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Dezső Tandori is one of the most important Hungarian authors of the second half of the twentieth century. His work can seem limitless: he wrote several volumes of poetry, novels, detective stories, and plays, as well as translating from every possible genre, from the novel *Paddington* to Schopenhauer's work. Later in his career, he started to use journals as a laboratory: while poets usually collect their latest publications in their books, Tandori published experimental pieces in journals and only published his "final product" in the book format.

Mainly due to these publishing practices, only focusing on Tandori's published books would disregard nearly half of his work¹. For example, the experiments leading to *Koppar Köldüs* are visible if we examine his published works in the preceding two years. Even more surprisingly, Tandori organized these experiments into cycles such as the *Copenhagen Trio [Koppenhágai hármás]*, *Düsseldorf Trilogy [Düsseldorfi trilógia]*, *Düsseldorf Quartet [Düsseldorfi négyes]*, *The Viennese Duo [A bécsi kettős]*², emphasizing the fact that these poems are already heavily edited³.

Contemporary publication practice (at least in Hungary) is simple, pragmatic, and economical⁴. Readers usually know the poems published in books from journals beforehand⁵, and when poets accumulate the necessary material, they publish a book that represents the last few years' production. Similarly, short stories and excerpts of novels are published in journals first, and in a book format later. However, Tandori, starting from the 1980s, distanced himself from this practice, so while his first few books followed this practice, his later works are more experimental⁶. For example, *Koppar Köldüs*⁷ was entirely unknown to the public

¹ Ákos Tóth, "Az ismerős és titkos tandarab" in *Szövegek között V.: Fejezetek a mai magyar irodalomból*, ed. István Fried & Annamária Hódosy, Szeged, Szegedi Tudományegyetem, 2000, p. 25-26.

² Dezső Tandori, "Koppenhágai hármás", *Tiszatáj*, August 1990, p.12-18; "Düsseldorfi trilógia", 2000, October 1990, p. 33-35; "Düsseldorfi Négyes", *Új írás* October 1990, p.409-414; "A Bécsi Kettős", *Tiszatáj*, January 1991, p. 34-35. All translations throughout this paper are by Péter Füzi.

³ Ákos Tóth, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁴ György Tverdota, "Ciklusépítkezés a modern költészetben", *Irodalomtörténeti közlemények*, 2000/5-6, p. 619. Although Tverdota was talking about the beginning of the twentieth century, the practice he describes is still followed today.

⁵ Tandori followed this practice in his first two books. László Bedecs, *Beszélni nehéz*, Budapest, Kijárat, 2006, p. 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷ Dezső Tandori, *Koppar Köldüs*, Budapest, Holnap, 1991. From now on, I only use page numbers when referring to this book.

except for one poem, *All-Saints of London* [*Londoni Mindenszentek*]. This is probably Tandori's most published poem, appearing in two volumes, in *Koppár Köldüs*, and in his next book, *Or Almost That* [*Vagy majdnem az*]⁸, as well as twice in different journals: first on its own (before *Koppár Köldüs*⁹), and then, 17 years later, as part of its own cycle¹⁰.

Still, *Koppár Köldüs* is not without its precursors. Examining the years before its publication, a clear path can be detected to the books, following Tandori as he creates the unique language of this book, experimenting with different perspectives of language that would become both the material and the subject of the book. We can also discover the dead-ends, the experience gained from which was also used in writing *Koppár Köldüs*. For example, the writing method that was used in the book to represent the language of the typewriter was first used to signify animal language, and only by getting closer to the publication date of the book did this method gradually become a sign of the mechanized writing process. In this process, this method gradually loses its ability to signify the animalistic but never comes to signify the human. Incorrectly used language and editing mistakes signify the interruption of communication, pointing to its impossibility and shortcomings.

Despite the large volume of his work, Tandori started to publish relatively late. His first book, *A Fragment for Hamlet* [*Töredék Hamletnek*] was only published in 1968, when he was already thirty years old. His next book, *Cleaning of a Found Object* [*Egy talált tárgy megtisztítása*], was published in 1973, and contemporary critics already claimed that he had started two separate periods in his first two books, while others treat the two books together, as Tandori's early period¹¹.

A Fragment for Hamlet is "one of the best accomplishments of philosophical-thought poetry of all times", according to its author¹². The early periods of the first two volumes can be summarized by the poem *Koan III*, which has become a classic: "Silence instead of sound. / But silence instead of what?" [Némaság a hang helyett / De a némaság mi helyett¹³ ?] The first volume emphasizes the impossibility of speaking, with the empty page of *The Impossibility of Signifying the Movement of the Pawn on Undivided Field* [*A gyalog lépésének jelölhetetlensége osztatlan mezőn*]¹⁴. In

⁸ Dezső Tandori, *Vagy majdnem az*, Balassi, Budapest, 1995, p. 5.

⁹ Dezső Tandori, "Londoni Mindenszentek", *Holmi*, February 1990, p. 83.

¹⁰ Dezső Tandori, "Londoni Mindenszentek", *Jelenkor*, October 2008, p. 1038.

¹¹ Eszter Babarczy, *A ház, a kert, az utca*, Budapest, JAK-Balassi, 1996, p. 75; Gyula Doboss, *Hérakleitosz Budán*, Budapest, Magvető, 1988, p. 5.

¹² "A TH a mindenkori filozófiai-gondolati költészet egyik legjobb teljesítménye." Dezső Tandori, *Töredék Hamletnek*, Budapest, Kijárat, 2nd edition, 1995, p. 124.

¹³ Dezső Tandori, *Töredék Hamletnek*, Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1968, p. 107.

¹⁴ Dezső Tandori, *Egy talált tárgy megtisztítása*, Budapest, Magvető, 1973, p. 76.

contrast, in *Cleansing of a Found Object*, it is not sound that moves to a place of silence, instead a shallow prattle, meaningless over-talking creates a redundant sea of poems. For example, *Losing Amateurship [Az amatőrség elvesztése]* contains the same line twice.

In either case, there is a consensus about the next important and meaningful dividing line in Tandori's career, in *Koppár Köldüs*, published in 1991. This volume chronicles Tandori's travels in Western Europe, since traveling was finally allowed after the collapse of the regime, and his finances also made traveling possible. The title of the book was stitched together from the name of the cities he visited, Copenhagen [Koppenhága in Hungarian], Paris, Cologne [Köln], and Düsseldorf¹⁵.

Koppár Köldüs redefines the possible answers to the question of *Koan III*. A recreatable sound in the place of silence will never be the same as the original voice preceding the silence, even more so in this book, where silence is replaced with the noise of typing.

However, what makes this book interesting is the fact that he wrote it on a typewriter with a German keyboard layout he had purchased in Aachen, and while writing, he did everything he could to make the machine recognizable while reading his book.

When reading *Koppár Köldüs*, at first it seems as if it had been coded, written with a secret key known only to its author. When we try harder, we can make some sense of the cacophony of the letters, but not without non-trivial effort¹⁶. But not because the entire book and every poem in it was encrypted: Tandori wrote this book entirely with a foreign typewriter, a German model called Prásident electric 2012, trying to use the typewriter's German keyboard to form Hungarian words.

He seems to confirm this simple practice—writing Hungarian words with the German keyboard and bestowing all fault on the foreign interface—with his mottos, in which he transcribes three famous Hungarian poems (one from Zoltán Jékely and one from Attila József) with this method, only to write them out correctly, with correct punctuation, on the last page of the respective book.

However, in the third motto he does not even offer a correct transcript or the name of the original author, only referring to him as 'MI NTUGYUJK'—which can be translated as "WEL KNOW" when we keep the mistakes and "We all know" when typed correctly. The motto is from Sándor Márai, from his famous *Funeral Oration*¹⁷: "your name loses its diacritical marks"¹⁸. As in Márai's case, who experienced a new

¹⁵ Dezső Tandori, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ János Bányai, *Talán így*, Novi Sad, Forum, 1995, p. 123.

¹⁷ László Bedecs, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

language and a new language state during his emigration, Tandori also experiences something new that cannot be described as a mere transcribing of Hungarian words on foreign keyboards. His circumstances force him to create a new language; more accurately, he experiences a new language while he writes during his travels, a language he can only create and experience while writing on a typewriter.

Still, the motto from Márai bears a deeper meaning. For him, diacritical marks are unique to the Hungarian language, and language is depicted as a co-creator, equivalent to a human being with unique qualities and a unique journey. Márai even found a little press in New York where they were able to “save” the two diacritical marks in his name¹⁹. “Without my diacritical marks, I am not myself” [Ékezet nélkül nem vagyok én²⁰]. By selecting a motto from him, Tandori also accepts this worldview, and without the unique diacritical marks, he becomes a new person, needing a mediated experience to remember even his own memories during his travel.

With the typewriter, not all the mistakes came from the foreign keyboard, Tandori also experienced some mechanical errors, mainly errors that came from his inexperienced use of the typewriter. This is the first instrument that directly demolishes the link between the human body and writing, making the apparatus used for writing more than just the extension of the human body²¹.

For example, when writing in hand, the eye creates continuous feedback by monitoring the hand, but in the case of the typewriter, the letter is hidden from view just in the moment of its “creation”, at the moment when it is inscribed on the paper, making any corrections only possible later, so they cannot be incorporated into the flesh of the text, they can only be applied above it²². While the pen acts as an extension of the human body, as Marshall McLuhan describes the medium, the typewriter changes this relation around, making the human body its own expansion, as marked by the disappearance of unique handwriting.

Tandori refused to proofread his book in the usual way, using a pen, and blindly accepting his editors' corrections, and he left all the mistakes that occurred while typing in the text; only sometimes did he offer a potential correction for the reader, always marked with the instruction “jav.”—“cor.”—“correction”.

¹⁸ Sándor Márai, “Funeral Oration”, translated by George Gömöri & Clive Wilmer, *Modern Poetry in translation*, 2004/02, p. 32.

¹⁹ István Dobos, “A teljes napló tanúságtétele”, *Forrás*, March 2020, p. 42.

²⁰ Sándor Márai, *A teljes Napló 1952-53*, Budapest, Helikon, 2009, p. 365.

²¹ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramofon, Film, Typewriter*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young & Michael Wutz, Stanford, Stanford University, 1999, p. 207.

²² Dezső Tandori, *Koppár Köldüs*, *op. cit.*, p. 23-24.

The typewriter demolished the direct link between body and writing. While writing with a pen, we create a manuscript unique to each person, just like we each have a unique fingerprint or gait, but with the typewriter, if anyone presses the same key, it produces the same uniform letter with the same movement every single time.

To produce a readable document, we have developed the institutions of editors and proofreading, and this book, deliberately refusing to enforce these institutions on itself, purposefully focuses our attention on the modern technologies surrounding the printed text.

Pen-written letters are not only unique to each person, but they are also different every time, impossible to recreate: “and it would be good [...] if there wasn't two n” [es jo lenne [...] nem lenne ket n.²³]. Every letter is unique whenever it is written, and its uniqueness cannot be reproduced later, while the letters produced by the typewriter are just copies of the same image every time someone uses a given key.

In Saussure's classic example, illustrated with the different shapes of the letter *t*, the shape of the letters is not important, they only need to be identifiable in the boundaries of their system. Handwriting is an analogue scale, while the typewriter follows a digital scale, deleting non-uniform shapes, creating ruptures on the scale and essentially creating only one recognizable form for each letter²⁴.

Tandori tries to fully use this new language created from the layered strangeness of using a foreign mechanical instrument during his travels, and he tries neither to add nor to take away anything. For example, while the Hungarian language contains several accented letters, and seeing such letters without the diacritical mark creates a strange feeling for Hungarian speakers, Tandori did not enforce this strangeness by not utilizing the accented letters also found in German, like “ü” or “ö”. He admits that he wanted to maximize the feeling of strangeness²⁵, but he cannot because otherwise he would transgress his own rules, and rules have an important part in his conception of language. This is illustrated by his infamous “chess poems”, where he uses chess notation to form poems—he is looking for the limits of this writing system and finds them when he is able to create rhymes, both visual and vocal, with chess writing, thereby liquidating the possible future usage of this language.

However, the fact that Tandori does not let his perfectionism win and follows the rules contradicts some of his critics, who try to dress up his works as heavily concerned with as many angles of language theory as possible²⁶, and he makes the

²³ Dezső Tandori, *Koppar Köldüs*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in general linguistics*, translated by Wade Baskin, New York, Columbia University, 2011, p. 120.

²⁵ Dezső Tandori, *Koppar Köldüs*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁶ István Margócsy, “Három írás egy könyvről”, *Holmi*, June 1992, p. 92.

whole book seem like a simple game, where the author only has to follow simple rules. Breaking the rules would make the game invalid. Nevertheless, he still cheats once, disregarding his own rules. We can find two accented vowels in the book that are not available on the German keyboard. “‘Szpéró’—here I have done the accents, and I’m doing the typing right²⁷”—this is probably the only correct line in the whole book if we disregard the last page with the above-mentioned mottos and last poems. We also learn from this sentence that doing the typing right means that we edit our mistakes afterward, in a different and separate act, using a pen to enforce our ideas of the understandable text in the machine-generated sea of letters, by correcting the incidental mistakes. We can almost be certain that this citation was corrected because in the following line the name “Szpéró” is written as “Szpero”. We can also catch the documented act of editing and proofreading the texts of the book in his essays, where he separates the two methods of writing by changing places—he has two tables, one for typewriting and one for pens²⁸.

Furthermore, in the numerous writing scenes in this book, we see the writer sitting behind the machine, writing the book, and his travels are only shown as memories, memories that he wants to document and register with his newfound language-machine. This is an exceptionally lonely place, everyone else can only reach this place if they are mediated by some technology, for example, his wife with a telephone, which distorts both of their voices²⁹, or Madonna, who is summoned to the room through the MTV channel that is always on, only to confuse and divide the writer’s attention. They represent different layers of sound, showing that even the spoken word is as distorted and distorting as the written world can be. And of course, we can only access this room with the help of this heavily mediated language, and as we can see later, the writer also needs this mediated language to remember, replacing his own memories during the process.

This makes the last poem, the “traditionally written” *All-Saints of London* significant. It not only connects this book and Tandori’s next one, *Or Almost That [Vagy majdnem az]*, being the last poem in this volume and the first poem in the next one, but it also contains the only actual travel scene in a book about traveling. The poem portrays the poet during an airplane flight—we can see the wings of the airplane through his eyes—and we are not working with mediated language, so the degraded language of the typewriter, from a traditional perspective, is connected to the machine of the typewriter. The poet does not have access to the machinery necessary for mediating

²⁷ “Szpéró most azért kivettem az ékezeteket, meg rendesen csinálom / a gépelést.”, *op. cit.* p. 23.

²⁸ Dezső Tandori, “Túl...minden effélén” in *Figyeljétek a mesélő embert”: Esszék és tanulmányok Lengyel Péterről*, edited by Anikó Radvánszky, Budapest, Ráció, 2013, p. 557.

²⁹ Dezső Tandori, *Koppár Köldüs*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

the language, instead he has his own messenger, his favourite bird, Szpéró, who requires traditional language to communicate³⁰.

Because this book contains the events of Tandori's European tour, we tend to interpret this book as some kind of memoir, as something that concerns itself with a hypothetical reader, with an addressee. However, just as the TV channel within the book, the book itself seems to be only noise, not compatible with the concept of traditional communication. Some recent theories of writing on the changes and evolution of the technologies connected to writing establish different roles for different kinds of technologies. For example, Maurizio Ferraris assigns the role of communication only to spoken words while arguing that the written word was created to register items of value³¹. As we can see, this book does not concern itself with being understandable, the bare minimum of successful communication, and its primary aim is to contain its writer's memories, not for a potential reader but for the writer himself, as diaries normally do.

However, we can see traces of a potential reader throughout the book. As mentioned above, from time to time we see instructions for correction— "jav." ("corr."), with a clear intention and precise spelling, as we can see where the writer made a mistake during typing this correction.

First, we can see the mistyped word, then the instruction, and lastly the correct spelling of the word. We simply need to replace the typo with the correct spelling to follow the instruction correctly and thereby create an ideal version of the book in the process. Yet with the layered strangeness of the foreign typewriting, can we be sure that we can even rewrite this book in its entirety to achieve this ideal state, or if we try, should we condemn ourselves to recreating the book endlessly, always leaving some mistakes to be corrected in our next try?

More importantly, since the book is written from the perspective of an "I", containing the memories and impressions of its writer, during this hypothetical recreation of the book, we find ourselves also recreating the stored memories and impressions, making them come alive, performing them in a cyclical pattern. At this point, we need to add another category to Ferraris' list, that of the program. If the function of the spoken word is to communicate, and the written word was made to register items and values, the only function that validates the existence of any program is a successful performance. If the performance cannot be completed, perhaps because the program is invalid and does not follow the rules, or we do not have the right instrument for it, we cannot call that text code.

³⁰ One can speculate that Szpéró, as a bird, also replaces the typewriter with its own feather, which serves as a pen.

³¹ Maurizio Ferraris, *Where Are You? An Ontology of the Cell Phone*, translated by Sarah De Sanctis, New York, Fordham University, 2014, p. 74.

In *Koppar Köldüs*, Tandori tried to avoid making the book “finishable” in the traditional sense. He created instructions that everyone—even he himself—needed to follow. While we usually associate the computer keyboard with the typewriter, in this case he follows the logic of programming language: the instructions are part of a constricted language.

Still, how did Tandori arrive at the concept of a programmable text and performable orders? This concept was not foreign to him, since it was already briefly explored in his first book, in his chess poems, and he also played with this concept during his later days, as we can now see in some of his unpublished works. Based on a broader examination of his works, Tandori did not mean to write any executable order, any performative text, he simply played with some of his favourite philosophers' concepts, for example, those of Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein has a central place in Tandori's books, Tandori even gave him the nickname *Witti*, which he regularly uses in his poems and essays. Wittgenstein's philosophy is currently a major source of inspiration for philosophers trying to understand programming languages and computational artifacts—not so much his famous *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* but his later works, which were published posthumously.

In a recent paper Raymond Turner discusses Wittgenstein's ideas about rule-following as the basis of any language and logic, trying to liberate us from any Platonic concept of language, while understanding that any rule is only valid if the users accept it³². In Tandori's case, we can read *Koppar Köldüs* only if we discover its rules, and Tandori can only write the book if he follows them. He discovers that writing with a machine is fundamentally different from writing with a pen, and he needs to follow this experience to be loyal to the rules, and these rules are not written by him but are enforced by the letters available on the typewriter³³, demonstrating how he can use the machine, and how the machine allows itself to be used.

In Wittgenstein's words, traditional languages are based on Platonism, the exact thing that he wants to obliterate to allow true formalism—the basis of any programming language according to Turner—to work in the language: “every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. But if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict³⁴.” Following the rules of the typewriter,

³² Raymond Turner, « Understanding Programming Languages », *Minds and machines*, August 2007, p. 13.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by Gertrud Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1953.

Tandori does the same—refusing the Platonic ideas of language and only using a formalistic one, creating a system of executable instructions in the process.

In short, *Koppar Köldüs* does not want to mimic executable text and programming languages, it simply arrives at the same philosophical principles that we are using to understand these computational artifacts by following Wittgenstein's lesser-known works. Whether it was intentional or not, we cannot know, but knowing Tandori's obsession with Wittgenstein, we cannot rule it out, especially since Tandori was deeply obsessed with the idea of this book for a long time. He wanted to create an indivisible volume³⁵, and he found a way to create a living, recreatable and forever changing object.

³⁵ Dezső Tandori, *Nincs beszédülés*, Szeged, Tiszatáj, 2018, p. 172.

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