence (“The pine-tree drops its dead; / They are quiet, as under the sea”), while in “In the Black Forest” it is precisely that Szabó uses silence to amplify the sound, in which the “tűlevél zizzen” (pine-needles rustle), thus the sound acquires a transformed linguistic articulation. For Meredith, the sound-imitating word “drops” writes the plant voice of death and mourning into the melos of the poem, and with it into the language of the poem, just as “zizzen” (rustle) plays a communicative role in the relationship between language and plant voice. In Szabó’s poem, the voice of plant life uses the speaker’s bodily mediality, i.e., the self, for linguistic articulation. Meredith also connects language and life with the utterance, the same way as “we” can be applied to the sounds of the text by repeating it with the rapid dynamics of the wind. It is deictically referring back to the semantics of falling (“so”) and replacing “we”, the text “as under the sea” dies (falls silent). Exactly as the silence causally follows the falling leaf: the language expresses grief, conveys the sound of the fall, then goes silent. It is worth taking into account the line “Not a breath of wild air” in the semantics of the negation: the line negates the difference between breath and wind, rather than the act of air exchange, which can also refer to “drops” or the breath of nature, the sound-forming role. In Szabó’s line “Sóhajtvá remeg át rajtam az élet” [Life trembles through me with a sigh], the linguistic formation of life is connected with sound, the medial biological organism of the self, through which the breath of nature speaks. Meredith does not present a human form of existence, but in the same way as the self in “In the Black Forest”, the ‘we’ fulfills a similar role: it identifies with nature, becomes its voice and, at the same time, provides a linguistic medium.

The seabed that appears in *Dirge in Woods*, which the darkness and silence are associated with, make a suitable medium for nature to speak. Just like plant communication perceived with the senses, it also appears in Szabó’s translation of “Correspondances”. Furthermore, the meeting ray of the anthropomorphic and plant gaze plays a role and permeates “In the Black Forest” as a function of verbalization which creates the basis of medial mediation with a human aspect. In the Hungarian translation of “Correspondances”, Szabó also includes the image of the sea, while the original French text only speaks of depth on a semantic level: “Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unite” [“on the sea of some secret and deep unity”]. This gives rise to the assumption that Szabó was influenced by Meredith’s “Dirge in Woods” and/or certain Shelley poems, which will be discussed later. The linguistic articulation of nature is realized along the medial transformation of an anthropomorphic presence in Szabó’s translation as in the poem “In the Black Forest”.

“Correspondances” presents nature from a culturally objectifying point of view [“Templom a természet: élő oszlopai / időnkint szavakat mormolnak össze-súgva”; “The pillars of Nature’s temple are alive / and sometimes yield perplexing

messages”²⁹], just as “In the Black Forest” identifies trees as “élő árbocok” (living masts) from the same position. In both poems, linguistic articulation, the speaking of nature is created in a similar process through the reciprocity of what is seen. The more difficult orientation tied to the depth of the sea implies the need for a different kind of vision, which facilitates the medial carrying and transmission of the language of nature. In “Correspondances”, as in the case of “In the Black Forest”, the utterance is created through anthropomorphic mediation and form, if only because of the human perspective. The colon placed between the lines “Jelképek erdején át / viz az ember útja:” [forests of symbols between us] and “időnkint szavakat / mormolnak suttogva” [sometimes yield perplexing messages] creates an inverse causal relationship. The forest identified with “symbols” alludes to the coding method of a pictorial, symbolic, linguistic sign system, thus the murmuring possibility of nature’s words is designated as its need by the anthropomorphic gaze. The resolution of the sign system is based on the mutual relationship of gazes, similarly to how nature (with anthropomorphic perception) monitors the human presence: “s a vendéget / szemük barátként figyeli” [forests of symbols between us and the shrine / remark our passage with accustomed eyes]. Reciprocity of attention creates the communication channel for the meeting of the two languages. The coding of “symbols” is positioned in a paradoxically dark environment: “valami titkos és mély egység tengerén, / mely, mint az éjszaka, oly nagy” [somewhere else / into one deep and shadowy unison / as limitless as darkness]. The “symbols”, i.e., the linguistic articulation of nature becomes visible in the harmony of different senses. The poem explicitly sets them in opposition to the night as a light effect, but also treats the dark as a function of the phenomenon, as the medium of the unity of the senses: “s mint a fény, / egymásba csendül a szín és a hang s az illat” [and as day, the sounds, the scents, the colors correspond]. He then expands all of this in the last two stanzas, and in the closing line assigns the sound to the material medium in addition to the soul: “test s lélek mámore zeng bennük ég felé” [to praise the senses’ raptures and the mind’s]. The dissolution of the language compressed into a light signal in the darkness of the sea is carried out by “Correspondances” and “Dirge in Woods” through a complicated poetic constellation, as is seen in József’s, as well as in Szabó’s poems analysed.

The poetical turning points of thinking about natural existence, which Ernő Kulcsár Szabó reveals in Lőrinc Szabó’s lyrical output, seem to appear in “In the Black Forest”: life represents equal value on both the plant and human levels; and the human organism is depersonalized through sensation and enters into the embrace of nature. This also takes place at the level of *melos* and *opsis*, as Kulcsár Szabó also discusses the poetic significance of this in several other poems by Szabó.³⁰

29 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 15. All further English translations of “Correspondances” are from the same source.

30 Kulcsár Szabó, “»Lizard on a Sunlit Stone«.”

Silence is also a manifestation of nature in “Dirge in Woods”, as part of this “dirge”, but with Szabó, silence plays a different role. He reflects on a romantic rhetoric and attempts to override it. Silence moves nature out of the background and breaks down the distance so that the perception of nature is realized.³¹ The representation of nature used at the beginning of the poem may allude to the romantic anthropomorphization technique, which assumes that the state before the animate figuration is inorganic.³² When silence enables a sensual connection between the forest and humans, it directs attention to the similarity of life present in the organicity of the two, even though the self is unable to leave the framework of its human organicity. He does this by setting nature and culture in a doubled disjunction, natural and human existence appear as organicity saturated with life and inorganicity when deprived of life. At the beginning of the poem, the instrumentalized nature is freed from the objectifying gaze with a chiasmic construction, as it objectifies the human organism with the equivalence of the lives of the two forms of existence. Thus, human organicity experiences recognition as directedness, as instrumentalization. The instrumentalization of life thus overwrites the objectifying aspect. In order for the poem, which uses the noises and sounds of nature in eco-mimesis, not to appear as secondary nature, so that the text itself is pushed into the background as a distance-creating presence implying the loss of nature,³³ “In the Black Forest” uses the poetic tools of sensuality to find a common point between plant and human life, and in this way decodes the life of nature into human language. Allowing the utterance of nature and its necessary release is the understanding of the equalization of life.

The lyrical self of “In the Black Forest” comes into contact with plant life in the light of nature’s communication, which is metaphorized by the image of the glowing mushroom. Subsequently, the inversely iterated syntactic structure appears: “Feketén állnak szörnyű őreim” [My terrible guards are standing, black]. The change of perspective is followed by a sound effect: the consonants ‘z’ vibrate in the “zizzen” (rustle) of pine-needles. The vibrating sound becomes important in the sense that the self, as a medial signal receiver, transforms the sound, making it with its own physicality, like an instrument. The vibrating sound is followed by a linguistic articulation: “Minek jöttél ide?” [Why did you come here?]. The source of the sound cannot be determined, since the address may also be read as a possibility to transform the plant sound or to address the lyrical self. The continuation of the internal dialogue is also characterized by the internal language translation of the external voice, the inseparability of the two.

The contamination of the organization of the plant and human body is also

31 Smid, “Antropomorfizmus és ökomimézis,” 295–96.

32 Smid, “Antropomorfizmus és ökomimézis,” 302.

33 Smid, “Antropomorfizmus és ökomimézis,” 304–5.

indexed by the “görcsös szorítás” (tense grip), which József’s “Trees” applies to the roots as the tense grip expresses the fear of the trees. This transgression between plant and human organism also appears in the poem “In the Black Forest” as a manifestation of fear. The poetic construction of tactility and plant vocalization is related to Szabó’s earlier poem entitled “Field Eryngo” [*Szamártövis* (a folk name for a thistle)] in the 1931 volume “You and the World” [Te meg a világ]. It is as if the field eryngo spoke through sensuality, in the pain of the hand. Thus, the voice of the hand is sound borrowing: the plant conveys its own pain with the pain of the sting: “Don’t hurt me!—the hand that / hurt me cries out—Alas, don’t hurt me! / [He hurts me and is guilty, so are you, / poor thistle?” [Ne bánts! – jajdul fel a kéz, amely / megbántott – Jaj, ne bánts! / Ő bánt, és bűnös, ügye, te vagy, / szegény bogáncs?].” Similarly, the dialogue in “In the Black Forest” can be interpreted as the self’s inner self-directed discourse or as the words of the trees spoken through sensuality. In both poems, the lyrical language conveys the plant form of existence through sound: In the poem “In the Black Forest”, the rustle of pine leaves appears again and again in the vibrating ‘z’s and creates a connection with the self, and in “Field Eryngo”, the fragmentation of the rhythmicity, which plays into the rattle of the “Field Eryngo”.³⁴ In both poems, the plant’s direct speech appears around the touch of the hand. Just as Kulcsár-Szabó perceives the relationship between the interrogator and the interrogated as embedded in a moral parable,³⁵ in the case of “In the Black Forest” there is also a moral reckoning with regard to the objectifying crime of the trees. In the same way as “Field Eryngo” places the sign of guilt in the wounding act of contact with the hand, so is life objectified in the hand in the other poem and turned into a tool of evidence around which the interrogation is activated.

“In the Black Forest” transforms the human body into the same instrument as the forest that appears metaphorized into strings at the beginning of the poem, which is played by the storm, i.e., the wind, in the same way as the air that operates the human voice makes the lungs and vocal cords produce noise. The identification of the “many” with strings implies the quivering, vibrating movement of the strings, just as the sigh of life causes the biological existence of the self to vibrate, that is, “Life trembles through / me with a sigh.” [Sóhajtva remeg át / rajtam az élet.] The distance between the outside and the inside of the outer wind that makes the forest sound and the air that shakes the human body, as well as their meeting in the medial sound box, are more disjointed metaphorically than in József’s poem the plant and human breathing, which are mutually metaphorized in contamination, and the working of air that meets in identification. “In the Black Forest” brings out the effect of an external exposure in the movement of the air. The sovereign nature

34 Kulcsár-Szabó, “A (túl)élő üzenete,” 114–37, 135–36.

35 Kulcsár-Szabó, “A (túl)élő üzenete,” 119–22.

of self-instrumentalization is impossible, while breathing appears as the trigger of its inner, own thought in “Trees”. In the case of Szabó, however, the articulation of life is not realized semantically in the utterance either, language remains in the closed, bodily mediality of the self, just as József keeps the thought within the physical organism, and only sound effects convey life. Even with Szabó, the language is not released from the inside, only the air leaves, vibrating through the body. The plant sound can only appear as an internal language perceived by the body.

“In the Black Forest” presents a communication that takes place in the processes of human and plant physics. An invisible communication network based on sound vibrations connects the organism of the forest and the self. This is indicated by the objectified trees displayed at the beginning of the poem with the terms “párhuzamos” (parallel) and “függőleges” (vertical) referring to dependence and pull, and later by the pulling and attractive forces defined as the cause of fear: “Why are you here, why did you come? Because I’m afraid. This black forest attracts me, pulling and threatening me.” [Minek vagy itt, minek jöttél? Mert félek. Vonz ez a fekete erdő, húz és fenyeget]. The sound waves of the already mentioned vibrating, buzzing ‘z’ consonants in these words create the connection, the attraction that affects the biological organism of the lyrical self. This effect, perceived as an internal, physical life, is explicitly staged in the poem in two parts: “it’s all nervousness” [idegesség az egész] and “it lives inside you” [benned él]. The spatial deixes that interweave the entire poem localize the fear within, in the organic world existing in the fusion of plants and humans. It is life itself that comes to the foreground in communication and ensures equality between the two forms of life through the mediation of fear. The threat of the forest reflects the threat of humanity: just as man threatens the forest by objectifying life,³⁶ the fear of the forest echoes as a threat and creates fear in the human organism in the same way. It vibrates or trembles with a sound wave. It objectifies similarly to the humans’ objectifying perspective, since it plays its own fear on the human body as an instrument. This is how the equality of the two forms of life is realized, the way life trembles through the self with a sigh. The forest threatens with objectification and, at the same time, draws attention to life.

It is well known that Lőrinc Szabó developed his poetic expression while working as a translator. This is supported by the fact that the Shelley poems he translated did influence “In the Black Forest”. The translations are taken as a basis for the comparison, as they show how Szabó interpreted the poems, what poetic solutions he

36 The mechanism of anthropomorphic vision objectifying dendroid forms of existence, as well as the gesture of anthropomorphizing it together with objectification, already appears in the poems of “Separate Peace” [Különbéke], such as “Sons of the Forest” [Az erdő fiai] and “The Fool’s Truth” [A bolond igazsága], as highlighted by Adrienn Pataky. Pataky, “Antropomorf és dendroid organizmusok,” 138–62, 148–51.

noted in Shelley's works, which he transferred into the Hungarian translations, and what unique solutions he replaced them with.

In "Ode to the West Wind", in the comparison of the harp and abundance ["Legyek hárfád, miként a rengeteg: / mit bánt, ha hull rólam is a levél!"; "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is: / What if my leaves are falling like its own!"], the term "rengeteg" (woods) used as the equivalent of the forest connotes the trembling-vibrating movement of the strings. What is particularly interesting is that in the translation, Szabó replaces the lyre symbolizing poetry ("Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is") with the harp. Presumably, the semantic change occurs due to the monumental character of the forest and the instrument, but the sound effect may play on the word "fa" (wood/tree) embedded in the term "hárfá" (harp) and the breathy, voiceless, wind-like effect of the 'h' sound that appears before it, and the trembling tremulant 'r' string vibration that follows. This sound game can also bring about the sound mechanism of the "fa" or "fák" (wood/tree or trees) entering the word in the sound of the word. This translation solution can strengthen the importance of the relationship of the same rank between *melos* and *opsis* in Szabó's poetry.

Just as the heart "dobog" (beats) and the twig "ropog" (crunches) in Szabó's "In the Black Forest", so does the similar nature of the two onomatopoeic words create a transgression between the sound of the forest and the human body of the lyrical self. But an even more enlightening relation is the repetition of words between the "vad rengeteg" (wild woods) and "szívem vadul dobog" (my heart beats wildly) referring to the forest, and the similarity of fast movement. Just as the heartbeat, the crunching, the dynamics of the wild are related to the heart, so does the heart as nature, the melodic reservoir of life, also appear in Shelley's *Earth, Ocean, Air* translated by Szabó, and is connected to breath, as in the line of "In the Black Forest" "Life trembles through me with a sigh." [Sóhajtva remeg át rajtam az élet]. Szabó's poem condenses what Shelley unfolds. Shelley's invocation wrapped in the imperative "Megfejtethetlen Létünk anyja, ihlesd / ünnepélyes dalom" ["Mother of this unfathomable world! / Favour my solemn song"] uses the term "ihlet" (inspiration) in the derivative sense of breath,³⁷ as it also returns at the end of the poem in the semantic iteration ["fölkasztva / várjam lehelleted, örök Anyánk"; "Suspended in a solitary dome [...] / I wait thy breath, Great Parent"]. The middle and end of

37 The meaning of the Hungarian 'ihlet' (inspiration) was influenced by the Latin term 'inspirare'. 'Inspiration' was created from the verb 'ihel' 'instils, inspires', dating from 1372, first used as a noun, and later appearing as a verb. The word 'ihel' was initially a term referring to breathing due to its onomatopoeic character, which relates it to the verb 'lehel' meaning 'to exhale, to breathe'. It is assumed that 'inspiration' received a new meaning as a translation of the Latin 'inspirare' 'to blow into, breathe into, inspire' after the original 'breath'. Benkő, ed., *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*, Vol. II, 195.

the poem semantically stage the same triple action of nature—sound—heart with a different lyrical solution. The lyrical self asks for the “ihlet” (inspiration) of the song, i.e., for it to be sung, brought to life, and created through air. In addition to the relevance of fulfillment, he argues through the relation of emotion [“a tavasz / pihegő kéje kedves volt nekem”, “spring’s voluptuous pantings / have been dear to me”; “szép madarat, rovar, szelíd ősz / [...] mint / rokont szerettem”, “bright bird, insect, or gentle beast [...] cherished these my kindred”; “én örökké szerettelek”, “I have loved / Thee ever, and thee only”], vision [“árnyadat figyeltem”, “I have watched / Thy shadow” ; “szívem mindig mély misztériumod / mélységbe néz”, “And my heart ever gazes on the depth / Of thy deep mysteries”] and hearing (“sötét lépéseid”, “the darkness of thy steps”). Nature speaks in the heart through an emotional connection which is perceived as using sight and hearing. The command of the imperative is realized close to the punctual conclusion of the sentence, as the pictorial appearance of the heart melodically evokes the sound of the “dal” (song) in the deep murmuring, rumbling alliteration of the ‘m’s’. (Also in the English original, alliteration appears in the rhythmic beating of the ‘d’ sound similar to the sound of the heart in the excerpt “And my heart ever gazes on the depth / Of thy deep mysteries”, but it is not as dominantly melodic as in the murmuring sound effect of the translation: “s szívem mindig mély misztériumod / mélységébe néz”). This sound effect is alluded to by the recurring reflection at the end of the poem: “dalom visszazengje a szél-morajt, / erdők és tengerek mozgásait” [my strain / May modulate with murmurs of the air / And motions of the forests and the sea]. The enumeration brings to light the realization of the sound with an explanatory interpretive structure, as the sound effect of the “szélmoraj” (wind gust) from the poem (“dalom visszazengje”, my song reverberates) connected to water migrates into the equivalent relationship of forests and seas. Similarly, to the latter relation, “In the Black Forest” identifies the sea and woods, which are designated as the location of the sounds.

Returning to translation of “Earth, Ocean, Air”, as the next step in the list, it brings the “élők szava” (word of the living), which transforms the roaring dynamics of the sea and forests into a linguistic form. The list ends with the heart (“az ember mély szívét”, the deep heart of man), where the adjective “mély” (deep) refers to the alliteration of the murmuring ‘m’s’ in the middle of the poem, and pointing downward also positions the “mély misztériumát” (deep mystery) of life in the heart with the listed sounds, along with the murmur of the forest and the sea, the word of life. This organic mediality unfolds from the image of the subordinated object, the “lant” (lyre) instrument. The scenery—“most mozdulatlan / és boldogan, mint rég-ottfeledett lant / valahol egy rejtelmes árva templom / elhagyott dómja alatt fölakasztva / várjam lehelleted” [And moveless, as a long-forgotten lyre / Suspended in a solitary dome / Of some mysterious and deserted fane, / I wait thy breath]—strongly

reminds of “In the Black Forest”: “Sóhajtvá remeg át / rajtam az élet. A fekete dóm / résein itt-ott beizzik a nyár” [Life trembles through me / with a sigh. Here and there the summer shines through the crevices of the black dome]. The replay of life appears in both poems through the lyrical self-deprived of its sovereignty. However, while Shelley’s poem waits for fulfillment with an optative tonality, “In the Black Forest” also realizes this at the level of perception. This is also reinforced by enjambement, as “rajtam az élet. A fekete dóm” [life is on me. The black dome] is placed in the same line, so the punctuation indicating a pause acts as a breath-like comma in the reading, which realizes the equality of life and the “fekete dóm” (black dome) with an identifying and interpretive structure. The metaphor of the forest emerges semantically from the text, from the lyrical self.

The sound of nature is embedded in a musical metaphor in “In the Black Forest” and in the poems analyzed in relation to it, as well as hidden in “Trees”. This metaphoricality, the interoperability between plant and human linguistic sign systems, may be clearer in Manfred Bierwisch’s presentation.³⁸ Bierwisch lists factors, such as acoustics, temporality, linearity, ephemerality and repeatability, for identifying the similarities between music and language. However, he notes as a difference that, in contrast to language, music does not convey a conceptually based meaning: if music expresses anything at all, it is of an emotional nature. This connection of emotional content, musicality and natural sound is emphasized by the trees expressing fear in Szabó’s “In the Black Forest” and the water circulation moved by the emotion embedded in the thought in József’s “Trees”, which forms the (signal) system of sounds. Music and language meet through the time structure of common acoustic media, one of which is the metric of the phonetic form of the text. An example of the conscious use of this may be the already mentioned use of the term “hárfa” (harp) in Szabó’s translation, or the alliteration of the ‘m’s, and the attractive, emotional power of the ‘z’ consonants in the poem “In the Black Forest”. The *melos* of József’s poem works in a similar way. In his comparison of music and language, Bierwisch also notes that the vocabulary of language is invariably a conventional, fixed repertoire, while on the other hand, musical forms may always be newly introduced. Their meaning is formed through development and does not rest on conventions. Both music and language have linear, complex structures, but under different conditions. The simple and complex symbols of language are combined on the basis of grammatical conditions, which affect sound form, morphology and syntax, whereas the combination of musical signs is subject only to the condition of musical forms. In this way, plant vocalization is incorporated into the conventional system of language in relation to the melodic, affective, and sensual levels, and it is incorporated along the lines of freer musical conditions.

38 Bierwisch, “Sprache – Musik – Bild.”

“Earth, Ocean, Air’s” image of the mother appearing in mother nature and her breath for speaking, the connection through love, and the transmission of the sounds of nature support Kittler’s statement that “Der Mutter Wiegenlied” [The Mother’s Lullaby] represents the matrix of Romantic lyric.³⁹ The dual relationship between the flow of air and the sound of nature is present in the poems “Earth, Ocean, Air” and in the “Ode to the Western Wind”, and is also included as a whisper in Szabó’s translation of “Dirge in Woods” and “Correspondances”, and can also be found in the sighs in “Trees” and “In the Black Forest”, as has been argued in the present interpretation. In these poems, the flow of air comes into contact with some kind of sensuality. Kittler links the acquisition of the child’s (native) language to the mother’s voice. This affects the child’s senses through natural instincts⁴⁰ with the rhythm of the air flow.⁴¹ By mastering the sound, the child receives sensual language elements that can be combined into words.⁴² Words enter into a signifying and signified relationship with their objects along cultural codes. “At the same time, however, a mother’s voice represents that unique and paradoxical aspect of nature which, by itself and without undergoing any alteration, can make its own transition to art, education, and culture.”⁴³

“Earth, Ocean, Air” emphasizes love as a condition for receiving the breath of mother nature, so that it becomes possible to speak (instrumentally) similarly to music, “the voice that rouses both love and love-in-return remains, even after the acquisition of language and forevermore, a pure *melos* that refers to nothing yet means everything: Love itself”.⁴⁴ On the other hand, “Dirge in Woods”, “Trees”, and “In the Black Forest” do not create a connection through a love-based feeling, but rather capture fear, activate the senses in conjunction with the flow of air for the

39 Kittler, “Lullaby of Birdland,” 40–41.

40 “Instinct makes the mother speak; that is, it makes her pass beyond instincts. Bodily desire [Körperlust] makes the infant hear; that is, it induces the child to receive concepts that will go beyond its body and articulate it.” Kittler, “Lullaby of Birdland,” 37.

41 “Only the voice of the mother could fulfill this role, because it is half ‘breath’ [Athem], through which the child learns to ‘feel’ [Empfinden], and half articulation, through which it acquires language. [...] ‘The Mother’s Lullaby’ [...] undermines this very precondition. It has effects on levels that concern the mute body; its parameters are melos, sound, and breath.” Kittler, “Lullaby of Birdland,” 38, 42.

42 “Accordingly, the new technology for instilling a soul into children involved disclosing a field in which speech and the sounds of nature transformed into each other without a remainder (*ungeschieden*). All at once, the fact that the act of hearing is infantile in a literal sense provided the basic precondition for theories of language and practices of language transmission (*Sprachüberlieferungspraktiken*).” Kittler, “Lullaby of Birdland,” 38.

43 Kittler, “Lullaby of Birdland,” 37.

44 Kittler, “Lullaby of Birdland,” 38.

functioning of communication, and reflect on the relationship on the *melos* level as well. The tradition of romantic contact with “mother nature” can be felt in the poems in the process of the linguistic coding of the plant sound: the anthropomorphic senses are affected by nature in the same way as maternal instinct (love); the flow of air is activated by this effect, which becomes the basis of sound formation, then language is formed from it. The sound of trees is realized in the poem “In the Black Forest” using the romantic lyrical tradition. And “Trees”, merging the functions of the plant and human organism, realizes the inseparable closeness of the two with the sigh. This connection creates an even greater sense of closeness, while the poem, with its hidden self-reflection, also achieves linguistic expression. However, the decoding of the sounds of nature cannot be carried out, just as it does not succeed in Goethe’s “Wanderer’s Nightsong”, since “the main point of Kittler’s study is, nevertheless, that in the “Wanderer’s Nightsong”, the chirping of birds turns into meaning. Hence the noise, which the medium placed in the position of nature, because it was unable to record pure noise (like the gramophone), literature could only simulate it, always semanticizing it in a binary opposition (noise vs. understanding).⁴⁵ József’s and Szabó’s poems reduce the distance between the sounds of plants and human language in a poetic form. This can be felt at the level of the *melos* (Szabó uses the alliterative murmur even in his translation of Shelley’s “Earth, Ocean, Air”) dominantly through the alliterations, the frequent tone-imitating nature of the words, while the blurring of anthropomorphic and plant boundaries is evident. This semanticization is inevitable, but “Trees” and “In the Black Forest” relax the meanings with sensual poetic solutions in favor of the voice of nature.

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45 Smid, “Birdlandtól Ladylandig – és vissza,” 524–50, 531.

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