

Propositions

The *Password and Myth*, that contains the most important document of this polemic, was published in 2003 by the Mentor Publishing house from Marosvásárhely. Béla Pomogáts wrote a study to this volume, in which, besides other things, he enlists the 15 most important pieces of argument of the Transylvanian literary life between 1919 and 1944. Most of them are to be processed by literature historians – said Pomogáts – however the book *Changed World* (Kossuth University Press), author Júlia Vallasek, redeems this kind of uncontroversiality by processing the literary inquires from the period between 1940-1944. My Dissertation deals with the very preceding *Password and Myth* of 1937, and the ideological atmosphere that serves as its background. For this reason the present dissertation mainly documents from contemporary public papers that have not been studied yet, (The Brassó Papers, The Independent Paper) two so far unpublished letters (Abáfáy's letter to Ferenc Szemlér from the 1970s) and papers (Szemlér lecture on the Vásárhely Convention), it tries to sketch the so far unexplored literary and ideological happenings of the second half of the 1930s.

The major conception of the Transylvanian Hungarian literature and the political public life between the two World Wars was the Transylvanianism. It was a desperate try of the Transylvanian Hungarian people drawn to minority, to survive the trauma caused by Trianon. Its formation is usually dated back to 1920, it was named in the *Crying Word* by Károly Kós–Árpád Paál–István Zágoni, published in 1921, and the validity of the concept has been put in the period of 1920-1930 by the literature history writing. Transylvaniansm did not have a definition, those who made it up talked about it with poetic enthusiasm, not with a “scientific exactitude of notion”. As Pomogáts writes, for this reason the users of this notion have put their own opinion too in the “melting pot” of the Transylvaniansm. There were certainly some basic ideas that the believers of the Transylvaniansm shared. They believed, the three nations of Transylvania, the Hungarian, the Romanian and the Saxon people, are protruded by a common Transylvanian spirituality, the proof of which has been found – mostly according to Kós–in the common architectural and ethnological motifs, the geographical peculiarities of Transylvania as well as its historical events. The development of the common spirituality has been justified by the geographical isolation of Transylvania

as well as the living together for centuries of these people in interdependence. To prove the common spirituality such historical events were mentioned where at least two out of the three mentioned nations got together and rebelled against the adverse circumstances. As an example the Revolt from Bábolna has been mentioned most often, as well as Rákóczi's longest fighting Romanian villeinage and gentry. The followers of the Transylvanianism sincerely believed that the spirituality of Transylvania is more democratic and more humane than that of Hungary. In the *Sketch of the Cultural History of Transylvania*, through a series of historical as well as religious and cultural moments Kós proves how almost since the Settlement of the Magyars in Hungary the Transylvanian Hungarians have become more open and liberal than the Hungarians from Hungary. Of all proofs the proclaimers of the Transylvanianism prefer referring to the parliament of Torda in 1576, to the fact that the religious integration was first announced here, as well as to the fact that Transylvania was much more open to the reformation than Hungary, and its democratic facade exists thanks to the fact that this protestant spirituality was looking for a remedy for their thirst of knowledge elsewhere than the catholic Hungary.

The mode of the Transylvanianism in literature was much more outlined than the mode of the Transylvanianism that is built up by different "sciences". Somehow it was so obvious that if there was such a thing as Transylvanian spirituality different from the Hungarian spirituality from Hungary, it must leave its imprint on a work created in Transylvania, this way no one really endeavoured to define Transylvanianism as a literary mode. So given was a notion: the Transylvanist literature with absolutely no theoretical concept behind, that in fact was nothing else but the shade of the original concept on the horizon of literature. And, however, Aladár Kuncz unambiguously regarded it as the local flowering of the West, the bare existence of the notion made many people believe that this was something utterly new, a phenomena radically different from the Hungarian literature from Hungary.

The study *Password and Myth*, written by Szemlér in 1937, confutes each proposition of the Transylvanianism with unbeatable logics. He has not only one, but two remarks that on their own are enough to question the whole concept of Transylvanianism. One of them consists of the re-examination of the notion of the three nations. That is to say, when the ideologists of the Transylvanianism refer to the fact that living together for several hundred years has evoked this kind of spiritual behaviour, they tend to forget the fact that

the Romanians did not use to take part in forming the future of Transylvania, that is to say, in Transylvania the people never lived together in interdependence, which is the basic condition of the common spirituality, but they lived in a subordinate – superior relationship. It is also Szemlér who points to the fact that the “inventors” of the Transylvanianism belong to the very generation that admittedly does not speak Romanian. This breaks the “basis of the arguments and statements”, since discovering “Transylvanian peculiarities in a work that we do not understand, and in people we cannot communicate with, ... is very close to the literary and scientific imprudence”¹

The *Password and Myth* is the first long length study between the two World Wars that examines the literary projection of the Transylvanianism. Szemlér, the immediate follower of Aladár Kuncz’s thoughts, is also of the opinion that there is only a contextual difference between the Hungarian and Transylvanian works; he thinks that Transylvanianism does not bring forth any kind of artistic innovation, and the Transylvanian attribute only refers to the place of origin. Thus, this adjective only refers to the facts that are absolutely outside, “organically not linked to literature”. This cannot serve as the basis of a new literary theory, since if it did, we could also talk about “the literature of Dunántúl, Szatmár, Pécs or Marosvásárhely”².

Szemlér’s study examines both parts of the Transylvanianism, that is the “country Transylvanianism”, as Szabédi names it, that relies on the results of the history-ethnography-geography, as well as the literary Transylvanianism. Accordingly the polemic that buds along the *Password and Myth* will have two flows too. Kós, Ligeti, Kacsó, Károly Császár joint the discourse of the “country Transylvanianism”, whilst the question of the literature will be considered by Szenczei. He will come to a very important conclusion i.e. there is one single point where the Transylvanianism, or if you like, the Transylvanian literature can show something entirely new and colourful, utterly different from the literature of Hungary, that is the regionalist literature, i.e. the art of the two Szekler writers, Tamási and Nyirő.

Before writing the *Password and Myth* Szemlér sent letters to quite a few members of the second generation of writers, in which he asked if they considered the Transylvanianism an existing and influential phenomena, and whether they were influenced by it or not. Since each answer unequivocally denied the existence of Transylvanianism, and Szemlér himself was of the same opinion, he confidently makes the proposition in the

¹ Szemlér: *Password and Myth*, in *** Password and Myth, Mentor Publishing House, p.165

² Ibid, p. 168

Password and Myth, that is, the Transylvanianism, which had never been more than a myth, had finished its career, and slowly disappeared from the horizon of the Transylvanian intellectuality. The Transylvanist writers who took part in the polemic certainly remained on the side of the ideology of Transylvanism. Surprisingly, though, it found supporters among the young writers as well, and this time they do not use the jargon of descriptive sciences but the jargon of more realistic disciplines (mathematics, statistics) to state that Transylvanianism exists. (Emil Z. Vásárhelyi, Dániel Antal) Moreover, not only does Dezső László broaden the Transylvanianism into the only valid ideology of the Transylvanian existence, he also charges Szemlér that with the critical approach from the *Password and Myth* he had intended to discredit the Transylvanianism, so he could replace this weakened ideology with the rational materialism. Although Szemlér never mentioned rational materialism, he did mention that there was a new intellectuality developing under the protection of the Transylvanianism. To understand why Dezső László considers Szemlér through *Password and Myth* to be a rational materialist, and to what exactly Szemlér might have meant when he mentioned the “new ideology”, we need to have a wider perspective on the intellectual turbulence of that period.

Much before the *Myth and Password* was written, in the beginning of 1930s, the left side youth insisted that Transylvanism was not more than a myth. Elemér Jancsó – who does not consider himself left sided but bourgeois radical, though according to several documents only he could have been the intellectual leader of the left side youth, criticises the Transylvanianism as far back as 1931, in a study published in the first common anthology of the second generation (*The New Frontline*). It is true, however, that he does not question its validity, he only misses the fact that the Transylvanian writers did not “make up” the Transylvanianism of the workers and the farmers, but they only “made up” the Transylvanianism of the middle class. However in 1935 he considers the Transylvanianism a myth too and regards it merely a continuation of the Hungarian literature from Hungary, similarly to Szemlér, who- let us mention - in the 1930s was an enthusiastic propagator of the Transylvanianism. Jancsó believed in the “socialising function” of the literature. He believed that literature does not only offer a realistic portray but it brings forth solutions about how to eliminate the social anomalies. Even if there existed such a work on the Transylvanian literary scene, it was either aesthetically atrocious or it was impossible to find a publisher for it. The Ady Endre Association (A.E.A.) was formed in 1933 with the presidency of Jancsó. In the beginning it incorporated every writer of the second generation,

and its main goal was to establish an own paper and an own publishing house so as to publish all the highly aesthetical prose that the Transylvanian Guilds of Art would not have published.

The A.E.A. never had a paper or publishing house of its own, and the ideological arguments dissipated the literary association almost from the very beginning. But, there were some writers left, like Jancsó, Szenczei, József Kós Kovács etc, who, even if they could not form a literary organ, they were able to lift the intellectual status of Transylvania with the announcement of various conferences. It is them who initiated Edgár Balogh's circular letter of 1935 to the prominent thinkers of Transylvania about the assessing of the most immediate tasks. (As a reply Tamási writes the series of articles *The Active Transylvanian Youth*) In 1936 they will start another inquiry on the columns of the Independent Paper, entitled *Democratic Intellectual Battlefield*, and this is the moment when Jancsó introduces to the common knowledge the notion of the Transylvanian realism. In 1937 they will appear again and this inquiry will be the introduction of the Vásárhely Convention. Both inquiries realised that the influence of the growing Romanian offensive as well as the economic recession can only be alleviated if every segment of the Transylvanian Hungarian Society will join with each other and if they will try to assess objectively and rationally the mistakes on every walks of life (economy, education, culture, press, etc.) and try to find solutions for them. This is what Szenczei calls minority empirics. The implacable facing with reality, as an intellectual behaviour is called again *Transylvanian Realism*, and the practical realisation of this view will be the Vásárhely Convention. The notion of the Transylvanian Realism, just like the notion of the Transylvanianism before, is used in relation to literature as well. It refers to practical duties, (e.g. the approach of the writer and the people), as well as a kind of position towards the literature of the Transylvanianism, which by now, thanks to the formal logics is supposed to be *romantic*.

Szemlér was one of the lecturers at the Vásárhely Convention, but he was not a member of the Ady Endre Association. (Even today it is not clear why he, and why not Elemér Jancsó was the lecturer.) As a result, not only did Jancsó not have anything to do with the Marxist literature and society concept, but he did not have anything to do with the Jancsónian Transylvanian Realism. Probably Szemlér would not have been able to name the new concept that bud under the protective wings of Transylvanianism in the autumn of 1937.

Whilst the Ady Endre Association was fighting in Kolozsvár for different publication surfaces, a new column started on the pages of the Brassó Papers, in Brassó, under the editorship of Gusztáv Abafáy, in 1937. In this column he introduced the writers of the second generation and their work. Abafáy wrote an introduction to this column in which he takes into account how the second generation differs from the first one. One of his most important statements was that the young do not believe in any kind of *ism*, but they do believe in the impossible nature of the word, *the poetic stammering, the spirit turned into soul*, that is a beautiful phrasing, but nobody knows what it means, however, on the basis of later reviews, it can be attributed with the meaning that the second generation believed in the superiority of the soul (and not of reality!). In their work they tried to follow the results of the analytical psychology as well as the new literary genres of Western Europe (e.g. Proust's surrealism).

The brand new anthology of the second generation, *The New Transylvanian Anthology*, was born on the basis of this column, and its editors were Abafáy and Szemlér. There was only one common thing in the approach of Szemlér and Jancsó, they both thought about the new literature in the spirit of Transylvanianism. Jancsó called it Transylvanian Realism, and Szemlér called it barely "New Intellectualism".

Writing of the *Password and Myth* coincided with one of the most important events of the year 1937, which is the Vásárhely Convention, and editing the *New Transylvanian Anthology*. Thus the polemic is not only about the interpretation of the Transylvaniam, but also about the difference between the writing art of the two generations, and the difference between their basic intellectual attitudes. However, according to the anthology, the differences are quite blurred, moreover, according to Ligeti, there is no differentiating whatsoever. The second generation only starts publishing books that are really different from Transylvanist writers after the publication of the Anthology, in 1938. The two most important of them which really triggered the Jaussian kind of different reader's attitude and change of horizon are *Grime and Crown* by Szenczei, and *On a Different Star* by Szemlér.

Whether this change of horizons really occurred or not, could be the subject of the next part of the present survey.

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