

**LET’S LOVE LŐRINC SZABÓ!
THE SPEECH DELIVERED
AT THE KABDEBÓ LŐRÁNT MEMORIAL CONFERENCE**

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Lőránt Kabdebó quotes Aurél Bernáth, who created a ‘portrait’ of the poet, in his monograph on Lőrinc Szabó entitled *The Time of Summing Up (Az összegzés ideje)*:

It was in the summer of one thousand nine hundred and fifty-five. Lőrinc was on holiday with us at Lake Balaton. The volume of *Selected Poems* was the first volume to be published after a long break, and Illyés had selected the material and promised a foreword. One day we were sitting in the garden, a postman came and put a thick letter down in front of Lőrinc, Gyula’s foreword. Lőrinc became immensely anxious. He jumped up, and paced back and forth around the table. ‘I can’t read it’, he said, ‘you read it and tell me what it’s like’. I began to read it to myself. But I could feel that he was not taking his eyes off me, even though it took half an hour. ‘What was it like,’ he asked me, when I was moved to put down this study, written with a warm heart of friendship and a wonderful mind. ‘I have only one word for it: tremendous!’ and I thrust the bundle in front of him.

He began to read it. Now I was watching his face. He could barely get ahead. He looked back, pondering, looking at me. It must have taken him an hour to finish reading. But even after that he kept his head on a swivel until I said: ‘See?... see?... that’s the kind of friend you have!’ That really tore him up. He jumped up from the table and started running up and down the garden, crying like a child. ‘See?’, I repeated the word several times, for I felt that it was good for him to cry. I was running around in the garden with this crying child. Until suddenly he stopped. With tears in her eyes, she began to bring the writing in her hand to her blind eyes, and frantically turned the pages. ‘Yes... yes... but this here... this part here... it’s not quite like that...’ and he thrust a trivial detail before my astonished eyes.¹

The volume, with a foreword by Gyula Illyés, was published for the 1956 Book Week. The first edition is sold out. In September 1956, in an interview with Áron Tóbiás, Lőrinc Szabó talks about the preparation of the new edition. Twelve years of silence, ‘twelve years of real ruin’, after two heart attacks in his fifties, had bro-

¹ BERNÁTH 1962, 77–78.

ken the poet. 'The way life breaks.' He is 'delighted' to be remembered by his old readers and how good it is that 'he is so well known to the new youth'.

The real joy for him before that was when he was finally able to speak in his own voice on the radio. This 'Miskolc broadcast', in which the poet presented his hometown, was directed by Éva Zsurzs. The editor, Áron Tóbiás, remembered it thus:

Lőrinc Szabó was 'introduced' to me by Miskolc. I was working at the radio station and once I was assigned the task of putting together an hour-long celebratory programme about Miskolc, which was celebrating the tenth anniversary of its liberation.

Everything was already together: the 100,000-year-old caveman and the MOKÁN partisans of '44, the rattling tramway from Pest and the fragile wooden bridge over the Szinva, the huge wheat field and the giant blast furnace giants of Diósgyőr, the blue-green fields, the lake and grove of Tapolca, the inviting wine cellar of Avas – only one more line of poetry kept returning:

'My hometown, will you never have an eye on your stray son?'

Lőrinc Szabó has asked to be included in the Miskolc festive programme.

The poet who did not speak on the radio after liberation, his poems were hardly heard by the public. I wanted to start with him, speaking about the city of yesterday, the one-hour panorama in words and sounds.²

Then, on October 23, 1956, his hometown hosts his author's evening, introduced by Gyula Illyés. The Arany János and the Sándor Petőfi of the time are introduced to the large audience gathered in the town. In view of the huge interest, the event will not be held at the usual venue, but at the SZOT headquarters at 11 Kossuth Street, organised by the TTIT.

It is a coincidence, but it is a source of pride for us Miskolc residents that the revolution broke out in Budapest on this day. Lőrinc Szabó, driving past Stalin's statue on his way to Miskolc in the morning, sighed. I don't think he ever had a wish come true sooner in his life. Of course, even they didn't know that on the night.

The next day, as the guests and their hosts reported, Aunt Flora and Uncle Gyula wrote down from memory *A Sentence about Tyranny* in front of their eyes. In Lőrinc Szabó's bag was the first piece of his later revolutionary cycle, Surprises. First little Klára collected it 'for safekeeping', then Aunt Klára asked Lóránt to see what he had hidden in the manuscript cupboard. Finally, on 31 January 1990, Lóránt published a cycle of poems by Lőrinc Szabó in *Magyar Nemzet* under the title *A Cycle of Poems in a Drawer* by Lőrinc Szabó, after the entire cycle had been kept in Xerox copies until the fall of communism.

When a new part of Lőrinc Szabó's legacy was placed in the Manuscript Archives of the MTA Library, it contained the complete manuscript of the poem,

² TÓBIÁS 1964, 1096.

including Gyula Illyés' handwriting: 'And it was no longer a shame / that you were a son of the Hungarian people.'

On the plaque commemorating the event, unveiled forty years later, are lines from Lőrinc Szabó's poem 'Surprises' (Meglépetések).

A fourteen-year-old high school student heard the big news from his mother – who had come to pick him up from school – that a revolution had broken out in Budapest. On 23 October 1963, a twenty-one-year-old student went to a concert. 'Hajnalka! Hajnalka! What a beautiful girlfriend you have! Introduce me to her!' a young man shouted after them. It happened. At the concert, we were only looking at each other's eyes. We got married on 18 July 1964. I became the widow of Lőrinc Szabó's monographer on 24 January 2022.

On 25 November 2021, we received the copies of his last volume. The last interview of his life was broadcast on the 72nd programme of Zugló TV's KultúrZug on 31 December 2021:

Ferencz, Gábor: Lóránt Kabdebó, freeman of Zugló and of course literary historian, expert in the work of Lőrinc Szabó, monographer to him, presented a new volume. He is our guest in the studio, I greet him with honour. The volume is entitled: *The Poet's Brains*. This is a reference to a line isn't? But what does it mean as a title of a volume? What's the aim of this reference?

Kabdebó, Lóránt: Well, in the blurb the editor – I am lucky with the editor because he represents the grandchild generation, namely he is the student of my students. Nevertheless, he is a man of understanding. He interprets very well my book and he guides there, that finally every train of thoughts runs into this line, that the poet's brain. The Universe is also only the brain of a poet. This 'only', what does it mean? Until Lőrinc Szabó got this 'only', now it's what I write in this volume.

F. G.: If you did mention the blurb, the blurb mentions three lines in relation with the volume and with the train of thoughts, respectively. On the one hand it relates to an international comparison. You enumerate, from where these parallel thoughts do occur and by all means how these thoughts exert an influence on Lőrinc Szabó that he drew from the works of contemporary poets from abroad, from those of Western European and American poets. On the other hand, there is a line that makes comparison with Attila József and the third line deals not with the poetical works of Lőrinc Szabó, but with his journalism and a comparison with other volumes. How you can summarize, where gets the reader having ploughed through this book?

K. L.: Well, what is the criterion of an excellent teacher? My professor was József Szauder. He was relatively young when died, at that time he was professor of Rome. He said when was a beginner only (and got the PhD also at him), that 'now, take care, a verse from the 18th century

ought to be analyzed'. He says: look in the European poetry a verse, something similar one against which you can measure it. It was a remark of his that he passed by chance. Now, when I became old and came to like Lőrinc Szabó, I took as a little brat not as a task to trace the career of one of the most remarkable Hungarian poets – and I always mentioned that Ady has been my favourite poet – but now, I came to like him and I can say that Lőrinc Szabó is nearest me because I grew old to him. And I say something that's curious: the Lőrinc Szabó of 19 years of age.

F. G.: You had to grow old to him?

K. L.: I had to grow old to him. He had a great luck. He was born in 1900, so he was always as old in age as the century, the 20th century. In his 19 years of age how was the world? He meets Ady at the catafalque of the poet. He meets revolutions, counter-revolutions, gets acquainted with the series of leaders reigning over Europe, and this is important since he was attacked because of this. Misunderstanding him because he was afraid of them. Consequently, everything that has been horrific in the 20th century, he has experienced. And as a simple university student who visits the Central 'cause Babits called him, and writes a paragraph to the greatest writers, say to the *Be good till death* (Légy jó mindhalálig) by Móricz, how a custom of Debrecen, i.e. bell-ringing is narrated in the gymnasium, in the college. Writes it, and when the book comes out, he observes with great surprise, that his text is word by word within. Now, he gets this environment, among the greatest writers, will be their friend and everything what horrific is (the parallel book is this book is now ready: the criminalization of the verse), what is horrendous and said in verse, they experience there, in the Central together, among one another. And not only himself as a little brat but as secretary for a short time to Móricz, Babits, Kosztolányi, Dezső Szabó. Since then he learns to fear. And the pronouncement of the horrible. Let us take the 'Poet of the Hortobágy' by Ady. One of my friends, unfortunately he is not any more among us, Laci Ferenczi wrote that it is not Hungary and not Debrecen, Ady only believed this. Because the American, the great poets grown up in America who come to Europe – Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot, the greatest according to Babits – they bring with themselves the same experience. Hence the poets, writers in Budapest, in the Central live in the highest poetical horizon, that we learnt: they are the greatest ones of the first half of the 20th century: Eliot, Yeats, Kavafis, Gottfried Benn, let me say contrasts, or Ezra Pound – different men, different poetical world, but in this fear they grow up together. Attila József, who was younger by five years, did have in a curious manner a dreadful life, but was a released child as compared to him. He did fear much better in the early thirties than his somewhat younger adorer, Attila József. Now, I do feel that these two men were in very good friendship for several years. But he (Lőrinc Szabó) himself lived in this Western Europe in which they (or Rilke) learnt to fear. And this was not

the first world war. It was produced only by the poet and by the writer, a wondrous being that is similar to the rats on the sinking ship. It is a strange analogy. While the sun shines, the weather is clear, no sign of the devastating storm – and then rats come up from the depth, from the locker and want to flee. Animals have a presentiment to earthquakes – and so do the poets. So the pistol shot in Sarajevo that started the horrors of the 20th century is a consequence only. They mark it in advance. Joseph Conrad. A Polish noble man. One of the classicists of the English literature. He wrote his novel, *Heart of Darkness* at the time of the turn of century, that is of turn of 1800 and 1900, in the merry peace times before the Great War and from here takes his motto, say that of Eliot. Well, one has to know this, has to understand this and this is why I said in my years of 80 of age I reached to understand and love the 19 years old little brat, this beginner poet, who wrote his first verse – it remained unpublished and I published later – and when Babits did read this verse he did begin to tremble and said: since Vörösmarty no one wrote such kind of verse. Because he wrote into the verse all his fears. And this wrote into the Leader. The leader is not Hitler and Stalin or somebody else in the future, because Europe is full with leaders. From Mannerheim to Atatürk, from Mussolini to Franco, from Horthy to Pilsutsky – good and wrong, many kinds. And this fear as the ‘For Nothing Entirely’ with the selfish Zoli Latinovits ... I was unable to force him though we were in good relations: My dear Zoli, this is verse absolutely fitted to you – he said, it’s a selfish verse, I cannot recite it. Lőrinc Szabó did not understand himself, he always wanted to write its counterpart, the resolution. But it is in the verse, like in Dostoevsky.

F. G.: I think, this is a good appetizer for those who are interested in Lőrinc Szabó, in the era and in this poetical world, this will be well enough. We suggest for all who like this world, to read this volume. Thank you that you came here and thank you that I could say all these.

K. L.: I thank, too and recommend to my readers to be, because this transmitted the desperation of Dostoevsky and hands over it to us, 85 years old of age.

We can see his enthusiasm for the forthcoming new volume. He lived in it. He wrote day and night. Two days before his death, on his last night at home, he sent it to the editor, Róbert Smid, saying, ‘Let it be in his computer’.

The volume was published in posthumous edition by Prae Publishers. I hope the first copies will arrive here, straight from the printers, for the conference. In the meantime, let me quote from him, whom we remember with this conference:

In 1962 I commenced to perform the monographic processing of poet-career, to disclose and publish the text-world of Lőrinc Szabó, our classical poet and great son of Miskolc. Prior to the change of regime I collect-

ed and published the documents of his oeuvre by a one-man work,³ later as professor and leader of the PhD-course this work continued by training of students.⁴ In addition of the documentation of the poet's course of life I aimed right at the beginning at the publication of the text-world of Lőrinc Szabó, to reach the level just preceding the critical edition. Finally, this was reached by the publication of the Lőrinc Szabó series of the Osiris Classics (Osiris Klasszikusok). 'Under the guidance of Lóránt Kabdebó' attested texts supplied with the necessary notes and reference service were published in cooperation with students and researchers. The edition including all his known poems run into its second edition, the two volumes of 'Our Everlasting Friends' (Örök Barátaink), a selection of his translations compiled by the poet himself, the volumes 'Verse and Reality' (Vers és Valóság) and 'Confidential Data and Notes' (Bizalmas adatok és megjegyzések) with verse explanations, later the prose-volumes issued with critical character: 'Memoirs and Publicistics' (Emlékezések és publicisztikai írások), 'Confessions' (Vallomások) and the 'Literary Studies' (Irodalmi tanulmányok) were published.⁵ Simultaneously, the Lőrinc Szabó Research Group (Szabó Lőrinc Kutatóhely) established at the Miskolc University, with the aid of OTKA-support (OTKA – National Scientific Research Fund) published eleven documentary volumes, in cooperation with the Csokonai Publishing House of Debrecen issued five unpublished drama-translations of Lőrinc Szabó,⁶ Seven memorial tablets were erected and unveiled with ceremony abroad relating to the poet's presence, coupling these ceremonies with local foreign language conferences (Titisee, Opatija, Dubrovnik, Macocha – cave near Brno, Hafling-Avelengo, Korcula and the Balassagyarmat-Bridge that served and border-bridge for some time). In cooperation with the Archive of Manuscripts of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Library (MTA Könyvtára Kézirattár) the website entitled Lőrinc Szabó – Verse and Reality (Szabó Lőrinc – Vers és Valóság (<http://krk.szabolorinc.hu/>),⁷ that allows the digital appearance and data processing of all the printed pieces and all variants of all poems published up to the edition of 'Omnibus Volume of Lőrinc Szabó, 1943' – Szabó Lőrinc Összes versei, 1943 (as researching-creating work of my younger colleague, Károly Horányi). In the Research Group Bálint Szele, Csilla Nagy, Aranka Kemény and László Barna grew into professional up-to-date philologists of the Lőrinc Szabó Philology, most of them defended their PhD-dissertation at our University. Further, the conference series of Pécs and Miskolc organized together with academician Ernő Kulcsár Szabó that meant the change of process of the pro-

³ SZABÓ 1974; SZABÓ 1989; SZABÓ 1993.

⁴ KABDEBÓ–LENGYEL TÓTH 2000.

⁵ SZABÓ 2001; SZABÓ 2002; SZABÓ 2003/a; SZABÓ 2003/b; SZABÓ 2008; SZABÓ 2010; SZABÓ 2013.

⁶ Publications subsequently made available: SZABÓ 2019.

⁷ SZABÓ 2019.

fessional regime can also be mentioned, as well as the cycles of the Hungarian professional periodicals (*Irodalomtörténet, Literatura*) edited by us, where a new generation of scientists grew up who are today academic doctors (among them the other monographer of Lőrinc Szabó, Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó, who commenced his career of training in my department of the Miskolc University and today he's one of the determinant personalities of our profession).

When I started to work László Németh gave my work his blessing: he emphasized even in two letters the importance of the task and to treat it as national interest: "I see you deal with Lőrinc Szabó. He is one of those who has been sentenced to eliminate from the public remembrance without ado. It is a hard but noble task to work against this careless oblivion and vicious living down." (17th November 1966); "I'm also glad that your book on Lőrinc Szabó is in progress [...] I do believe that even in this case the socially unpromising subject will be associated with high mental and professional enrichment: since in addition to his talent the career of a critic depends first of all on his orientation – to what he risks himself." (15th September 1967).⁸

László Cs. Szabó in the emigration in London suggested a proposal for the Mikes Kelemen Society of Amsterdam – as obeisance of western writers to the national performances – and published his opinion before the public in the *Irodalmi Újság* (Literary News) of Paris,⁹ in 1983 just the Lőrinc Szabó-research (at that time a one-man team) was awarded by the commemorative plaque of the society (the plaque and deed of gift could be sent home only by smuggling through the border): "The omission of Hungarians is staggering. Out of the two Nyugat-generations only one great poet is 'redeemed': only Lőrinc Szabó has a biography in three volumes, large volumes, complete and relatively final in western sense of the word or *une biographie définitive* as it is said in France." In Kortárs similar words were written by academician István Sötér under the title Lőrinc Szabó and his synopsis.¹⁰

At the moment of the change of regime when the Diary of 1945, apologies and verse-interpretations of the poet were issued¹¹ Tamás wrote in his essay: 'L. K. – who when issuing the *Napló, levelek, cikkek* (Diary, Letters, Articles) in 1974 and since then redacting the *Harmchat év* (Thirty six years), this amazing book of letters, and *Bírákhoz és barátokhoz* (To judges and to friends), these staggering confessions made a great service to all Hungarian friends of literature – last year clearly showed to the general reader: how a philologist can change the literary history.¹²

⁸ NÉMETH 2000, I. 1042; III. 170. Letters 2859 and 3059.

⁹ CS. SZABÓ 1984, 17–18.

¹⁰ SÖTÉR 1981, 647–651.

¹¹ SZABÓ 1990/a; SZABÓ 1990/b.

¹² TAMÁS 1991, 10.

In the Hungarian change of regime of literary sciences Lőrinc Szabó could have appeared as protagonist. As a result of repeated OTKA-supports (National Scientific Research Fund) he is present in the mind of the cultivated public and history of literature with major part of his text-world. This is verified by the paper of Ágnes Osztovics from the new century: 'Lóránt Kabdebó attained with a work of several decades that Lőrinc Szabó could get his deserved place in the Hungarian lyrics of the 20th century and so the image on the Hungarian poetry could be modified.'¹³

In leading periodical of the profession, *Irodalomtörténet* (History of Literature), the reviewer of the volume wrote the following about my comprehension on the Szabó Lőrinc researches: 'Lóránt Kabdebó gives the modest title Szabó Lőrinc utóélete ('Posthumous life of Lőrinc Szabó') to his review on the processing, publication, critical edition and analysis of the poet's text-world, although it becomes clear, how profound, careful gigantic work – performed along at the beginning and with student later on – stands in the background so Lőrinc Szabó, threatened by the danger of forgetting, could get the deserved position in the history of Hungarian lyrics.'¹⁴

I processed the poet-career of Lőrinc Szabó in a monography of three volumes (Szabó Lőrinc lázadó évtizede [Rebellious decade of Lőrinc Szabó], Útkeresés és különbéke. Szabó Lőrinc 1929–1944. [Seeking ways and means and separate peace. Lőrinc Szabó 1928–1944.]

Az összegzés ideje, Szabó Lőrinc 1945–1957. [Time of summation, Lőrinc Szabó 1945–1957] (9), then I wrote the poetic monography of the poet, that has two editions ['A magyar költészet az én nyelvemen beszél']. A kései Nyugat-líra összegződése Szabó Lőrinc költészetében ['The Hungarian poetry speaks in my language', Summation of the late Nyugat-lyrics in the poetry of Lőrinc Szabó], the text of my academic doctoral theses served as a basis for the latter one Further, in two micro-monographs I propagated the poet (Szabó Lőrinc, Szabó Lőrinc pályaképe [Lőrinc Szabó, Poet-career of Lőrinc Szabó])¹⁵ later in a collection I contended enforced by data with the character-killing legends developed around Lőrinc Szabó (Szabó Lőrinc 'pere' ['Legal action' of Lőrinc Szabó]) (12), finally in two study-volumes I published case studies on the development of career (13). Just after my 80th birthday celebrated in the assembly hall of the Academic Committee of Miskolc I completed my book that summarizes the poetry of Lőrinc Szabó and compares his poetry with the modern European poetry. Major part of the book consists of my lectures prepared for high-grade conferences. I continue to write my results achieved so far. My monographic books being composed in earlier

¹³ OSZTOVITS 2012, 58–59.

¹⁴ KÁLLAY 2014, 403–409.

¹⁵ KABDEBÓ 2001.

debates I introduce Lőrinc Szabó to the Hungarian experts and expectant reader and researchers as fashioner of the classical poetry, as phenomenon of the world literature [‘egy Költő Agya’]. Szabó Lőrinc Lőrinc pályaképe a ‘modern’ európai költészetben [‘Brain of a Poet’. Course of poet-career of Lőrinc Szabó in the ‘modern’ European’ poetry]]¹⁶

To conclude, Lőrinc Szabó received the Kossuth Prize on 15 March 1957. He used the money he received to help Zoltán Zelk, György Sárközi, István Sinka and the wife of Sándor Bihari, who was later imprisoned for directing his evening in Miskolc.

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¹⁶ KABDEBÓ 2021.

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