

THE RISE AND FALL OF BOURGEOIS LITERATURE IN HUNGARY (1945–1949)

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The origins of the literature of the Hungarian bourgeoisie can be traced back to the Freemasons of the late eighteenth century who tried to liberate themselves from the constraints of feudalism. Their initiative was continued by intellectuals of humble origin who could profit from the social mobility of the age of reforms that culminated in the 1848 revolution. Although the rise of bourgeois culture suffered setbacks in 1949 and at the end of World War I, such temporary declines were far less serious than the damage caused by the German occupation of 1944. At the end of that year chances for a continuity were so slim that it was an open question whether recovery was possible.

As is well-known, Hungary suffered serious military, material, civilian, and intellectual losses in World War II. Some 800–900 000 people were killed in the war and 40 per cent of the national wealth of 1938 was destroyed. About 450 000 Jews perished in the holocaust. Political and social changes were inseparable from a large-scale migration that affected approximately 450–550 000 people. 60–80 000 ethnic Hungarians fled to Hungary from the neighbouring countries, 170–180 000 ethnic Germans were forced to leave. Owing to a Czecho–Slovak–Hungarian exchange scheme, 90 000 ethnic Hungarians left Czecho-Slovakia for Hungary and 60 000 Slovaks left Hungary and settled in Slovakia. In 1949 the population of the country was 9 200 000. 376 173 among them were born outside Hungary. Economic factors made it very difficult for the country to recover after the end of the war. In 1938 the per capita national income amounted to 120 US dollars, which was 60 per cent of the European average. World War II and its consequences led to a rapid decline, and the 1938 level was not reached until 1950.

In short, our period was marked by an increasingly backward economy and serious intellectual losses. The poets Miklós Radnóti and György Sárközi, the short-story writers Károly Pap and Andor Endre Gelléri, the essayists Antal Szerb and Gábor Halász died in forced labour camps. No fewer eminent writers were killed by the Communists in 1945. The philosophers Tibor Joó and József

Révay, and the short-story writer and critic István Örley were among them. Continuity was broken also by the arrival of a group of Communists from Moscow. The film critic and writer Béla Balázs, the philosopher György Lukács, the journalist Andor Gábor, and the critic József Révai belonged to a generation active since the early twentieth century. Like the somewhat younger novelists Béla Illés and Sándor Gergely, they had lived in the Soviet Union before and during the war. Largely ignorant of the conditions in Hungary, they made an immediate attempt to force the Soviet system on the country. What the American historian John Lukács wrote about his namesake, recalling their meeting shortly after the philosopher's return to Budapest may give some idea of the distance between a Communist leader who had spent long years in Moscow and the experience of someone who survived the holocaust and the siege of Budapest:

His conversation, or what I remember of it, consisted mostly of tired *Kaffeehaus* witticisms with which he tried not only to lighten the customary Marxist platitudes but also to cover up the condition that he knew remarkably (...) little of what Hungary had lived through and what Hungarians were thinking (Lukács 1990: 97–98).

In spite of the lack of material resources and the presence of the Soviet troops, the Muscovite Communists met with considerable resistance. The surviving representatives of the literature of the interwar period tried to restore the continuity broken by the German occupation, which had started on 19 March 1944. In April 1945 the journal *Magyarok* was started with the idea of preserving the tradition of *Nyugat*, the organ of the liberal bourgeoisie and the most important literary journal of the first half of the century. The next autumn *Válasz*, the periodical of the Populists, appeared. Lajos Kassák (1887–1967) also made an attempt to continue the activities of the literary and artistic avant-garde by publishing *Kortárs* (1947–1948). In 1946 the members of the younger generation, the poets Sándor Weöres (1913–1989), János Pilinszky (1921–1971), Ágnes Nemes Nagy (1922–1991), and others also decided to start a monthly. By adopting the title of a collection of poems by Radnóti, published in 1935, *Újhold* openly referred to the tragic experience of the holocaust. The same year saw the publication of Radnóti's posthumous volume, containing the poems composed in a forced labour camp that are justly regarded as this poet's most significant contribution to Hungarian literature, the texts which have an additional documentary value by representing an unexpected legacy from the dead. Since my assessment of Radnóti's late works, together with a critique of their English translations, originally read at the University of Cambridge, in December 1994, has been published with some other papers of the Radnóti Memorial Conference (Gömöri 1994: 3–12, Szegedy-Maszák 1996: 13–28, Ozsváth 1996: 29–44, K. Géfin 1996: 45–57), on this occasion I merely state that this posthumous publication

served as a starting-point for Pilinszky, the most important Hungarian poet to emerge in the years following the end of World War II. *Trapeze and Parallel Bars* (1946) represented a new start: identifying himself with the fate of the victims of the holocaust, the young Catholic poet focused on a cosmic homelessness and created a language of great complexity in short and cryptic pieces. His influence was felt even in the work of Weöres, an outstanding poet of the previous generation, who in *The Colonnade of Teeth* (1947) published a series of one-line poems.

The movement represented by Pilinszky and others, sometimes characterized as a form of Central European 'catastrophism' was at odds with the propaganda literature written in the spirit dictated by the Muscovite Communists. Its first product was an anthology entitled *May Choir, 1945*, which contained poems by Tibor Méray, who is known in the West as the co-author of a book on the revolution of 1956. For György Lukács and József Révai, the chief architects of the culture controlled by the Hungarian Communist Party, the immediate purpose was to lay down the political grounds of the ideology of what Mátyás Rákosi was to call 'salami tactics'. The first step towards this goal was made by Révai, who in *Marxism and Populism*, a book published in Moscow in 1943, proposed a popular front.

There are two radically different interpretations of the years 1945–1949. Some argue that after the end of the war Hungary had a better chance for democracy than in previous times and the high hopes were lost only because of the Communist take-over. Others believe that the fate of the country was sealed from the beginning of 1945. It is difficult not to find the topic depressing and controversial. Some of the documents are still not accessible and may prove to have been lost. Popular beliefs notwithstanding, the post-war years cannot be called a closed chapter. Surprisingly little has been written on this period since 1989. There are some survivors with painful memories and the interpreter may hurt personal feelings.

As my field is limited to the sphere of literature, I cannot claim to make a general statement. All I can suggest is that the plan to have a full control over literature was made by a group of Communists in Moscow, before the Soviet troops reached Hungarian territory.

In 1945 Révai and Lukács were given roles that suited them well. Révai's task was to take measures against 'the enemies of the people', while Lukács was expected to provide a theoretical framework for the campaign against bourgeois culture. One of the lessons the Hungarian Communists had learned after the failure of the 1919 Commune was that the one-party system could not be introduced without the support of some spokesmen of the rural population. In the 1930s Révai worked out an ideology of popular front. After his return to Hungary his chief objective became to strike a deal with some members of the bour-

geoisie and some writers who claimed to represent the interests of the peasantry in the interwar period. There were underground Communists in both groups who were eager to help him. The others had to make a quick decision. Since we are talking about a period that calls for a drastic reinterpretation, it is still not easy to make generalizations.

In 1945 it was stated by the new political leaders of Hungary, the members of the coalition government that included Communists, that no one was immune from accountability for personal conduct. To avoid any misunderstanding, I wish to emphasize that it is not my intention to suggest that more people should have been punished. According to independent (Western) estimates over 250 000 persons were deported to forced labour camps in the Soviet Union after the end of the war, and between January 1945 and March 1948 there were almost 40 000 political prosecutions, which resulted in over 20 000 people being sentenced (Hoensch 1988: 161, 178). All I am saying is that Hungarian intellectual life was badly manipulated from the very beginning, so that the chances for the development of a democratic system were very slim. Some urban intellectuals were tolerated, although their totalitarian or opportunistic inclinations were apparent in the 1930s, and some Populists were accepted as representing a 'progressive', democratic movement, while the questionable elements in their ideology were ignored.

Révai decided to have the poet and prose writer Gyula Illyés (1902–1983) as an ally. In March 1945 he compared Illyés to such progressive figures in history as Ferenc Rákóczi II, Lajos Kossuth, and Sándor Petőfi. Illyés responded by arguing at a meeting of the National Peasant Party that "the Communists have gone much further in guaranteeing freedom for writers than we expected. We have to appreciate this" (Standeisky 1987: 29). It is far from easy to define the role played by Illyés in the period. On the one hand, he is still respected by many Hungarians, on the other hand, it is undeniable that his artistic and political reputation has declined since the 1980s. Older people maintain that he saved some intellectuals, in a literal or metaphorical sense, while the younger generations blame him for never opposing the political establishment. It is certainly true that he was awarded the Kossuth prize in 1948 and 1953, and never stopped publishing in the early 1950s, when almost all Hungarian writers of distinction lived in internal exile. It cannot be forgotten, however, that as a shrewd tactician he often outwitted the authorities and in 1950 he composed *One Sentence on Tyranny*, a poem that later became associated with the 1956 revolution.

In more general terms, there may be several open questions concerning the position of the Populists in intellectual history. The only book available on the subject was written in the West. While it is reliable in most respects, it fails to address the question of anti-Semitism. The following statement may be open to criticism:

As for the Jewish question and the interpretation of anti-Semitism, the Populist writers were balanced, good-natured, and humane; they condemned the discriminatory measures, the persecution and extermination of Jews, and they regarded anti-Semitism as useless and detrimental (Borbándi 1983: 390).

At the present stage the only hypothesis I can formulate is that the leaders of the Hungarian Communists sometimes tolerated writers who compromised themselves in the 1930s or during World War II. My example would be József Erdélyi (1896–1978), whose volume of poetry *Violet Leaf* (1922) may be regarded as representing a paradigm shift in Hungarian literature by heralding the Populist movement that was to play a decisive role in the political, social, and intellectual life of the interwar decades. Erdélyi was an unquestionably talented poet of half-Romanian origin whose ideology was strikingly similar to that of Octavian Goga and Lucian Blaga, or the young E.–M. Cioran and Mircea Eliade.

For an understanding of the anti-Semitic elements in the ideology of the Hungarian Populists, it is necessary to refer to an incident in nineteenth century history. On 23 May 1882 an anti-Semitic member of the Hungarian parliament reported the disappearance of a peasant girl from Tisza-Eszlár, a village in Eastern Hungary, just a week before the Jewish Passover (Istóczy 1904: 118–125). A ritual-murder allegation was made and another member of the Lower House, Győző Istóczy, who modeled his activities on those of Wilhelm Marr and made a speech in the Hungarian parliament on 25 June 1878 with the title 'Jews, the Iron Ring Around Our Necks', (Levy 1991: 100–103) appeared with a portrait of the alleged victim at an international anti-Semitic congress held in Dresden. The case resulted in a trial and the fifteen defendants were acquitted. The defense was represented by Károly Eötvös, a Liberal member of the parliament who was also well-known as a writer. His account *The Great Trial That Started a Thousand Years Ago and Is Still Not Over* (1904), published in three volumes, was widely considered a document about the triumph of Liberalism over superstition at the time when József Erdélyi composed a poem entitled *The Blood of Eszter Solymosi* (1937), suggesting that the verdict had to be reversed, because the girl had been a victim of ritual murder. In post-war Hungary Erdélyi was brought to justice. After spending close to three years in prison, he could make a new start as a poet. His collection *A Return* (1954) contained poems written between 1945 and 1954.

My intention is not to find fault with Erdélyi or such other Populists as István Sinka, Péter Veres, or János Kodolányi, who expressed similar anti-Semitic views, but to suggest that such prominent Communists as Lukács or Révai were responsible for not only a large decrease in personal liberty in the years following 1945, but also for the survival of anti-Semitism.

Instead of passing a moral judgement on some Populists, we need to recognize that in their works anti-Semitism was not only closely tied but even subordinated to anti-capitalism. Historians divide over their assessment of the role played by the industrial magnates who were largely responsible for the economic growth of Hungary around 1900. As in some other cases, the truth may be rather complex. On the one hand, Manfred Weiss, the owner of the factories of Csepel made a very important contribution to the rise of Budapest; on the other hand, his success was partly due to his significant involvement in the war industry in the years 1914–1918.

Some Populist writers were uneducated and their anti-Semitism was largely emotional. The other side of the coin is that several Hungarian Communist leaders who had important functions in the years following 1945 came from families closely associated with capitalism. Because of their social background, they felt vulnerable to the criticism levelled at the capitalist exploitation of workers and agricultural labourers, and tolerated the anti-Semitism of some Populists. They may have been taken by surprise by the fact that the most sophisticated analysis of anti-Semitic feelings came from István Bibó, a political scientist associated with the Populists. His long essay *The Jewish Question in Hungary After 1944* was published in the Populist journal *Válasz*, in October and November 1948, shortly before he was silenced by the Communists.

It is almost certain that the reason the Populists were favoured by the Hungarian Communist Party was political. The first issue of *Újhold* came out in July 1946. Shortly afterwards, the Communist monthly *Forum* appeared, edited by György Vértes, György Lukács, and two intellectuals who were called fellow travellers by some historians. The term is somewhat misleading, since both had joined the Communists in the 1930s and were given the task of undermining other political parties. Officially the folklorist Gyula Ortutay was a member of the Smallholders' Party, while the prose writer József Darvas belonged to the National Peasant Party. The first issue of *Forum* contained an article by Lukács attacking *Újhold*. A few months later *Válasz* appeared almost simultaneously with an essay by Lukács in *Forum* that praised the Populists' journal edited by Illyés.

The discrimination was obvious. In his opening statement Illyés claimed that in politics the working-class, whereas in literature the peasantry was destined to lead. This division of labour was tacitly accepted by Lukács. Of course, there is every reason to believe that the philosopher regarded the pact with some Populists as temporary. After twenty-five years spent abroad, Lukács badly needed followers. Among his first disciples were the philosopher József Szigeti and the literary critic István Király. Szigeti's attack on the bourgeois decadence and irrationalism of the poetry of Weöres, in his essay *Hungarian Lyrics in 1947*, published in the October issue of *Forum*, was followed by the banning of

Újhold. Király was rumoured to have been affected by right-wing ideas, so his sudden conversion to Marxism may have been influenced by a desire to make people forget his earlier activity. In October 1946 he published a long article on László Németh, in which he downgraded this author's essays and insisted on the significance of his narrative fiction (Király 1976: 339–352). This text signalled the intention of the Communists to put political pressure on the representatives of what they viewed as the most important intellectual movement of the interwar years. Németh was known to have a strongly anti-Communist ideology. Before the war he published a lucid analysis of Stalinism and insisted that Hungary was part of the Western world. At the same time, he had one important advantage over the urban intellectuals: he paid a serious attention to the other nations of Central Europe. Although what he called 'the revolution of quality' was conceptually unclear, it implied a rejection not only of Western capitalism but also of Eastern Bolshevism. By defending Németh, Király set himself the task of manipulating him. Although in our period Németh refused to make concessions and his novel *Revulsion* (1947) is free of any Communist influence, other Populists proved to be less independent. They paid a heavy price for their survival: they became compromised in the eyes of the later generations.

It has to be added that social democrats and bourgeois radicals expressed discontent with the compromise between the Communist leaders and the Populists. Moreover, by 1947 even some Communists thought it was time to end the alliance with the spokesmen of the rural population. On 16 February Géza Losonczy – who after 1956 died in prison – condemned the pessimism of Illyés in an article published in the daily of the Communist Party, and in June László (B.) Nagy – a young Communist born in 1927 who committed suicide in 1973 – harshly criticized the Populists and attacked Bibó as the architect of their reactionary ideology (Nagy 1947: 446–470).

By this time the goals of the campaign against bourgeois values were largely accomplished. After a considerable number of articles and books attacking contemporary writers associated with these values, a rewriting of the past was the next task. A new canon had to be established and institutionalized. During their years spent in Moscow Lukács and Révai interpreted works on the basis of a dichotomy: progressive traditions were opposed to reactionary trends. Sándor Petőfi and Endre Ady were regarded as representing the main stream of Hungarian literature. After 1945 a third name was added, mainly because of an initiative taken by Márton Horváth. A drastic selection of the texts by these three poets was made with official interpretations attached to them. Later the most trustworthy literary historians were commissioned to write books on the three poets. The task of Pál Kardos (Pándi) was to develop Marxist interpretations of the poetry of Petőfi that could replace the highly influential book published in 1922 by János Horváth, who was to be forced to give up his position at the uni-

versity, together with other bourgeois scholars. István Király, the son of a Presbyterian priest, was asked to find an explanation for Ady's attachment to socialism and Calvinism, and Miklós Szabolcsi, a well-educated critic with a special interest in twentieth century French literature, was destined to discuss the poetry of Attila József, which had obvious links with the international and the Hungarian avant-garde.

The consequences of this canon formation were far-reaching and sometimes damaging. At a conference celebrating the 175th anniversary of the birth of Petőfi, held at the beginning of April 1998, several participants spoke of a general lack of interest in the works of this nineteenth century author, and in February 1998, at a colloquium devoted to the activity of Ady, most of the papers addressed the issue of the decline of the poet's reputation. As for József, in recent years documents concerning his conflict with the Communists were published, and the interpretation of his works changed radically since the post-war years.

Some poems by Petőfi, Ady, and even József seem unreadable today. Teachers do not know how to handle them, and they are usually avoided by the authors of dissertations. By contrast, the young critics of the 1990s are avid readers of works by the authors who were dismissed by the Marxists in the late 1940s. In June 1998 a collection of essays, mainly by scholars in their twenties, appeared, testifying to the high reputation of Dezső Kosztolányi (1885–1936). In the years following 1945 this writer of the middle class was the main target of the Communists. In March 1947 Árpád Szabó – today emeritus professor of classical philology and a prominent member of the Presbyterian Church – published an essay in which he condemned Kosztolányi as a fascist. “I belong to that part of the Hungarian intelligentsia,” he wrote, “which needs Kosztolányi to be aware of what we wish to eliminate for the sake of the future” (Szabó 1947: 220). The essay appeared in *Valóság*, a monthly edited by Sándor Lukácsy, who later was at least partly responsible for the abolition of the Eötvös College, the equivalent of the École Normale Supérieure founded in 1895, and for making a long list of books that the Communists wished to destroy (Lukácsy 1985: 10–18).

Szabó's article was part of a large-scale campaign led by Lukács and Révai with the purpose of restructuring the canon of Hungarian literature. Lukács was consistent in the condemnation of certain representatives of the bourgeois tradition and expected his disciples to support him. In 1957, when he was afraid of a revival of the legacy that was virtually eliminated in the late 1940s, he urged a former student of his to repeat the attack on Kosztolányi. The main thesis of the book entitled *The Disintegration of Ethical Norms* by Ágnes Heller (b. 1929) – currently professor of the New School for Social Research and a member of the Hungarian Academy – is but a variation on the line of argument followed by Szabó ten years earlier.

Both works are indebted to the articles Lukács published between 1939 and 1941 in *Új Hang*, the organ of the Hungarian Communists who lived in Moscow. In 1945 these pieces appeared in Budapest with a twenty-page-long preface, still written in Moscow, in March 1945, with the aim of heralding a new era marked by “the annihilation of the relics of feudalism, the creation of Hungarian democracy, and the defense of the independence of the Hungarian people” (Lukács 1945: 4). Since Lukács was convinced that greatness in literature could be achieved only by serving social progress, writers who did not seem to have an unqualified belief in progress were dismissed as inferior. Lajos Kassák, a free-verse writer and constructivist painter, who in 1919 had refused to subordinate his creative activity to the principles laid down by the Communist Party, was rejected for “having obscured the real interests of the workers”, and Kosztolányi was called “a conscious and malicious reactionary” (Lukács 1945: 11).

On 20–21 May 1945 the Hungarian Communist Party held a conference. There were long and passionate debates over the tactics to be followed. On 31 May, Márton Horváth (1906–1987), the editor of the Communist daily *Szabad Nép*, launched a campaign against bourgeois culture in a summary of the conclusions of the conference called *The Death Mask of Babits*. His main target was Sándor Márai (1900–1989), who was widely regarded as the most celebrated representative of the bourgeois liberal tradition of Mihály Babits and Dezső Kosztolányi.

One of the most important books published in Hungary in 1945 was the diary Márai kept during the German occupation. This work was characterized as reactionary by Lukács in a lecture he gave in December 1945 under a title that is hardly translatable. ‘The Hungarian middle class is so rotten that it still does not want and has no courage to face reality’, Márai wrote in 1943 about those who believed in a German victory (Márai 1945: 149). After 19 March 1944 he lived in internal exile, and when the persecution of the Jews started, he identified himself with the victims. “I cannot expect anyone to forgive me that I was alive, writing novels while (s)he was in a labour camp” (Márai 1945: 231). To my knowledge no one formulated a conclusion comparable to the following: “Although we all suffered much, we are all guilty” (Márai 1945: 462).

Lukács made his unfavourable interpretation from the perspective of ‘párt-költészet’, a term denoting a strong political commitment defined in the following manner:

To give a wide, profound, and all-embracing picture of the development of social life. To fight for the progress of mankind, for a higher development by revealing the direction of such a progress, the driving forces behind it, and the interior and exterior powers that try to block it. The true and faithful reflection of social life is the main instrument that can be used to exert an influence on the people (Lukács 1948: 119).

Since Márai was the most important writer forced to leave Hungary by the Communists, his case might help us understand their cultural policy. Born in Kassa (today Košice) in 1890, he came from the Saxon bourgeoisie of what was Upper Hungary until 1920. His original name was Grosschmid, but he adopted the name of one of his Hungarian ancestors at the very beginning of his career. His first book, a collection of verse, was published in 1918. Although he was a non-Communist, after the fall of the first Hungarian Commune of 1919, he left Hungary because he disapproved of the right-wing regime. In the Weimar Republic he became a respected journalist and published fiction, drama, and essays in German. In 1923 he married the daughter of a Jewish merchant. Having spent the years 1923–1928 in Paris, where he was associated with the movements of the international avant-garde, he returned to Hungary. The motive behind this move was quite simple: he loved the Hungarian language and wished to continue the tradition of Dezső Kosztolányi and Gyula Krúdy, the outstanding prose writers of the early decades of the century.

In Search of Gods: The Novel of a Journey (1927), written at the end of the author's first period of exile, gave a shrewd analysis of the ethnic and religious conflicts in the Near East. As a publicist he wrote a series of articles attacking Hitler from 1933. His two-volume autobiography, *The Confessions of a Citizen* (1934–1935) was received by many as an imaginative characterization of the life style of the Hungarian liberal bourgeoisie. By the end of the 1930s he developed a high reputation as novelist, short-story writer, essayist, playwright, and poet. Because of his violent opposition to the Nazis, after 19 March 1944 he had to seek refuge in a village north of Budapest and could not return to the capital before the Soviet occupation.

Márai was described by Lukács in the above-mentioned lecture as representing “vulgar bourgeois individualism” (Lukács 1948: 126), the opposite of a progressive writer who “never stops singing about the great, national, humanistic mission of the party that plays a role in world history” (Lukács 1948: 128). As for world history, it was said to be dominated by such great individuals as Cromwell, Marat, Lenin, and Stalin, “who could unite their individual strength with the task given them by the party in a higher synthesis that is new, exemplary, and of a Classical status” (Lukács 1948: 127).

In April 1947 the text of this long lecture was put in a larger context, in a book called *Literature and Democracy*. To promote Realism, the author asked for the introduction of tighter controls and outlined a program with the aim of “destroying the reactionary thought of imperialism” (Lukács 1948: 7). In the introduction Lukács specified the following features of the culture to be rejected:

aristocratism, the rejection of equality, a contempt for the masses, the underestimation of economic, political, and social motives, the cult of irrationalism and

myth, and emphasis on the vanity of life, a distance from life, and a focus on the psyche (Lukács 1948: 10).

Assuming that after the 1848 revolutions the bourgeoisie ceased to be a progressive force in European history, Lukács argued that in the twentieth century bourgeois writers could produce either so-called pure literature, dominated by the cult of the ivory tower, or works of kitsch. Both weaknesses were detected in the works of Márai. According to the deal struck with the Populists, great art was defined as inspired by peasant or working-class culture. In conclusion, Márai had no place in the literature of post-war Hungary.

In May 1947 the younger Communists started new journals. *Emberség* was edited by Imre Keszi, Tamás Aczél, and Tibor Méray, while one of the two editors of *Tovább* was Géza Losonczy. Supported by the daily *Szabad Nép* and the periodical *Forum*, they urged writers to follow the instructions of Zhdanov and the example of Fadeev, the main representative of Socialist Realism. Márai's comment on one of these journals was not published until 1993. He called *Tovább* "a perfect copy of the Fascist *Egyedül vagyunk* in typography, setting, spirit, and tone," and gave the following characterization of the anti-Semitic articles that appeared in the Communist weekly:

The photographs of Jewish bankers appear with a text entitled "We have worked for such people". This is what the Fascist newspaper did three years ago. The only difference is that in the past the attacks on Jewish capitalists were made by blackmailing Christian journalists, whereas now the authors of similar articles are blackmailing Jewish journalists (Márai 1993: 209–210).

In the September-October issue of *Emberség* Imre Keszi asked for "the art of the rising workers" and condemned "the trends serving the taste of the old ruling classes" (Keszi 1947: 298). By that time Rákosi, whose desire was to be called "the Wise Leader of the Hungarian Nation," could boast that he had "sliced off like salami" most of the parties and factions other than his own. After the expulsion of those who spoke about Communist malpractices from the Smallholders' Party, the revelation of an alleged "counter-revolutionary conspiracy" led to the arrest and deportation of Béla Kovács, Secretary of the Smallholders' Party, by the Soviet military police. A long stream of refugees started. After Ferenc Nagy, the Smallholder prime minister, the Roman Catholic priest and president of Parliament Béla Varga, and Imre Kovács, one of the leaders of the National Peasant Party had left, came the turn of Social Democracy for liquidation. In October 1947 *Kortárs* was started. Edited by Kassák, it was a last attempt to preserve the tradition of the socialist avant-garde. On 16 December Géza Losonczy dismissed Kassák's movement as representing 'anti-Realism' and the contributors of his periodical as the most consistent enemies of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. At the

same time, the first issue of *Csillag* appeared. Until 1956 this monthly would determine the ideological principles for Hungarian culture.

One of the functions of *Csillag* was to strengthen the links with Soviet culture. In this respect the activity of Béla Illés (1895–1974), a Soviet Major and editor of the Red Army's Hungarian journal *Új Szó*, has to be mentioned. In 1947 he published a story *The Gusev Affair* with the purpose of setting the tone for the centenary of the 1848 revolution. To play down the Russian invasion that stopped the Hungarian uprising, Illés decided to give publicity to the merits of a previously unknown lieutenant. Gusev was said to have revolted against the Tsar in support of the Hungarian revolution. A street in the centre of Pest was named after him, and an abridged version of the story was included in the textbooks published for primary schools. In recent years the street got back its original name, since Gusev proved to have been invented by Illés, an author whose works are entirely forgotten today.

In Communist historiography 1948 was called the 'year of the turning-point', which transformed the country into a people's democracy. On 12 February the Politburo of the Communist Party made a decision to establish ideological unity. In his speech *The Analysis of Literary Life in Hungarian Democracy*, published in the March issue of *Csillag*, Márton Horváth condemned writers as different as Kassák and Márai, Németh and Weöres, and associated even Illyés with 'anti-democratic' forces. On 7 March the lead article of *Szabad Nép* was written by Rákosi himself. He called for an improvement of the theoretical activity of the Communist Party. A Committee of Cultural Policy was set up with the aim of defining the norms that artists and writers should respect. All cultural institutions were to be subordinated to the Committee that had four members, including its leader Márton Horváth. Otto Klemperer, the artistic director of the Budapest Opera, was sacked on the grounds that he was an American citizen of German birth and conducted works by Wagner. Painters were commissioned to work for a project called 'The Portrait Gallery of the Heroes of Labour'.

The first draft of the declaration of the Hungarian Workers' Party was published in *Szabad Nép* on 9 May. At the first congress of the 'new' party held in June Lukács spoke about the liberation of creative activity from the pressure of capitalism, the end of reification and alienation, the triumph of realism, and the supreme value of the Soviet experience. What followed was the darkest period in the history of Hungarian culture, dominated by an extreme form of censorship.

After the Hungarian Communist Party merged with the Social Democratic Party, several books were banned. One of these was the fifth volume of Márai's 'roman-fleuve' *The Work of the Garrens*, containing a visionary presentation of a 'Leader' addressing a public demonstration and the narrative of a meeting of the autobiographical hero Péter Garren and the famous writer Berten, who has been placed under house-arrest. Although these parts were based on Márai's

article about Hitler's 1933 speech in the Berlin Sport Palace and on his interview with Gerhart Hauptmann, retrospectively it is possible to assume that the Communist authorities saw a general criticism of totalitarian systems in the book. The scene in which the 'Leader' succeeds in manipulating his audience is about fanatics who lose their personalities and are controlled by the 'centre', a small group which has power and is alienated from the community. The general import of the meeting of the two writers, the young Péter Garren and the old Berten is no less obvious. Berten's hypothesis is that only communities with discontinuous memory can be manipulated from above. In other words, despotism is made possible by the destruction of historical consciousness, the distortion of collective memory.

Other works by Hungarian writers had a similar fate in 1948. A volume of poetry entitled *A Dream*, by the Transylvanian-born Zoltán Jékely, was printed but not published. From 1949 many writers were forced to silence, including the avant-garde poet Kassák, the Roman Catholic Pilinszky, and the Populist Németh. In 1948 the Geistesgeschichte philosopher Lajos Prohászka was expelled from the university, and during the next two years a great number of scholars lost their positions at the universities or at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

To my knowledge Márai's diary and his memoirs *Land, ahoy!* (1972) represent the only account of the years 1945–1948 that can claim credibility. Ironically, his diary was not made accessible in its entirety until the 1990s. István Csicsery-Rónay (b. 1917), a Smallholder, made a drastic selection when he published the diary covering the years 1945–1957 in Washington in 1968. As he told me some years ago, he refused to include those passages in which Márai called the Populist writer Gyula Illyés an opportunist. Other parts were excluded because of the strong opinions the author had on sensitive issues. Here is one example, an entry from 1946:

The problem with Jews is not that they failed to learn anything from suffering and misery. Who would have been different from them in this respect? The problem is that they have learned to continue fascism in their own style (Márai 1992: 131–132).

It is not easy to generalize about the reasons why so many writers renounced their past in the years following the end of World War II. Except for Márai, no one is known for having expressed strong reservations about the behaviour of the Soviet soldiers, and no other writer questioned the lawfulness of the expulsion of ethnic Germans. By 1948 he became increasingly isolated for two reasons: he was unwilling to paint in black and white and refused to accept any political function. He asked for a discrimination between Germans who sup-

ported and those who opposed Nazi Germany. "It is hard to win and hard to be defeated. It is hard to be Russian and to be human", he wrote in the summer of 1945 (Márai 1968: 15), and later made the following observation about the Soviet soldiers he met: "Their aim was to give up their personality (...) I as a Western man cannot accept this argument. Giving up my personality – this crazy ideal – would mean giving up my attachment to life" (Márai 1972: 78).

In a period when many of his colleagues modified their views under political pressure, Márai was consistent: throughout his life he approved of socialism but he never renounced his individual freedom. "My experience is that writers lose as much of their artistic and moral integrity as they gain in political significance," he remarked in 1945 (Márai 1968: 17), and two years later he expressed his disgust when he witnessed manipulations and corruption: "Elections. (...) It is no solution to keep silence in the midst of idle talk. *Not to respond from the inside*, not to listen – that is the real task" (Márai 1993: 152). He regarded radical land reform as "the greatest event in the life of the Hungarian people" (Márai 1968: 46) and held the whole nation responsible for the massacre of Jews but described the Soviet soldiers' idea of the bourgeois as ridiculous and felt contempt for those who enjoyed the executions. "It is not enough to like what they like; they expect you to hate what they hate. There we drift apart," he declared about the Communists (Márai 1968: 57).

In the summer of 1947 Aragon and Elsa Triolet visited Budapest. In his public lecture Aragon attacked those who lived in an ivory tower and called Paul Valéry a Nazi sympathizer, who admired Pétain and Salazar. Márai wrote about Aragon's visit with contempt. For him continuity was unbroken between the German and Soviet occupations. He refused to distinguish between class hatred and racism. No one had the inclination or courage to share this view. The first sign of his alienation from a country living in fear was that on the day of Hungarian books, in the summer of 1946, Ferenc Nagy, the Smallholder prime minister avoided him. "I cannot side with the left," he confessed one year later,

because it would be moral suicide to leave my class. I can criticize it from the inside, but do not wish to be treacherous. Nor can I make a single step towards the right, because I am not willing to support the fascism which may be hiding behind honest right-wing people (Márai 1993: 147).

Although feudalism had been abolished in Hungary in 1848, the rise of bourgeois culture was aborted by Communism. This was the conclusion Márai reached in 1948, shortly before he left his country:

In Hungary two types of man could play a full-scale role: the aristocrat and the peasant. What stood between them had to step down before it could fulfil its function in history (Márai 1968: 64).

One of the clichés of Marxist historiography is that Hungary never had a bourgeoisie. One of the worst consequences of the impact of the works of György Lukács and József Révai was the transformation of Hungary into a country with a history of backwardness. In 1948 Márai was forced to emigrate. A sense of foreboding haunted him, and his predictions proved to be correct: the persecution of kulaks, the nationalization of the Hungarian industry, banking system, and education were followed by the trials of Cardinal Mindszenty and the Communist Rajk in 1949 and by the large-scale deportations of 'class-aliens'. György Lukács himself came under criticism. On 29 April 1949 Rákosi received a long essay from László Rudas, an arch-enemy of the philosopher, in which Lukács was attacked for viewing Hitler as a tragic figure in history. Although the essay was not printed without significant changes in *Társadalmi Szemle*, the theoretical journal of the Hungarian Workers's Party, others joined in the debate. On the 25 December *Szabad Nép* contained an article in which Márton Horváth blamed Lukács for downgrading Socialist Realism to "an obscure generalization that can be approached with the help of abstractions rather than with that of the living reality of Soviet literature" (Urbán 1985: 174). The philosopher had to exercise self-criticism. Ironically, the main target of his opponents was *Literature and Democracy*, the book which was largely responsible for the fall of bourgeois literature.

By this time most of those he attacked between 1945 and 1948 were involved in writing fairy-tales for children or translating from Russian. The only major exception was Márai, who had to face poverty in exile. The rest of his life proves how difficult it was for him to leave his country and can be interpreted as a sad epilogue to the history of bourgeois literature in post-war Hungary. For forty years he continued to write and publish in Hungarian, but his works were inaccessible in his native country. The reason for this distortion of the past was quite obvious: those historians and critics who identified Hungarian culture with the traditions of the gentry could not find a place for a writer whose works contradicted their ideological assumptions.

Darkness surrounds me and I can see only one goal: I have to write in Hungarian as long as I can. This is the only task that is still meaningful. I have signed a contract with this language; this is the destiny I can never forget (Márai 1993: 107).

These words were written in 1947, at a time when many Hungarian writers denied their attachment to the bourgeoisie. Márai had expressed many reservations about his class throughout his career, but remained committed to its values to the very end. One of the reasons for his decision to commit suicide in San Diego (California) on 21 February 1989 was that he saw no chances for the re-

covery of bourgeois literature in Hungary. After forty years of Communism those chances still remain very much in doubt.

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