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THE TRANSCARPATHIAN MEMORIES OF LÁSZLÓ LATOR, RENOWNED HUNGARIAN POET

It is widely acknowledged in literary scholarship that a poet's or writer's relationship to spaces and places can be of crucial importance for the reception and interpretation of their work. From this perspective, we may rightly assume that *A Lator-tanya. Lator László tiszasásvári emlékei* [The Lator Homestead. László Lator's Memories from Trosnyk], published in 2023, offers deeper insight into the oeuvre of the prominent Hungarian poet, literary translator, and essayist László Lator. The book was published by the Széchenyi Academy of Literature and Arts in Budapest, an important representative body of Hungarian writers, poets, and intellectuals – hence it may not be an overstatement to say, even in this introduction, that we are dealing with a significant literary publication.

Critics and literary historians often describe László Lator in contemporary Hungarian literature as a concise (even reserved) poet who remained deeply committed to traditional poetic forms. In this respect, his work continues a tradition within Hungarian literature rooted in the journal *Nyugat* [West], and more specifically, in the mid-20th-century circle of the journal *Újhold* [New Moon]. Lator also left a substantial legacy as a literary translator. One notable example is his complete Hungarian translation of a volume of poetry by Paul Celan, including the celebrated poem *Todesfuge* [Death Fugue], which is still most often cited in Hungarian through Lator's authoritative version. As a poet, translator, and essayist, Lator was a well-known figure in contemporary Hungarian literature. In the later years of his life, he wanted to write more about his past, his Transcarpathian origins, and other identity-related issues through various memoirs.

It is worth noting, however, that *A Lator-tanya* is not the first book in his oeuvre to emphasize childhood and youth memories

related to Transcarpathia, particularly to Trosnyk (historical toponym: Tiszasásvár; contemporary Ukrainian toponym: Trosnyk) and its surroundings. As early as 2011, he published a memoir-like book titled *A megmaradt világ – Emlékezések* [The World That Remains – Recollections], which he described as a whimsical work of reminiscence. The opening chapters evoke the formative experiences of a poet who set out from Transcarpathia and was forced to adapt to the historical upheavals of the 20th century, striving to find his place within them. One could say, without exaggeration, that this book also addresses the traumas Lator endured during the war and the Soviet occupation. Unsurprisingly, the new volume – also a work of reminiscence – frequently references *A megmaradt világ*. It complements and expands upon it in various ways while also adding nuances to its train of thought. Enriched with a visual archive drawn from the family's legacy, the book illustrates many ideas previously conveyed only in words – images that significantly contribute to the documentation of the era.

On the first pages of *A Lator-tanya*, we find a detailed account of all the major stages in the creation of the volume. The foreword, written by Aranka Kemény – who also compiled, edited, and published the book – recounts how she and Ágnes Kelevéz first approached László Lator on the occasion of his 85th birthday celebration at the Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest. It turned out that the photo used on the cover of *A megmaradt világ* had been taken by none other than the poet's father, István Lator. At that event, a public slideshow of childhood photos was also presented. Later, following Ágnes Kelevéz's suggestion, Aranka Kemény asked Lator whether they could go through the family photos and albums together. After some consideration, they met with the poet five times in 2019, each time for an hour-long conversation. According to the foreword, *"the photographs brought forth stories, the fate of the family home, the homestead's residents and visitors, their shared experiences"* [p. 7]. Subsequent in-person meetings and phone calls helped clarify and complete many names and expres-

sions. Based on these discussions, *A Lator-tanya* was born. It includes 135 photographs from the 1920–1944 period of the Lator–Ujhelyi–Vitkay family – mainly pictures of László Lator's parents and younger self, with a few photos linked to his brother and the Styl Studio in Vynohradiv.

The book is beginning with a captivating conversation about the origins of the Lator family and their more notable ancestors, some of whom had artistic inclinations. This sense of family continuity is disrupted by a historical trauma. In response to the question of why they had to leave their native village, Trosnyk, and abandon the homestead, László Lator said:

"During the war, there was a long debate in the family – should we stay or leave Ugocsa? But by October 1944, when we already knew that Soviet troops were entering our native village and homeland, we finally left Trosnyk. […] In hindsight, I believe that by leaving Trosnyk, we escaped the cruel Svaliava camp" [p. 11]. This makes it understandable why the historical narrative in the book concludes in 1944.

The visual material in *A Lator-tanya* offers a glimpse into the micro-communities, spaces, and customs of a bygone era – many aspects of which have since faded from communicative memory, even in Transcarpathia. The artistically composed, mostly family-oriented photographs are accompanied by various texts that help place them in a broader context. Among these are Lator's own memoirs, poems inspired by the landscapes captured in the photographs (ranging from early juvenilia to mature works), as well as press clippings and excerpts from contemporary reports. The prose extracts that explain the images often come directly from *A megmaradt világ*. The appendix at the end of *A Lator-tanya* includes the coats of arms and family trees of Lator's paternal and maternal lines, sketch maps of the garden and courtyards of the family home, followed by a detailed chronology, a glossary of names, and a list of images and poems.

If there is one single motif to highlight in the volume, it would likely be the garden. Several photos capture the typical atmosphere

of the garden at the time, its orderliness, and the formative experiences the young poet had there, which later inspired his literary works. As he puts it in the introductory conversation:

"This garden was made up only of trees and plants. And this plant life, this material world – and I mean this in every sense, not only in that it could be touched and handled, but also that I somehow saw the material of the universe before me – this was incredibly important to me: that in my childhood I could live in such a garden, where I dug around among the bushes as a little child, saw animals, plants, insects […]. The garden offered both the power of wild nature and the gentleness of a well-tended plot. For me, this ever-perishing and ever-creating material world is my fundamental experience. Somehow, I tried to put this into my poems and my writings" [p. 16].

As we read through the book, gazing at the photographs and reading the accompanying texts, our lasting impression is that the childhood memories tied to Trosnyk played a defining role in shaping László Lator's worldview and poetic universe. Beyond confirming this impression, *A Lator-tanya* also guides the more dedicated reader through a bygone Transcarpathian world that no longer exists.

Конфлікт інтересів

Автори не мають потенційного конфлікту інтересів, який би міг вплинути на рішення про опублікування цієї рецензії.

Використання штучного інтелекту

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