

## Languages, Identities, and Transformations in András Ferenc Kovács's Poetry

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### ABSTRACT

András Ferenc Kovács (1959–2023) was a contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian poet, translator, and editor, renowned for his innovative and multifaceted contributions to modern Hungarian literature. His poetry blends traditional lyricism with postmodern techniques, emphasizing intertextuality, allusions, and irony. In his poems, self-irony, rhetorical play, fragmented or deformed words, and nonsense serve the same purpose as the increasingly complex allegorization: exposing the mechanisms of power that insidiously undermine culture, language, and identity. Simultaneously, within certain socio-political contexts, his works highlight the morally questionable compromises of literary life under the shadow of the communist dictatorship. Kovács's fragmented language and surreal imagery underscore the constraints of censorship and the absurdities of power. Themes of Transylvanian Hungarian identity emerge in his allegorical explorations, often layered with irony and self-reflection.

The study examines how András Ferenc Kovács's poetry uniquely combines traditional lyricism with postmodern fragmentation, creating a layered dialogue with cultural and poetic heritage.

**Keywords:** Transylvanian Hungarian poetry, contemporary literature, masks and transformations, poetic role, communist and post-communist period

## 1. Masks and Voices

When examining Transylvanian Hungarian poetry of the 1980s, alongside the lyrical works of László Király<sup>1</sup> and Géza Szőcs<sup>2</sup> (see Szilveszter 2020, 311–313), it is perhaps primarily the first two collections of András Ferenc Kovács – *Tengerész Henrik intelmei* [The Admonitions of Henry the Sailor] (1983) and *Tűzföld hava* [The Winter of Tierra del Fuego] (1988) – that are characterised a mode of expression that later, with varying emphasis, became a guiding force for the post-transition generations of poets. This poetry exhibits an unusual richness, blending old Hungarian lyrical traditions with the 20<sup>th</sup> century vernacular, or the theatre jargon, which are as much present as the literature and mythology of classical literature and mythology. An informal tone, alternating between fragments from the works of – in some cases fictional – French and Spanish authors, Anglo-Saxon poetry traditions and the gestures of commedia dell’arte figures, reveals itself in a unique poetic space, whose inalienable characteristic is the postmodern technique of allusion and citation, the hiding individual moving between texts, the clown mask, and allegorization.

Instead of the avant-garde clichés, András Ferenc Kovács’s first two books of poems are defined by classicization, traditional forms and genres, a light and ironic creative attitude that contemporary critics labelled, for lack of a better term, as role-playing, reminiscent primarily of troubadour lyricism (Szigeti 2017, 33–41), an attitude which looks with some scepticism at the social and community building role of language and poetry. This lyrical attitude contains dialogue with the poetic legacy of Bálint Balassi, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz, or even Jenő Dsida *Episztolatörökép apámhoz* [Epistolary Fragment to My Father], *Köröcskéző maszkabál* [Masked Ball in Circles], *Naiv glossza* [Naive Gloss]. It is characterised by the desire for a distinctly biographical, elegiac portrayal of a contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian identity and living spaces, radically different from the traditional Transylvanian

1 László Király (1943–) Transylvanian Hungarian poet, writer and translator, born in Sóvárad, held a degree in Hungarian Language and Literature (Babeş–Bolyai University, Kolozsvár), worked initially as a teacher before he became a reporter (Előre), and later editor of Utunk (Helikon from 1989 onwards).

2 Géza Szőcs (1953–2020) Transylvanian Hungarian poet and politician, son of István Szőcs, writer and translator. After 1986, he went into political exile in Switzerland, in Geneva, where he worked as a journalist. In 1990, Szőcs returned to his natal land, and was active in the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ), for which he sat from 1990 to 1992 in the Romanian Senate. From 1993 onward, he lived in Hungary. He served as Secretary of State for Culture of the Ministry of National Resources in Hungary from 2010 to 2012. In 2011, he was elected president of the Hungarian PEN Club.

perspective:<sup>3</sup> *Il Transilvano* [The Transylvanian], *Vásárhelyi passió* [Marosvásárhely Passion], *A hómezőn fekete lovasok* [Black Riders on the Snowfield]; as well as by role-playing that hides the true face of the self behind various texts, quotes, theatrical gestures and masks of real or imaginary figures: *Pulcinellofohásza, szerenádja Pulcinellához* [Pulcinello's Supplication, Serenade to Pulcinella], *Juvenalis Egyiptomban*, [Juvenal in Egypt], *Andalúz költő románca* [Romance of an Andalusian Poet]. “In the works of András Ferenc Kovács – as Ernő Kulcsár Szabó observes –, quotation, fictional and real allusions, the disassembling and assembling of the voices in a new way, and the relativization of the lyrical speaker – occurring through the historical complexity of the formal tradition – give rise to a poetics that anticipates several versions of postmodern Hungarian poetry” (Kulcsár Szabó 2004, 253).<sup>4</sup>

Simultaneously, the turn toward tradition in Kovács's 1980s work is realised not only through the palimpsest-like layering of meaning dimensions, the interplay of various strata of culture and historicity, but also through the virtuously diverse, capable of evoking both the lightness of Villon's poetry or the voice of Milán Füst:<sup>5</sup>

Like fierce caravans, oh, blessed torments travel across  
the Arabias of broken bodies, traders in dreams –  
offering written pitchers, carpets of spheres! My heart  
too is but a handful of pearls – exchangeable for dust, scatterable  
in the words of nomadic days... Oh, nothing that can be bartered for  
Berber wind,  
you are both beautiful and terrible – the watchfires of tent camps  
frozen on the tusk of the moon, you, the rising of  
warlike camels, the death of chess pieces in desert light  
*Mint ádáz karavánok, ó!* [Like Fierce Caravans, Oh!]  
(*Tűzföld hava* [The Winter of Tierra del Fuego] 1988, 13.)

This orientation does not suggest that the poems lack political engagement, that they are detached from communal issues, or are independent of the realities of the era. On the contrary, due to

3 Transylvanism mainly consisted of three different ideological orientations: emphasizing the rights of Hungarian speakers to of surviving on the native land as a moral imperative, highlighting the specificity of “Transylvanian Spirit”, and creating the historical background of national consciousness (Szávai 2004, 166–179).

4 All quoted texts and poems appear in my own translation.

5 Milán Füst (1888–1967) was a Hungarian poet and writer known for his introspective and deeply philosophical poetry. His work often explores themes of existential angst, loneliness, and the complexity of human emotions. Füst's style is marked by its modernist tendencies, combining lyrical intensity with a reflective, almost meditative tone. Though his poetry was less recognized during his lifetime, it has since gained appreciation for its depth and originality. He was also influenced by European literary traditions, blending them with a unique, personal voice.

rhetorical play and self-reflection, these poems often employ a mode of expression in which the communist dictatorship, the poet's role, and the individual's relationship with power appear in a distorted mirror. This is evident even in the first poem of the *Tengerész Henrik intelmei* [The Admonitions of Henry the Sailor] collection, *Ballada megadott téma* [Ballad on a Given Theme], which ironically reflects the reality of compromises made in the hope of success, where rebellious behaviour is reclassified as opportunistic compliance:

poetry contests and mastersingers  
 I have to laugh that I am swaggering here  
 stumbling around puppets, grinning  
 in a crowded dive among a thousand pipers  
 dissected nothing, precious misery  
 acute color blindness, pumped-up arrogance  
 the theme is lousy but fits perfectly here  
 I die of thirst beside the fountain's water  
 (*Tengerész Henrik intelmei* [The Admonitions of Henry the Sailor]  
 1983, 5).

The identification with Villon's vagabond role serves both the dialogue between texts that expand the rhetorical horizon of the poem and the (re)creation of a lyrical situation connected to the updated discourse on Transylvanian Hungarian identity. The refrain, which can be understood as a literal quotation – although in some respects it actually prevents access to the “concrete” meaning of the poem – ironically points to the ethical questions of literary life, under the shadow of communist state power, as well as the societal/intellectual role of poetry. Therefore, the poem may be seen as rejecting compromises made with the system to achieve certain cultural concessions or personal positions, and a refusal of the personality cult: “Tiny prince, your parade is horribly dull / don't be merciful, I don't plead for grace / today the world falls this way, tomorrow that way/ and we die of thirst beside the fountain's water.”

The inseparability of poetry and political stance, the reassessment of the position of literature, or the strategy of reading between the lines, all find themselves in an ironic situation here, just like the authenticity of the poetic voice or the acceptance of the lyrical pose as a genuine portrait. The poem *Dadogódia-dal* [Stammerer's Triumph] also aims at revealing the compromising, conventional attitudes and questioning the real value of the artwork and the validity of the poet's role:

ave caesar, you hired us for lies  
 why should we care now  
 about Parnassus' laurels if we live on pay  
 (*Tengerész Henrik intelmei* [The Admonitions of Henry the Sailor].  
 1983, 50).

From this perspective, it becomes clear that artistic freedom in a dictatorship is entirely subject to the dual burden of state censorship and the expectations of the audience, independent of the creator's will: "raging circus, bitter bread / exiled poets grinned they fled / the century's slashed its veins caesar." At the same time, András Ferenc Kovács's 1983 poetry book, *Tengerész Henrik intelmei* [The Admonitions of Henry the Sailor], also reflects a style characteristic of the contemporary verses of Aladár Lászlóffy<sup>6</sup> and László Király, reminiscent of the mood of Menippean satires. In the apocalyptic vision of poems like *Salétrompuszta* [Nitre Plain] or *Szélnek ereszttet menazsériák* [Menageries Scattered to the Wind], circus performers and props become figures of the here and now, embodying the obliteration of tradition and culture, reflecting a world of lacking values: "they have arrived, they are all circling here / uninvited, the St. Vitus dancers and the stump / orators here put on their show..." (*Tengerész Henrik intelmei* [The Admonitions of Henry the Sailor] 1983, 75). In this context, the lyrical identity takes on a diffuse historical form. The poems present a wandering soul, an individual who belongs to nowhere, a temporally and spatially homeless figure, experiencing a lack of freedom, as well as the inhumanity of a chaotic world. All of these are conveyed through the forced assumption of the clown mask and the vagabond role. In this artistic orientation, the return to traditional genres and the dialogue between texts become as important as the allegorical depiction. "The poet taking cover behind the costumes – as Éva Cs. Gyimesi notes in her analysis – is, in fact, restlessly searching for a meaning hidden from him. The passion of this search transcends the bleakness of an absurd philosophy of existence: behind the mask of the modern clown, the comedian weeps, no matter how well he disguises it" (Cs. Gyimesi 1999, 260).

Several poems in András Ferenc Kovács's 1988 poetry collection *Tűzföld hava* [The Winter of Tierra del Fuego], including *Alkony vak hegedőssel* [Twilight with a Blind Fiddler] and *Távoli tájkép térzenével* [Distant Landscape with a Brass Band], can essentially be associated with this allegorical field of meaning, depicting characters such as the minstrel, the fairground musician, the circus performer, and the goliard. Closely connected to lyrical tradition and history, these poems convey motifs of existential alienation and threat, presenting a peculiar "reality" in which ideological oppression and the intellectual's vulnerability to power come to the forefront. In these poems, the central dilemma revolves around the choice between surrendering one's individuality for total assimilation and embracing the status of a *persona non grata*: "Tremble at the morning / trumpet call – it cries for you / and shatters

6 Aladár Lászlóffy (1937–2009) Transylvanian Hungarian poet, writer, essayist. From 1961 on he worked as an editor for Állami Irodalmi Kiadó [National Literary Publisher], later for the Napsugár, Dacia Könyvkiadó [Dacia Publisher], Előre and Utunk journals (from 1989 Helikon). His work has been honored with several prizes, including the Kossuth-Prize, and The Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary.

in the wind / siren requiem. Hide / in a uniform / you too, hide in a cheerful / uniform-grin // The fog is already sending / its brass bands. Shout / hooray – it's worth it, poet / you could be – free / if you were. The new hope attacks / with trombones, / frayed trumpet fire" (*Távoli tájkép térzenével* [Distant Landscape with a Brass Band], *Túzföld hava* [The Winter of Tierra del Fuego]. 1988, 36).

In the poems of András Ferenc Kovács from the 1980s, the conscious dismantling of linearity, syntactic, and grammatical structures can, in a certain reading, ironically point to censorship imposed on artistic texts or the dictatorial creative or receptive attitudes. Fragmented words and half-sentences often crystallise new meanings. The lines in *Übuper utazása Micsináljunkban* [Ubu Père's Journey in Whatchagonnado] excellently illustrate this poetic orientation:

ubu cae shark the idiotic ROlation  
gesticulating on a rocket, squeaks and chops  
whirling and prances about, it jigs and joggles  
breezy propaganda gossips around it  
grandmasters and noble dumb-noses  
everyone who claps licks the cornucopia  
but he twangs, chatters, farts far away  
jiggles home with a tin whistle  
(*Tengerész Henrik intelmei* [The Admonitions of Henry the Sailor]. 1983, 52).

The mutilated, deformed words or gibberish here may serve a similar purpose as the allegorization that escalates to the point of incomprehensibility: exposing the power machine that grinds down culture, language, and identity. However, the poetic expression, dismantled to the point of meaninglessness – while seemingly renouncing any clear connection to external reality – also meets the demands of a discourse conducted against power.

In her essay entitled *Kritikai mozaik* [Critical Mosaic] Éva Cs. Gyímesi states the following: "The experience of reading poetry proves that the internal coordinates of the poetic situation can never completely detach themselves from the external coordinate system of the situation – except, perhaps, in the form of utopia. In most cases, only the possibility of symbolically and metaphorically modelling the situation remains, without the prospect of surpassing it. The imagery and metaphors are fundamentally shaped by the distinctive geographical-historical space, the world that poetry considers its homeland, its birthplace" (Cs. Gyímesi 1999, 9). This passage is not only valid as a diagnosis for the literary works analysed but also as a self-reflective, intellectual confession of a state of existence in communism.

## 2. Playing with the Old Ones

After the regime change in Romania, in the poetry of András Ferenc Kovács, the tradition that was already characteristic of the volumes of the 1980s seems to be complete: playing with different avatars, pseudo-identities, and alternating language registers, intertextual references, and forms of speech (see Lőrincz 2006, 142–150). In these poems, the lyrical self, hidden behind fictitious locations and characters, often appears in an indeterminate linguistic and historical context (see Demény 2017, 101–104). This multiplicity of the poem's rhetorical dimensions makes it difficult to clearly determine the identity of the "real" speaker. Self-portrait-like texts, such as *Be jó ismerni KAF urat!* [How Nice to Know Mr. KAF!] and *A kaffogás művészete* [The Art of Barking], visibly play on the identity of the creator and the speaker; but the individuals in the *Jack Cole*, *Caius Licinius Calvus*, or René Sándor Lázáry poems are not so closely tied to the schematic traits of the actual author. The origin in these works is subject to a diffuse movement, which, through multiple layers of concealment, prevents the coordinates of the depicted space and time or the lyrical identity from being associated with real-life events or the figure of the biographical author.

It may suffice to mention here the poems written under the name of René Sándor Lázáry in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which are also marked as translations or adaptations in their subtitles: *Kereskedő Alexandriából. Fordítás-próbák Sir Archibald Blacksmith révén, görögből* [Merchant from Alexandria. Translation Attempts via Sir Archibald Blacksmith, from Greek], *La primavera (Japán rajzok Julimnak)* [La Primavera (Japanese Drawings for My Julie)], and *Lenge, latin szerenád (Petronius Arbiter éneke)* [Light, Latin Serenade (A Song by Petronius Arbiter)].

The "Description de l'Égypte" (*Verses Napló Kairótól Núbiáig*) ["Description de l'Égypte" (Diary of Poems from Cairo to Nubia], signed by the alter ego René Sándor Lázáry, is such a play with words and dream scenes. Ironically, the location and the experience associated with it seem to be the source of the "travel diary" here, but these fictitious events are actually created only by the stream of the linguistic field, sounds, sonority, and names. The speaker himself alludes to the imaginary nature of the "narrated" story:

*Memphis, on the 25th of May, 1879*  
 Oh, how much green is pil'd up in the Journal –  
 Poor me, I almost believe it!  
 Beyond Memphis, at Dahshur, on the Nile  
 A cow carcass grazes on holy water... (Jelenkor 2002, 3: 305.)

The poem thus is replaced into the original environment of lyricism, music, and language, into the gravitational field of a self-creating rhetorical horizon, whose sole purpose is the play with words, since

the “individual” and the “message” can both be put in parentheses. The seemingly tragic speech, which is actually based on the superficiality of poetic tradition, essentially exposes the fictional nature of historical consciousness:

*Gizeh, on the 17th of May, 1879*  
 Pyramid upon pyramid... What a monotonous refrain!  
 Khufu rhymes with Menkaure and Khafre,  
 And we chew on sherbet and schnaps!  
 In vain did Khufu build a bigger one perhaps –  
 You arrogant pyramid, you'll wear away soon enough!  
 [...]

*Karnak, on the 7th of July, 1879*  
 Amon sails his crafted boat into the night:  
 A solemn ray rocks on Thutmose's sacred lake.  
 The young Khonsu now's crossing the dream:  
 The moon is white, deathly silent the toll-house...  
 I too will be gone – and the word won't pain my mouth.

The gibberish the allusions, and deliberate anachronisms evoke the mood of Menippean satire, as does the presence of footnotes,<sup>7</sup> playful name creations, or various techniques of genre and form mixing.

Alongside the clown mask and identity-multiplying postmodern playfulness, however, the relationship to cultural and poetical tradition, including Transylvania and Hungarian identity, is also emphasised in András Ferenc Kovács's poetry of the last two and a half decades. A distinctive type of this orientation is represented by works in which references to one or another characteristic of minority existence can be read as part of a broader textual context, as a detail of a consistently constructed allegorical image, connected to a situation based on some analogy, to a foreign ethnic group, historical figures, or events. This depiction is looking back to the characteristic speech type of Transylvanian Hungarian poetry in the 1970s and 1980s, which, under the dual burden of social expectations and censorship, subordinated the concrete references in the poem to the gestures of meaning multiplication, rhetorical play, and ironic alienation. The poem *Anonymus Smyrnaeushoz!*

7 A footnote beneath the poem, detailing the fictitious experiences of the journey: “(On the morrow, by vessel unto Dabud; thereafter: Tafa, Beit-el-Wali, Kalabsha, Dendur, Gerf Hussein, El-Dakka, Quban, El-Maharraqa, Wadi es-Sebua, Amada, Derr, Aniba, Qasr Ibrim; even unto Ipsambul, that is, Abu Simbel. My Nubian sojourn proved at whiles perchance yet more wondrous and more dreadful than all that had gone before. The desolate heat, the grandeur and multitude of marvels, together with mine own unflagging ardour, at length overcame me: I was spent, unable to write, or scarce set down aught save sundry jottings, prose-like impressions, and those but laboriously, in fragments, with trembling hand [...] It is the ninth day of October in the year 1879, close upon midnight, with jackals crying round about. The day after tomorrow it would already be time to move on... Final destination: Napata – Meroë – Khartoum! Done!)”

[To *Anonymous Smyrnaeus!*], dated 1990, may be the first example of a lyrical attitude that evokes the voice of Greco-Roman poetry in such a way that apostrophic speech, recalling the turbulent centuries of European culture – in an allegorical reading sensitive to the identity of the creator and the actual message –, prevails as a reflection on the situation and struggles of Hungarians in Transylvania:

forget not, traveller, the taste of the last word  
 in your mouth the triumphant shouts of arsonists  
 the wise generations of library fires  
 [...]  
 forget not, traveler, the imperial desire  
 the universal reconciliation of ashes,  
 the abduction of words, the conquest of letters,  
 forget not the counter empire of inner speech.  
 (Üdvözlet a vesztesnek [Greeting to the Defeated]. 1994, 22).

Among the Kavafis transcripts published in 2005, the poem *Gyászkórusok* [Funeral Choruses] also fulfils this play with (fictional) historicity, allowing the ironic-allegorical orientation of the search for identity to build upon the well-known motifs of Greco-Roman culture and literature (see Kerti 2019, 59–70). Here, too, the dialogue with tradition is connected to a lyrical context that, in a certain reading, becomes capable of recreating the topoi of “Transylvanian Hungarian identity”:

Advancing, or always retreating,  
 from defeat to new triumph,  
 from triumphs to continuous defeats,  
 from exile to banishment,  
 always opposing, or always maneuvering,  
 always fleeing to feasts,  
 all patriots, all traitors too:  
 Sparta's friends, Persia's friends  
 Spartan mercenaries, Mede leaders all!  
 (Jelenkor. 2005, 10: 889)

However, in these allegorical readings, the content of statements relating to Transylvanian Hungarians instantly dissipates the moment we separate the text from the information about the real author's identity, namely András Ferenc Kovács, the poet of Marosvásárhely.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, due to the unrevealability of the speaker's identity and the emphasis on the “transcript” character of the poem, this dimension of meaning can be overwritten by an interpretation that evokes classical Greek heroes, the characteristics of the Athens–Sparta–Persia) relationship, and the

8 Tg-Mureş, Romania.

traditions of ancient history and philosophy. In this way, the reliance on cultural memory in András Ferenc Kovács's poems foregrounds the experience of otherness, highlighting the awareness that, from a postmodern perspective, dialogue with historical texts, literary works, and the canonised national tradition is at the same time a hermeneutic and deconstructive relationship. According to László Bedecs, such poetic masks "make it impossible to identify the poet, that is, to assign the prophetic voice, while simultaneously freeing the poet from expectations and obligations" (Bedecs 2003, 202).

Furthermore, the alter egos in András Ferenc Kovács's texts, such as the dual alienating techniques of the poems of René Sándor Lázáry, which build on both fictional personality and fictitious dating, allow the speaker to develop a multidirectional approach. This, on the one hand, by adhering to traditional forms of poetry, evokes figures, events, and requisites of the national past, while on the other hand, it maintains an ironic distance from this extremely selective, ideological, illusion-based horizon, which is subordinated to the self-righteousness of collective memory and amnesia, as well as to the interests of those in power. For instance, the poem *Edények romlása* [Decay of Pots], signed by René Sándor Lázáry, reviews the history of Transylvania from the era of the Principality onwards through the metamorphosis of a wine cup that has advanced to the status of a church chalice. The elevated diction and archaization, reminiscent of 16–18<sup>th</sup> century historical songs, reinforce the authenticity of the "speaker", as well as the current validity of the "message", but also maintain a playful-ironic distance, especially because the narration comes from the mouth of a fictitious person who lived at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries:

Anna Bornemissza was a diligent housekeeper,  
This clean jug is from her kitchen:  
Perhaps Apafi himself poured wine from it,  
And a servant of the emperor drank it before him!  
Thieving times are upon old goblets –  
We constantly diminish, arguing over words,  
Hope once devout has turned into chatter,  
Our faith rings hollow, a dented drinking vessel.  
(*Tiszatáj*. 1995, 9: 30–31.)

The duality of pathos and irony is heightened by the imitation of the speech style of the Reformed preachers, the musicality produced by pure rhymes, the quickening pace of the narrative, and the sententious conclusion: "No miracle or place shall be given to us anew. / We exist ... Like a silver communion chalice: / Its luster wears from many bitter mouths, / Until it becomes a copper cup at the final reckoning."

This same tone essentially characterises the texts of *Kettős portré Erdélyből* [Double Portrait from Transylvania], *Díárium* [Diarium], *Metamorphoses Transylvaniae*, [Metamorphoses Transylvaniae], and

*Erdélyi kripta: Pantheon* [Transylvanian Crypt: Pantheon], signed by René Sándor Lázáry, published in the mid-1990s, with fictitious dates between 1921 and 1924. The awareness of the irreparability of historical crimes, as well as the need to address the contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian society, which builds castles in the air from illusions of the grandeur of the national past, can be discerned in these poems. Internal rhymes and references to ancient mythology serve the same purpose here as the archaisms, the gestures of alienating the text, as well as the presence of the footnotes – simply dubbed “philological gags” by Gábor Képes (2004, 105) –: they promote a playful-ironic detachment and self-reflection, that is, the need for an attitude facing reality:

He honours God – jovial Péter Bod:  
 No blight touches him, nor shallow doubt.  
 She called upon His face, enclosed in grace –  
 In vain did Árva Kata Bethlen lament.  
 Wise Hungarian Athena, mournful Minerva,  
 Who gains redeeming cheer through duty's chain now?  
 We whisper pale, like old parchments:  
 For naught – stiffened into martyrs, saints.  
 (*Kettős portré Erdélyből* [Double Portrait from Transylvania] Forrás. 1995, 9: 2)

The proliferation of the lyrical tradition in these poems points not only to the possibility of recreating reality as fiction, but also to the existence of humans and culture, the individual and the world in language and their dependence on language. Perhaps in this relation we should interpret *Psalmus Transsylvanicus* [Psalmus Transsylvanicus], in which the elevated tone and the attempt at self-definition based solely on linguistic identity appear in the context of role-play-like dialogue that ironically reinterprets the psalm of the Reformed priest of the 16–17<sup>th</sup> century Albert Szenczi Molnár:

In you we trusted from our ancestors' falling,  
 Psalm, you were our shelter,  
 When there were no words left,  
 And home was but formed from dust –  
 No symbol on our tattered flag,  
 Only our hearts flap in times of shame.  
 (Üdvözlet a vesztesnek [Greeting to the Defeated]. 1994, 33)

However, it seems obvious that this mode of speech perceives the entire Christian cultural sphere as only a symbolically accessible, formal dimension, which can still be protected by the energies of community and social cohesion from disintegration for a while, but whose essence can be considered – at least for the self – lost forever. The absence of transcendence and its transfer into a profane, desacralized space, opened

by the Reformation and completely emptied in modernism, thus puts the genre itself in quotation marks, regardless of the fact that at the level of stylistic imitation the poem is closely tied to the text of *Psalm 90*.

In conclusion, it may be argued that in András Ferenc Kovács's poetry, the creative engagement with language and tradition entails not only a poetic orientation but also a distinctly ideological positioning. In this context, postmodern identity is frequently interwoven with the motifs of Transylvanian discourses, through which the subject's selfhood is articulated within a sharply delineated historical and textual framework. The fractured linguistic texture and surrealist imagery function not merely as aesthetic gestures but as indices of the systemic constraints of censorship and the absurdist logic inherent in authoritarianism. Through the deployment of alter egos and the construction of fictive topographies, Kovács destabilizes conventional boundaries between biography, historiography, and fiction, producing a poetics that oscillates between the personal and the collective, the historical and the fabulated.

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