

Theses of PhD Dissertations

**World Conceptual Elements
in the Poetry of Lajos Áprily**

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Nyíregyháza

2001

I. THE AIM OF THE DISSERTATION; METHODS OF INVESTIGATION APPLIED

The always newer and newer editions Lajos Áprily's poems in the 70s and 80s of the last century, the four monographs presenting his life and poetic career, together with the growing number of studies analysing or commenting on his work all indicate that ever since his death (1967) there has been a continued interest in his figure and oeuvre on behalf of readers as well as critics. The distressing socio-political situation, created during the reign of Ceausescu in Romania, has also contributed to this phenomenon. Under the circumstances of the absolute dictatorship that was being built, the poet's works, above all the ones bearing the traces of a transylvan inwardness, obtained a newly enhanced actuality.

After the fall of the dictatorial regime, the name of Lajos Áprily has emerged over and over again during the disputes concerning the former role of transylvanism and its current topicality, and in relation to this, the dilemma of Transylvanian Hungarians in the question whether to stay or leave. However, some literary critics have judged his art this time as such that can hardly claim to raise the interest of the reader waiting to be given new answers to the new questions of contemporary life.

My thesis attempts to highlight in what ways can today's readers relate to the poetry of Lajos Áprily, what it means to be human in the light of the encounter with Áprily's works. According to reader response theory, a satisfying answer to these questions cannot be given without investigating the reception history of the oeuvre. "This prevents, as leading figure of reader response theory from Konstanz H. R. Jauss points it out, that the preconceptions and expectations of the present naively assimilate the old texts, and through clearly separating the horizons of the past and present, creates an opportunity to make the poetic text visible in its own alterity." The first chapter aims to give a brief survey of this reception history, and in the

following attempts to answer the questions concerning the oeuvre of Áprily in a way that the voicing of opinion and the analysis of the lyrical world concept are linked.

In interpreting the world conceptual components of the poet's oeuvre, the dissertation intends to make use of the results that have been achieved in the theoretical works in this subject by Miklós Béládi, Mihály Szegedi-Maszák, Antal Bókay, Gábor Bonyhai and Éva Cs. Gyimesi, as well as to rely on the arguments of Attila Tamás, Károly Csúri, Zoltán Kenyeres and Pál S. Varga as regards world concept analysis. Concerning the more pragmatic considerations of the methods of investigation, it tries to bear in mind the concept proposed by Éva Cs. Gyimesi, that is, "the exploration of a lyrical world concept (...) means above all the investigation of the value symbols and the connotative structure in relation to these values (...) Within the oeuvre, certain connotative connections, correlations come into existence, weaving themselves into a system of patterns, the exploration of which makes it possible to describe the connotative structure of the work: that sphere, in which concept and its objectivation correlate the closest."

Alongside these, the dissertation also mentions those poem-structuring elements that – beside the connotative system of relation – take part in creating the world of the poems. Even so, it does not endeavour to give a detailed analysis of the examined lyrical world concept, only outlines the basic structure of this image and its most important components. Thus it abandons discussing the connections between the biography, the social and historical processes and the oeuvre in great detail, reviewing the impacts of certain literary trends and the role of literary forerunners. At the same time, it observes and integrates the extensive and rich literature dealing with the subject.

II. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

The first chapter, which outlines the history of reader response criticism, primarily aims to investigate the answers that the works of the Transylvanian poet gave to the problems surfacing in the life of the contemporary reader, and the ways they fulfilled the expectations developed by the literary tradition.

Critiques of the successively appearing Áprily volumes – disregarding some more extreme manifestations – draw a more or less similar picture of the relationship between works and life. They made Lajos Áprily seem to be an author, whose works, albeit they did not give a response which would have moved masses to the problems surfacing in the different periods of the 20th century, still voiced personal issues, losses, claimed values that one as a member of the nation and humanity can (and should) overtake – through which readers felt this poetry to be their own. At the same time, a great deal of attention is paid to those works – mostly written in the mid twenties – that also transmitted communal (transsilvan) intentions. The number of these policy-manifesting poems, inspired by the spirit of transsylvanism is relatively few, yet these works have played an unquestionably significant role in helping the Hungarian minority in Romania find its place and regain hope in the future. According to his critics, the author during the mid twenties, becoming lonelier after moving to Hungary, comes to represent an attitude that goes beyond the daily issues of the community and protects humanism and universal human values. The chapter also touches upon the problem of the current questions of Transylvanian Hungarians and the conceivable answers offered by Áprily's early works, and agrees with those according to whom the poetic standpoints of the poet (and that of his contemporaries) are illuminating for many

Transylvanian author of the present, and they respond to the current questions, if not through the renewing the old symbols, but through creating new ones, and, like their forerunners, through showing the historic attitudes.

There has been less agreement concerning the ideological place of the poet. Transylvanian experts between the two world wars tended to emphasise his connections to the Western literature and culture (behind which the intention of the organisers of Transylvanian Hungarian literature, namely, that the – in the spirit of decentralisation - developing Transylvanian literature should find its way to connect to modern, Western European artistic trends without the mediation of Budapest is easy to discover), while the more conservative critique in Hungary underlined his links to Hungarian poetic traditions. The scale measuring these standpoints remained wide after the Second World War as well. One of the reviewers claimed that this kind of lyrical poetry embraced the tradition of János Arany and that of the impressionism, evoking a turn-of-the century spirit, another maintained that his art “was the missing link between the Hungarian classicism of János Arany and the revolution of the *Nyugat*“, yet another argued that the utterances of the *Áprily* poems “belong to an artist of the form who came to possess the entire poetic culture of the *Nyugat* movement.” Opinions also differed as regards the predominant trends within the oeuvre, and there has been no consensus to date whether *Áprily*’s poetry can be considered modern or not.

The thesis claims that Lajos *Áprily* – reaching back to many of his predecessors, yet “transferring their tradition to the tendencies of his own time”, and at the same time successfully applying some results of Ady’s poetry in his own poetic world which has a more traditional architecture – followed the same example of tradition-preserving modernity as among his renowned contemporaries for instance Babits, Radnóti or Attila József, accomplishing their own art. However, the process of his poetry becoming more classicist

pursued – sometimes with stops and detours - its own way, and achieved its fullness during the decades after the Second World War.

Further on, the dissertation follows the development of the lyrical world concept from the juvenilia under the title *The Old Spring (A régi forrás)*, collected after the death of the poet to the closing of the career. It investigates the artistic phases in separate chapters, describing the scope of value symbols and systems of motifs, also demonstrating how they varied in time.

It points out with reference to the starting of the poetic career, that Áprily, experiencing dissonance in the world and in himself, develops his art in the twenties with a wish for consonance, receives its most important tune under the influence of the experience that “even the homeland is lost”, and obtains its true rank through voicing this tune. The author, pressed by outside and inner circumstances, strove to establish a poetic world which is suitable for living for “trembling, singing” human beings by showing a positive value system as opposed to a negative one, through the lasting forms of classic metres, disciplined versification and balanced structures, with a music which made secrets tangible and at the same time created balance, and finally with a self-restraint of puritanical discipline.

As the thesis points it out, the repeating textual elements of the poems build a peculiar binary structure characteristic only of Áprily, the framework of which is composed out of semantically opposing archetypes (e.g., *light – darkness; up – down; autumn – spring*), and the value symbols – on the right side – also fit into this pattern (e.g., the visual objectivation of *mountain, top – valley; historic persons attached or less attached to Transsylvania, his mother, figures and universal symbols of the European history personating values or destruction*) and motifs (e.g., *feeling at home – feeling without a home; life – death; freedom – confinement; blood red – dewy rose; care – being carefree; loneliness – handshake, hug*).

The outlines of this structure appeared early, already in the twenties, and hardly changed until the late artistic phase of the author. Only the *mountain – valley* bipolarity ceased to exist (*valley* losing its original connotation), the structure itself – and the placement of values – remained. However, in accordance with the general process of simplification characteristic of senior poetry, the occurrence of connotative meanings became less frequent, and the clear contours of the oppositions' binary pattern became blurred and more flexible (semantic modifications, occasional changes of meanings). The associative system of the “music of fate” and that of the colours also got more fixed on reality, with the texts voicing the natural voices and colouring the natural colours of the seasons.

Taking all the other altering elements of the world concept objectivated in the texts, some parallels are possible to be drawn between the art of Áprily and that of his contemporaries. Just like Babits and Radnóti, Áprily perceives the growth of barbaric forces in Europe, and, like them, he also starts appreciating some elements of the Christian culture more. The preservation of human and artistic integrity through withdrawal connects him with Babits, and similarly is the bond with nature, preserving and consoling, a feature shared with Babits (and Radnóti). The impact of *Kalevala*, the folklore and that of the old Hungarian poetry appears in Áprily's poems as in the texts of Attila József, though the vernacular style found in the works of the older poet is not as common or radical as in the case of his younger colleague.

III. RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The cycle collecting the juvenilia of the poet (*the Old Spring – A régi forrás*) has not been thoroughly examined by Áprily's receptionists to date. This thesis attempted to do that in order to render the realm of the later, well-known Áprily poems more transparent and to bring about a more complete portrait of the oeuvre.

By exploring the basic structure of this lyrical word concept, the experts' view as well as the public image of Áprily may become subtler. It may also contribute to a more accurate definition of his placement in literary history. And it may raise more interest for this noble-minded artist, who gives an example to today's readers of how to form a harmonious relationship to nature and our fellow human beings, how to hold on to the most important values of Christianity and the European humanism in each dreadful period of the twentieth century.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE AUTHOR ON THE SUBJECT

Articles

1. "Régi, kedves, hű csapatok, tudom, ti kísértetek." A költő és a pedagógus Áprilyról. *Pedagógiai Műhely*. 1987/2: 93-96.
2. "A tengeren rab énekel." Áprily Lajos erdélyi korszakáról. *Napjaink*. 1987/12: 17-18.
3. "Áprily Lajos fiatalkori verseinek költői világa." *Irodalomtudományi Közlemények*. Nyíregyháza, 1992: 89-99.
4. "Áprily Lajos erdélyi fogantatású költeményeiről." *Kelet Felől*. 1994/6: 15-19.
5. "Két Áprily-versről." *Magyartanítás*. 1997/September: 7-9.
6. "A tengeren rab énekel." *Bár*. Szombathely, 1997/ 1-4: 100-110.
7. "A messzeség és a múlt hívása. Áprily Lajos: *Bessenyei* című verséről." *A szétszórt rendszer*. Nyíregyháza, 1998: 208-211.

Lectures

1. On the Transylvania – inspired Áprily poems. (*Áprily erdélyi fogantatású verseiről*). Nyíregyháza, 24 October 1994
2. The world concept of Áprily's poetry during the Transylvanian phase (*Az Áprily-líra erdélyi korszakának világképe*). Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Committee of the Hungarian Academy. Nyíregyháza, 30 September 1995
3. The Transylvanian phase of Lajos Áprily (*Áprily Lajos erdélyi korszaka*). 3rd International Hungarological Symposium. Ungvár, 26 October 1995

4. The reception of Lajos Áprily's repatriation in Transylvania (*Áprily Lajos repatriációjának visszhangja Erdélyben*). Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Committee of the Hungarian Academy. Nyíregyháza, 27 September 1997
5. "Bessenyei". A poem by Lajos Áprily (*Áprily Lajos "Bessenyei" című verséről*). Conference for the memory of Bessenyei, Nyíregyháza, 16 October 1997