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ON THE DRAWINGS OF IMRE MADÁCH

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ABSTRACT

To the question that has preoccupied Madách criticism from the outset – namely, what motivated the author of The Tragedy of Man to drawing and painting, that is, what might have led a writer exceptionally endowed with the power of naming existing things and of creation through concepts to regard as a form of self-expression the various ways of transforming things and events into images – although the "realizations" fall far short of the standard of his literary works – scholarly inquiry has thus far provided primarily historical-biographical and, secondarily, psychological explanations. In this study – taking these findings and critical perspectives as a point of departure – we aim to reflect on the question by mapping the characteristics of the cognitive determinants that underlie the sensory organization of meaning.

KEYWORDS

Imre Madách, drawings, compositions, perspectives

New critical approaches extending the study of literary oeuvres beyond the textual realm, such as genetic criticism or new structuralism, evidently regard graphic and visual phenomena connected to literary activity as part of their own scholarly territories. They interpret sketches born as "by-products" of published works, digitally produced drawings, and personal photographs as tools of intellectual creation, that is, they view these as functions of fundamental significance for the examination of the creative process and productivity. Following this interpretive perspective, this study presents—from among the drawings and paintings that permeate the entire Madách oeuvre and symbiotically accompany the writings—four childhood drawings.

To the question that has preoccupied Madách criticism from the outset – namely, what motivated the author of The Tragedy of Man to drawing and painting, that is, what might have led a writer exceptionally endowed with the power of naming existing things and of creation through concepts to regard as a form of self-expression the various ways of transforming things and events into images – although the "realizations" fall far short of the standard of his literary works – scholarly inquiry has thus far provided primarily historical-biographical and, secondarily, psychological explanations. In this study – taking these findings and critical perspectives as a point of departure – we aim to reflect on the question by mapping the characteristics of the cognitive determinants that underlie the sensory organization of meaning.

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Cultural, Social and Psychological Origins

In the first half of the 19th century, the artistic outlook of the defining circles of Hungarian literary life was increasingly permeated by a conception that defined knowledge and experience of the interplay of the arts as such as a prerequisite for significant creative work and modern cultivation in general. The statement of Ferenc Kazinczy, the taste arbiter of critical life, "the Artist is not an Artist if he is not a poet," (Kazinczy, 1890–1923: 245) and conversely the "truth" of the assertion 'the Poet is not a Poet if he is not an artist', summarizes in bonne mot fashion the changes in this contemporary cultural context that can be associated with creative attitudes. In the interest of "shaping" the eye, pattern-following, imitation and copying of foreign masters becomes accepted, even desirable, for example the drawing/writing of illustrated landscape descriptions that facilitate the rediscovery of the relationship between nature and man, the creation of painted and literary portraits.[40] All this is naturally not mere theoretical declaration, but the consequence of new cultural-social changes affecting the theoretical perspective shift concerning the relationship between creator and work. On the one hand, a technomaterially new medium, literature adorned with "illustrations", reaches noble homes in relatively large numbers: travel books, almanacs, pocket books and fashion magazines, as well as oil paintings (copies, portraits, illustrations) that decorate living spaces and can also be understood as symbols of national-noble identification, economic-social belonging, etc. (Cf. A portré és az életkép új felfogása a 19. század elején Európában, 2018: 158-164 and Nagyné Nemes & Andor, 1997: 12.). "The rooms of the Madách castle in Sztregova were decorated with pictures, portraits, oil copies, illustrations satisfying rural noble tastes. Thus Anna Majthényi's youthful portrait, Mária Madách's miniature and the watercolors depicting the 12 months, which family tradition attributes to Anna Majthényi. In the library was Antal Mocsáry's Nógrád monograph, whose 14 castle drawings were made by József Lántz, engineer of Kékkő, and Schmidt" (Nagyné Nemes & Andor, 1997: 12).

On the other hand, expectations regarding cultivation and creative activity were also reinforced and catalyzed directly and indirectly by the emergence of bourgeois occupations that enabled the production and distribution of new media: printer, antiquarian, itinerant painter, etc. Particularly significant is the appearance of drawing teachers entrusted with the artistic education of potential future creators, operating in cities and also in the countryside at the invitation of noble estates. "Better upbringing at both bourgeois and middle-noble levels already includes understanding 'a little drawing, watercolor and gouache painting'. In families that paid attention to upbringing, they hired drawing teachers, piano masters and French language masters for their children. For magnate families this was an indispensable requirement, but middle-noble families—often making heavy financial sacrifices to provide their children with upbringing worthy of their rank—adhered to established needs. However, the acquisition of arts remained only superficial: they remained at amateur level. Even the more talented mostly remained dilettantes. For them this was not an occupation or calling, but merely entertainment conforming to fashion" (Nagyné Nemes & Andor, 1997: 13; Virág, 2013).

[40] Ferenc Pulszky's Travel Sketches are referenced by Nagyné Nemes & Andor, 1997: 12.

Anna Majthényi, following contemporary social patterns of artistic education, presumably commissioned Károly Schmidt, who operated the Pest painting school, to teach her sons. "Based on the frequency of drawings and paintings (...), the presence of the painting teacher can be delimited, which we can place between 1838 and 41. If we compare the expressly children's drawings with the pictures created after May 1838, we can experience the beneficial collaboration, the guiding hand of a practiced drawing teacher" (Nagyné Nemes & Andor, 1997: 15). Although Madách did not later systematically develop his drawing skills, the fact is that various forms and genres of visual expression became—secondary but by no means insignificant—parts of the oeuvre. Furthermore, their role was not limited to the early stage of the career; the influence of social fashions and expectations, the critical canon and consequent family inspirations show their effectiveness in the posed question of why Madách considered drawing and painting his own forms of self-expression.

On the other hand, in psychological terms, according to research, the origin of the presence of medial dualities in the life work could have been the "inner inclination" that always sought the most appropriate form of expression. The discovery of concrete image against abstract language, especially during life phases filled with difficulties, could be accompanied by some kind of spiritual liberation ("entertainment", "passion") and tranquility (Vayerné Zibolen, 1964: 11). "It is not a rare phenomenon that masters of the word also seek the expressive form of their thoughts through the tools of drawing. Madách was prompted to learn drawing by inner inclination—this was his dear occupation from childhood. (...) The satisfying outlet for the inner expressive desire of a person condemned to forced rest, passion and entertainment thus became for him what he might have expected to become an independent goal" (Vayerné Zibolen, 1964: 10, 11.).

The creative advocacy for the tools of image against word, drawing against writing can also be explained by the existence of a more complex psychological state, such as the compulsion to find the "further path" and "spiritual validity." "For an individual practicing the alchemical principle of 'solve et coagula', 'dissolve and bind' at any high level, who is—sometimes—swept from the cause-effect reality of things into the effect-cause, pure reason dimension, no other possibility was given than pictorial formulation, more precisely the symbol-formation lying in the nature of pictorial representation (...) The objects of the surrounding world serve merely as pretexts for manifesting the spiritual validities that can be projected onto them. The hours and moments of rest and regeneration of a person fleeing from multidirectional dependence are the time spent drawing, and since drawing is born from movement impulse, it could also counterbalance his enforced bedridden state during days of weakness" (Benes, 1996: 75, 77).

Cognitive Origins Aimed at "Sensory Organization of the Mind"[41]

A picture is never merely optical copying; in the picture "the eye creates sensually organized reason, and not by reproducing what is processually seen," but by the creative activity "stepping

[41] Simultaneity (simultaneitas) and succession (successivitas) are conditions of all vision. Through pictures they "depend on each other through the play of interaction," which is fundamental "for the organization of sensory reason" (Boehm, 1997: 250).

further where the purely contemplative relationship stops" (Boehm, 1997: 249). Madách's inclination to draw is certainly connected to the sensing-according to the testimony of the flower drawings (*Watercolor with Greeting Lines* (Figure 1), *Name Day Greeting* and *Greeting*) (Figure 2) and the cross representation *Cross with Anchor and Ivy* (Figure 3)) - of the potentials lying in this "stepping further" that can be dated to childhood, and later the recognition of their significance. The 6–13-year-old "greeting" drawings in any case testify to the *practicality* of the gesture of image-making: the drawing is born to transpose onto a paper sheet as an object, more precisely into an object, as a factually existing gift object, the things and memories experienced by the gift-giver in spectacle and preserved in inner images. Consciously or unconsciously with the intention that the points, lines, spots over which it can exist make something linguistically inexpressible perceptible. The floral representations arranged in wreath form could even be manifestations of the flowers of the recipient's garden, but the relationships of forms created with colors, sizes, contrasts, etc., the image-whole's visible striving for rhythm and harmony makes it unquestionable - however simple a childhood drawing it may be - that the cooperation of pictorial elements has more connection possibilities than what the mere "summation" of individual picture elements, as well as what the words trying to describe them, would be capable of expressing. At the same time, it should be noted that the graphical "genre" chosen by the child Madách, the greeting card, seems to justify the validity of this statement not only generally due to the functioning of pictoriality, but also through the text applied to the drawing sheet that directs attention to the picture (see the deictic pronoun: "*Thus* may the beautiful flowers of your life bloom" (Figure 1)).[42]



Figure 1: *Watercolor with Greeting Lines*
Source: Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, Kézirattár, Analekta 3847. (57)

[42] The inscription written in original spelling reads as follows: " Így virúlyanak Életednek szép virágai"

The result of the creative activity that creates the picture, "what addresses the viewer of pictures," therefore has "much to do with that anonymous dimension that cannot be grasped in words, which we try to circumscribe with concepts of 'mood', 'style', 'originality', etc." (Boehm, 1997: 247). (Undoubtedly "atmospheric" and evoking the "style" of folk decorative art is how the greeting card arranges the garden flowers into a wreath). On the other hand, the picture not only "lists" (although it is obvious that it also takes account of several flowers blooming in May, recognizable are forget-me-not, rose, Pentecost and windflower, morning glory, petunia, narcissus, bluebell, poppy), but also prescribes, since in a picture the thing and its property only become accessible in the way they are bound to the starting points of the surface.

The wreath drawing and similarly the other two flower drawings also recall educational pressed specimens, depicting the stems, leaves and petals in a "smoothed", two-dimensional manner. Thus and only thus, not otherwise. That is, illuminating this question from the opposite side, while "in real perception the momentary qualities can be varied on the same thing without the substance of the thing changing," in the picture "thing and property are inseparable" (Boehm, 1997: 250). Staying with our example, in the dimension of the Madách drawing, openness to the viewer's gaze as an object property is forever fused with the flower carrying it as a "thing." Thus the creative intention is realized: the calyxes unfold their fullest possible beauty "spread out" before the recipient's gaze, operating immediacy and finality, showing themselves while excluding words that hesitantly circle around things. Upon closer examination of the early drawings, we can also observe that the Madách picture always makes this "inseparability" perceptible within the framework of a certain representational order. The operation of this order seems to become, for the drawer, a condition for conveying the true being (beauty, nature, etc.) of things, organizing itself processually, guided instinctively by inner dynamics - in any case, it seems to dominate most of the early drawings composed along the vertical axis.

On each of the 2st and 3rd numbered drawings, the depicted things are mostly visible to the left of the picture plane's vertical symmetry axis, just as the vertical axis marked out by the picture elements themselves (we are speaking of the verticals determined by the stems; and the left corner of the cross and the anchor's branching point). In the broader vertical field falling to the right, in the middle two quarters that can be marked out horizontally, the figural load is relatively large, and we see the repetition of element pairs forming rhythm here (two leaves correspond to two flower calyxes in both drawings of Figure 1, but the placement of the cross and anchor peaks is also rhythmic in picture number 3). Furthermore, the distance ratios of the compositional axes that vertically divide the picture plane can also be made to correspond to each other (i.e., they allow us to conclude the effectiveness of "order") (after the broader field following the left field to the right-which also gives place to forms located along the picture's diagonal-follows a narrow field containing forms organized along downward-directed axes. On all three drawings we can also identify axes (two-two per picture) acting contrary to the reading direction, directed from the central vertical toward the picture's left frame. Beyond all this, the contact and intersection points of forms, also on the drawings depicting flowers and the anchor, divide the main axis marking nearly identical proportions (Figures 2, 3). Could all similarity be the work of chance?



Figure 2: Structural mesh of the image titled Name Day Greeting and Greetings
Source: Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, Kézirattár, Analekta 3847. (2, 3)

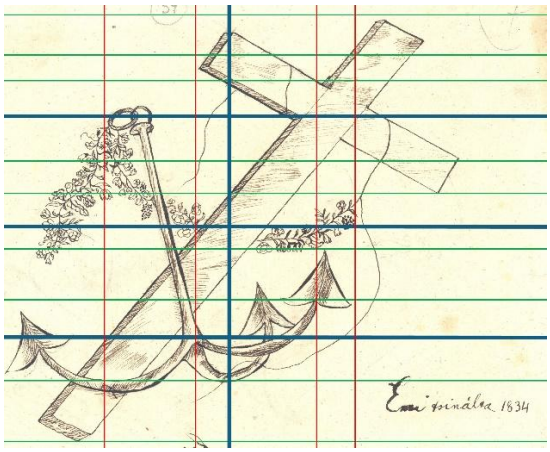


Figure 3: Structural mesh of the painting Cross with Anchor and Ivy
Source: Országos Széchenyi Könyvtár, Kézirattár, Analekta 3847. (34)

If the compositional correspondences of these pictures (which, we note, are more or less valid regarding the portraits made by Madách as well) served purely that receptive operation which enables linguistic-type meaning formation, the flowers drawn beside the greeting words would have no "meaning" whatsoever. However, beyond the fact that the drawing was almost certainly made first, and only afterward the textual application, the pictorial cooperation can also be primary and more than what is purely linguistically expressible, because despite its simplicity, as a creation, it offers "conceptually inexhaustible" "contemplative conjunctions." More and different: a sight transformed into image, for whose perception vision must free itself not only from "linguistic-type intellectual structures," but also from the rigid function of observation and overview characteristic of the perception of real things. Only thus can it become capable of perceiving "the dynamic

connections of the picture," the reception given only to "sensory intellect" (Boehm, 1997: 250, 247).

For the drawing Madách, we believe, precisely these characteristics made the image, forming differently from every other mode of expression, suitable for intensifying his creative imagination. And if this is so, our question articulated above requires modification, since, we can see, the essence here does not lie in whether the repetitions of composition are connected with intention (perhaps with chance) or with instinctiveness, since presumably most with the latter, i.e., with some kind of vaguely outlined *inner compulsion*. Precisely because the drawings contain no auxiliary lines indicating "construction," their structure does not seem to conform to classical pictorial "norms," compositional proportions, furthermore the repetition is apparently not based on mathematically determined strict precision. (And we can exclude chance based on the law of large numbers). The essence lies much more in that whether through the unconscious formation of structural parallels, or through other, for example individual, re-semanticizing symbol-creation of iconic tradition (see for example the replacement of the first member of the rope-anchor-cross form triad with a flower garland),[43] something not given to reason and un-expressed might become intuitable and perceptible.

The creative intention prevailing within the picture's framework of 'thus and only thus,' 'in this way and not otherwise' could function for both child and adult Madách as an original, even necessary principle of visual contemplation. True, after completing school studies it was increasingly subordinated to practical purposes (Madách gifted family members with drawn flowers and portraits, entertained them with caricatures and genre pictures). At the same time, it is well perceptible that parallel to achieving utilitarian goals, Madách's drawing strives for the re-dynamization of vision, in other words, to liberate the picture's effect "in contemplative experience". (Boehm, 1997: 246). For example, by creating such a (already mentioned above) *vertical structure* that, permeating several portraits and figure representations, opens a path for "sensory reason organization" that also operates our often unconscious associations.[44]

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[43] It can be assumed that Madách saw examples of joint representation of anchor and cross on tombstones, reliefs. About the meaning of this symbol, the Symbol Dictionary writes the following: "The metal device that secures water vessels is a symbol of hope, fidelity. (...) It expresses the solidity of earth against water, in figurative sense that part of the soul which finds tranquility even in the storm of life, emotions." In Christian iconography "the anchor of the soul is faith. (...) It appears as hope of resurrection, redemption in early Christian art on tombstones, in catacombs, on jewelry. It was the secret identifying sign of believers, because they saw an allegorical, hidden cross in the anchor, thus it-especially when supplemented with a cross-beam-became part of cross symbolism" (Pál & Újvári, 1997: 174).

[44] Since in these structures the compositional axis forms slightly to the left of the picture's symmetry axis, therefore the things contemplated in the picture become past-oriented in character. In "contemplative experienc-according to the general laws of spatial symbolism-with the semantics of origin, beginning connectable with reading direction, birth, plans and already lived things, etc.

The general, culture-independent characteristics of spatial symbolism are discussed by Max Pulver's (built on Carl Gustav Jung's theory) Symbolik der Handschrift [Symbolism of Handwriting], which became a classic work of graphological theory, associating meanings with the spatial directions of up, down, right and left. (Cf. Urbán, 2010: 15–18.) Regarding questions of the semantic, "universally accepted symbolism" of pictorial composition, see among others Bergström's classification (Bergström, 2009: 140–142), as well as Panofsky's theoretical writings on iconology. For example: Panofsky, 2011: 301.

Madách, if not for the general public, rather only for himself and his immediate environment, over the years developed that method of communication and expression which can only be connected with visual experience acquisition, with seeing and contemplating, and whose essence, as image-making activity, is the sensory organization of reason, specifically "in the experiential form of the identity of sensuality and reason" (Boehm, 1997: 253). The path connecting the individual with the whole (the concretely seen objects, living and lifeless things, flowers, castles, mountains, the "actors" of family and everyday life with the general knowledge acquired about them) is traversed by the eye forming connection patterns. This requires experience, practice, skill, which essentially differs from that conceptually guided cognitive process that characterizes linguistically organized writings.

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