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**“CURSED FREEDOM” – COEXISTENCE OF NATION(ALITIE)S
IN THE PROSE OF JÓZSEF NYÍRŐ AND MIHÁLY BERNULA**



The article points out the importance of human coexistence of nations and nationalities in the Central and Eastern European space-time of the 1930s. It presents the basic attributes of cultural and literary factors from the aspect of Hungarians, Romanians and Slovaks. It treats important historical events after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary (1918) and their effects on the concrete life of simple people in the majority and minority mode. It characterizes the sources, features and creative perspectives of the movement of so-called “folk writers”. It is based on the theoretical findings of important culturologists, philosophers, journalists and literary scientists of mentioned chronotopes. He applies the individual theorems to the specific development of this literary group in symbiosis with the European and Hungarian traditions of the idea of freedom. First of all, it is based on the minority position of Hungarians/Szeklers in Romania/Transylvania, which is concretized on the basis of an analytical interpretation of József Nyíró’s novel *Az én népem* [Eng. *My people*, 1935]. It presents the biography of this Hungarian – Transylvanian writer and emphasizes his specific/artistic authoring practices. In the background of the narrative moments, it notices the question of freedom and coexistence of Hungarians and Romanians in a small closed micro-society of a contemporary village. In the next part, the article – in a similar spirit – deals with the opposite view of the description of not always problem-free coexistence of Hungarians and Slovaks in Hungary during the great economic crisis in the work of Mihály Bernula *Elátkozott idők – Preklatie časy* [Eng. *Cursed Times*, 1998]. This time, on the basis of the Treaty of Trianon, the Hungarians are in minority. Of course, the issue of historically, politically, socially, culturally or literally determined “cursed freedom” is always analyzed, and it is concluded that the most important thing is the peaceful coexistence of nations and nationalities – independently of various turbulences in time and space.

Keywords: minority existence, freedom, interpretation, József Nyíró, Mihály Bernula.

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Transylvania is a mystical, magical country, bearing the seal of history and legends. For many centuries, Hungarians, Romanians, Saxons, Slovaks live there side by side. At the same time, each of them preserves their culture; however, they still enrich each other. In the background of established local traditions, therefore, nations and nationalities living in this space-time constantly “... must get to know each other ... They must be aware of the concept of mutual mental belonging; the three nations / nationalities must come spiritually closer together; this is a serious commitment and role of the Transylvanian writer” [Széfeddin 2013, 26]. Emphasis is also placed on peaceful coexistence, as “... these people can only understand and respect each other if they get to know each other’s external and internal qualities” [O. Nagy 2013, 31]. Social interaction among these nationalities has a great influence on individual personality development and the development of an individual’s characteristic features such as possessing appropriate problem-solving skills, life management skills, being tolerant and creative, since these personality traits “... do not evolve in a vacuum, creative behaviour can be the result of cooperation and social interaction” [Puskás 2020, 39]. At this background: “The political turbulence brought about by 1918 went down in history as the impetus for the emergence of new borders in Europe. The new territorial division determined the next stage in the history of the Lowlanders, which found themselves in the newly formed states from day to day. An important research source for the evaluation of these changes as a result of the turning point of 1918 is the literary work of Lowlanders, who responded to 1918 with prose, poetic and dramatic works” [Pavelcová 2019, s. 235].

Writers of Hungarian nationality from this region have fully established themselves in the broader Hungarian literary context. The historical event of 1918 (i.e. the disintegration of Austria-Hungary) was a source for the creation of Hungarian literature in Transylvania (Romania), because literature remained “... relatively the best-preserved area of Hungarian spiritual life, which responded most up-to-date and flexibly to the problems of the time. This situation significantly increased its ideological role, which was also highlighted by the crisis situation at the turn of the 20s and 30s, and the collapse of traditional spiritual-political currents” [Salamon 1982, 47]. The basic effort of the writers in this new chronotope became the



concretization of the minority destiny of the Hungarians. Individual (prosaic) texts gradually reflected the extraordinary instinct of life of this national minority, whose representatives believed that "... writing has a mission. They did not just want to guard the idea of Hungary; they believed that fate had special plans for their national life. Transylvania thus received European problems of coexistence of nations / nationalities on a daily basis. They wanted to be an example in that as well" [Czine 1988, 516]. In the field of comprehensively understood foreign affairs, authors proclaimed "... cooperation of small Eastern European nations; in culture / education a deep feeling of Hungary; on the question of faith, the Hungarian form of Christian religious feeling" [idea of László Németh, a certain spiritual father of the so-called folk authors in Hungary; Bimbó 1967, 53]. These authors understood literature as a means of uplifting society. By the way, at the same time, people have reported on the active social and literary activities of the age, elements of travelling was emerged. Mihály Guhr has been "... a great supporter of visual artists, actors and literary creators. He encouraged them in the work..." [Dobay 2021, 36]. He and other authors accurately identified the long-term poverty and suffering of millions, the expulsion of much of society for political and social reasons, or the day-to-day injustice. The village with its many peculiar problems became their source of inspiration. In their fiction texts they used the knowledge of folk culture, i.e. preserved and proven traditions of the common people. In Romania, between the two world wars, there was also a similar movement as in Hungary – the so-called poporanism. Its members-authors sought a literary treatment of the problems of agriculture; their most common theme was the difficult life and misery of poor villagers.

Of course, the so-called folk authors were also organized in contemporary Hungary, i.e. in the mother country, sharing time and ideology – from the Hungarian and Slovak aspects – with compatriot authors. This current, which was created around 1928 and consolidated at the beginning of the next decade, was characterized by a commitment to the people and the nation, moral ties and efforts to create a society on new – more socially just – foundations. The so-called movement of folk authors was actually "... a demanding spiritual current which tried to give comprehensive solutions / programs to the Hungarian problems, while having its own worldview on society, history, progress..." [Révai 1946, 150]. Hence it was "... one of the most varied and complex phenomena of Hungarian history of the 20th century" [Papp 2012, 30]. Gradually, there were also movements in the geographical areas of the former Austria-Hungary, which after the Treaty of Trianon (1920) fell to other states – as for example Transylvania to Romania. Cultural and literary groups, of course, primarily sought answers to questions of the minority existence of Hungarians in the area; for example, in the spirit of the question where and how the most pressing problems can be captured in the intricate contours of the changed ‚Hungarian‘ world so as to create a universal, modern and promising, yet meaningful, Hungarian literature. Adherence to the people from a literary point of view meant associating with "Hungarian" matters of a spiritual nature in the background of the representation and concretization of its current problems. In the background of the so-called folk writers "... they did not want to transfer – and thus save – the stylistic popularity of the 19th century to the 20th century, but to combine a deeper, more serious, society creating humanity with the spiritual program of the nation" [Bíró 2001, 136]. However, it should be emphasized that the ‚folk‘ attribute does not only signify an author who explicitly comes from peasant roots and writes in a ‚folk‘ style, however one that "... commits himself to identification with the people, has a common destiny with them and is an integral part of the eternal Hungarian spirit, which is primarily guarded by the peasantry" [Salamon 1992, 321]. In the background, "... when the people came to the fore, the fact that several of the new group came from the peasantry did not play a major role. As a result, new answers had to be found to the old questions" [Juhász Pintér 2003, 9]. Thus, they were authors from diverse strata with intricate life destinies, who, however, unanimously proclaimed the important role of uplifting agriculture. A significant result of this autonomous movement was that in the background of universal ethics, European techniques and Hungarian traditions of the idea of freedom and law (with adequate social practice) were combined. These approaches clearly indicated that ethics is highly justified. On that basis the current state of society "... that is confronted with various events indicates that practical philosophy in the form of ethics is inevitable in dealing with arising situation" [Mura, Machyniak, 2014, 64]. Of course, its defense of national identity did not stand in contrast to contemporary European integration, while "... the popular idea could not allow the rejection of already tried and established forms of political and public freedom. To this it added the validation of national interests and self-identity..." [Tóth 2000, 49]. According to the Hungarian thinker and humanist István Bibó, no (larger or smaller) society can be expected to lack evident demand or a natural desire for comprehensive freedom. The specific sensitivity to Hungarian spiritual and historical traditions, the sincere desire for freedom, social ills and the identification of agricultural poverty appeared to be a certain unifying force of this group. In the background of this direction

“... thinking in the intentions of the spiritual unity of the nation, he emphasized the importance of following the fate of each individual ethnocentrically, that is, in the center of the people – and not territorially...” [Borbándi 2000, 21]. Later, in the spirit of openness to Europe, this idea ‘shifted’ in the direction that the authors “... did not want to point to the idealistic or idyllic position of the peasants, but with a realistic drawing, combined with a feeling of solidarity, to their real state” [Borbándi 1989, 143].

Significant prose writers of the mentioned chronotopes, due to the geographical conditions of the surroundings (state) in which they existed, were amongst others the Hungarian writer from Romanian Transylvania József Nyírő and the Slovak writer from Hungary Mihály (Slk. Michal) Bernula. This fact signaled “... inseparability of the movement of existence from its spatial and temporal situation. The world understood as the human life world integrates into itself the movement of existence, i. e. being-in-the-world, in the form inseparability of the stay from its temporal and spatial parameters as existentials” [Bílik 2019, 290].

József Nyírő, who was born on 28 July 1889 in the village of Zsombor (Hung. Székelyzsombor, now Rom. Jimbor), was “... a prominent figure and an important creator of Transylvania's Hungarian literature between the two world wars; one of the most popular novelists, an advocate of Szeklers and Transylvanian Hungarians. Fictionist, journalist and editor” [Váradi P. P., Lőwey L. 2013, 47], apostle, chronicler and Mikszáth of Szeklers’, Catholic priest, journalist, parliamentarian. In 1907 he graduated from the Roman Catholic Main Grammar School in Odorheiu Secuiesc (Hung. Székelyudvarhely). He studied theology at the Institute of the Priestly Seminary in Alba Iulia (Hung. Gyulafehérvár); philosophy and theology at the Collegium Pazmanianum in Vienna (Germ. Wien). He received his doctorate in theology in 1912; in the same year he was ordained a priest in Sibiu (Hung. Nagyszeben). He first taught religion in this city, then in Bistrița (Hung. Beszterce, 1914–1915). He later became a priest in the village of Chidea (Hung. Kide). After the annexation of Transylvania to Romania (1918), he left the church and married Ilona Bedő, who came from the village of Racoș (Hung. Alsórákos). Three children were born from their marriage. He first rented a mill in the village of Chidea (Hung. Kide) to support his family as a miller. For the next ten years he worked as a journalist for the Keleti Újság in the city of Cluj (Hung. Kolozsvár). In 1920, his short story Haldoklik a székely (Eng. The Szekler is dying) won the literary competition; subsequently he won first prize in the Ellenzék newspaper competition (with prose Értelek virág and Rapsonné rózsája; Eng. I understand you, flower – Mrs. Rapson’s rose). In 1923 he moved with his family to the town of Cluj (Hung. Kolozsvár), where he edited the magazine Újság. From 1923 to 1924 he was the editor-in-chief of the local cultural and literary magazine Pásztortűz. In addition, he was one of the founders of the Erdélyi Szépművés Céh group, a member of the Transylvanian Literary Society and the Zsigmond Kemény Society. In 1924, his first collection of short stories called Jézusfaragó ember (Eng. Jesus carving man) was published, which was a success in Transylvania and Hungary. From 1928 he became a senior employee of Erdélyi Helikon. He gradually became involved in the Szeklers’ literary circle. In 1931, however, he withdrew to the background: he farmed in the village of Racoș (Hung. Alsórákos). He later lived with his family in Odorheiu Secuiesc (Hung. Székelyudvarhely). After a few years, he returned to work in the Keleti Újság (from 1939 to 1942 as editor-in-chief). In 1940, his literary work was recognized with state honors – the so-called Corvinus wreath. After the Second Vienna Arbitration, he moved to Budapest and from February 14, 1942 he became a Member of the Hungarian Parliament as an invited Member of Transylvania. In the years 1942–1943 he edited the weekly Magyar Erő; in 1944 he was a senior employee of the Magyar Ünnepe newspaper. Later he became a parliamentary member in the period of the so-called arrow crosses. After the war, he was forced to flee: from 1945 he lived in the Bavarian villages of Wollaberg and Waldkirchen. As an emigrant from 1946 to 1949, he was co-editor of the Magyar Harangok newspaper. From 1948 to 1951 he held the position of the first chairman of the Association of Hungarian Journalists Abroad and the Hungarian Cultural Association (both organizations were founded in Munich, Germany). In 1950, he moved near Madrid. As an employee of the Hungarian broadcaster Spanish National Radio, he wrote political commentaries. In 1952, he joined the initiative to establish the Kossuth Lajos Publishing House in Cleveland. In the same year he was elected co-chair of the Hungarian Freedom Movement. In the background of these activities, we can say that József Nyírő actively participated in the cultural work of Hungarian emigration. This effort finally ended on October 16, 1953 in a Madrid hospital.

Based on the published opinion of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (from 2016), it should be noted, or clarified that there are no extreme political views in the literary work of József Nyírő. His priestly upbringing and admiration for Transylvania or Szeklers are, of course, reflected in his prose, which is given a special atmosphere by a mixture of the Catholic faith, the world of Szekler superstitions



and the pantheistic notion of nature. It is a socially and psychologically authentic, world of poetic depiction interesting to readers. The combination of playful twists, clear elements of the regional language and typical sayings leads to a unique authorial style. Nevertheless, his prose did not escape repeated criticism for simplifying depictions of social conflicts, naive romanticism, and false idyll in describing Szekler characters. Admittedly, the depiction of this world that constantly appears in his novels is sometimes slightly superficial. But yet: “Nyirő’s literary works show a high level of disorganization on the structural level as well as in their language use, rife with attempts at expressive rhetorical imagery, dialect phrases and single-use words...” [Huszar 2014, 311]. For this reason, too, his texts can be thought of as lectures expressing the unifying spirit of the time within micro-society, rather than as the masterpieces of a given era.

József Nyirő’s prosaic nature tends toward romance in the background of the strong mythization, idealization, and conservatism of the simple village man. He had the most frequently encoded backbone of directness and dignity in him – that is, even in the faults of life. The author writes about agriculture, using a rich well of folk culture (for example, balladism or drama of folklore itself). It describes mutual interpersonal relationships (also) in the background of love for nature (identification with it), concretizes the beauties of the mother tongue and concerns about its persistence. It sharpens the faith of the Szeklers despite a difficult – minority – fate. At the same time, he defines his own authorial idiolect with the aim that the Szeklers should identify themselves precisely (themselves) and become acquainted with Hungarian nationhood as a whole.

His novel *Az én népem* (Slk. *Môj ľud*, Eng. *My people*, 1935), which was written during his stay in the village of Racoș (Hung. *Alsórákos*), is a testimony to the most contemporary Szekler period, the unanimistic human micro-society and its superhuman struggle for continuous existence. It is a bit of an exaggeration to say that no one has ever portrayed the fate of Hungarian minority life in a gloomier and yet more peaceful, shocking and so reassuring way than József Nyirő in this novel, which convincingly points to reasons stemming not from superpower conspiracies but from the mistakes of Hungarian politics. In it, the author elevates the mountain region to the art world, using the perennial idea that the Szeklers have always lived in the collision point of the East. The description of the life, problems, crises and struggles of simple villagers in the overall desire for protection and self-preservation is guided by the whole text (minority existence, difficult economic fates of everyday life).

The story of the novel takes place in a small mountain-based Szekler village sometime between 1920 and 1935, where a new pastor of the Reformed Church – Béla Botár – comes with his young wife and children. He is welcomed and inaugurated by local Romanian government circles. The language of the new state power is already Romanian; local Hungarians also speak to Romanian officials in this language. Nevertheless, Romanians do not avoid the Hungarian / Szekler reality of the village, they give an empathic gesture about the possible use of Hungarian. The *primprétor* (chief serving judge) accepts the new pastor in his mother tongue (*pars pro toto* on behalf of the Romanian authorities). The linguistic image of the novel is quite promising at the moment: the prime minister as a Romanian / normal person / representative of power cannot be complained about. At this moment, the hope for a conflict-free, linguistically correct minority life of the Hungarians / Szeklers in the new Romania is shining.

After the inauguration ceremony, the new pastor is forced to face the reality of his new place of work. However, one person is powerless to ensure the existence of a problem-free minority, but to maintain the overall condition. That is also why Béla Botár is looking for allies. It's not an easy task, because i.a. the Romanian state does not recognize the medical degree obtained in Hungary by Miklós Mester, a respected member of the local village intelligence.

Through the person of the pastor, Nyirő depicts the political-economic-minoritarian post-Trianon suffering of the Szeklers, reveals the frustrating situation of a large part of the Transylvanian Hungarians and the hegemonic pressure of the majority culture. Nevertheless, the novel does not bear the attributes of hatred towards Romanians, nor is it generally permeated by Hungarian nationalism or chauvinism. His characters are mainly people, minority citizens of Romania, who are trying to adapt to the changed situation (of course, everyone according to their temperament). The relatively free structure of the text is united by the complex fate of the pastor. Since the inauguration, we can observe his vicissitudes of life in creative symbiosis with the minority disposition of the villagers. Within the limits of his experience, readers will receive information about far-reaching historical contexts. Everything happens around him and in connection with him. He is a character who lingers for a long time in specific events until the people accept him among themselves. The novel thus also speaks of what a clergyman can do in the life of a minority Szekler village in restoring the

faith of the inhabitants, who have already been literally oppressed by Romanian priests with their rites. However, Botár becomes forsaken, he does not receive support from the state or from his church. At the same time, dramas take place every day in the lives of the characters (for example, when the quarrelsome Romanian chief service judge Pompeiu enchants the pastor's wife, causing a family crisis). The teacher becomes a native to get a job in a Romanian public school. From episode to episode, the author not only describes the life of Szeklers under Romanian rule, but also points out that they are not innocent either.

Social problems also complicate everyday life: state aid is delayed, even though the mayor of Bucharest himself provides assistance for the pastor and his family. The only decisive Romanian figure is not static. In the background, we can feel the constant anonymous presence of state power, but the depiction of the Romanian-Hungarian conflict is not schematic. Nevertheless, in the end, unfortunately, the Hungarian parish's intercultural communication with the Romanians is not functional, because as a minority representative it is not an adequate communication partner for the Romanian state. In this intercultural experience "... the process of transformation begins, which teaches the community that Szekler Hungarian, which is perceived as natural, is unprotected. From this springs what we can call the interculturally motivated sense of identity consciousness..." [Dani 2014, 211]. However, the final message of the novel is optimistic: people should not be allowed to break even in directly untenable circumstances; a church school for a national minority is also being built, in which Hungarian will be taught, and parents are glad that their children can be educated in their mother tongue. On the other side, this way is also extraordinary useful, too, because it develops "... a language repertoire that applies all language skills, knowledge and experience. The children and pupils of citizens belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups are guaranteed the right to acquire the state language" [Szóköi 2018, 53].

In the text, the author emphasizes the mutual belonging of nations and nationalities. A Szekler with white socks is a good Hungarian and should live in peace with a shorty Romanian. Nyíró typifies the characters first from the outside, then from the inside. He confronts the reflection of hard reality on the rotten faces of individuals and the inner honor of their character. The freedom of the soul is concretized by the free choice of religious songs in the church. In the dialogue between Hungarian and Romanian, it is possible to record mutual tolerance with the features of diplomacy. When looking at the fat fields, which are the roots of peace, hope appears in the spirit of the village man, which escalates even when we are aware of the laws and regulations of the new Romanian state. The symbol of the human, social, empathic, continuous path is contracted here, along with the physical path, which actually ends on the edge of the village. Therefore, the self-identification of the pros and cons of people and the environment is important. Against the background of the binary opposition ‚here – there / inside – outside‘ geographically truncated Hungary appears to be the outside world external to the home order. The Transylvanian Szeklers live a quiet, gradually assimilating fate of minorities, whose dramas are only slightly reflected on the outside. Based on this aspect, the author more or less presents the psychological development of the main characters, who are clearly aware of their minority fate. At the same time, Romanian gendarmes, as representatives of the majority state power, roughly declare their rights. On the other hand, the pastor-Hungarian will no longer receive credit in the cooperative business – but the Romanian notary, secretary or sergeant will. The nature of the Jewish innkeeper, who vacillates between the nationalities, is also depicted here. The economic crisis brings a struggle for survival, highlighting the idea that nothing can be reluctant in the minority. These coordinates also include a young pastor, whose psychological development leads to a certain apathy towards God, life, office and minority being. This situation is a springboard for disillusioning thoughts that people do not want to be buried in a Romanian country (preferably in Hungarian or even Czech). In one way or another, they must wander like Roma without a home, constantly adapting to strangers. It's literally a minority being, that "... peculiar minority feeling, some constant fright from unexpected and unknown horrors that cannot be prepared for. Some unshakable consciousness that grinds the nerves from minute to minute" [Nyíró 1935, 67]. This is objectified by the fear of state support or employment. Life is getting harder by the day, and almost everything has to suffer. In this aspect, the minority destiny of individuals is united: "Minority being, fateful common suffering, toppled all the dividing wall between us, and wherever we would knock, we would be at home in every Hungarian abode, every slice of bread would be everyone's common bread, even in some crumbly crumbs, it would belong to everyone as well..." [Nyíró 1935, 84]. The fact about the change of words in the song – from ‘poor Hungarian‘ to ‘poor orphans‘, which can only be sung in public in this way, sounds tragic ...

Sad, but perhaps promising from a national point of view, is the story of Dani Sala, who commits suicide in a remote purely Romanian village located in the Regat region only for persecution for not



speaking the state language. The author describes the young boy's efforts to overcome this obstacle (he wants to go to Bucharest to a purely Romanian environment, he escapes to Debrecen in Hungary with a desire to understand Hungarian overall, he studies in high school thanks to the cohesion of his classmates). However, everything goes to waste... However, the attitude of Prahova Romanians towards the dead boy sounds empathetic, and they do not even understand the language of his documents. The ideas of reconciliation are strong, especially at the last farewell: Hungarian-Romanian metacommunication is a symbol (even a concretization) of hope for a more meaningful life. An individual may die, but a minority must survive.

The efforts of the Romanian authorities to abolish the national school are sadly clear. However, the Hungarians must comply with official decisions. However, the teacher's chameleon behavior is disillusioning, his newly created bootlicking towards Romanians. The question of loyalty, principles, (non)existence of the backbone arises... The micro-society (Hungarian, but also Romanian!) condemns him, criticizes his multidirectional compliments. The gradual reduction in the number of pupils is determined not only by the cold in the classroom, but also by the number of offices. They afflict not only young people, but also war veterans, who, because they served in the war under other powers, receive only half the staff on the boil. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the prototype of the collegial figure is the director of Szűcs, who strives for national reconciliation. At the same time, Béla Botár is reluctant to accept the offered teaching position in a state school; he sees in front of him an abandoned people and the tragic fate of the Transylvanian Hungarians. Once again, the social interest of nationality comes to the fore over the personal principle. A strong identity is the driving force behind activities and a snag of desertion. There is a world in the tangle of Hungarian with Romanian elements. Religious life is also being curtailed in the way that Hungarian Reformed believers have to go to pray in the Orthodox Romanian Church – symbolically adapting to its bells. It is a world in which Romanians with originally Hungarian names multiply. There are fewer and fewer Hungarian grave inscriptions in the cemetery. On Sunday, he also adapts to Romanians in his clothes. It describes a micro-region in which: “The grandson of the former vicarage is a Greek Catholic servant, the great-grandson of a former Calvinist pastor, originally from an ancient Hungarian family with a surname, is now a hateful Romanian teacher towards the Hungarians ... In 1848 a Greek Catholic priest baptized a Hungarian clergyman with all his believers” [Nyíró 1935, 184–185]. Also in 1930, the teacher should reorient himself to the “Romanian” faith (in order to apply). Statements must be avoided, which, most often, come from Hungarians. Such a person will not teach his students either Hungarian or Romanian. He is not an authority or an exemplary citizen of reconciliation, because he in vain pleaded with the lords and political parties – he remained only a man who denied God and his own nation / his own race / his own nationality. However, a strong person “... honors himself especially when he bends over to the fateful historical reversals of another nation that has retained its moral credit” [Nyíró 1935, 209]. This is what József Nyíró did in his novel, trying to make sensitive readers understand the secret that has helped the Szeklers persevere for centuries, despite various ailments. It is actually the fact that earth and man form a unity. Man becomes earth, earth becomes man. Thus they become immortal together, for life and future reside in them. Everything else is external and transient.

This view of the coexistence of Hungarians and Romanians, in which the Hungarians are in a minority position, naturally, can vary in a directly “opposite” way, when the Hungarians get into a majority position against the Slovaks in terms of state law. This fact, of course, is also determined by historical and political events in Europe. Overall, it can be stated that “... Hungarian government policy in post-war Europe also upheld the concept of a unified Hungarian nation ... This meant that the existence and identity of non-Hungarian nationalities and their right to independent cultural and minority life were denied” [Deák 1994, 15]. Nevertheless, closed micro-communities have to some extent retained their minority identity. This also applies to Slovaks who lived in southern – post-Trianonian – Hungary in the 1930s. In the cultural system of this minority, significant acculturation processes took place at that time, which were also accompanied by a certain cultural assimilation at various levels. During them, the traditional hierarchy of values was broken down. However, the ratio of the two cultures, in this case Hungarian and Slovak, their over- / under- / assignment and placement on the scale of these values within bilingual cultural systems, extremely “... influenced the taste of the time and a new orientation in the evolving hierarchization of values, which was stimulated by ever newer social cultural challenges” [Divičanová 2001, 40]. However, the main driving force of the changes in national culture can also be identified precisely in the interethnic relationship of culture, in the coexistence of majority and national communities. Emphasis is placed on the processes of the mentioned changes in pointing out that national culture is shaped and transformed by two tendencies: general patterns of

cultural changes and peculiar motivations, typical for a particular national minority. However, its transformations also have specific features that can cause changes in it. Under the influence of these changes, however, considerably "... it also modifies ethnic cultural identification, the cultural behavior of the individual, but also of the entire minority community..." [Divičanová 2002, 217].

Within these processes of Hungarian-Slovak coexistence, the national literature is also dynamic, which, of course, is again created in another socio-ethnic environment, i.e. outside a certain ethnic unit. In the changed conditions, she had to take on certain new tasks of relatively independent functioning in her ethnic environment. For this reason, too, the thematic peculiarity with elements of local color and the special category (in the understanding of the terminology of the Slovak comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin) are typologically characteristic of national literature. These, as we have already mentioned from another aspect, are "... located in a certain interspace, but close to the other two, or more contexts of the same interliterary community" [Harpán 2000, 15]. Literary expressions are thus unimaginable without a specific space in which they take place. Thus, this attribute can be described as a semiotic category, as it is not present directly, lies indirectly, encoded in individual words. Literary category of the epic hence "... represents a semiotic superstructure and transformation of the geographical and social space. Space in a literary work is not a physical givenness, but a semiotic fact. Epic space is always realized in a specific way. There is an ‚own‘ space in which the narrator moves sovereignly and a ‚foreign‘ space in which he is uncertain and which needs to be managed" [Harpán 2014, 81]. Each conceived theme in a work of art thus has its spatial coordinates, i.e. geographical correlations in which it concretizes, realizes and creates other layers of interactions. From this aspect, there is an indisputable connecting and mediating function of the Lowland literary communities, i. e. national literatures in Hungary, Romania and Serbia. The ‚Lowland‘ attribute "... suggests a creative directness to the geographical space and the resulting local color of literary expressions, but this does not mean that those works in which there are no such features do not belong to the Slovak Lowland context" [Harpán 2004, 57]. Thus, the dynamism of the literary community (in this case) of Slovak national literatures is emphasized. Lowland writings written in Slovak in literary communication will therefore always give the impression of a kind of thematic peculiarity, which is understood as the result of the processes of universalization and concretization of life experience. However, this should not hinder its involvement in contexts and interactions, but should allow it to participate more comprehensively in co-creating the diversity of literature itself. The sum and interplay of factors thus qualifies the function of a minority community within the contexts that correspond to it – for example, the literature of the surrounding region and home country and its specific features that result from the position of the cultural enclave (even in a negative sense). It is a latent, spontaneous interliterary exchange, the processuality of which is understood "... as the objectification of impulses and values while preserving the peculiarities and details that make up the whole ... This is a confirmation of the requirement of autonomy and openness at the same time" [Kníchal 2005, 266]. From this point of view, it is interesting that the literatures of Central and South-Eastern Europe did not penetrate into the wider consciousness, but some of them, even through their minority branches, permanently and significantly influenced each other. Thus the authenticity of the artistic statement in an epic work "... increases over time, because the author can choose from the experienced reality, artistically sort the essential from the marginal ... and thus update the experienced reality" [Plutko 1992, 27]. Actualization is a means of more comprehensive and deeper artistic knowledge, which makes it possible to express a new perspective on reality, to reveal current relationships and connections between known phenomena, which is also the root of interpretation. A work of art appears to reflect a fact and "... at the same time as the expression of the man who creates this epoch" [Škamla 1970, 99]. In some micro-environments, even a minority writer "... played with his undried pen a specific function of preserving national and cultural identity ... Even in such conditions ... literature has proved its viability. True, it evolved in a more tortuous way..." [Dudok 2001, 67]. But it progressed ... and gave various (prosaic) testimonies. In this context, the contribution of writers writing in the language of minorities in preserving national identity is obvious, as even in such a case the language is "... a basic tool and a manifestation of one's own identity" [Kováčová 2016, 224].

Mihály Bernula, a native of Pitvaroš (Hung. Pitvaros), published a bilingual prose text in an equivalent Hungarian-Slovak mutation [For details about the relationship between text variants, see e.g. Lőrincz, Lőrincz 2020, 238] ‚Ballad of the Corner of Storms‘, a colorful mosaic of a jewel box of minority literature, entitled *Elátkozott idők / Prekliate časy* (Eng. *Cursed Times*, 1998). It is a memorial story in which the author returned to the interwar times of the 1930s with a general picture of misery in Lower Hungary – also Slovak-inhabited Pitvaroš [For more details see: Andruška 2008, 96], which was a very strong Slovak village



with conscious Slovak population (in 1930, up to 91.2% of Slovaks lived in the census; about the further development of the ethnicity in Pitvaroš see: [Tóth 2004, 106–109]). The place of narration is the writer's well-known home region, in which he survived his childhood and youth. It authenticates the past, updates the difficult times in the village, but also love and sin, the irreconcilability of fire and water. On the other hand, it is not possible to be satisfied only with fixed and from every aspect verified knowledge about the cultural (thus also literary) past, but it is necessary to "... constantly verify and arrive at new findings. The literature of the past is also a problem, a problem even with regard to the present, not only in terms of continuity, but also in terms of approach and solution of those issues with which the literature has constantly dealt and is settling" [Hlavatá 2011, 11]. The image of local society is depicted through the fates of various characters in an engaging storyline and clear style. The author's social feeling is evident, while the text presents a historical picture of the times of ancestors who struggled not only with their everyday problems, but also with a certain ethnic oppression of state (i.e. Hungarian) power. The cross-section of the time, described in the novel form, allows perceptive readers to look into the life of a micro-society that is close and at the same time distant, but illustrating the image of Slovaks being and living in Hungary. The symmetrical bilingualism of this work, the importance of which we have already mentioned above, "... carries a picture for the future reader, who, regardless of his nationality, will be given the opportunity to get to know each other's nations condemned to live together, and thus the only right way for the future of us all" [Papuček 1998, 6]. The coexistence of nations and nationalities may resonates in, for example, for readers in useful rows of this prose. In this background "... the work with legends allows an interdisciplinary approach (multicultural education)" [Vítězová 2020, 26].

The cooperation of nations and nationalities is also reflected in joint physical work (for example, after a snow disaster). It is an obvious attribute of the foundations of freedom with the reverse symbol of the infinite area. It is – at least temporarily – a deliverance from poverty, the economic crisis, desolation. The author contrasts this chronotope with the world of absolute freedom of hunting of the "great enlightened regent" Miklós Horthy and of the great county lords on the state stud farm. Onomastically, it is interesting to note that the main steward of the stud farm was called foal-headed (as a reference to his Hungarian name Lófő Ignác). A hat with a rooster feather was a symbol of the superiority of the local police, who had to swear allegiance to the social order. With impunity, they were able to disperse young people at fun and knock them out. The mayor also threatened to report to the highest forums. Thus, the subjects of modern times are left with nothing but misery in Pitvaroš and Nadlak (Rom. Nădlac) abodes, eels, hemp fields. Only the bravery of the village man remained in this world, of course, regardless of his national (minority) identity. In difficult times, however, the village unanimously held together; A symbol of its freedom was that: "The villagers could not be hired for their families, for their birches, even when they had nothing to eat for many weeks. They hated servitude" [Bernula 1998, 20]. It was enough to be a servant during the manorial hunts, during which the life of a wildlife hound meant nothing. The proposal to divide at least a piece of land between them directly provoked laughter of the noble lords. Once again, the determining non-freedom came to the fore, which could be confirmed and concretized by a possible prison in case of dissatisfaction with the master. The economic crisis, unemployment, the existence of the cuisine of the poor and the regression of the Hangya cooperative have also reduced personal freedom. The only straw of hope was faith, which infiltrated contemporary politics and everyday life. Skepticism also contaminated the view not only of the past but also of the present, with people fighting: "... on various fronts, once in Halič, then in Italy. They were told that the fight was for the homeland and for the truth. They told everyone the same thing, and the people were led to lead them against other nations and take them to the slaughterhouse. Just because they spoke another language. The cause of the war was once religion, other times nationality..." [Bernula 1998, 52]. Gradually, however, interpersonal relationships (friendships, camaraderie, love) were disrupted – even in the pub as the emblematic center of the village's events. At the same time, the question of emigration to Czechoslovakia arises, which at that time was a more prosperous and freer country than Hungary, in which even then medieval conditions prevailed. It was a world of false statistics on the unemployed and the distance of ideals and reality. Landowners in great Hungarian robes marched in parliament, deputies were able to commit crimes with impunity. The lack of interest in the real development of the whole country was evident. It was a world of renegades and returnees from America, whose new mores stood out from the traditions and customs of Pitvaroš. Tragicomic was the behavior of the grandfather, who "... wants to buy a horse for his grandson, let the boy have his will. He is gifted, he was after all born in America and raised there for thirteen years. He is said to look like the son of a baron. He would also like a bear from his grandparents. Well, just a bear! These Americans can be so conceited that they don't even

know what to do. They're just showing off. Does the boy want to walk down the street with the bear? Why don't they buy him a hippo or a camel or a giraffe right away ...? He should learn to ride on it, he would see into every yard" [Bernula 1998, 71]. Communication was replaced by silence, the slogan of freedom, equality and brotherhood fell into a vacuum. Čílek from Nadlak (Rom. Nădlac) and Kešiar from Békešská Čaba (Hung. Békéscsaba) could not even dream of the freedom of the Pitvaroš instructor Ferenc Capf and teacher Pál Kovács. Freedom was maximally reduced by the declaration of martial law throughout the country after the railway assassination in Biatorbágy (1931). The author describes strikes for wage increases, so he also emphasizes the social attribute. Dissatisfaction was fundamentally shaken by the deteriorating situation. The simple villager was so afraid of himself, his family, his neighbors – he even breathed stealthily. Nonsensical regulations often accumulated. Imprisonment and executions were the order of the day, as: "People must live in fear, otherwise they will quickly resist" [Bernula 1998, 114].

An important feature of space-time is the question of language: Slovak is in decline, despite the fact that the surroundings of Pitvaroš are clearly Slovak. Bernula describes the Hungarianization of people from generation to generation. The Slovak becomes a Swabian, then a Hungarian. However, the importance of morality is emphasized, if not more broadly, then at least within the common residence: "Only spouses could live together, but they had to stay with each other for better or worse. Even if it has to collapse, even then. If they hurt themselves, if they hate each other, if they can't even look at themselves, they have to keep their promise when they married each other. What God has united, man will not divide" [Bernula 1998, 153–154]. In the character of Anna Repková from Slovakia, the author points to an unhappy marriage from which he wants to break out – despite the anger of the whole village. And that is where personal and social hope lies: to look for ways and ways of individual and collective freedom. Because that's the only way to live. Even when the road is cut. As described by Mihály Bernula.

Based on the above-mentioned attributes, it can be stated that the issue of freedom was, is and will be a current feature of literary processing in European literatures. It is necessary to look for certain specifics. We also tried to describe the complex, not always simple fate of the majority and minority man, citizen, individual: Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak in the 1930s.

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«ПРОКЛЯТАЯ СВОБОДА» – СОВМЕСТНАЯ ЖИЗНЬ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОСТЕЙ В ПРОЗЕ ЙОЖЕФА НЬИРЕ И МИХАЯ БЕРНУЛА

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В статье подчёркивается значимость сосуществования народов и национальностей в восточно-европейском пространстве 30-ых годов 20 века, отмечаются основные черты деятелей культуры с точки зрения венгров, румын и словаков, обсуждаются важные события, произошедшие после распада Австро-Венгрии (1918) и их влияние на жизнь простых людей (большинства и меньшинства). Характеризуются творческие перспективы так называемых народных авторов. Статья базируется на теоретических положениях выдающихся культурологов, философов, журналистов и литературоведов; которые делают акцент преимущественно на эволюции темы свободы в европейской и венгерской литературной традиции. Предметом рассмотрения в романе Йозефа Ньире *Az én népet* («Мой народ», 1935) стало венгерское меньшинство (секуй) в Румынии (Трансильвании). Биография Й. Ньире (который был родом из Трансильвании) наложила отпечаток на его идиостиль. Основной мотив произведения – свобода и взаимоотношения венгров и румын в отдельно взятом селе. Далее в статье анализируются проблемы и особенности сосуществования венгров и словаков на территории Венгрии во время экономического кризиса, описанные в романе Михая Бернула *Elátkozott idők* («Проклятые времена», 1998). На этот раз, в результате заключения Трианонского мирного договора, в меньшинстве находятся венгры. Данный вопрос, определенный как «проклятая свобода», в романе проанализирован через историческую, политическую, социальную, культурную и литературную призму. Но самым важным, безусловно, является мирное сосуществование народов и национальностей.

Ключевые слова: существование меньшинства, свобода, интерпретация, Йозеф Ньире, Михай Бернула.



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