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Silenced voices, faded memories, hidden multilingualism: revisiting Vilmos Kovács's “Holnap is élünk”

1. Introduction

The history of Hungarian literature in Transcarpathia after the World War II is marked by silence, censorship, and cautious renewal. While the territory's shifting borders repeatedly interrupted cultural continuity, literary expression remained an important means of preserving minority identity. One of the rare prose works to survive the strict ideological climate of the Soviet decades was Vilmos Kovács's novel *Holnap is élünk* [We will still live tomorrow] (1965), the first to address openly the fate of Hungarians in Transcarpathia during the Stalinist era. Although it was withdrawn from public library circulation, some interested parties were still able to access it, obtain it, and read it. The novel occupies a unique place as both documentary testimony and literary experiment, revealing the strategies available to minority authors who sought to negotiate the limits of permissible speech.

This article examines *Holnap is élünk* from the dual perspective of political history and multilingual literary practice. The analysis situates Kovács's work within the fragile institutional framework of Transcarpathian Hungarian culture, drawing attention to the publication struggles, editorial interventions, and censorship that shaped the novel's reception. At the same time, it focuses on the linguistic dimension: the representation of Russian, Ukrainian, and Hungarian contact zones, the silence of untranslated utterances, and the stylistic use of borrowings that reflect local speech. The central argument is that Kovács, while compelled to write “in Hungarian only”, nevertheless encoded the multilingual environment of Soviet Transcarpathia, thereby documenting both the constraints and the resilience of minority expression.

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By combining textual analysis with historical contextualisation, the article contributes to three interconnected fields: the study of Hungarian minority literatures, the exploration of censorship and cultural politics under state socialism, and the analysis of multilingualism as a literary device. In doing so, it demonstrates that *Holnap is élünk* stands not merely as a regional curiosity, but as an important case study of how literature at the margins both reflected and contested the structures of power in the Soviet Union.

2. Historical background of the study

Transcarpathia has traditionally been a somewhat “left behind” region due to its peripheral position in all the different countries it ever belonged to. Locals supported themselves mainly by farming, and apart from the capital (Uzhhorod), all towns were rather rural. The local intelligentsia were mainly officials and clerks from the central parts of the Hungarian Kingdom, however, with the change of states even they, or at least most of them left the region (Szakál, 2020b, p. 310).

In 1938 the mostly Hungarian inhabited southern parts of Transcarpathia were reunited with Hungary, and the other parts were occupied by Hungary in 1939. It was only a brief period for the territory within the Hungarian Kingdom, which lasted until the 1944 Soviet occupation, and these six years did not favour the budding local cultural initiatives. World War II halted the Transcarpathian Hungarian intellectual advancement, all significant authors either died in the war or had left the region. In 1941, Hungarian poet, writer, and journalist Dezső Győry moved to Berehove, and lived there for eight years, however, during this time, he did not produce any significant literary works (Görömbei, 2001, p. 311).

The post-war Hungarian cultural initiatives are considered to be a long silence before the second beginning according to János Penckófer, Transcarpathian Hungarian literary historian. The shock of the terror following 1944, the demographic catastrophe suffered by the Hungarians of Transcarpathia, the emigration of part of the intelligentsia, the deportations, and the repressions, along with the lack of Hungarian cultural institutions, brought about nearly two decades of “silence”. As Penckófer puts it, the first truly significant literary institutions started to emerge in the second half of the 1960s. By this point, much had changed. The center of Hungarian cultural life gradually shifted to Uzhhorod, while the once vibrant, multi-centered Hungarian life — dominated by Berehove between the two world wars — receded (Szakál, 2020a, p. 42), and the first opportunities for renewal emerged among the Hungarian lecturers and students at Uzhhorod State University (particularly after the establishment of the Department of Hungarian Language and Literature in 1963) (Tóth, 2013, p. 64), as well as within the editorial staff of the Hungarian-

language newspaper *Kárpáti Igaz Szó* (Császár, 2021, pp. 600–602). The Hungarian literary and cultural life of the era was dominated by two leaders, Vilmos Kovács and László Balla, who represented two completely different stances. The former became the leader of Forrás Studio which was founded in 1967, gathering the editors of a formerly shut down student newspaper (András S. Benedek, Gyula Balla, Mária Punykó, László Györke). Sándor Fodó professor was also an influencing figure in organizing a recital choir that helped to nurture the Hungarian culture minority. Opposing their activities and views, the other group of contemporary intellectuals gathered around the latter leader, who was also editor-in-chief at the local newspaper *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*. Their studio, named after famous Hungarian poet Attila József, is considered to be a less professional organization than Forrás Studio, as their work was regarded as levelless, overly agitative, and boring (Penckófer, 2019, pp. 65–67). The texts of László Balla's series Soviet Hungarians also reveal that the emerging tensions from the 1960s had historical dimensions as well. In his search for literary continuity, Balla highlights an essential difference. He was convinced that the roots of Hungarian culture in Transcarpathia and in the Soviet Union should not be sought in the predecessors of the region who had created in Hungarian, but rather in those who, already in the interwar period and during World War II, wrote within the framework of communist ideology and were active in the Soviet Union. (Tóth, 2013, p. 68; vö. Balla, 1973). The Soviet regime saw the Hungarian nationalist movement first in the activities of the choir, and later in Forrás Studio as well, and they liquidated both, the members had to endure various forms of repression (Tóth, 2013, p. 66), which led to more pronounced expressions of their opinion

The Attila József Literary Studio was renewed in 1981, with a dynamic new generation of authors and some outstanding figures who influenced them, they became known and recognized throughout Transcarpathia. *Kárpáti Igaz Szó* gained some independence in 1965, and the author of the Literary Studio had the opportunity to publish in it. The literary section of the newspaper could be cut out from each issue, then glued together into a "literary journal". This way, Transcarpathian Hungarian contemporary authors reached a rather wide range of readers, and the authors became known and popular. By 1988 the studio was transformed into a creative community, however, as it soon started to protect the political interests of the local community above its literary activity, it was obvious that these tasks needed more than one organization. For the protection of the interests of the local Hungarian minority, the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association was founded, while several literary organizations appeared to continue the cultivation of Hungarian culture and literature. Among them is remarkable the first Transcarpathian Hungarian, independent literary journal, *Hatodik Síp* [Sixth Whistle] founded in 1989, and edited by Károly Balla D.

(Penckófer, 2019, pp. 67–70). The chosen title reflects on the sentiment of Hungarian poet, and writer Gyula Illyés as he refers to Hungarian literature as a five-pronged whistle, meaning that the literatures of the Hungarian minority are an integral part of Hungarian literature.

It is easy to see the end of the Soviet regime as an economic, historical, political, and sociological change, however, it is not therefore evident to consider it to be a literary turning point in Hungarian literature, as the development of literature does not necessarily follow political changes. But, in the case of Transcarpathia, the changes in politics and literature somehow coincide, as the regime change went hand-in-hand with the expansion of literary institutions, for instance. Furthermore, the works were not censored anymore and were not affected by social ideology. From the Soviet era, only one novel seemed to stand the test of time, Vilmos Kovács's *Holnap is élünk*, therefore it is easy to see why the Transcarpathian Hungarian literature was considered to be poetry-oriented by experts of literary history (Csordás, 2020, pp. 20–22).

3. The novel *Holnap is élünk*

The novel is the first to tackle the fate of Transcarpathian Hungarians during the Stalin era, and it is also the only piece of Hungarian prose published in Transcarpathia during the Soviet regime to stand the test of time. There is another trilogy by Zoltán Mihály Nagy that is placed in the same Transcarpathian setting during around the same time, but for several reasons, it was not considered for analysis in the present thesis. First, the author was born in 1949 which makes his account of the second half of the 1940s at least second-hand. Second, the first book of the trilogy was published in 1991, not long before the dissolution of the USSR, which puts a considerable time gap between the time of publication and the time of the story itself. This time gap is only a couple of years in the case of Vilmos Kovács's novel, as it was written in 1963 while the story of it is placed in 1958–1959.

Based on István Tóth's 1995 account on the details of the publication of Vilmos Kovács's novel, it was written in brief two months in 1963 while it took another two years for it to be published. The 1960s were a time for concessions and even cautious reforms alternating with times of hectic severity in the politics of the Soviet regime, and of course, it dominated cultural politics as well (Tóth, 1995, p. 93). The first manuscript was submitted for publication in the middle of 1963, and the first review supporting its publication came as soon as by the end of December in the same year. Following this, the publication process started, and the manuscript was edited. On August 20, 1964, László Balla, an influential contemporary Hungarian poet and writer wrote a rather negative editorial

decree criticising the author for advertising abstract art and urges a “showdown” with the managers of art in the party. Vilmos Kovács reacted to the accusations with well-founded arguments that the rejection was based on rather subjective reasons, following which Balla admitted some of his mistakes. But the manuscript was handed out again for reviewing to both Miklós Rotman who was a history professor of the Uzhhorod State University, and a committed member of the communist movement since the thirties, and the regional communist party committee where it spent another few weeks, only to be handed out for evaluation to other reviewers afterwards. Finally, in the spring of 1965, it was published in 2500 copies (Tóth, 1995, p. 96). Soon after its publication the novel was withdrawn from circulation in bookstores. Years later, the novel was removed from the Transcarpathian, and then from Hungarian public libraries as well on the instructions of the Soviet party leadership (URL1).

Following its 1965 publication, the novel was republished two more times, in 1990, and 2007, and all three versions are a bit different. Following some advice from different reviewers Kovács made some alterations in the novel, which he characterized as “minor, and irrelevant”. However, the editor of the 1990 version of the novel described some of the changes in more detail:

“He left out many paragraphs from his main character’s philosophizing inner monologues about art and life, but he also trimmed the dialogues. He left out many adjectives and word repetitions he considered unnecessary. In some cases, he made characterizations and descriptions, which – presumably due to the publisher’s instructions – appeared truncated and euphemistic in the 1965 edition, again concrete and critical. In some places, he approximated the vocabulary of his heroes and descriptions to the standard variety spoken in Hungary” (Csordás, 2014, p. 15).

While Barzsó Tibor, the editor of both the 1965 and 2007 versions of the novel emphasised that the author only partially restored some parts of the novel he was forced to erase from the first version. Some of these included comments on Transcarpathian Hungarian schools, on the forced application of Moscow time, or the details about the ban of the noon chime (Church bells have rung for Hungary ever since 1456, commemorating the heroism of Hungarian soldiers in the siege of Nándorfehérvár). Although ideally all three versions of the book should be considered when analysing the language of the novel, the limited extent of the current thesis does not give an opportunity to study all of them. After careful consideration, the first, 1965 version was chosen for analysis for several reasons. First, apart from the manuscript, this is the closest version in time to the timeframe of the story. Second, the alterations that were made in the text later were either influenced by political or aesthetic reasons, thus they might

have a lesser impact on the display of multilingualism and the multicultural environment depicted in the novel.

The story of the novel unfolds around the main character, Gábor Somogyi Hungarian painter living in the Transcarpathia of Soviet Ukraine. All expert opinions agree on the fact that the book is a documentary novel (Penckófer, 2019, p. 102). One of his great traumas comes from the fact that despite being a communist, his father was detained and never seen again. This resonates with his biography, and proves the autobiographical character of his novel, as Vilmos Kovács came from a rather poor family, his father was a communist, and the family had to suffer persecution after the brief annexation of Transcarpathia to Hungary in 1938–1939. Kovács regarded the Soviet power established in his native land with considerable trust, even though his father, who had previously been proscribed due to his left-wing convictions, was also persecuted by the Soviet authorities, declared an “enemy of the people” and became the victim of a forced labour camp. The author, especially in his first books of poems, still declared himself a supporter of the Soviet system, many of his poems bear witness to this. For many years, he too expected the modernization efforts of the Soviet system to uplift the poor, and renew society and civilization (Pomogáts, 2007, p. 26). Here it is worth pausing for a moment, since the novel touches upon a distinctive feature of the history of Transcarpathia and its Hungarian community. In today’s historical memory, the history of the communist movement in the interwar period appears only faintly. Although the far-left movements could operate under very different conditions within the First Czechoslovak Republic and later within the Kingdom of Hungary, which regained the territory in 1938–1939, communist ideas strengthened among Hungarians in Transcarpathia after 1919 and attracted a significant following.

The most evident indicators of this were, of course, the election results. It is telling that in the five elections held between 1924 and 1935 – four parliamentary and one provincial – in Berehove, considered symbolically the Hungarian center, and in Berehove County, later the Berehove District, the communists received more votes than the Hungarian parties on three occasions. The Hungarian parties were especially popular among rural Hungarians, yet even so, communist candidates often outperformed them (Fedinec, 2022, pp. 108–112).

The mobilization of Hungarians in Transcarpathia was fostered, on the one hand, by émigrés who had participated in the Hungarian Soviet Republic and then arrived in Czechoslovakia, and on the other hand by former soldiers returning from Russian captivity in the early 1920s. Among young people who grew up politically socialized within the First Republic, communism became particularly attractive. The successes of the movement are clearly reflected in the efforts of the restored Hungarian authorities after 1938 to eradicate it, especially

in the 1940 Košice trial against 394 individuals — mostly of Carpathian Ruthenian origin and largely Hungarian communists. The documents of this trial, preserved in the Berehove Archives, vividly illustrate that communist organizing had penetrated Hungarian society in the regained territories far beyond the number of defendants (Szakál, 2023, pp. 91–98). The restored Hungarian authorities persecuted the communist movement. Some Hungarians sympathetic to the ideology went underground, while others went into exile in the West or in the Soviet Union. The latter became the most organized and, from 1944 onwards, supported both the advance of the Red Army into Transcarpathia and the consolidation of the Soviet system in the region. Many representatives of the emerging Soviet administration and party apparatus were Hungarian members of the interwar communist movement in Transcarpathia (Rotman, 1982). During the Hungarian years, among the left-leaning Hungarians of Transcarpathia who had been forced into illegality, there were likely some who regarded the Red Army as liberators and imagined the Soviet Union as a kind of model state. One can imagine the rupture it must have caused them when, after 1944, they were subjected to reprisals on the basis of nationality, disregarding class and party affiliation, and were deported to prisoner-of-war camps. As Erzsébet Molnár D., a distinguished researcher of the deportations in Transcarpathia, writes in her PhD dissertation, between December 1944 and December 1945 countless petitions surfaced from various localities addressed to the relevant district committees, seeking the release of deported men — left-leaning, communist-minded internees held in prisoner-of-war camps (Molnár D., 2015).

The other trauma of the main character was his own unjust conviction in 1949, then, although later he was set free and rehabilitated. He is depicted as he is trying to figure out his life with his inner monologues always contemplating professional and intellectual issues. One problem about his character that was pointed out by some contemporary critics was the fact that he was separated from his wife and later fell in love with another woman. This was against the morals the Soviet regime was trying to publicize in contemporary literature, the main character was stigmatized as weak and unrelatable. But in fact, all he is trying to achieve is to be able to freely express his opinion on the era he lives in, on art or love. All the conflicts he faces in the novel come from this attitude. His nemesis is the local party secretary, Mazur, who is trying to destroy Somogyi for his ideology, but in the end Reiner, another party committee specialist, who is able to understand Somogyi's artistic ideas, saves him from the false accusations. Other characters in the story are mainly the friends and family of Gábor Somogyi, and his fellow artist and nemesis Zágony, whose character undoubtedly was based on Vilmos Kovács's contemporary and the most committed critic of the book, László Balla. The nationalities of the characters represent the actual

composition of contemporary Transcarpathia: Hungarians, Russians, Rusyns and Ukrainians all appear among them.

Several experts share the opinion that one of the strengths of this book is that the author aims to be “a chronicler of his time” (Penckófer, 2019, p. 105). After the territory was briefly given back to Hungary, the characters of the book face similar problems, as those seen in Mihály Tamás’s *Két part közt fut a víz*, upon arriving home from Budapest, the borders are already closed due to the Soviet occupation of the territory, and as they are travelling without any documents of identification the Soviet soldiers detain them.

<p>Az államhatár már le van zárva, és Csapon letartóztatják őket. Gézától elkobozzák a rádiót, a bőröndöket. Igazolványt kémeek. Igazolványuk nincs. Két napig a romokat takarítják az állomáson, aztán mehet ki-ki amerre lát (Kovács, 1965, p. 29).</p>	<p>The state border is already closed, and they are being arrested in Csap. Géza’s radio and suitcases are confiscated. They ask for an ID. We don’t have any. They had to clean up the ruins at the station for two days, and then everyone could go wherever they wanted.</p>
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The other similarity with what is depicted in *Két part közt fut a víz* is that the political situation seemed to be temporary to the Transcarpathian Hungarians. They got used to the swift changes in regimes so much that they were sure, the Soviet occupation would not last. As the author writes about the youth of the main character, he also depicts the family of his future wife, Ildikó. Her family is introduced as follows:

<p>Apja főszolgabíró volt, bátyja ludovikás tisztt. Mindketten Pesten vannak. Ildikóék pedig – ahogy anyja mondja – itt rekedtek és várják, hogy rendeződjön a helyzet, és visszamehessenek Pestre (Kovács, 1965, p. 31).</p>	<p>Her father was a high sheriff, her brother an officer of the Ludovica Academy. Both are in Pest now. And her mother and Ildikó – as her mother puts it – are stuck here and are waiting for the situation to settle so they can go back to Pest.</p>
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An interesting feature of the novel is that it already mentions the issue of assimilation of Hungarians. Although the phenomenon is not significant, which might be due to the fact that mastering the state language or assimilation does not guarantee good prospects or financial stability in a country with a not-very-prosperous economy, it is still present nowadays, as some Hungarian parents consider it more beneficial for their children to go to Ukrainian kindergartens and/or schools to learn the state language. Such children often find Ukrainian

spouses for themselves and their families slowly move away from their Hungarian roots. The same phenomenon appears in the novel in the following dialogue:

Reiner visszajött.

–Vesse le a kabátját – mondta –, és foglaljon helyet. Különben, magyarul is beszélhetünk. Magyar ajkú, ugye?

–Igen. Sőt a nemzetiségem is magyar.

–Miért mondja, hogy sőt?

Már ültek mind a ketten. Reiner az íróasztal mögött, ő az öblös fotelben.

–Miért mondom, hogy sőt? Tudja, Reiner elvtárs, manapság furcsán állunk az anyanyelv és a nemzetiség kérdésével. Van egy ismerőszám, a magyar lapnál dolgozik, fordító. Magyarul vallja magát, otthon a feleségével magyarul beszélnek, csúnyán törlik a különben nagyon szép orosz nyelvet, a gyerekek azonban már nem akarnak magyarul beszélni. Soha egyetlen Petőfi-verset vagy Móricz-elbeszélést még nem olvastak el (Kovács, 1965, p. 213).

Reiner came back.

–Take off your coat – he said – and take a seat. Besides, we can also speak in Hungarian. You are Hungarian-speaking, right?

–Yes. In fact, my nationality is also Hungarian.

–Why do you say that?

They were both already seated. Reiner behind the desk, he in the armchair.

–Why do I say so? You know, Comrade Reiner, nowadays we are in a strange position with the question of mother tongue and nationality. I have an acquaintance, he works for the Hungarian newspaper, and he is a translator. He claims to be Hungarian, he and his wife speak Hungarian at home, they butcher the otherwise very beautiful Russian language badly, but their children no longer want to speak Hungarian. They have never read a single Petőfi poem or Móricz story.

And later:

Na, csak folytassa, hol hagytuk abba?

–Az anyanyelv és a nemzetiség problémájánál.

–Igen, igen. Ez érdekes helyi jelenség. Persze, nem általános. Egyes papák és mamák abban a tévhitben ringatják magukat, hogy csemetéik nagyobb karriert csinálnak, ha nem magyar iskolába adják őket, hanem oroszba... (Kovács, 1965, p. 214).

Well, go on, where were we?

–Regarding the problem of mother tongue and nationality.

–Yes, yes. This is an interesting local phenomenon. Sure, it's not common. Some dads and moms are swayed by the misconception that their children will have a better career if they are not sent to a Hungarian school, but to a Russian one...

The above phenomenon is not unheard of in the real-life, local Hungarian community either. Transcarpathian research shows that among Hungarians who attended non-Hungarian schools, the proportion of those who do not pass the Hungarian language on to the next generation is much higher, and almost 40% of the respondents who went to Ukrainian school used the majority language at home as well instead of Hungarian. At the same time, 93.16 % of those who attended Hungarian language schools used only Hungarian while communicating with their parents (Molnár, 2010, p. 81; Csernicskó-Hires-László, 2019, p. 75).

Kovács needed to be particularly careful about what and how he included in the novel as he was hoping to see his work in publication despite the strict censorship of the era. However, he was the first author to write about the “Malenkij robot”, meaning ‘little work’, but in fact the forced labour of “undesirable” nationalities in the Soviet Union. November of 1944 marked the beginning of the most traumatic Soviet measure in the life of Transcarpathian Hungarian and German nationalities. Between 13 and 16 of November, all Hungarian and German males aged between 18 and 50 had to report for what was advertised as a little post-war reparation and restoration work. The nationality of the people was determined using a self-report method, those who claimed to be Rusyn, Ukrainian, or Slovak were let to go back home. After assembling the people, they were escorted by armed soldiers on foot to concentration camps in Svaliava (in Hungarian: Szolyva), and from there to various camps in the Soviet Union. Many did not survive even the first collective lager, the majority of them never came back home (Molnár D., 2021, pp. 507–508; 2022, pp. 22–24). The following can be read in the novel on the topic:

A legtöbb baj persze az asszonyokkal van, mert a férfinépet tizennyolctól ötvenötig elvitték munkára. Azt ígérték, hogy három nap múlva hazaengedik őket, de már eltelt öt hónap, és sehol senki. Sőt, egyeseknek halálhíre is jött. A falu olyan, mint a felbolygatott darázsfészek. A jehovisták járják a házakat és az utolsó ítélet szörnyűségeiről prédikálnak.

–Mit mondjak az asszonyoknak, fiam? – kérdezi az apja.

–Az igazságot – mondja Gábor, és érzi, hogy keserű a szája.

–De honnan tudjam, hogy mi az igazság? Három napra vitték el őket és tessék. Már

Of course, most of the problems are with the women, because the men were taken to work from eighteen to fifty-five. They promised to let them go home in three days, but five months have passed and no one is to be seen. In fact, news of the death of some people came. The village is like a disturbed hornet’s nest. Jehovah’s witnesses go door to door and preach about the horrors of the last judgment.

–What should I say to the women, son? – asks his father.

–The truth – Gábor says, and feels a bitter taste in his mouth.

–But how do I know what the truth is?

<p>heten haltak meg. Kettő közülük kommunista volt. Nem értem, fiam. Gábor sem érti (Kovács, 1965, pp. 27–28).</p>	<p>They took them for three days and there you go. Seven have already died. Two of them were communists. I don't understand, son. Gábor doesn't understand either.</p>
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László Balla in his executive director's opinion on the novel questions if writing about the deportation of Hungarian men was truly essential in the story. Kovács tried to explain the necessity of writing about the topic in his response to Balla's opinion, arguing that it was not the fault of the Soviet leadership or it cannot be blamed on the nature of socialism, but rather the overreaction of the cult of personality (URL2).

4. Features of multilingualism in *Holnap is élünk*

The environment of the novel is indisputably multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multilingual, where Ukrainians, Russians and Hungarians with some other Nationalities live together. An example to this is the following example:

<p>A lakó fiatalasszony. Férje nincs. Faluról került fel, a gyermekkórházban dolgozik, a konyhán. Az asszonyka helybeli ukrán, magyarul nem tud. Gáborral oroszul beszél, de az oroszot is töri, és mindig mosolyog. Az Ildikó anyja szerint folyton vigyorog Gáborra. Az asszonyka különben is mindig mosolyog. Mosolyog, ha a nagymama magyarul szól hozzá, és ő nem érti, mosolyog, amikor a Gáborék szobáját súrolja, mosolyog, ha a kislánya akadozva mondja nagymama után a magyar szót. Mosolyog, nem bánja. Az egyszerű emberek nem nacionalisták. A nacionalizmus főleg intellektuális lelki táplálék (Kovács, 1965, p. 94).</p>	<p>The resident is a young woman. She has no husband. She came from a village, works in the children's hospital, in the kitchen. The lady is a local Ukrainian; she doesn't speak Hungarian. She speaks Russian with Gábor, but she butchers Russian too and is always smiling. According to Ildikó's mother, she keeps grinning at Gábor. Anyway, the lady is always smiling. She smiles when her grandmother speaks to her in Hungarian and she doesn't understand, she smiles when she scrubs the room of Gábor's family, she smiles when her little daughter repeats the Hungarian word after her grandmother stuttering. She smiles, she doesn't mind. Ordinary people are not nationalists. Nationalism is mainly intellectual spiritual food.</p>
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And also:

Markovits bácsi régebben ruszinnak vallotta magát, most pedig ukránnak, de lelke az összeomlott Monarchia talajában eresztett gyökeret, és onnan szippantotta magába a magyar kultúra nedveit. Tökéletesen beszél ukránul, az orosz viszont töri. És tanulni már nem tud, csak tanítani. Festészetet (Kovács, 1965, pp. 95–96).

Uncle Markovits used to claim to be a Rusyn, and now he is a Ukrainian, but his soul took root in the soil of the collapsed Monarchy, and absorbed the juices of Hungarian culture from there. He speaks Ukrainian perfectly, but his Russian is broken. And he can no longer learn, only teach. Painting.

This is not the only case where the author points out that some Ukrainians could not master Russian perfectly. On page 225 we can read about a letter that Gábor received from a Ukrainian friend:

Hív, hogy menjek el. Megürült az egyik szobája, az édesanyja elköltözött a lányához. Gyere, azt mondja, nézd meg, honnan indultak el az őseid abba a beteg Európába... Viktor kijevi, tudod, „h”-nak ejti az orosz „g”-t, ukránosan, és engem is úgy hívott mindig, hogy Hobi (Kovács, 1965, p. 225).

He invited me to go there. One of his rooms got empty, his mother moved in with her daughter. Come, he says, see where your ancestors left for that sick Europe... Viktor is from Kyiv, you know, pronounces the Russian “g” as “h” like Ukrainians do, and he always called me Hobi.

Ukrainian and Russian geographical names, brands, Slavic names of different characters all appear in abundance throughout the novel. Some examples include the following: *Kolomeja* [Kolomyia], *Zsitomir* [Zhytomyr], *Sztarij Szambor* [Stryi Sambir] for geographical names; *Verhovina*, *Kazbek*, and *Mahorka* are all cigarette brands; *rubel* [rouble] and *kopek* [kopeck] are Russian money, *Sputnik* is a Russian satellite. Names which are surely Slavic, either because of how they sound, or since they are used together with the paternal names include the following examples: *Sztyepan Sztyepanovics*, *Tolik*, *Vaszilij Iljics*, *Belov*, *Litvinov*, *Milja*, *Vaszilij Ivanics*, *Zsora*, *Belkin*, *Vanya*, among others.

Although the story of the novel clearly takes place in a multilingual setting, the writer delivers all of it only in Hungarian. His reasons for doing this are unknown but we can assume that he was counting on some monolingual Hungarian readers as well, and this is why all the text appears only in Hungarian, even if it is clearly said or written in Russian. Some examples from the book are the following:

Kihúzta a zsebéből a papírost, amit az orvostól kapott, és még egyszer elolvasta a cirill betűs szavakat: szív működése normális (Kovács, 1965, p. 4).

He took the piece of paper he had received from the doctor out of his pocket and read the Cyrillic words once more: his cardiac function is normal.

It is obvious from the context that the words “his cardiac function is normal” were written in Cyrillic, but the author chose to use Hungarian instead of actual Cyrillic. Similarly, in the following scene the main character visits a doctor, and it is less obvious from the context than in the previous example, but we can read the following:

Az ajtón kis tábla: „M. Popovics, belgyógyász, rendel...” Mi az? Hát ma nem Szekeres van szolgálatban? Na, ezt jól kifogta. Most mit tegyen? (Kovács, 1965, p. 51).

A small sign on the door: “M. Popovics, internist is consulting...” What is it? Isn’t Szekeres consulting today? Well, just your luck. What to do now?

It is safe to assume that any sign in a Soviet hospital would be in Russian, just as the results of the medical examination in the previous example. Also, we can see, that the main character, Gábor is disappointed by the fact that he was going to see a new doctor, not the one he already knew. While this can be simply because he is not as comfortable with a stranger, but it is also possible that based on the surname, he assumed that the doctor would not be Hungarian. While the surname Szekeres is clearly a Hungarian one Popovics has a Slavic origin, and it is possible that the main character was uncomfortable speaking about his health issues in a language he could not express himself perfectly, a phenomenon well-documented in sociological and sociolinguistic research in Transcarpathia (Márku, 2003, p. 103; Ferenc-Séra, 2013, p. 101). And, this brings us to the question of the attitude of minority speakers to the state language.

This issue is tackled in the novel through the attitude of Gábor Somogyi, the main character, as the whole story is told from his perspective. Gábor clearly struggles with Russian at the beginning of the novel as it can be seen in the following example:

Azért jöttünk, hogy valami kérvényt írassunk veled. Itt van a cím. Sztarij Szambor, vagy hogy hívják. Még kimondani is nehéz. Apádnak is szóltunk már, de ő azt mondja, hogy nem kell kérvény, majd bemegy, oszt

We came so you write us some official request. Here is the address. Staryi Sambir, or whatever its name is. It’s difficult even to pronounce. We have already told your father, but he says that there is no need for an official request,

megtudja, hogy mi van velük, de csak ígéreti. Meg aztán te iskolán vagy, oroszul is tudsz. Gábor nem tud oroszul. Honnan tudna? Iskolába se jár, mert a magyar iskolákat bezárták. De mert tanulni akar, most nyelvtanfolyamon van. Bickó tanítja őket, a görög pap. Csak Gábornak sehogy sem megy a tanulás.

–Abszolút bükkfanyelvű vagy, fiam – mondja neki a paptanár.

–Igaz lenne? – kérdezi magától, és ott-hagyja a tanfolyamot (Kovács, 1965, p. 28).

then he will go in and find out what is going on with them, but he only promises. And you're at school, you know Russian. Gábor does not speak Russian. How could he? He doesn't even go to school because the Hungarian schools were closed. But because he wants to learn, he is now on a language course. They are taught by Bickó, the Greek priest. Only Gábor can't study well.

–You are absolutely hopeless, my son – the priest tells him.

–Would that be true? – he asks himself and leaves the course.

However, he does not give up learning Russian completely, later we can read:

Este pokrócot, gyertyát visz az üres szobába és tanul. Oroszul. Naponta harminc-negyven szót magol be. Közben orosz újságot olvas (Kovács, 1965, p. 30).

In the evening, he brings a blanket and a candle to the empty room and studies. Russian. He inculcates thirty to forty words a day. At the same time, he reads Russian newspapers.

Changes of state were always accompanied by a change in the official language. During the Czech era, the same person heard and experienced that in order to get by, one had to learn the Czech language, then between 1938 and 1944 Hungarian became the dominant language again, then after 1945 it was Russian, and even though Transcarpathia belonged to Ukraine within the Soviet Union, even the Ukrainians had to deal with learning the Russian language (Csernicskó-Ferenc, 2014). The issue of language skills was a prominent topic throughout the Soviet era; the central government implemented a series of measures that were hoped to increase the Russian language skills of the population. One of these measures was the so-called internationalist schools. In the institutions that taught several languages in parallel, the prestige language was not Hungarian, and the necessary conditions for nurturing the Hungarian language and culture were not provided. As a result, the Hungarian language was increasingly pushed into the background and placed in a subordinate position. In those institutions where education was conducted in three languages at the same time, it was placed in a twofold subordinate position (Orosz, 2005, pp. 100–102; 2022, pp. 144–148).

Despite his efforts Gábor is depicted as a person who never managed to fully acquire the state language, as it is shown in the following situation:

Tóninak egyáltalán nem volt igaza, hogy Kantos Pityu dadogni fog. Folyékonyan beszélt és hévvel. Felszólalásában sűrűn durrogtak a szuperlatívuszok, akárcsak a lövöldékben az eltalált állatfigurák, amelyeket biztoskezü kiszolgált bakák vettek puskavégre. Gábor megpróbálta megtalálni az összefüggést a sokemeletesre épített orosz mondatok között, de hiába. Az egész beszámoló olyannak tűnt neki, mint egy felbontott boríték, amelyből kiszedték a levelet, és csak a címzés maradt rajta (Kovács, 1965, p. 79).

Tóni was absolutely not right that Pityu Kantos would stutter. He spoke fluently and with passion. The superlatives fell frequently [were thick] in his speech, just like the animal figures in the target shot, which were hit at by veteran bucks with steady hands. Gábor tried to find the connection between the Russian sentences built on high-rises, but in vain. The whole report seemed to him like an opened envelope from which the letter had been taken out, leaving only the address on it.

At the same time, we can also see that there are minority characters who are fluent in Russian in the novel, as the name *Pityu Kantos* clearly belongs to a Hungarian person and, based on the above example, he uses Russian with great confidence and fluency.

The main character, Gábor is a painter who often attends trade union meetings that all take place in Russian, yet every speech or conversation from these meetings is only delivered in Hungarian. We can read the following on page 81:

–Tehát, elvtársak – kezdte a mondókáját. Ha oroszul szólalt fel, mindig a tehát szóval nyitott, és beszéd közben is sűrűn használta. – Meghallgattuk elnökünk beszámolóját. A beszámoló kimerítő volt és igen részletes. Teljes képet nyerhettünk egy újabb országos méretű kulturális rendezvényről. Tehát teljes képet nyerhettünk róla. Látszik, hogy Kantos elvtárs igen gondosan szemügyre vette a kiállítás gazdag anyagát és sok mindent feljegyzett róla. Remélem, hogy amit hallottunk tőle, segítségünkre lesz a mi szerény kis

–So, comrades – he began his speech. When he spoke in Russian, he always opened with the word so, and used it frequently during his speech. – We listened to our president's report. The report was exhaustive and very detailed. We were able to get a complete picture of another nationwide cultural event. So, we were able to get a complete picture of it. It can be seen that Comrade Kantos took a very careful look at the rich material of the exhibition and wrote down many things about it. I hope that what we heard

gárdánk munkájában, és útmutatásul szolgál nekünk a továbbiakban. Mint igen sajnálatos hiányosságot említem meg, hogy ezúttal egyikünk sem szerepelhetett ezen az országos rendezvényen, de remélem, hogy a jövőben... (Kovács, 1965, p. 81).

from him will help us in the work of our humble little troop and will serve as a guide for us going forward. As a very regrettable shortcoming, I mention that none of us could participate in this national event this time, but I hope that in the future...

Similarly, when Gábor is hospitalized, everybody around him, his doctor, nurse, and roommate are Russians, yet every dialogue is written in monolingual Hungarian. On page 109, we can read the following:

Ilyenkor Milja nézte a fényes tej üveg-burát, vagy a novemberi csillagokat, és sohasem szólt közbe. Csak egyetlen-egyszer jegyezte meg tréfásan:

–Maga egészen más bolond, mint a többi. Milja ritkán tréfálkozott, és a betegek-re is gyakran rászólt. Talán ezért volt, hogy tartottak tőle és nemigen kedvelték. Vaszilij Ivanics, a Gábor szobatársa, valósággal félt tőle.

–Nem bírom ezt a nőt, hiába – mondta, mikor Milja már kiment a szobájukból.

–Ha meglátom, mindig rosszul vagyok. Maga nem figyelte meg, Somogyi? Olyan a keze, mint valami hentesnek. Nem lesz ebből orvos soha, hiába iratkozott be az esti tagozatra (Kovács, 1965, p. 109).

At such times, Milja looked at the shiny milk glass lamp shade or the November stars and never said anything. Only once did she jokingly remark:

–You are a completely different kind of fool than the others.

Milja rarely joked, and she often rebuked the patients as well. Maybe that was why they feared her and didn't like her very much. Vasilij Ivanich, Gábor's roommate, was truly afraid of her.

–I can't stand this woman, I can't help it – he said when Milja had already left their room.

–I always feel sick when I see her. Didn't you notice, Somogyi? Her hands are like a butcher's. She will never become a doctor, even though she enrolled in the evening course.

There are a vast number of similar examples throughout the novel, where conversation that clearly happened in Russian in real life got delivered in Hungarian to the readers. The only utterance in the book actually in Russian is in the following example:

Negyvenötben, amikor ott járt, már nem húztak semmit, de ötszáz pengőért orosz-magyar fonetikus kéziszótárt

In forty-five, when he was there, they no longer played anything, but for five hundred pengős you could get a

lehetett kapni, beszédgyakorlatokkal. Russian-Hungarian phonetic hand
 Ilyenekkel, hogy: Tovarish, ja antifasiszt... dictionary with speech exercises.
 (Kovács, 1965, p. 226). With such as: Tovarish, ja antifasiszt...
 [Comrade, I am an anti-fascist].

As it is indicated in the text itself, the last sentence is a phonetic transcription of the Russian utterance “Товарищ, я антифашист...”, or “Comrade, I am an anti-fascist...”.

Language contact can also be traced in the novel in the form of lexical borrowings. It can be said that these words are mostly known by the Transcarpathian Hungarian community, they occur frequently in the spoken language but are not used in other regions, so they do not, or only rarely occur in the local written language or fiction (Csernicskó, 2004, p. 116). In the latter, they mostly serve as a stylistic device, and in the case of the examined novel, they were used in order to imitate the local spoken variety of Hungarian. Some lexical borrowings in the novel include *gramota* (certificate of commendation for academic progress in the Soviet school of the time), *milicista* (policeman), *diktör* (radio announcer), and *kopera* (the distorted Russian word for a cooperative store). These are not explained in any way in the first, 1965 publication of the novel, but the 2007 version explains the meaning of some in the editorial endnotes.

In conclusion, it can be clear from the text of Vilmos Kovács's *Holnap is élünk* that the story is placed in a multi-national, multilingual setting, as several references are made that some dialogues or written utterances occur in Russian. However, the author chose to rely on references only, and never actually used any Russian in the novel. Another proof of the multi-ethnic and multilingual environment are some geographical names, personal names, and brands that appear in Slavic, mainly Russian. The author also aimed to convey the spoken variety of Transcarpathian Hungarian, utilizing either a dialectal language variant or some Slavic lexical borrowings in his characters' utterances. In the examined novel they are only used as stylistic devices. Apart from the features of multilingualism, the author tried to capture the people's attitude towards the political situation that changed yet again. Similarly to the novella from between the two world wars, people seemed to think, that the Soviet rule would not last long, the borders would not remain the same for long, and everything they need to face is only temporary. However, Vilmos Kovács needed to be particularly careful about what and how he wrote, as the strong censorship of the era was reluctant to let the novel be published in the first place, and they banned the book soon after publication.

5. Conclusions

Vilmos Kovács's *Holnap is élünk* illustrates how literature written under conditions of censorship and ideological control could still serve as a form of historical testimony and cultural self-preservation, and the bearer of faded historical memory. By embedding autobiographical experiences of persecution, the trauma of the “Malenkij robot”, and the fragile position of Transcarpathian Hungarians, and the disappointment of some of the adherents of communist ideology in the Soviet state within a documentary-style narrative, Kovács created a text that outlived the regime that once sought to suppress it. The very fact that the novel was published, banned, and then republished in altered forms testifies to the complex negotiation between individual creativity and the shifting boundaries of permissible discourse in the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the novel reveals the paradox of multilingualism in minority literature. While the setting of *Holnap is élünk* is unmistakably multi-ethnic and multilingual, the text itself refrains from presenting authentic Russian or Ukrainian speech. Instead, multilingualism is mediated through Hungarian, conveyed indirectly through references, borrowings, or stylized allusions. This strategy both widened accessibility for Hungarian readers and served as a subtle reminder of the pressures minority authors faced: the impossibility of fully rendering their linguistic environment without drawing the attention of censors.

More broadly, *Holnap is élünk* highlights the resilience of Hungarian literary culture in Transcarpathia. Despite institutional fragility, and political repression, Kovács's novel became a landmark that preserved memory, documented local realities, and offered a voice to a community at the margins. Its case underscores the importance of minority literatures not only as cultural expression but also as historical sources, revealing lived experiences often absent from official narratives.

In conclusion, *Holnap is élünk* is more than a regional curiosity: it is a crucial text for understanding how minority identity, censorship, and multilingualism intersected in Soviet Central Europe. Its survival and continued relevance remind us that the peripheries of literature can illuminate the core dynamics of power, language, and memory in the twentieth century.

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Silenced voices, faded memories, hidden multilingualism: revisiting Vilmos Kovács's "Holnap is élünk"

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Vilmos Kovács's novel "Holnap is élünk" [We Will Still Live Tomorrow] – in its genesis, content, and afterlife alike – constitutes one of the most characteristic imprints of the history of the twentieth-century Transcarpathian Hungarian community. The work functions simultaneously as a literary creation, a historical document, a site of memory, and a corpus that preserves the period-specific features of minority language use.

The history of Transcarpathian Hungarian literature after the Second World War unfolded under the signs of silence, censorship, and cautious reorganization. Although shifting state borders repeatedly disrupted cultural continuity, literary creation remained an important means of preserving minority identity throughout. Few prose works survived the rigid ideological climate of the Soviet decades; among them is Kovács's novel – the first work to openly raise the question of the fate of Transcarpathian Hungarians in the Stalinist era. Although the book was soon banned, the novel occupies a unique position as both a documentary testimony and a literary experiment, revealing the strategies through which minority authors sought to navigate the boundaries of permissible expression.

The present study examines "Holnap is élünk" from a dual perspective: that of political history and that of multilingual literary practice. The analysis situates Kovács's work within the fragile institutional frameworks of Transcarpathian Hungarian culture, drawing attention to the difficulties of publication, editorial interventions, and the constraints of censorship that shaped the novel's reception. At the same time, it places emphasis on the linguistic dimension: the representation of contact zones among Russian, Ukrainian, and Hungarian; the silence of untranslated utterances; and the stylistic use of loanwords reflecting local speech.

The central argument is that although Vilmos Kovács was compelled to write "only in Hungarian", he nevertheless encoded the multilingual environment of Soviet Transcarpathia, thereby documenting at once the limitations and the resilience of minority expression.

By combining close textual analysis with historical contextualization, the study contributes to three interrelated fields: research on Hungarian minority literature, the study of censorship and cultural policy under state socialism, and the analysis of multilingualism as a literary phenomenon. In doing so, it demonstrates that “Holnap is élünk” is not merely a regional curiosity but an important case study of how peripheral literature reflected and questioned the structures of power in the Soviet Union.

Keywords: *history of Transcarpathia, Hungarian literature, historical memory, multilingualism, minority language, minority literature.*

**Приглушені голоси, притлумлена пам'ять, прихована багатомовність:
переосмислення роману Вільмоша Ковача «Holnap is élünk»**

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Роман Вільмоша Ковача «Holnap is élünk» [І завтра будемо жити] за обставинами створення, змістом і подальшою долею є одним із найхарактерніших відбитків історії угорської громади Закарпаття у XX столітті. Це водночас літературний твір, історичний документ, місце пам'яті та корпус, що несе епохальні ознаки мовної практики меншин. Після Другої світової війни для закарпатської угорської літератури притаманне мовчання, цензура та обережне відродження. Хоча державні кордони, що змінювалися, неодноразово переривали культурну тяглість, літературна творчість залишалася важливим засобом збереження ідентичності меншини. Одним із небагатьох прозових творів, що витримав суворий ідеологічний клімат радянських десятиліть, став роман Вільмоша Ковача, перший твір, який відкрито порушив питання долі угорців Закарпаття у сталінську добу. Хоча його швидко заборонили, у наш час роман посідає унікальне місце як документальне свідчення і водночас як літературний експеримент, що розкриває стратегії, до яких вдавалися автори з числа меншин, намагаючись застосовувати гнучкий підхід у межах дозволеного висловлювання.

У статті роман «Holnap is élünk» [І завтра будемо жити] розглянуто з подвійної перспективи — політичної історії та багатомовної літературної практики. У процесі аналізу твір Вільмоша Ковача вписано у крихку інституційну рамку закарпатської угорської культури, звернено увагу на труднощі публікації, редакторські втручання та цензурні обмеження, що визначили сприйняття роману. Водночас наголошено на мовному вимірі роману: представленні контактних зон російської, української та угорської мов, особливостях неперекладених висловлювань і стилістичному використанні запозичень, які відображають регіональне мововживання. Центральна теза полягає в тому, що Вільмош Ковач, будучи змушеним писати

«лише угорською», усе ж закодував багатомовне середовище радянського Закарпаття, тим самим задокументувавши як обмеження, так і стійкість форм вираження мови національної меншини.

Поєднуючи текстуальний аналіз із історичною контекстуалізацією, зроблено внесок у три взаємопов'язані напрями: дослідження літератури угорської меншини Закарпаття, вивчення цензури та культурної політики в умовах соціалізму, а також аналіз багатомовності як літературного прийому. Таким чином доведено, що роман «*Holnap is élünk*» [І завтра будемо жити] є не тільки регіональною цікавинкою, а важливим прикладом того, як література на периферії відображала й водночас оскаржувала структури влади в Радянському Союзі.

Ключові слова: історія Закарпаття, угорська література, історична пам'ять, багатомовність, мова меншин, література меншин.

Elhallgattatott hangok, elhalványult emlékezet, rejtett többnyelvűség:

Kovács Vilmos „*Holnap is élünk*” című művének újraértelmezése

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Kovács Vilmos *Holnap is élünk* című regénye – keletkezésében, tartalmában és utóéletében egyaránt – a 20. századi kárpátaljai magyar közösség történetének egyik legjellemzőbb lenyomata. A mű egyszerre irodalmi alkotás, történelmi dokumentum, emlékezhely és a kisebbségi nyelvhasználat korszakos sajátosságait hordozó korpusz.

A kárpátaljai magyar irodalom története a második világháború után a hallgatás, a cenzúra és az óvatos újjászerveződés jegyében telt. Bár a változó államhatárok többször megszakították a kulturális folytonosságot, az irodalmi alkotás mindvégig fontos eszköze maradt a kisebbségi identitás megőrzésének. A szovjet évtizedek szigorú ideológiai klímáját kevés prózai mű bírta ki, ezek közé tartozik Kovács Vilmos regénye is – az első alkotás, amely nyíltan felvetette a kárpátaljai magyarok sorsának kérdését a sztálini korszakban. Bár a művet hamar betiltották, a regény egyedülálló helyet foglal el egyszerre dokumentarista tanúságtételként és irodalmi kísérletként, amely feltárja azokat a stratégiákat, amelyekkel a kisebbségi szerzők igyekeztek lavírozni a megengedett kifejezések határain.

A tanulmány a *Holnap is élünk* című regényt kettős nézőpontból vizsgálja: a politikai történelem és a többnyelvű irodalmi gyakorlat felől. Az elemzés Kovács Vilmos művét a kárpátaljai magyar kultúra törékeny intézményi kereteibe illeszti, rámutatva a megjelenés nehézségeire, a szerkesztői beavatkozásokra és a cenzúra korlátozásaira, amelyek meghatározták a regény recepcióját. Ugyanakkor a nyelvi dimenzióra is hangsúlyt helyez: az orosz, az ukrán és a magyar nyelv érintkezési zónáinak megjelenítésére, a le nem fordított megszólalások csendjére, valamint a helyi beszédet tükröző kölcsönszavak stilisztikai használatára.

A központi tétel az, hogy Kovács Vilmos, miközben „csak magyarul” volt kénytelen írni, mégis kódolta a szovjet Kárpátalja többnyelvű környezetét, ezáltal egyszerre dokumentálva a kisebbségi kifejezés korlátait és ellenálló képességét.

A szövegelemzés és a történeti kontextualizálás ötvözésével a tanulmány három egymással összefüggő területhez járul hozzá: a magyar kisebbségi irodalom kutatásához, az államszocializmus alatti cenzúra és kulturális politika vizsgálatához, valamint a többnyelvűség mint irodalmi jelenség elemzéséhez. Mindezzel azt bizonyítja, hogy a *Holnap is élünk* nem csupán regionális érdekesség, hanem fontos esettanulmány arról, miként tükrözte és kérdőjelezte meg a peremhelyzetű irodalom a hatalom struktúráit a Szovjetunióban.

Kulcsszavak: Kárpátalja története, magyar irodalom, történeti emlékezet, többnyelvűség, kisebbségi nyelv, kisebbségi irodalom.