
Minority Culture*Péter Demény***Longing for competence****(A report on book publishing in Transylvania)**

There are two kinds of summaries; one publishes data and columns of numbers and intends to deliver the message through them - let's call them positivist summaries. (A high standard example for this is the study by Gyula Dávid: *A romániai magyar könyvkiadás egy új évezred határán* Hungarian book publishing in Romania at the beginning of a new millennium. In: Bodó, Barna (ed.): *Romániai Magyar Évkönyv 2000*. [Hungarian Yearbook in Romania] Szórvány Alapítvány - Polis Könyvkiadó, Temesvár-Kolozsvár 2000). The other one does not focus on facts but rather on processes and the mentality that they involve - that is hermeneutic analysis. Sharp wording (by intentions at least) should not hide but reveal the main point: it does not mean that any of the approaches would be useless rather which one is more useful in the given situation.

The following report does not conceal its belonging to this latter type rather than to the former one. The author believes there has been enough discussion about data in the past sixteen years since the change - its time to talk about what is behind them and even more how they are treated by those who keep hiding behind data. There are charts about the number of book publishers - but however precise these are they cannot show what these publishers are like, whether they deal with what they should and in the way they should.

Rhetoric of complaints has been characteristic of the Hungarian culture of Transylvania since 1989. The pragmatic system of ideals based on the ethos of work promoted by Károly Kós and his companions referred to as Transylvanism became well-known, commonly cited, and publicly defamed, and finally completely obsolete in the hands of the descendants and especially in their speech. I would like to evocate an anecdote for those who might be doubtful and would claim that it could not have possibly been obsolete since it still exists. During one of his philosophy lectures Hegel mentioned that anything real is rational. At the end of his lecture a mischievous young man sidled up to him and asked what to think of the dying Prussia since it was real. The German philosopher answered: "The monarchy is real but it does not exist because only those things exist which have rationally to be." The same applies to Transylvanism too: its ideas are referred to but it has gone wrong on the one hand, and (that is why) it fell out of time on the other.

What do I mean by this? If I put it very roughly I would say nowadays it does not matter at all nowadays that we are a minority and what is more we are Transylvanians. While some time ago we could stand high after we introduced

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ourselves- recently we had better tell it as a fact for which we do not receive any appraisal. First because this is how it is smart, elegant and natural, secondly because this is how "things work nowadays". Anybody who trusted that Transylvaniam still meant anything could experience what it meant in 2004 at the referendum at the latest: the rejection of lamentation.

We are at cross-roads. One of the options is to represent our being Transylvanian through the highest possible quality. The other is that we do not identify ourselves as Transylvanians but plainly as Hungarians.

Those publishers, who chose one of the above mentioned strategies, are at the intellectual heights of the Hungarian book publishing within the Romanian borders. Kalota and Komp-Press in Kolozsvár can be listed in the first category: they publish neat and beautiful volumes, which are suitable for the purpose for which they were published. Both institutions know what editors and correctors are for, the covers are designed and the printers work neatly and conscientiously.

Kalota builds its activity around four types of series; Transylvanian anthologies of classical works (poems, prose, dramas, essays), study volumes which analyse Hungarian reality in Romania (Szilágyi N., Sándor: *Mi-egy-más, Egyed, Péter: Látlet* - all the publications mentioned in brackets are mere samples), publications of posthumous and/or less known works (Vass László *Levente: Üvegmezők, Bálint, Tibor: Sánta angyalok utcája* - dramatised version of the successful *Zokogó majom*) and children's books (Andersen: *The Pine*, Kiss-Bitay, Éva: *Az erdő lakói, Állatparádé*). Komp-Press has only one "real" series, the Ariadne Books - it publishes collections of studies and essays. The cover was designed by Ferenc Deák, the doyen of graphic profession. Those publications of the publisher are also very interesting which are the results of a competition or a survey like *A Ieremtmények arca* in 2001. Its material was edited along a "top-list" which included more than a hundred replies to the question: "Which are the ten most beautiful Hungarian poems of the twentieth century?"

Előretolt Helyőrség Könyvei of Erdélyi Híradó in Kolozsvár belong also in this category, in which contemporary writers, poets and critics can publish. We can also list *Mentor Művészeti Monográfiák* of Marosvásárhely and the *Pro-Print Krónika Könyvek* and *Múltunk Könyvek* series of Csikszereeda (the first are volumes of folklore and anthropology, the latter are works of the great minds of Transylvanian thinking. The books of *Polis Prospero* and its series *Kettős Tükörben* (the first publishes interviews about lives of theatre people, the second one publishes essays written about writers and other major personalities). It is to be remarked that a few enterprises are suspended at the moment e.g.: the *Nobile Officium* series of Pallas Akadémia (publications of Transylvanian writers living in emigration; the latest opus issued was: *A konvenció vendégei* by Vilmos Ágoston in 2004).

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In other books of these publishers and publications of other publishers no well-thought-out conception can be traced. All of them have "tough" titles and good enterprises (e.g. the bilingual anthology of poems with the title *Un pahar cu lumină - Pohárnyi fény* of the publishing house Tinivár, or the re-issue of the *Téka* series of Kriterion) but as a whole they cannot be described as intellectual workshops or publishing houses. The Hungarian Writers in Romania series of Kriterion has recently re-edited Rodion Markovits' novel *Szibériai garnizon*; its foreword is flooded by linguistically bizarre terms and confused images. (One example for that is "the risky task was definitely not without danger" page 21. I was so shocked that I inquired and found out that sometimes Kriterion just scans in the original text and puts the introduction - which arrives by e-mail - before it. This way everything depends on the external colleague who took upon himself the task of the selection of the classics. This is undoubtedly a great performance from a company which would not have had to do anything but make use of its intellectual capital and network of relations developed before 1989.) The covers of *Bibliotheca Transsylvanica* series of Pallas Akadémia Csikszereda are characterless to such an extent that the otherwise valuable studies by Samu Benkő, Gyula Dávid, Ákos Egyed, András Magyari, János Péntek have faded to invisibility.

Koinónia Kolozsvár has been the only one to choose the other way until recently. This institution did not "announce" that it is a Transylvanian publisher which publishes works of authors who come from this area or deal with Transylvanian topics but it takes upon the book *Transylvania Anno Domini MMI* as well as basic works of the second reformation and works of St. Augustin, Nicolae Balotă, Gábor Schein and Tibor Zalán too.

The workshop led by András Visky is the odd one out in the Hungarian prairie in Romania. Both authors and the books are dealt with in a great care: the publisher does not merely edit the manuscripts but comes up with suggestions to writers, who are informed about each phase of the book production: of editing, page-selling, press-work, cover design - nothing can happen or be altered without the author's consent; all translations are checked by a lector; contract is not an unquestioned application of the pattern of the one-party regime but an individually elaborated document; royalties are not shamefully low; it is the publisher who distributes the published volume, who also collects press reactions; information about the books can be found on the publisher's website; the volumes themselves can also be purchased via internet; all in all each book is published as an item which is created as a part of a thoroughly elaborated conception.

All this should not be an exception, but unfortunately it is. At certain places everything can be more important than the author or even the book to be published: the main motive is the income which according to the owner is not relat-

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ed either to the intellectual value of the author or to the parameters of the volume as a product. At other places there is almost a struggle with the colleagues to make them understand that the pleasure of the author is shared by the publisher since none of them can exist without the other. Some companies simply lack the necessary infrastructure (employees, machines, cars) which are necessary for the above mentioned to be executed.

Of course the greatest problem is the out-of-date attitude. Nowadays culture is not some superior, almost religious ideal which keeps together and preserves Hungarians and to which everybody should bow (it is better so because monuments can be respected but cannot be related to and to love them is far more difficult) - culture (especially in the sphere of publishing) is simply an intellectual commodity, which has to stand its ground in the market; and it is in the market it has to stand its ground. There are still some who expect the Hungarian government (in the name of unity of Hungarians and the misery of Hungarians over the border and similar causes) to support the opening of a Hungarian bookshop in Transylvania and cannot understand that today things do not work like that any more.

The other major problem is the mixing and confusion of standards. It is apparent from the situation described above that in Transylvania a book is either beautiful but not good or is good but not nice and exceptions remain exceptions. This would still not be thwarting (that is what there is, this is what we are capable of, that is all we can do) but there are those who speechify about Albert Szenci Molnár, János Apáczai Csere, Miklós Misztótfalusi Kis and others - "our great ancestors" - hoping for and sometimes gaining advantages. Whoever would apologise that "he has understood the laws of market" I would reply that anyone who sells sausage as weenie is not a businessman but a scoundrel. Why does it happen that the Kalligram in Pozsony can publish Mészöly, Thomas Bernhard, Céline, Kukorelly while Hungarian publishers in Transylvania are already glad to publish a work of one contemporary Hungarian writer? Why does the Kalligram have an editorial branch-office in Budapest while none of the Transylvanian publishers? "The crown..." -begins the sentence of those who have not understood anything and who are seemingly up-to-date but in fact have been out-of-date for long (see Hegel). The crown is worth so and so much Forints; the crown is made of gold ... they are wrong. Manoeuvring connections in a successful, elegant, generous and discrete way is such a science or an art that Transylvanian publishers are hardly familiar with. Raising money - means either such a remorseless begging that one feels like starting to scratch at once or it is an activity below our dignity (as if we had any pride left). It is not a skill like handling a ball for a football player or conducting for a conductor.

What could be the solution? How could a viable and high-standard publish-

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ing system be created? First of all such an organisation should be established which works for publishers but is equally near to each of them just to avoid suspicion of any of them and keeps an eye on all book events and intermediates between organisers and Hungarian publishers in Romania. Those publishers who issue unedited manuscript should be excluded (it has happened in the Uplands! - see "korona"). Better criteria and circumstances should be elaborated and provided for book publishing. (e.g.: publishers should attach a brief recommendation to every manuscript, which summarises the content, assesses its style, informs about its aim etc. I have learned recently that this informative material is not submitted to the two lectors, who criticise the work - so the danger of the "mishearing" of the "evaluated" work obviously remains.) Most important of all: we have to focus on the present, not the past. All in all we are not contemporaries of Apáczai but of Alexandra book-house. One can go on whining or be glad about it as well as can remain indifferent - but we cannot possibly ignore it.

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Politics
and
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