

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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**Transcendence and Mission-Awareness as Individual and  
Collective Identity-Forming Ideas in the Poetry of Sándor  
Reményik**

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**Transcendence and Mission-Awareness as Individual and Collective Identity-Forming  
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(Theses)**

**I. The antecedents of research raising problems**

After more decades of ignorance, the reception and evaluation of Sándor Reményik, concerning the reception and the evaluation of his life-work in literary history, he can finally get the place of his own in public appreciation, as well as in school syllabus. It is a good occasion to analyse his oeuvre with the requirement of writing a monography, – about the poet who enjoyed great popularity in his own era, and was really accepted in Transylvanian literature – so that he can appear in today’s literary forums to be able to take place among the most significant Hungarian poets by his poetic and ideological values.

The aim of my dissertation was clear even at the beginning. It was my main task to prove that Sándor Reményik’s oeuvre, his way of thinking about the world and his poetical vocation were determined by his inner needs of transcendence and nation-fear awareness.

I got the philological directions ready, however, I found it important to observe the whole life-work in the way how his life was formed by less known typical and atypical subjective and objective facts. It was unavoidable to study the political, sociocultural and etnopolitical relationships of the era, as the perception of the world changed for Reményik, meaning the acceptance of such a role that made him the leader of collective lyrical responsibility. It was possible to change the bad cultural dialogue. “The identity – by his theory – established endless dialogue with our own traditions, also with our native cultures as well. With the help of our existing identity-awareness, – supported by the axiom of our identity-awareness – we enter the communication process and it enriches us with new impressions.”<sup>1</sup>

It was a great help for me – being able to carry out my aims – to study the literary works of Gusztáv Láng and Béla Pomogáts, as the best experts of the era, furthermore, the studies of Lajos Kántor, and his book *Konglomerát* were also useful in understanding transylvanism.

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<sup>1</sup> PAPP Endre, *Azonos önmagával = Irodalmunk az áldozat, áldozatunk: az irodalom*, Bp., Hittel Könyvműhely, 2013, 58.

Besides these studies I could read through materials, – having been unrevealed up till now – and this knowledge was also built in the chapter dealing with the beginning of his career. I found several poems and documents in autograph manuscript. These writings were not published during his life time, maybe he left them out from his volumes by his own decision. Most of these writings lack high aesthetic quality, but they help gaining better knowledge of the poetic oeuvre. Having explored the relationship-net, it will be obvious, what facts and events played an important role in forming his ideology. I studied the school reports and notes of the Calvinist college-board in Farkas street, focusing on the period, when Sándor Reményik was a student there. This way I could draw more overall picture about the school system and school culture of his age. All documents assured a better understanding of the period.

During my work – with aim of studying the literary dialogues between the ethnic minorities – I dealt with the articles of the German journal, *Klingsor*, published in Brassó, so that I could prove, how the ethnic groups could live next to each other with tolerance, preserving their own nation-awareness.

## **II. The Structure of the Theses**

I built up my theses from twelve chapters with the intention of writing a monography, being able to draw the final conclusion of my dissertation: the ideas and thoughts of Sándor Reményik were formed by his relationship with God and his nation-awareness deriving from his ethnical affiliation.

In the first chapter I deal with different aspects of writing monography by reading through the studies in one of the issues of *Irodalomtörténet*, 2014, exploring diversities. The studies show that the relationship between the text and the writer in a given social formation plays an important part in the evaluation. For me the evaluation of Márton Szilágyi was the most reasonable. In his opinion the poet – as a social phenomenon – must be observed in interaction with his circumstances. I list some examples from English and German authors as well, to show the diversity of interpretations.

In my second chapter I make a short summary of historical and ideology-historical relationship, because the changes in Transylvania were basically important in the previous decades, before Reményik was born. After Trianon the only possible way was the cultural integrity, the education of the three nations kept very strong relationship with the culture of the native country and they emphasized that “ethnic groups are minorities only in politics, in

literature and education they are universal”.<sup>2</sup> The ethnic Hungarian author expressed not only his disappointment, but also his mission-awareness, as they were obliged by the order of national identity.

I give a short summary of the ideology-history in the period for the right interpretation of transylvaniam, the ‘Transylvanian thought’, I focus on people and trends that obviously influenced the ideology of Sándor Reményik: the value-philosophy of Károly Böhm, the subjective idealism of László Ravasz, the theology of Bishop Sándor Makkai, as combinations of different mental-philosophical influences.

The ideology of transylvaniam played an important role between the two world wars. There were many kinds of theories, so I enlighten the ‘country-transylvaniam’ of Károly Kós and the ‘landscape-transylvaniam’ represented by Sándor Reményik. In the ideology-circle of Transylvanian authors, László Tompa, Sándor Reményik and Lajos Áprily played an organic part in “all-Hungarian” literature based on regional traditions.”[...] besides the literature of the native country, due to the compulsive consequences of the peace-treaties after the wars, the authors – to preserve their national identity – established their own literature”.<sup>3</sup>

In the fourth chapter I focus on the beginning of Reményik’s career. I make a list of facts and events concerning his peers. These facts and events have been less known so far, although they all contribute to the deeper understanding of his oeuvre. I also studied the Reményik-heritage in Petőfi Literary Museum and the notes and annals of the Calvinist college-board in the pedagogical library. In these documents I equally found poems and prose that have avoided the attention of researches until these days. There are several facts and data about school events and lectures in these documents, which give the chance to map the education strategy of the school, and we find lots of information about such people, who played an important role in Reményik’s later life. (Sándor Makkai, Béla Lám, Lajos Áprily) There are authentic records about the Gyulai Pál Self-Education Circle, and these notes serve additional data to understand Reményik’s personality much deeper. The relationship-net gives an outline about the poet’s own ideas and conception. A life-long relationship was born there with Lajos Olosz and Lajos Áprily, all this can be followed step by step through their correspondence. I quote one of Reményik’s writings, which was published in his book under the title *Vércsöppek a hóban* (*Blood Drops in the Snow*). This volume contains the tragic impressions of the first-world-war.

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<sup>2</sup> KUNCZ Aladár, *Az erdélyi gondolat Erdély Magyar irodalmában*, Nyugat, 1928/2, 508.

<sup>33</sup> BÉLA Pomogáts, *A szellem stratégiája (Előadások és tanulmányok)*, Marosvásárhely, Mentor Kiadó, 2007, 183-184.

In the fifth chapter I deal with the collaboration and dialogue between three journals: the Pásztortűz, The Erdélyi Helikon and the Klingsor from Brassó. Preserving identity is outstanding in the collaboration of the three journals – it is inevitably important in Reményik’s mentality and attitude – because it was the period, when the Saxon ethnic literature was ready to melt into the motherland’s literature. On the other hand – having signed the peace-treaty finishing the first-world-war – the unit of Hungarian literature disintegrated into different parts.

In spite of the different opinions and political standpoints, this relationship proves that the “Transylvanian soul” really existed, there was “a country by the soul”, as Babits emphasized in his poem *Hazám (My Homeland)*. With this conception the ‘nation’ was valued in a spiritual-cultural aspect and it was the only possibly way to continue life and creative work. The authors of the ethnic groups could speak each other’s language, making their relationship much stronger.

The communication between each other shows that the Saxons also joined the debate of *Vallani and vállalni*, initiated by Mária Berde. From the 1930s the Klingsor gradually moved away, the reason was the constantly strengthening ideology of the great German identity. It is important to mention – considering the collaboration of the quality journals – the role of Korunk, the process of the 12 year-long debate about the ‘Transylvanian thought’. Having the aesthetic productivity into consideration, the authors of Helikon produced lasting pieces of work, left-sided lyrics was mostly propagandistic.

In the next chapter I analyse the importance of literary interpretation and ideology, mostly with the help of *Kézszerítés*, a collection of critical reviews, debates, commemorations. All these contribute to reveal every segment of Reményik’s attitude towards life. Reményik’s literary interpretation and ideology, his relationship with the Transylvanian land are explored in these writings, not to mention the *Gondolatok a költészetéről (Thoughts about Poetry)*, which was published in Arad as a separate volume. There are a lot of critical reviews and 88 individual reviews published in different journals. His poetic creed is clear: the most important task of a poet is to create harmony from disharmonic elements. Studies interpreting Sándor Makkai’s writing are especially significant in this collection.

Having read the *Magyar fa és az “erdélyi gondolat”*, it is rather instructive to read Reményik’s answer as a reaction to Makkai’s article, the *Lehet mert kell!*. Reacting to Makkai’s desperate mood, by which minorities’ fate cannot be solved with dignity, there is a lack of solution. Reményik immediately answered to this, emphasizing the necessity of the fact to be able to stay Hungarian in the minority category and find ways of self-defence under any circumstances.

The main thought of this article in the question is the following: the specialty of Transylvanian thought must be found in the ancient myth of national(patriotic) feelings, involved in the freedom of the thought, the power of tradition, the respect of originality and the Word of God as a biblical unit, the magic and dignity of Transylvanian land.

In the seventh chapter I analyse the position of the lyrical subject in his poetry. The text-creating poet qualifies things from one hand, on the other hand he reveals the creator's relationship with things. This is mainly the system of relationship between himself and the nature, it is the presentation of things and living creatures anthropomorphized, where ideas are transformed into a metaphoric way of his duty-awareness. Moreover, his poetic text is characterised by his belief in predestination, according to which fate is unavoidable, everything happens in determination, so his moral is controlled by the everlasting law. The strategy of biographic ego is obviously modified by the diversity of experience in the writing process, being able to become the organic part of the lyrical subject.

Reményik rewrites the reality in a metaphoric way of speech, which is possible only with the means of illumination. Illumination is possible only in dialogues with God in the transcendental sphere. The position of his subject is mainly determined by the fact that he found the way of communication with such cultural groups who lived next to each other, and this intercultural position made it possible to create acceptance, reception, rejection and prejudices. The subject, in this case Sándor Reményik, arranged his poetic texture in the way, as if he was in his creative process, serving the proof of being unable to reveal his own reality in his self-hidden mood. "I got lost in the life-forest / I lost myself/ I really got lost"<sup>4</sup>. For the interpretation of the text-subject position I chose the poem *Lobogódísz* to analyse.

In the next chapter the way of poetic speech and role-awareness are in focus; the first stage is the *Fagyöngyök*, followed by the appearance of an entirely new form of poetic way of speech and role-awareness in the volume of *Végvári versek*.

At the beginning of his career critics (Aladár Schöpflin, Elemér Jancsó) evaluate his poetry as the acceptance of life and the representation of his trauma-history. Jancsó emphasizes the existence of Hungarian problems even in the first volume of his. It seems as if Reményik could feel in safe in the shade of the "light of spiritual giants" in the *Fagyöngyök*. (*Templomok, Vajda János szelleméhez*) Between the poles of safe and unsafe does he have to accept his role. He got lost in the "life-cage that is stuffy and choking", however the moral order wins and

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<sup>4</sup> REMÉNYIK Sándor, *Az igazi* = R.S., *Összes versei*, i.m., I, 204.

multiplies his strength. László Németh thinks – looking back *Fagyöngyök*, – that the cohesion in his poetry is possible only with “the belief in arts and moral values in life”.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Holt tenger felé* – belonging to *Fagyöngyök* – the silent contemplation is changed for depicting danger in the reality of life. He had to come up from the “depth of ancient weed” because they are “not dancing san rays “on the surface. He has to face the terror of the war. His poetic world reflects, even at the beginning, the duality of his individual and collective trauma-experience. “I want not to be important for myself”, he confesses in one of his outstanding poems. This inclination for aesthetic attitude does not focus on his suitability for his task accepted. However, it does not mean the loss of identity, he expresses his self-estimation and self-value in these lines. He knows the greatness of his task and he is also aware of his fragile human existence.

Soon, the change of the way of speech will obviously happen, the *Végyári versek* are born, influenced by the events of the war. During this period of crisis, poems come to life spreading first as manuscripts among people. The value of these poems is, that they “sing the passion with suggestive sincerity that stirred in Hungarian people’s soul that time”.<sup>6</sup>

The 75 pieces of *Végyári versek* represents his insistence to his homeland and responsibility rather than represent the power of Hungarians suitable for surviving in the collective trauma-situation. (*To the Hungarians of Transylvania*) The poems of *Végyári versek* contributes to the birth of debates around the ideology of transylvaniam.

The aim was to let ‘minorities’ voice of fear to emphasize within the ‘all-Hungarian’ nation and create opportunities with the ideology of “Transylvanian thought” and “Transylvanian soul” at the same time The idea of nation-fear appears in the poem *1919. január 24*, which is analysed in my theses more detailed. After the Romanian attack it was possible to inspire only with fatalism and obstinate determination, go into the depth of moral-ideological layers, not to take the emotional-existential plunder into consideration. That is why he is able to sing – with the possession of his role-awareness – the devastation of Hungarians. (*Új szövetség*) Originally Sándor Reményik was not suitable – on the basis of his personality – to take part in public life in fierce struggles, in “fit for fighting” way. He looked for peace and endurance at all costs. The power of his role-canon is hidden in being able to achieve a collective lyrical way of speech

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<sup>5</sup> NÉMETH László, *Mégis ő az erdélyi költő = Lehet, mert kell*, szerk. DÁVID Gyula, Nap Kiadó, 2007, 100.

<sup>6</sup> KOSZTOLÁNYI Dezső, *Végyári versek*, Nyugat/5-6, 323.

with the power of tradition-creating Transylvanian values. His identity can be considered “accepting such traditions that are common for all Hungarians”.<sup>7</sup>

I have a separate chapter for such motifs that go through the whole Reményik oeuvre. He intends to strengthen his created ego with such a role, where his lyrical ego and that of real one are inseparable present, and it is confirmed with the help of motifs. The wander-motifs communicate relationship and forms of attitude. This way the “category of discourse and discursive work appear as the communicator of self-understanding.”<sup>8</sup> The linguistic - psychological images create the wander-motifs originating from the characteristic features of his inner and outer world. His life-work is qualified by such motifs like: ‘pine-tree,’ ‘rock,’ ‘ship,’ ‘butterfly,’ ‘train,’ ‘church’. During the research of individual motifs I use and study the symbol-dictionary published by Balassi Publisher, supported by the Ministry of Education. The dictionary contains valuable supplementary knowledge in different forms of arts, illustrating the motifs (patterns) with several examples in literature as well. I illustrate the role of motifs – besides Reményik – with patterns from word literature as well.

In case of Reményik, the pine-tree appears as the most frequent symbol, representing the feeling of timelessness, and parallel with this they are representation of self-value, as the personification of endurance, the embodiment of the ‘Transylvanian thought’. The repeating motif is the symbol of loneliness and persistence, the pine-trees in their fixed places are the symbol of endurance under any circumstances.

The image of pine-tree stretching high into the sky represents the dignity of God’s closeness, the mystery of creation and transcendence. (*Kis templom a nagy dómban, A holt fenyő, Havasi feszület, Lovas favágó, Visszanyert fény, Már járt...*) Besides the ‘pine-trees’ the ‘rock’ in the Transylvanian landscape is used by Reményik as a moral-value symbol. The rock is an important element of the Christian symbolic, representing eternity and immortality, but on the other hand also represents morning and decay. The rock, as a wander-motif has got an outstanding role in the system of topos. After Trianon, – in order to interpret a new situation – it is significant for the representation of his role and mission-awareness according to the changes of political situation. (*A szemérmes sziklák, Az a félelelmetes másik, Helgoland, Sóvárgás bizonyosság után*)

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<sup>7</sup> LÁNG Gusztáv, *Séta egy definíció körül = Száz év kaland Erdély irodalmából 1918-2017*, Csíkszereda, Bookart, 2018

<sup>8</sup> RICOEUR, Paul, *A diszkurzus hermeneutikája = Paul Ricoeur válogatott tanulmányai*, szerk. KOVÁCS Gábor, Bp., Osiris, 2010, 42.



The ship is the symbol of overcoming obstacles and struggling with difficulties of life; it can be the symbolic means of finding the right way, getting into trouble or solution-disability. *Törött hajók, Májusi biztatás*)

‘Butterfly’ is a very frequently used symbol from the volume of *Egy eszme indul*. It is the representation of short-living beauty, carrying dreams that we need to get rid of, to be able to revalue our life and events, and we will be able to see the danger of attraction towards light. This motifs also express his personal confession, crisis-experience of the loss of his self-values.

The ‘train’ appears as a literary experience in Petőfi’s poems for the first time. In Reményik’s poetry it is present in the opening poem of *Egy eszme indul*, interpreting the growing importance of ‘transylvaniam’ as overcoming obstacles. The ideology – as the intention of self-value preserver – represents tradition-attitude towards endurance, way for escaping. (*Végállomás, Gyorsvonaton, Sínek az utolsó kocsi ablakából nézve*).

The ‘church’ motif is the representation of divinity, mediator between transcendent and real world sphere, sacral centre, macrocosm being reflected in microcosm, the image of eternity. The motif is basically important for Reményik, he is the mediator of his mission-awareness in fate. This way ‘church’ is the symbol of the universe, sacral place where all things and creatures appear as part of the great Service. The *Templom és iskola* has got emblematic importance, being the citadel of national culture. The ‘house of God’ has got a great significance this way, the idea of Christianity determines emotional qualities.

In the next chapter, I concentrate on the importance of counter-poles playing an outstanding role as the means of trauma-process in Reményik’s poetry, since the basic law of life is the constant, mental influence of the counter-poles. The frequent appearance of these poles, mainly in the volume of *Két fény között, romon virág, Magasfeszültség*, are present to illustrate the absurdity of balance between the biographic and the lyrical ego. Diversity of counter-poles are found in this poetic structure reacting to the events after Trianon: binary-poles of light and dark, up and down, castle and ruin, heaven and hell, fire and water. These oppositions supposedly complement each other. The poetical technique built in counter-poles is definitely expressive in the pieces of *Korszerűtlen versek*, written in elegy mood. These poems are obviously and undisputedly the “sacral documents of poetry and nation”<sup>9</sup>. In my dissertation, I deal with this poem more detailed in order to demonstrate his summarizing-retrospective, value-preserving and value-losing attitude and life-strategy.

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<sup>9</sup> LÁNG Gusztáv, *Kérdezz másképp...*, Bp., Parnasszus könyvek, i.m., 155.

The last chapter focuses on the role of dedications as further interpretation of understanding his life-work and poetic attitude. He dedicated more than 100 poems to family members, writers, politicians, priests. These poems – even if they do not contribute to the poetical intention – also play an important role concerning his relationship with the community as the author of responsibility. They also help interpreting the very depth of the subject. The diversity of dedications show that he always had a great desire to live in a community – in spite of his shyness and frail body – he tried to escape from his loneliness this way. His poems dedicated to children and friends seem to be unimportant from a literary historian aspect, but they are also part of his trauma-process in life.

### **III. The novelty of the method in research, main results of the dissertation**

The aim of my dissertation was writing a study with monographic requirement. I wanted to confirm that of the opinion of highly qualified literary historians, that Reményik's poetry represents a special world of ideas and values designating his place among the most significant poets in the canon. For this reason I used materials that have been unknown in public so far, as the Reményik-heritage in Petőfi Literary Museum, to collect new facts and data making his life oeuvre even more complete. Besides these, the college documents, I found in the pedagogical library, also contributed to the more exact mapping of the school system and culture that time. The school-relationship-map helped reveal the deeper understanding of his creative personality.

During my work I found documents unpublished, as well. Of these writing I quote a piece of prose, *Semleges lélek*, in my dissertation and refer to such poems at the same time that also contribute to complete his life-work, even with poorer aesthetic quality.

It is also a result that I managed to explore and demonstrate the dialogue between the Pásztortűz, the Erdélyi Helikon and the German Klingsor much deeper, and could enlighten the originality of the Saxon identity in a more authentic way. In the interest of this I studied the original German copies of Klingsor.

My central sequence of ideas was the intention of proving how impossible it was to separate Hungarian and Transylvanian literature during the two world wars, and Reményik, in this effort with his nation-fear awareness and inner demand of transcendence represents this mental-spiritual space. I believe, the more detailed demonstration of his dedications also contributed to a better understanding of the whole era, the political efforts and a more detailed understanding of Reményik's oeuvre.

#### IV. Publications

1. *A kötelességvállalás, mint a küldetéstudat attribútuma Reményik Sándor A Műhelyből című kötetében*, Agria, 2013/3, 208-213.
2. Kántor Lajos, *Konglomerát (Erdély)* című kötetének recenziója, Agria, 2013/4, 246-250.
3. *Octavian Goga románságtudata és irodalmszemlélete az erdélyi multikulturában*, Erdélyi Toll, 2014/1, 156-169.
4. *A kötelességvállalás, mint a küldetéstudat attribútuma Reményik Sándor A Műhelyből című kötetében = Babits és kortársai*, Bp., Cédrus Művészeti Alapítvány, Napkút Kiadó, 2015, 313-311.
5. *Reményik Sándor pályakezdése*, Agria, 2015/3, 191-206.
6. *“Egy roppant kéz utánam nyúlt”= A lírai szövegszubjektum pozíciója Reményik Sándor Lobogódísz című költeményében*, Magyar Napló, 2018/8, 29-30.
7. *Történelem és eszmetörténet az “erdélyi gondolat” és a transzszilvanizmus értelmezéséhez*. Napút online, 2017, 05, 12.
8. *Irodalom és világlátás Reményik Sándor pblicisztikájában*, Erdélyi Toll, 2018/3, 6-17.
9. *Ellenpólusok Reményik Sándor versbeszédében*, Helikon, 2018/ 21, 14-16.

#### Accepted for publication

1. *A lírai szövegszubjektum pozíciója Reményik Sándor költészetében*, Várad, varadlap.com, Szücs László
2. *A fenyő-motívum Reményik Sándor költészetében*, Vár, [melinda.sebok@gmail.com](mailto:melinda.sebok@gmail.com)