

BOOK REVIEWS

Abolish the Past Once and for All.

A kommunista aszketizmus esztétikája [The Aesthetic of Communist Asceticism]. By Dávid Szolláth. Budapest: Balassi, 2011. 288 pp.

While the literary and cultural history of the socialist period has begun in recent years to reemerge as an important field of research, one nonetheless cannot help but sense a certain failing if one examines the works dealing with this era. Interestingly enough, in spite of the fact that there is a clear desire to reassess the literature of this time, which was the longest period of twentieth-century Hungarian history and therefore also a period that left perhaps the deepest marks on the cultural landscape of the country, the essays that deal with the era often seem to adopt very similar perspectives. In general, they first offer at most a short sketch of the cultural and political context and then turn their attention entirely to works of the period before the change of regimes in 1989 that are still widely read today. Other works (of which there are many to say the least) are relegated to the realm of the “deservedly forgotten” or the “interesting at most from a historical point of view.” This is not necessarily a problem, of course, since clearly the works of the era that are less interesting today from an ideological or poetical perspective will be given less emphasis in narratives of literary history. What remains problematic, however, is that often we too easily dismiss compositions of the era with the contention that they belong not to literary history but rather to cultural or social history. It is perhaps not an overstatement to claim that with very few exceptions the most interesting articles to be published over the course of the last two decades dealing with the literary and cultural history of the past half-century were written not by literary historians, but rather by historians and sociologists, and for the moment the literary history of the communist era still waits to be written.

Dávid Szolláth’s new book seeks in part to address this hiatus. As the author indicates in the introductory chapter, he has two principal aims. Building in part on the recent debates regarding literature, he examines the potentials of literary history, focusing precisely on a period that scholars of literary studies have in recent years neglected. Furthermore, as he demonstrates, this period obliges us to formulate some of the basic aesthetic and methodological questions and rethink some of the fundamental principles of our approach to the study of

literature and our overview of literature itself. The book explicitly examines works by authors who, in simple terms, are no longer part of the canon, such as Tibor Déry or Erzsébet Galgóczi, or works by authors that are not part of an individual author's canonized oeuvre, such as the labor movement poems or by people who are peripheral at this point of our notion of literary history (or they completely fell out from our literary canon).

Of course these names might prompt one to raise the question with (false) ingenuity, why should we deal with works and authors who are peripheral (or perhaps not?) at this point to our notion of literary history? Why should we have to read the texts of the communist era, the better part of which are dull and uninteresting today? Does it not suffice to familiarize ourselves with the philosophical and aesthetic ideas of the young Lukács? Why should we have to have penetrating discussions about his later theory of Realism or (spare us) his theses regarding Social Realism, which, let's confess, are not the most engaging part of his oeuvre? Not many people read the novels of Social Realist writers today (and that is as it should be). These questions, of course, are deliberately (falsely) ingenuous, and in addition to the fact that the very engaging analyses offered in the book demonstrate quite clearly the relevance of the themes, the author alludes to several thought-provoking principles underlying the importance of the study. According to Szolláth, following the change of regimes, a narrative of literary history emerged that essentially adopts the presuppositions, with regards to aesthetics and literary history, of the *Nyugat* generation (the generation of writers that published in *Nyugat*, the leading literary journal of the first half of the twentieth century), and today this narrative has become not only pervasive but even dominant. With the "rereadings" that became fashionable in the 1990s, this narrative has conserved these presuppositions, or, more precisely, adapted them to today's literary tastes and poetic references. While Szolláth does not make this explicit (and I imagine this may well have been intentional on his part), I cannot help but wonder if the polemical tone of the introductory chapter is in response to the literary-history narrative of Ernő Kulcsár Szabó and the notion of "interrupted continuity." According to this concept, which has been promulgated to great effect by Kulcsár Szabó and his students, in 1948 there was a rupture in the history of Hungarian literature, when literary tendencies, which until then had been developing in an "organic" manner, were suddenly silenced by the forces of power politics. The repressed poetics of Hungarian literature, thus severed from its past, emerged again sporadically in the 1960s, and the Postmodern turn essentially can be seen as the organic resumption of

these tendencies.¹ Szolláth criticizes not so much the relevance of this notion as its exclusiveness. He suggests that it is in part due to this narrative that the works of the 1950s have essentially disappeared from Hungarian literary history and, moreover, even the compositions of the 1960s are seen as relevant only to the extent that they can be understood as forerunners of the prose turn (authors such as Géza Ottlik, Miklós Mészöly, or György Konrád) or as representatives of a Realist, mimesis-based literature on the other side of the spectrum (p.13).

This is problematic from several perspectives. I myself have been surprised, for instance, to notice that in university courses on the Hungarian literature of the 1960s and 1970s my students have not responded to the works according to values and preferences that to me seemed self-evident. For instance, they did not always enjoy Ottlik, and only rarely enjoyed the early Péter Esterházy. In contrast, Ferenc Sánta or Galgóczi were often met with interest and enthusiasm among the students, at least at first reading. In addition, it can be difficult, to say the least, to speak of the contextual aspects of Esterházy's novel *Termelési regény* ("A Novel of Production") or *Kis magyar pornográfia* (*Little Hungarian Pornography*, translated by Judith Sollosy) if one has no knowledge whatsoever of the various constituents of a production novel genre or the origins of the metaphor "the writer is the engineer of the soul" (a statement attributed to Joseph Stalin). Of course we can bewail the alleged lack of taste or erudition of younger generations, or perhaps in the best case scenario we could speak knowingly of the need for more education in aesthetics. Or we could think about the relativity of the canon today. We could consider the possibility that there is more than one narrative of twentieth-century Hungarian literary history, and that various texts will mean different things to various interpretive communities. Indeed, works that are considered significant today may have been interpreted quite differently at the time they were written.

There is another possibility—or trap—as well, what I would refer to as "spasmodic re-canonization." Fortunately, the book avoids this. Szolláth does not strive to create an alternative canon. He does not wish to demonstrate that the forgotten works of the communist era were in fact masterpieces. He argues, rather, that aesthetic standards are historical constructs, and that literary historians should not presume to found their inquiries on a given notion of "literature," but rather should remind themselves that "literature" is a living,

1 See Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, *A magyar irodalom története 1945–1991* [The History of Hungarian Literature, 1945–1991] (Budapest: Argumentum, 1993).

functional concept (to use Terry Eagleton's term).² In other words, much as it is not the task of the historian to analyze the past as if it were some kind of prologue to the present and project the preferences of the present onto the past, but rather to approach the events of the past as a stranger, at least to the extent possible, the scholars of the literature of the twentieth century should not regard the works or tendencies of earlier times as a prologue to the present or the Postmodern. Rather they should attempt to write the history of the shifting phenomenon to which we refer as "literature." As Szolláth emphasizes at one point, one does at times have the impression that historians of twentieth-century Hungarian literature seem hesitant (sometimes almost proudly so) to make use of tools from other, related fields of inquiry (such as branches of the history of science, philology, etc.) the use of which would have been self-evident and accepted for scholars of literature in centuries past (p.13). Thus most of the historians of the literature of the twentieth century actually study not literary history, but rather the history of contemporary literature. The past is relevant to them only to the extent that it can be tied to the recent literary tendencies.

This is particularly important and problematic if the field of inquiry itself seems to require us to set aside the aesthetic approach. And for the most part this is the case with regards to the subject of the book, the literature of communism, when literature had a specific function and the notion of aesthetics was very clearly subordinated to political, historical, and ideological "grand narratives." In other words, if we are studying the history of the functions of literature, in the case of communism it does not suffice to speak of the subordination of art to power (nor is this a simple matter), since the texts are not merely "aesthetic" objects, but rather acts that have certain social functions. From this perspective, knowledge of context can add a great deal to the interpretation of the texts. Indeed, it can bring to the foreground the importance of the study of the history of the uses of literature, an approach suggested by József Takáts. According to this approach, one addresses questions regarding when literature was used, under what circumstances, by whom, and in the service of what aims, as well as the functions of these uses (which often were not aesthetic, or at least not only aesthetic) in the given context.³ As one of the most interesting and most original essays demonstrates (an earlier version of which Takáts cited

2 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 8.

3 József Takáts, *A használati történet = Thomka-symposion. Ünnepi kötet Thomka Beáta köszöntésére* [The History of Use = Thomka Symposium. A Commemorative Volume to Beáta Thomka], ed. Tamás Kisantal, János D. Mekis, Péter P. Müller, and Dávid Szolláth (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2009), 398–406.

as an example of the history of the uses of literature), in order to interpret some of the labor movement poems of the 1930s, we must be familiar with the (sub)cultural political rituals in which they emerged and in which they were used. These verses were created not “simply” as poems, but rather as texts that acquired some kind of specific functions (agitation, emboldening, ritualistic) and were often given voice by a speaking chorus. Here the author examines not only and not even primarily the propaganda poems of the workers’ poets of yesterday, but rather authors who occupy a prominent place in today’s canon as well. For instance, Sándor Petőfi’s poem *Föltámadott a tenger* (*The Whole Sea Has Revolted*, translated by George Scirts) acquires a different meaning when recited by a speaking chorus, and some of Attila József’s poems, such as *Tömeg* (“The Masses”) and *Munkások kórusa* (“Workers Chorus”) were composed precisely for such presentations. Szolláth argues that some knowledge of the circumstances of a poem’s composition at the very least has the potential to enable us, in addition to having some grasp of the broader interconnections of direct and contemporary poetic tendencies in the case of the poetry of Attila József (for instance), to understand more thoroughly the entire system in which the poems came into being, a system which is both social and aesthetic. A sketch of the context under communism can offer a significant interpretive framework, particularly if one takes into consideration the fact that the essays in the book cover a very long period of time. Some of them deal with the workers’ literature of the 1930s (for instance analyses of the aforementioned essay on the speaking chorus or Déry’s novel *A befejezetlen mondat*, “The Unfinished Sentence”), while others offer more comprehensive case studies of the oeuvre, stretching over a period of several decades, of a given author (such as the essay on Lukács’s theory of critical Realism and canon formation or the thorough analysis of the private and public roles that Galgóczi attempted to represent). Szolláth chose to adopt an admirably prudent approach that avoids making the context overly broad. He interprets “communism” not in the traditional sense as an ideological or political movement or an event in the history of ideas, but rather as a particular practice of persuading or compelling individuals to develop self-reform techniques. This is necessary because this is the sphere in which, according to the author, one can find the common components in the communist visions and practices of different eras, components which in the case of an inquiry into the history of mentalities either become too homogenizing (such as in the case of Hannah Arendt’s conception of totalitarianism, as Szolláth notes) or are too divergent.

In adopting this approach to communism as a system of self-reform and self-control of the individual, Szolláth recalls the late works of Michel Foucault. He uses the methodology of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* in his analysis of communism as an ensemble of power discourses and practices that was at work simultaneously on the social and individual level. In the case of the latter, the socialist ideology and conception of history can only be adopted on the individual level if the individual is able to exert control over him or herself and maintain oversight over his or her own instinctive spheres. Thus the adoption (as a personal view) of communism as an ideology or belief system can be thought of as a history of salvation or initiation. The individual joins the Party (he or she converts), and from then on his or her new life is one of asceticism. The new "Communist Man" exercises ethical control over himself. He is willing to forego the many advantages of his earlier life and sacrifice his earthly happiness for the final victory of the proletariat and the Utopia of a classless society.⁴ This asceticism is paired with a distinctive approach to literature as well. The new "Communist Man" does not simply bring his desires and personal well-being under the oversight of his vigilant consciousness (since—especially in the 1930s—membership in the party was illegal, and therefore clearly compelled the individual to sacrifice his or her carefree life to the movement and accept in its stead tough work and persecution), but also his personal tastes. Literature becomes one of the tools of the struggle and one of the implements of social engineering. In this struggle, aesthetic taste as understood in the traditional sense is not the guiding principle. The "Communist Man" prefers not the "beautiful," but rather the "useful." This is particularly interesting when there is something personal at stake. The "heroes" of the book for the most part are transitional figures who stand on both sides at once, figures who deliberately try to renounce the determining features of their earlier selves in order to live a genuinely ascetic life. In other words, what is truly interesting to Szolláth is not so much the "pure" functioning of communism, but rather the transitional figures, the individuals who stood at the border of the two worlds. This is palpable primarily in the essay on Lukács, since the history of his life clearly exemplifies the domination of

4 The asceticism of communism is perhaps the most spectacularly embodied in Béla Biszku, one of the characters of the recent novel *Igazságos Kádár János* ["János Kádár the Just?"] by Vilmos Csaplár. Biszku is a stern, humorless communist who lives on kefir and dry bread in order to hasten the coming of the "World Revolution." The book elegantly presents the strange memory of the Kádár era. Asceticism has become lunacy and is in stark contrast with the indulgences of the hedonistic petty monarchs, who carouse and hunt with machine guns.

ideological and power oriented self-control over the aesthetic sphere. Following the Hegelian and Marxist turns, the messianic aesthetic ideology of the young Lukács, which drew on German Romanticism, Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, and other influences, became an ideological aesthetic, which first sought its place in the theory of classical Realism (giving up on Dostoyevsky and Flaubert as the first great “renunciations” of ascetics in favor of Tolstoy and Balzac) only later to flow into the self-renunciation of critical (Socialist) Realism through the ritual of self-criticism, which was prompted by the Lukács debate and the influence of power pressures. Aesthetic asceticism thus can only function in cases of figures who know the other side as well, who form the art of the new era while in some way being aware of the values of the “bourgeois,” “Western” canon—and possibly, heaven forbid, the greater value of this canon (a short section, but a very chatty digression makes reference to a later literary historian and theorist, Pál Pándi, who as one of the powerful scholars of the Kádár era and the editor-in-chief of *Kritika* disparaged tendencies in contemporary Hungarian and global literature with such conviction that one cannot help but presume he himself was very aware of their merits).

In addition to ascetic aesthetics, the book also examines the aesthetics of asceticism, in other words, the works of authors that were created out of this attitude and conduct of self-formation and self-control. The chapter on Galgóczi is perhaps the most interesting in this regard. Szolláth emphasizes the conflict between the role that the writer forces on herself as a representative and the efforts to meet the expectations created by this model. Another far more evident form of asceticism emerges here. As Galgóczi’s correspondence makes clear, she expressed her own lesbianism in the discourse of the class struggle and with the language of the ideology of power. It is perhaps particularly interesting to note that Galgóczi regarded her homosexuality not as some external stamp, but rather as the failure of her very own communist self, as a “bourgeois, decadent inclination.” Prompted by this diagnosis, Galgóczi abandoned her role as a writer who represented the party and the people and in the 1970s gradually came to figure in the role of the critical, peripheral intellectual, for instance in *Törvényen belül* (“Within the Law”) or *Vidravas* (“Otter-Iron” – a plate-shaped implement used to kill small wild animals that pose a danger to house pets and domesticated animals).

The case studies in the book examine certain fundamental phenomena of communism as a mode of self-formation. The clever and penetrating analyses offer a system of perspectives from which one can rethink the art of

one of the dominant ideologies of the past century. This rethinking, however, its inventiveness notwithstanding, sometimes yields debatable results. The analyses complement the theoretical framework well, but in my view from time to time the author falls into the trap that he himself criticizes with regards to “rereadings.” However much he may emphasize the contextualization of the texts and the relativity of aesthetic judgment, he tacitly and sometimes explicitly shows certain aesthetic preferences, and he passes, however subtly, aesthetic judgment. In other words, his efforts notwithstanding, he too represents the aesthetic approach of the present moment, if, however, in a much more nuanced manner than those he takes to task. The finest works of the “heroes” of the narrative are those that “go beyond their context.” They were created (allegedly) not in conformity with their original context, but rather in conflict with it. More precisely, “decontextualization is not just a concomitant of their survival and their attainment of universality, but a precondition” (p.257). In other words, aestheticism is present, if in parentheses. One cannot read without it. Here too the value judgments of the present inevitably overwrite the original context. I should note, I mention this not as a flaw of the book, but rather as a fact of the writing of literary history, a fact that we may not be able to surmount. The author shares a great deal with the approach to literature that he criticizes, an approach that is oriented to the present. Of course there are many differences of degree, and sometimes they are striking. For instance, in the case of Attila József Szolláth persuasively demonstrates, with reference to the original context, that some recent interpretations, however legitimate as readings, may have little relevance from the perspective of literary history, since they function only as decontextualizing readings that transform the poet into a contemporary of the reader. In other words, the author, as a literary historian with good taste (or to use terms that would be more palatable in the study of literary history, sharing contemporary literary tastes and values), reads within the framework of a decontextualized, aestheticizing canon of masterpieces, though he recontextualizes these works and searches for their literary place.

I also have the impression that the aforementioned problem of contextual value may arise in part due to the scope of the essays. The distance in time of the themes of some of the chapters sometimes creates confusion. Following the aesthetic-political debates of the 1930s and 1940s, in the chapter on Galgóczi the book radically changes context. In the discussion of the socialist discourse after the 1950s more emphasis is given to the similarities to the earlier period than the (often highly notable) differences. One can argue for and against

the essay collection as a structure. In the case of this book, the fact that the methodological and theoretical unity is coupled with an impressive thematic diversity is an argument for it (in addition to the aforementioned works and authors, at the beginning of the book the reader is provided with a short analysis of some of the films of the 1980s that criticized the asceticism of communism). However, some of the themes and the span of the oeuvres of some of the authors are an argument against it. At least two of the four longer chapters, the one on Lukács and the one on Galgóczi, resemble preliminary studies for a monograph, their cogency notwithstanding. In addition, in order to situate properly the important works (those that somehow go beyond the context in which they were composed), perhaps it would have been worthwhile to have dealt a bit more with the “average” works. The “great” works of Socialist Realism are mentioned only as examples, without any actual discussion or presentation. Alexander Ignatyevich Tarasov-Rodionov’s 1922 novel *Chocolate*, which was a kind of parable of ascetic conduct in the 1930s, is given the most attention. The virtues and vices which for the party faithfuls of the time were of primary importance, are exemplified by this work, but we are given no real insight into the nature of its actual influence, beyond its ideological and messianic poses. Why was it read by so many people, and why did it become a kind of illegal bestseller? This is what gives rise to the fragmentary nature of the collection, which the author addresses at the end of the book. It is not, he observes, a monograph on the asceticism of communism, but rather “merely” an analysis of some careers, authors, and viewpoints and an attempt to put them in proper context. By no means does it aspire to offer a complete image of the era. The book “merely” offers an example of the use of an impressive methodology alongside persuasive analyses in a field that today is rarely made the subject of inquiry, or when it is, then with debatable results. One can only hope that the nuanced analyses, which exemplify an important approach and system of perspectives, will find readers and perhaps prompt more thorough study of the literary history of the socialist era.

Translated by Thomas Cooper

Tamás Kisantal

Tudomány és ideológia között. Tanulmányok az 1945 utáni történetírás történetéről [Between Scholarship and Ideology. Essays on the History of the post-1945 Historiography]. By Vilmos Erős and Ádám Takács. Budapest: Eötvös Kiadó, 2012. 169 pp.

A collection of essays that provides methodologically and theoretically complex analyses of the history of Hungarian historiography of the postwar period, *Tudomány és ideológia között* (Between Scholarship and Ideology) helps address a lacuna in the scholarship that remains painful to this day. At the time of the conference on historiography on which this collection is based, a work by Ignác Romsics was already available as a kind of fundamental study on the topic.¹ Romsics followed a traditional concept of synthesis that handles historiography itself, as the “protagonist” of the inquiry, as an intact problem of the calling of the historian, regardless of the historical era. His analysis tells little about the era-specific conditions of the practices of writing history. Accordingly it does not provide satisfying explanation of the historical context concerning institutional, ideological and socio-cultural factors, which could make clear the reasons for the prominence of careers and works.

The lack of such examination is particularly problematic with regard to the analysis of the Socialist period. Romsics demonstrates the expectations of the Socialist system with regard to historical scholarship, but he does not examine how this was translated into practice. He cites statements made by historians, but because his analysis provides no era-specific problematization of the subject, it reveals little about the ideological stakes of the discourse and the actual substance of these statements of historians addressed to an (also unanalyzed) “public.” Romsics presents the prominent historians, but he does not explain how their work or their stances might offer insights into the prevailing circumstances of the time or how exactly the terms and conceptual frameworks within which they articulated the questions of their profession should be understood. The voices and historical moments to which he refers remain incidental. Within the framework of his synthesis, Romsics proves unable to find proper analytical tools to uncover their message. When he lists the array of topics with which historians concerned themselves, the contextual body of knowledge remains

¹ Ignác Romsics, *Clio bűvöletében: Magyar történetírás a 19-20. században* [Enchanted by Clio: Hungarian Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries] (Budapest: Osiris, 2011).

stuck within the system of objects and facts. Thus for a university student today, the book offers little grasp of what it actually meant to write history in the recent past, and yet the book is intended precisely for this audience.

The volume of essays, which was edited by the conference organizers, Ádám Takács and Vilmos Erős, adopts an entirely different approach. With regard to the post-1945 period, the title suggests that we turn our attention to historiography in the shared spaces of scholarship and ideology. This perspective, which places emphasis on the importance of approaching both fields of inquiry with the same sensitivity, creates the potential for analyses from a variety of approaches, such as the history of ideas, social history, or the history of mentalities. As the analyses clearly illustrate, the study of the nature of historiography after 1945 also represents an occasion for self-reflection. It prompts us to address the question of “what shapes us, as historians.”

The conference volume is not a hodgepodge collection about the historiography of the era. The majority of essays provide the reader with a kind of distinctive constant of the postwar period from the perspective of the practices of history writing. Furthermore, some of the authors (Ádám Takács, Zsolt K. Horváth, Vilmos Erős and Holger Fischer come to mind) offer strategic suggestions based on their own research for comprehensive analysis of the nature of the era. Regarding the overlapping terrain of scholarship and ideology, the essays examine the study of history in their social context and highlight the importance of social institutions in its analysis. They place emphasis on dependencies, compulsions, and socio-cultural factors involved in the study of history as a profession that determined the development of the “discipline.” The volume demonstrates first and foremost that the questions and problems of historiography shed light on the era and the mental determinants of living with particular force. I will examine how the individual essays address this question. Do they manage (and if so, how) to make the era more accessible to interpretation from the perspective of the manner in which historiography was pursued?

Perhaps the most successful essays in this regard are those that deal with the historiography of the Socialist era. This is unquestionably due to the constant and carefully guided presence of ideology in the Socialist period. In this case, ideology is understood as something that cannot be separated from the cultural system of everyday practices. Ideology is also something the nature of which changes over time, but which nonetheless is present in the functioning of society as a whole and extends beyond the borders of individual periods of history. One

therefore cannot avoid—and the historian in particular cannot avoid—dealing with the social institutions in which it finds form.

The essay by Holger Fischer, which is the first of the collection, presents the shifting nature of ideology with the division of post-1945 historiography into periods. His goal is to systematize the manner in which political-historical eras appear in the evolution of the study of history and individual fields within the discipline. At the beginning of the essay, Fischer asks the question, what tasks did the party assign to the discipline of history? As this question makes clear, any analysis of the period must address the peculiar system of conditions of the scholarly study of history. According to Fischer, the historian enjoyed more freedom in Hungary than in any of the other Socialist countries. He often speaks of the absence of ideology in the historiography, while at the same time he displays, at the apex of this historiography, the synthesis entitled *Magyarország története* (“The History of Hungary”),² which complied with both scholarly criteria and the official ideological function of historical narratives. Thus in the professional context, it would be appropriate to speak not of freedom from ideology, but rather of scholarship that developed within era-specific limitations, even if this “scholarship” is not defined analytically in Fischer’s essay.

The essays that follow concentrate more forcefully on the practices of history writing. They do not attempt to define the essence of historiography on the basis of a priori political-historical shifts, but rather examine the politicized countenance of the era from the perspective of the practices of writing history. These analyses actually throw into question the necessity of explicit periodization, for while they “contextualize” historiography and examine it in its normative space (which is also determined by the flexible nature of ideology), they also indicate connections and interrelationships that can be discerned over longer periods of time and even *form* mentality. What are the practices that the authors make the focus of their inquiry?

Boldizsár Vörös examines the strategies according to which historians attempted to meet the expectations of the public over the course of the entire Socialist period. He is interested in part in the mechanisms of self-censorship and in part in the concrete steps that historians took in order to convey ideas that were “problematic from the perspective of power” (p.71) (for instance by adhering for the better part of a text to the party rhetoric, but then inserting

2 The authoritative work of late socialist historiography in Hungary, the so-called “ten-volume” history of Hungary. Zsigmond Pál Pach, ed., *Magyarország története tíz kötetben* [The History of Hungary in Ten Volumes] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976–1989).

statements that undermined this rhetoric). The legitimate problems of scholarly endeavors led to the spread of the characteristic practices of the era.

The essay by Károly Halmos offers a glimpse into a complementary process. He does not ask how scholarship becomes a politically viable product, but rather how the political is made into the scholarly, drawing on the example of Ferenc Erdei's theory of a dual society. He mentions some of the decisive features with which Erdei's system of views is integrated into the historian's store of implements. Halmos calls attention to strivings to renew and revivify historiography and the increasingly palpable craving for alternative theories in the Socialist period. This is in part a story of the reinterpretation of the meaning of scholarship, which could only satisfy its craving for renewal by drawing on a realm the scholarly content of which only seemed justifiable within the framework of the political and social conditions that prevailed at the time.

György Kövér examines the mechanisms of the writing of economic history in the early years of Socialism, i.e. the beginning of the 1950s. His analysis offers insights into the milieu of the discipline of history at the Academy. As his sources amply illustrate, ideology was closely tied to cultural practices and representations, and it was adapted through these practices to academic life. The "planned economy" nature of scholarship and the practices of debate culture and self-criticism in the new interpretation of the science of history clearly reveal the influence of the models of party life at the beginning of the 1950s.

Zsolt K. Horváth sheds light on practices in the writing of history in connection with the "canonization" of the workers' movement. Of the various implements in the (particularly sensitive) historiography of the party and the workers' movement, the practice of selection seems to have been one of the most important. The ability to select judiciously from among the historical sources presupposed the internalization of the ideological system of perspectives and the capacity to create a kind of "scholarship" that was based on a distinctive understanding of the term. The ability to select judiciously, however, was characteristic not only of historians who dealt with questions of political history. Rather, it was a skill every professional historian had to master.

Csaba Lévai examines reception as a practice in the development of the historiography in the Socialist period, drawing on the example of the responses to the work of Charles A. Beard and Carl L. Becker, whose theory of "subjectivist-relativist-presentism" gradually become part of the discussions among historians in Hungary. Because of the ideological filters under Socialism, reception was an actively used and controlled practice in the shaping of historiography. Lévai

calls attention to the fact that the notion introduced by these two authors “was immediately elevated into the political and ideological context. In other words, the opinions that were formed of them in Hungary not only reveal a great deal about them as historians, but also reveal a great deal about the functioning of the system (p.113).”

In his analysis, Vilmos Erős deals first and foremost with the professional legacy of the historians of the interwar period. He examines how it was present in the historiography after 1945. While the previous two essays shed light on the ideological functions of reception and selection as tools in the writing, according to Erős the identification and control of the institutionalized forms of historiography originated in the interwar period, the intellectual heritage of the so-called *civic* historiography, and the convictions of the profession were part of the practices that were aiming to transform the writing of history into a substantially ideological activity.

In contrast with the other authors, Ádám Takács switches the perspectives by reading the party resolutions as discursive sources. The author examines how the party ideology circumscribed the practices of historical research. Thus he offers an answer to the question of what this scholarship that found a place within the system of conditions of the Socialist era, actually was. The Party directives defined the practice of academic research as the “discovery of reality” which in principle transcends the ideological functions of scholarship in the “formation of socialist conscience”. In turn, this “discovery of reality” was the domain that seemed to promise for the study of history an autonomous field of inquiry. However, historical research nonetheless remained within the confines of ideological conditions (including institutional and socio-cultural factors). Thus the notion of “autonomy” should be understood in relative terms. According to Takács, the historians’ debate, for instance, was never allowed to evolve beyond anything more than an “evocation” of “the atmosphere of a genuine scholarly debate (p.97)”. This also meant that in certain areas the possibility increasingly existed to fashion intellectual products identified by Takács as “postideological (p.100),” in other words products that, from a peculiar perspective, could be regarded as comparable with scholarship.

Because of their focus or the approach adopted by the author, three essays in the collection do not examine how the practices of the historian shed light on the era in which they were used. They each survey a corpus of materials that has been assembled in a specific field of research. Judit Pál examines works of Hungarian social history in Transylvania after 1945. The isolation that the

authors of these works have faced (and still face) is symptomatic of Hungarian and Romanian historiography, but this study does not explain the development of this isolation or the development of the Transylvanian institutions of historiography. In another essay of the volume, István M. Szíjártó establishes international parallels in order to further interpretations of Hungarian works of microhistory. He does not, however, shed much light on the practices of the era, such as the processes of reception or the circumstances of the early development of microhistory. The essay by Éva Standeisky can also be classified as such. She examines endeavors that were made after 1989 to situate the so-called “coalition times” between 1945 and 1950 within historical periods. Standeisky also does not devote any attention to the question of what the methods with which this period is discussed might reveal about the 1990s or possibly even the first decade of this century. In all likelihood, there is little or no examination or elucidation of the era in these essays because the authors, in their discussions of the given corpuses, are not analyzing practices the evolution of which could be tied to ideological expectations or in any specific way to the Socialist era. In the case of the other essays, the functioning of the ideology of the Socialist era constitutes the curious feature that enables scholars today to examine the broader horizon of an era on the basis of an analysis of the workings of a discipline.

In addition to furthering our understanding of an era (and perhaps the Socialist era in particular), the study of the history of historiography offers an occasion for reflection on the discipline. The authors of this collection took advantage of this opportunity. Some of them even included their observations regarding the present in their essays. The questions addressed in *Tudomány és ideológia között* call our attention to the historical question of the influence exerted on historiography by the political. According to these essays, any analysis of the post-1945 historiography (and indeed any contemporary self-interpretations) must address the question of the place of ideological horizons in scholarly practices. The statement made in the preface to the collection is worth pondering, “historical discourse is the only discourse that can establish a critical standard by which to assess the possible social and political uses of history (p.7).”

In this respect, an assessment of the legacy of the discipline must go beyond a mere examination of how ideological discourses become an integral part of institutional scholarly life. As a subject of further reflection, one could consider the state of affairs that developed parallel with this, a state of affairs characterized by Erős in his essay with the simple observation that “the interest in theoretical questions (...) was fundamentally tepid (p.162).” This diagnosis

is thought-provoking, even if Erős was comparing the situation in Hungary at the end of the Socialist period with the situation in the countries of Western Europe, where theoretical innovation found fertile ground. The challenges that characterize the effectiveness of scholarly historical writing on the social stage today call our attention to the shakiness of the theoretical preparedness of historiography in some of the areas of the discipline. The position of theory could be strengthened in the practices of history writing if the study of the history of historiography were seen by historians as a useful implement in this undertaking.

Translated by Thomas Cooper

Anna Birkás

The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide. By Zoltán Vági, László Csósz, and Gábor Kádár. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2013. LXVII, 442 pp.

Part of the *Documenting Life and Destruction: Holocaust Sources in Context* series, which presents “original historical documents on the Holocaust within an explanatory narrative” (p.xi), this important publication by leading Hungarian Holocaust historians Zoltán Vági, László Csósz, and Gábor Kádár offers penetrating analyses of “how [the Holocaust in Hungary] came about, what drove it, and what it meant for those who were targeted” (p.xxx). It features selected sources many of which are made available in English for the first time.¹ Characterizing the Holocaust in Hungary as “not only the final major chapter of the Nazi genocide but also the peak of its evolution” (p.xxx), the volume consists of a substantial introduction and ten chapters that have been organized thematically and chronologically. It also contains a selected bibliography, a substantial glossary and a chronology, as well as a few maps and tables. The only thing missing as an appendix is a list of primary sources.

In their introduction, Vági, Csósz, and Kádár discuss the interactive decision making process involving both Germans and Hungarians that resulted in the plan of complete deportation in the spring 1944.² They highlight the widespread and willing cooperation of the Hungarian authorities, which was essential for the barbarously efficient implementation of this large-scale plan. The introduction also presents several crucial specific features of the Holocaust in Hungary, such as its special timing and unprecedented rapidity. Following the German occupation of Hungary on 19 March, 1944, a mere fifty-six days were adequate for the preparations and another fifty-six proved sufficient for the deportation of 437,402 Jewish individuals. Apart from some 15,000, all of those deported arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau and over 300,000 were immediately murdered there. Hungarian Jews thereby ended up constituting the single largest group of victims of the most infamous Nazi camp complex. In fact, it was this

1 Zoltán Vági is member of the Social Conflicts Research Center of ELTE Budapest, László Csósz works as researcher at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest, Gábor Kádár is currently employed at the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe.

2 This process is explored in greater detail in Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *A végső döntés. Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau 1944* [The Final Decision: Berlin, Budapest, Birkenau 1944] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2013).

unprecedented campaign that made Auschwitz a synonym for the annihilation of European Jewry.

Individual chapters of the book present central issues, such as the consequences of Hungary's anti-Jewish laws prior to 1944, Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to persecution, the complete disenfranchisement and physical isolation of Hungarian Jews in 1944, their horrific experiences in the Nazi camp universe, and the expropriation of Jews and subsequent fate of Jewish property. The first chapter examines the series of anti-Jewish laws adopted in Hungary as of the late 1930s and provides an account of their primary consequences. Vági, Csósz, and Kádár explain that these Hungarian laws not only caused major material losses for Hungarian Jews and increasingly meant severe intrusions into the most intimate spheres of their lives, but also fostered nepotism and corruption and only escalated tensions and hatred. The second chapter also covers developments in the years prior to 1944, focusing on local anti-Semitic measures, the so called "Labor Service," the first mass murders, and German–Hungarian negotiations regarding the "Jewish question." Studying interactions between various levels of state power, the authors discuss how anti-Semitic initiatives originating at the lower levels often violated the harsh discriminatory laws in place ("illegal anti-Semitism") and how a host of regulations with anti-Semitic effects were implemented ("bureaucratic anti-Semitism"). Moreover, this chapter also explores the particularly severe policies applied in territories Hungary had re-annexed between 1938 and 1941, highlighting that the mass deportation of Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia in particular, which emerged as an aspiration of officials at the highest echelons of the Hungarian state as early as 1941.

In their chapter on the disenfranchisement of Hungary's Jews and their physical isolation in ghettos and collection camps, Vági, Csósz, and Kádár explain that local authorities and sometimes even civilian populations could substantially influence the specifics of ghettoization. As a result, various models of segregation emerged. Conditions in the short-lived Hungarian ghettos varied greatly, although radical manners of implementation clearly predominated. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on the extreme brutality of the deportations, symbolized by the humiliating body searches as well as the fact that some 6,000 to 7,000 Jews had already died by the time their trains arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau (p.217). Chapter seven examines the specifics of the Nazi camp universe, following the trails of the deported into Auschwitz-Birkenau and other major Nazi camps, such as Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück, Buchenwald and

Mauthausen, while also highlighting that Jews from Hungary ended up in a total of about 600 concentration and forced labor camps, factories, and production plants scattered across Europe.

The book also carefully contextualizes Horthy's decision to halt the deportations, documenting Hungarian intentions to continue them beyond July 1944 and arguing that changes in the military situation proved to be the decisive factor. However, deportations resumed following the assumption of rule by the Arrow Cross party in mid-October 1944. In November and December, the Arrow Cross authorities herded about 50,000 people westwards, many of them on foot. As the authors highlight, international protests played a major role in persuading Ferenc Szálasi to stop the deadly marches and organize two large ghettos in Budapest instead, the fate of whose Jewish inhabitants increasingly rested in the hands of lower level representatives of the Arrow Cross party.

The particularly insightful chapter on the material side of 1944 explains that “no independent budget existed for the plunder, ghettoization, and deportation” (p.190), and the genocide against Hungarian Jews was “self-financing: the victims paid the costs of their own murder” (p.178).³ Illuminating the key measures, agencies, and beneficiaries of robbery, Vági, Csósz, and Kádár show that Hungarian authorities may have prepared hundreds of thousands of inventories of property and assets, but they ultimately proved overwhelmed by their involvement in genocide: they “managed neither to store properly nor to distribute this massive amount of plunder, lacking the time and personnel” (p.208). At the same time, the cynical vileness of some decision makers could hardly have been greater, as the state not only aimed to seize the last spoon and wineglass from every Jew, but also collected their taxes for the whole year of 1944 in advance (p.189).

The chapter on non-Jewish reactions highlights that the vast majority of the Hungarian population passively observed and widely accepted the persecution of Jews. The authors clarify that Hungarians may have murdered less than 10 percent of the more than 500,000 victims of the Holocaust in Hungary, but, in some way or another, hundreds of thousands of them took part in the massive “de-Jewification” campaign. In addition to clarifying that no vacuum of state

3 This part closely relates to innovative previous works of Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Self-Financing Genocide: The Gold Train, the Becher Case and the Wealth of Hungarian Jews* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004). See, in Hungarian, Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Aranyvonat* [Golden Train] (Budapest: Osiris, 2001) and Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *Hullarablás. A magyar zsidók gazdasági megsemmisítése* [Robbing a Corpse: The Economic Destruction of Hungarian Jewry] (Budapest: Jaffa, 2005).

power existed and no “popular” anti-Semitic outbursts were unleashed during the deportations, the chapter explores the controversial role of the Christian Churches and the impressive rescue attempts initiated by the neutral diplomatic corps. Toward the end of the war, and triggered, above all, by the open brutality of the Arrow Cross, a host of civilians and even some members of the police took an active part in coordinated rescue operations that brought assistance to tens of thousands.

The chapter on Jewish responses to persecution confirms a long-accepted view according to which in Hungary most attempts at survival involved unarmed resistance. It contests, however, the image of complete Hungarian Jewish passivity, noting the ways in which regional and temporal differences affected people’s ability and inclination to resist. While the traditional Jewish leaders of Hungary notoriously proved largely incapable of reassessing their relationship with the authorities in 1944, tens of thousands of Jews in the capital city chose the path of “illegal” opposition during the Arrow Cross era. The last chapter sketches the situation of Jews and the memory of the Holocaust in the postwar period, covering developments into the early twenty-first century. Vági, Csósz, and Kádár argue that while the legal rehabilitation of Jews was partly achieved, there was no real economic or financial compensation or restitution, and Jews were not effectively protected from postwar anti-Semitism (p.342). Nevertheless, the closing pages of the book reiterate the ascent, catastrophe, and revival narrative of modern Hungarian Jewish history (p.365).

In sum, *The Holocaust in Hungary* provides an up-to-date overview of its subject and constitutes a substantial addition to the English-language literature on this major chapter of the Holocaust, which has been relatively inadequately researched. The volume also includes a wide variety of documents and traces the various life trajectories of their authors to great effect. It reveals the specificities of the Holocaust in Hungary and shows parallels with events in a host of other countries. Still, it remains essentially a national narrative in which relevant developments outside Hungary, particularly those in Nazi Germany, tend to be hinted at rather than systematically explored. The authors are entirely correct to emphasize that the radicalization of Hungarian anti-Semitism was largely an internal process. Still, the chronology of this radicalization strongly suggests the relevance of transnational trends that researchers still need to explore in detail. Second, while gender aspects are recurrently highlighted in this volume, gender could have been made a major theme to considerable effect. Last but not least, the book is characterized by a restrained and largely analytical tone. It shows

acute awareness of moral issues and stakes, but without exploring in detail the peculiar moral notions behind anti-Semitic persecution in Hungary, another potentially fruitful avenue for future researchers, who will certainly build on this impressive achievement.

Ferenc Laczó

Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema and the Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary.

By Beata Hock. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013. 284 pp.

Although the title aptly describes the content of the book, it does not represent a conventional historical account of the changes surrounding the social and cultural opportunities of women who have entered the field of art in Hungary since 1945. It is clear already from the outset that the book has a manifest feminist agenda: it seeks to explore possible ways of undoing conventional patriarchal hierarchies that seem to prevail in all areas of modern Western society and are particularly visible in the field of arts. However, Hock also wants to challenge the dominant master narratives of feminist thinking created in the West that focus on individual self-care through equal opportunities in the workplace and the family.

Hock's approach has been shaped by somewhat different concerns. The book has emerged as a PhD dissertation at the Central European University in Budapest, which exposes its students to a radically destabilizing effect of a multinational and interdisciplinary milieu. As Beata Hock stresses, such an environment encouraged her to deconstruct dominant cultural positions, including Eurocentrism, as well as to seek approaches beyond the disciplinary boundaries of conventional feminist studies. The book argues for a "situated feminism," which should take the actual social and historical experiences of women and men (the constructions of gender) of the societies under scrutiny into greater consideration and, thus, should be able to actualize otherwise abstract tenets of feminist politics.

Such concerns raise interesting and challenging methodological problems. It seems clear that East-Central Europe, the region with a postwar experience of state socialism, differs significantly from the historical trajectories of liberal capitalism in Western Europe and North America. Although the state in these societies doubtlessly limited personal autonomy as well as the ways of expressing subjectivities and repressed ideas of citizenship based on individual rights over one's own body, it did induce certain programs of emancipation, which transformed the lives of women. Such transformations, however, were divergent from mainstream Western development. The benefits of the communist welfare states, particularly the broad opportunities of permanent salaried jobs and relatively long periods of paid maternity leave as well as the possibilities of legal

abortion in many countries of Eastern Europe, made the experiences of socialist women very different than those of their Western counterparts.

If the master narrative of Western feminism is challenged by divergent historical conditions of Eastern European societies, how is it possible to deconstruct it? Hock has similar doubts with the application of post-colonial critique, the major global challenger of Western emancipation discourses. Postcolonial criticism, argues Hock, which claims that Western liberal individualist emancipation makes global normative demands and, hence, relates the historical experiences of non-European societies as backward and marginal to the European one, is equally misleading in the context of Eastern Europe. Although Eastern Europe is also marginalized by such normative discourses, its societies have long been inherent parts of the same Eurocentric world, where criticism, that which would radically oppose such culture, makes little sense.

Hock's book instead suggests a way to apply the categories of mainstream feminist critique, which reflect the general cultural and political expectations of women all over Europe, together with a careful localization of such concepts into the conditions and legacies that state socialist systems created in Eastern Europe. The book chooses art, film, photography and contemporary new media, since besides illustrating political and social opportunities of women for entering public spheres, it shows in sharp contrasts the strategies of developing subjectivities, which have long been in the focus of feminist studies in order to analyze the dismantling of patriarchal orders.

Whereas the first three chapters in Part I of the book deal with clarifying the theoretical and methodological implications of such concerns, Parts II, III and IV examine the political and social background of producing art by women and the actual work of women visual artists since 1945. Part II concerns the aspect of the political, which Hock understands in this book as programs of élites aimed at social transformation and the ways they communicated such goals towards target groups in society. Clearly, postwar élites put great stress on equal rights, which was visibly reflected by the legislation of both the democratic and the post-1949 communist governments. The enfranchisement in 1945, the new labour and higher education law in 1946 and the family law in 1953 dismantled the legally sanctioned privileges men had previously enjoyed in Hungarian society. Nonetheless, as Hock highlights, in the context of state socialism, which in general denied political rights, these legal frames meant little in practice. As a partial consequence, the ways in which public spheres were generated after 1989

likewise turned the superior access of men to symbolic and social capital during socialism into visible overrepresentation in public politics.

Hock observes similar tendencies in education as well. She claims that while state socialism provided broad opportunities for women to enter higher education and other forms of training, a clear gender division prevailed, which also continued to exist after 1989. Certain professions have been feminized, particularly teaching and many subjects in the humanities, whereas sciences and economic-management positions are still dominated by men. Women have remained overrepresented in undergraduate studies and lower- or mid-level management positions. Hock is not, however, unaware of the complexities of such political programs. The book reminds the reader that the major intention of communist emancipation was not the democratic participation of women, but rather the creation of a reliable and predictable workforce. Besides, a visible anti-feminist political culture, which denied civic and individual initiatives and endorsed only centralized state interventions, remained in force. Likely more importantly, the mentalities and attitudes have not changed significantly since 1945 that have largely confined the role of women inside conventional frameworks. It is also noteworthy that new social movements like feminism or queer movements appeared or started to make a broader impact in Hungary only after 1989.

Political programs of state socialism have a paradoxical legacy. Although the communist governments never really fulfilled the promises they made about emancipation, they did generate progressive, new individual types of female subjectivities. In the post-1989 decades, the expectations of those who saw the opportunities to finally realize such progressive goals often collided harshly with the ideas of those who identified these progressive visions as “communist” and offered instead within the post-communist context new types of conventional conservative gender roles.

Parts III and IV discuss the role of women and opportunities in cinema and visual arts in Hungary. As Part III highlights, women directors made their entry in the Hungarian film industry around the mid-1960s. Although since then their numbers have constantly increased, this fact conceals important structural inequalities, as Hock argues. There was only one female director, Márta Mészáros, who was able to build up an extensive individual oeuvre consisting of 21 films up to 2005, greatly superior in number to other women directors with their 5-8 works up to that year. Women directors of the late 1960s, and particularly Mészáros, explored the opportunities of constructing women’s subjectivities

independently of men. Their protagonists were ready to refuse unwanted attention and were developing lives in the absence of men.

Such concerns were also developed by other films of the period. The 1950s recognized the transformations which led to new female types independent of men. However, in general, Hungarian cinema in the 1950s, as Hock reminds the audience, represented such women as agents of the official policy of emancipation. They usually appeared as members of a category and were linked to the state as a consequence. Besides, romantic films reproduced conventional patriarchal meanings and depicted the ideal type of woman—beautiful but prudish and thus being able to tame her sexual appeal. In the 1960s, such openly sexist positions were rare, Beata Hock points out. Films of this period concentrated rather on the problems of living without men. The 1970s and 1980s were much more concerned with troubles of private and everyday life. Films recognized the loss of values and orientations, which was reflected by their choice of women protagonists. Directors were attracted to non-conventional female actors and characters, thus illustrating the demise of certainty surrounding gender categories and the trust in conventional gender types. Nonetheless, the use of women to highlight broader social problems meant also a feminization of criticism, as Hock's book claims. By linking critical voices to women in films, socio-political criticism was made private and, therefore, appeared potentially less dangerous. After 1989, however, even this particularly disguised feminist criticism disappeared or decreased to great extent. The changing structures of film production and of financing benefited men as well as topics of conventional patriarchal culture.

Lastly, Part IV turns to the analysis of gendered positions in visual arts in Hungary since 1945. Hock draws similar conclusion here as in the previous chapter. She claims that there were a few individual women who could pursue a career in art from the 1960s in Hungary, particularly Dóra Maurer and Katalin Ladik. However, as the book clarifies, their presence was far from a genuine breakthrough of women's special perspectives and role in contemporary art. Probably because of the fragmented nature of female art in late socialism, the attitude of artist towards feminism was rather special. Maurer mediated between international and domestic art since she was living partly in Vienna during that period and also transmitted contemporary feminist ideas to Hungarian fellow artists. Ladik transformed the female body in her performances from the object of gaze to the subject of speaking. Despite their visible feminist implications, these artists were nevertheless reluctant to openly engage themselves with such socio-political movements that they could not identify as art.

Due to the relative absence of feminism as a social movement and civic cultural criticism in late socialism, 1989 signified an opportunity for many young women artists to pursue more manifest programmatic feminist art. The artists of the younger generation—Hock highlights the work of Ágnes Szépfalvi (1965), Emese Benczúr (1969), Eszter Radák (1971) and Kriszta Nagy (1972)—consciously used art to express specific female experiences and also to construct visible and often provocative female subjectivities in public. However, as the book observes, they conspicuously refuse to engage themselves with broader social issues like poverty, exploitation or unequal opportunities beyond the implications these factors have on individual female experience.

Beata Hock's book is an original combination of the adaptation of Western social science and the analysis of Eastern European experiences. Due to her sensitivity to the connection of development of state socialism with their legacies after 1989, however, she avoids the trap of constructing Eastern Europe as a fundamental other of Western modernity. This book rather makes the complexities of answers to a pressing question comprehensible. Reading this book, it becomes more conceivable that the answers that élites and societies in various regions of Europe give to the challenges of the emergence of women's voices, female subjectivities and the dismantling of patriarchal hierarchies run rather convoluted roads: sometimes parallel and converging, sometime diverging and separate.

Péter Apor

Vezércsel. Kádár János mindennapjai
[King's Gambit. The Everyday Life of János Kádár].
By György Majtényi. Budapest: Libri Kiadó, 2012. 212 pp.

Historian and college professor György Majtényi has been conducting research connected to post-1945 social and cultural history in Hungary for many years. He has published the results of this research in books regarding social mobility as well as the socialist-era elite, among others. Majtényi's latest book provides the reader with a glimpse of longtime Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party General Secretary János Kádár—one of the most significant leaders in twentieth-century Hungarian history—not at meetings of the Central Committee or Political Committee, but at his home, among his “friends,” in his office, on vacation or while hunting. In doing so, the author is attempting to understand and transform the established image of Kádár (p.8). This image is composed of three main components: working-class origin; torture suffered in Rákosi's prison; and the myth of the hard-working, puritan leader. Majtényi does not take an explicit position with regard to the question of whether the popular image of Kádár was the product of conscious cult building or of “mere” cult creation/establishment. The author seems to suspect the latter case to be more likely, because, as he states, it is not a single person, but the surrounding social milieu that produces the cult (pp.10–11, 116). Majtényi does not, however, leave any doubt that one can speak of a cult surrounding the personality of János Kádár, even if it was not as robust as that previously connected to Mátyás Rákosi.

The author's objective is therefore to dismantle this cultic image and to expose the legend surrounding the reality (p.13). The use of scientific method to uncover popular myth is, in fact, the “classical” mission of the historian. Although there exists a perspective from which science itself represents just one discourse among many,¹ thus, in the present case as well, one could speak only of competing myths, determining the degree to which the exposure of legend is compatible with the historical objectives connected to an understanding of the phenomenon represents a much more significant question. In the opinion of the reviewer, the author manages to harmonize the two endeavors in such a way as to endow the book with (at least) two means of interpretation.

1 See at length Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge* (London: New Left Books, 1975); in brief: idem, “Theses on Anarchism,” in Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend, *For and Against Method*, ed. Matteo Motterlini (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 113–8.

The objective of the author, as demonstrated in the book's subtitle, is to present the reader with an impression of the everyday life of János Kádár. The main title of the work makes it clear that it is not about the everyday life of an average person, but of a leader. As a consequence, the focus of the book is on the years after 1945, particularly the period after 1956. Majtényi tells three stories about Kádár that show how the party leader conducted himself at three major locations of his everyday life: his home, his office and "outside". The author concentrates on one component of the cult surrounding János Kádár in his attempt to destroy it—the image of the hard-working, puritan, moderate leader—and in doing so devotes much less attention to the other two aspects of the cult: Kádár's working-class origin and the suffering he endured in Rákosi's prison. Majtényi takes care of the latter aspect of the cult in just a couple of pages, asserting that there is no evidence to corroborate the widely publicized incidents in which Kádár's prison tormentors tore out his fingernails and urinated in his mouth (pp.121–4). The author's choice to place the section of the book dealing with Kádár's prison years in the chapter entitled "Outside" is totally incomprehensible (and reveals some degree of cynicism). Although Kádár certainly resided outside the sphere of power at this time, this type of "outside" was of a totally different quality than that he experienced while hunting, on the football pitch or playing chess as the holder of political power. (Examination of the post-1956 reprisals, particularly Kádár's role in the execution of Imre Nagy (pp.133–7), occur in this chapter as well, which is even less justifiable in the opinion of the reviewer.)

For János Kádár (and his wife), home was the villa located at Cserje Street 21 in the distinguished *Rózsadomb* ("Rose Hill") section of Budapest. Kádár, who as an operative in Hungary's illegal communist parties before 1945 had faced persecution and difficult living circumstances, evidently felt following the "liberation" that he deserved a nice home. Although this sentiment was typical of high-ranking communist functionaries, Kádár's case was unique in that evidence suggests that he acquired his villa through an agreement with its owner, National Assembly representative István Vértés, at the end of 1948. According to Majtényi, Vértés was compelled to sell his villa to Kádár because he had to flee Hungary. However, Vértés apparently remained in Hungary after selling the house: not only is his name in the Budapest telephone book published at the end of 1949, but it also appears that same year on the electoral ballot of the communist-dominated Hungarian Independence People's Front (which is not surprising considering that Vértés had been a member of the

collaborationist, Father István Balogh-led Independent Hungarian Democratic Party). Considering, furthermore, that Vértess died while serving as a National Assembly representative in 1951, the question arises: when did he emigrate to Great Britain, as Majtényi claims he did (pp.20–21)?

Regardless of how Kádár acquired his villa, had made his definitive “arrival,” becoming a full-fledged member of the supreme leadership. Not only did Kádár rise rapidly within the official hierarchy, becoming minister of the interior in August 1948, but he also took up residence in the same area as other communist leaders. The couple did not live in their new abode for even three years before losing it (as well) following Kádár’s arrest in 1951. Mr. and Mrs. Kádár did not get the villa back following his release from prison in 1954, though they were visibly much attached to it. Kádár subsequently reacquired the villa as the leader of the newly formed Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party in 1957. Kádár was similarly attached to his work office, which he got back as well in 1957 after the party headquarters moved into the former Ministry of the Interior (and State Protection Authority political-police) building. Thus in 1956–1957, Kádár “took back” everything that he had possessed at the end of the 1940s and which he considered to be his rightful property. It is certainly not an accident that Kádár wanted to return to these places, which he considered to be home. One would dare say that the Rózsadomb villa and the Ministry of the Interior office represented the defining locations of Kádár’s self-identity.² Majtényi naturally points out that the most important place for Kádár was that of power (pp.94–99, 107).

Following his release from prison in 1954, János Kádár was depicted as a victim of the Rákosi régime, whether he wanted to be portrayed as such or not. Kádár was initially reluctant to play this role, because he remained faithful to Rákosi and did not gravitate toward the internal party opposition. Kádár was extremely cautious and continually accommodated himself to the prevailing locus of power: if necessary to Rákosi, if necessary to Imre Nagy (in October 1956) and if necessary to the Soviets (beginning in November 1956). Thanks to this strategy, he attained positions of increasing power and was able to hold on to them, leading Hungary for over three decades after becoming the highest-

2 See, for example, Harold M. Proshansky, Abbe K. Fabian, and Robert Kaminoff, “Place-Identity: Physical World Socialization of the Self,” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 3, no. 1 (1983): 57–83; Leila Scannell and Robert Gifford, “Defining Place Attachment: a Tripartite Organizing Framework,” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 30, no. 1 (2010): 1–10; and Maria Lewicka, “Place Attachment: How Far Have We Come in the Last 40 Years?” *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 31, no. 3 (2011): 207–30.

ranking communist official in the country following the 1956 revolution. Both Hungary and the system named after Kádár naturally changed continually (and greatly), although his personal life apparently remained static. The communist leader's age obviously had something to do with this: perhaps not incidentally, by the middle of the 1970s, when he had entered his sixties, Kádár's daily and weekly routine became entrenched (strict work schedule, swimming, barber, doctor, Friday-evening cinema etc.) (pp.90–93).

Kádár gradually lost his personal connections at this time and became quite solitary. Contrary to the popular image, he did not go out among others, appearing among “the people” only in the course of ceremonial events. As a member of the élite, Kádár spent his leisure time away from the masses at party resorts and on hunting trips. (Beginning in the 1970s, Kádár did not even go to the theater anymore, though he continued to go to the movies with his wife on Friday afternoons.) It is characteristic of his increasing reclusiveness that although football could have drawn Kádár closer to the people, he watched matches at the *Népstadion* (“People’s Stadium”) from the private box seats and very rarely attended the games of his beloved Vasas club. It was perhaps only through chess that Kádár could come close to common people: he frequently went to play the game at the chess-federation building, where “ordinary” players could challenge him to matches. Kádár became increasingly isolated within the ruling élite as well: his circle of friends broke up in the 1960s, after which the atmosphere within the political leadership was often cold and formality began to rule social relations between its members (on hunting trips, for example). Kádár behaved in a reserved manner, which encouraged others to adopt this demeanor as well, thus creating a stiff and uneasy mood. Kádár was equally as aloof at work, using either the formal form of “you” (*maga*) or the term “comrade” to refer to his colleagues and even to fellow former underground party activists. Kádár's isolation culminated in the spring of 1989, when he was dismissed from all of his offices and remained completely alone. It was symbolic that after his dismissal, Kádár left party headquarters walking arm in arm with his wife, the only person with whom he had maintained confidential relations over the previous decades (pp.163–4).

The reviewer regards the primary importance of György Majtényi's book to be the means it provides the reader for rethinking the nature of power, dictatorship and the terms “communist” and “socialist” through an insight into the everyday life of a person of supreme authority. In the foreword, the author himself states: “The contradictions between cult and everyday life can

help to understand the inner logic of the system and even enables us to draw conclusions regarding the norms, regulations and structure of society at that time” (p.12). It would be difficult based on a reading of the book to assert that the political system and society of the Kádár era were socialist. The large library that Kádár maintained at his Cserje Street villa included very few ideological works, while evidence suggests that the well-read, continually self-educating party general-secretary gravitated toward classical bourgeois culture. (Although Kádár did make room in his library for a few obligatory Marxist works, these could have appeared on the bookshelves of any cultured citizen.) Kádár’s dress, manner and leisure-time activities were all suggestive of a conservative spirit and personality. Communist cultural chief György Aczél characterized the party leader as an explicitly conservative person. Kádár’s consciously built proletarian image appeared only in the public and semi-public domain, such as his office, which contained much more austere furnishings than his home and made conspicuous display of the symbolism of the workers’ movement.

(Kádár on several occasions had to face the fact that the workers did not necessarily support Hungary’s Communist parties, not only in 1956, but previously as well. Majtényi cites as an example an instance in which party officials sent Kádár to the town of Szentes in southeastern Hungary in order to placate miners who were angry about the murder of the anti-communist local police chief (p.68). But why did the miners find themselves in the middle of the Great Hungarian Plain?! Only as a result of the inattention of the author, who mixed up two incidents mentioned by Roger Gough: Kádár was, in fact, sent to the city of Miskolc in northeastern Hungary in 1946 to attend to matters related to a communist-organized protest of miners against the black market and price increases that had degenerated into an anti-Semitic pogrom.)³

János Kádár, the holder of power, was not a proletarian leader, but a bourgeois political official: this assertion seems bold, but considering that in technical terms the system was not socialist (since the forces of production were not in public ownership), then one should not be surprised. Kádár stood at the head of an administrative apparatus, not a movement, and as the leader of a state-capitalist régime, a party-state possessing the means of production (as “aggregate capitalist”) i.e. as a quasi bourgeois, he naturally followed bourgeois models. (Just consider the privileges, the hunting trips or the special train that

3 The work cited by Majtényi is Roger Gough, *Kádár János, a jó elvtárs?*, trans. Richárd Rákócza (Budapest: J LX, 2006), 65; for the original English version see Roger Gough, *A Good Comrade: János Kádár, Communism and Hungary* (London–New York: IB Tauris, 2006), 30–1.

he treated as his own.) The worker's image served to preserve the myth that Kádár was the leader of a workers' state (a proletarian dictatorship). Seen from this perspective, the fresco-secco *Munkásállam* ("Workers' State") located at the headquarters of the state party can be regarded as symbolic (pp.104–5): the régime did not create a workers' state, but merely had one painted for itself.

The author's use of a great number and variety of source materials (archival documents, memoirs, oral history, interviews, press articles) to underpin his portrayal of the everyday life of János Kádár represents a commendable historical approach to his subject. György Majtényi did not attempt to show how Kádár *really* was, but rather that he was *different* than he *appeared* to be during the decades of his rule. It is for this reason that the reviewer, contrary to the author, would not characterize this image as false: as Majtényi himself suggests in the book, everybody plays some kind of social role that is nearly all that others are able to see of the given personality (pp.169–70). The role of spectacle in modern societies should not be underestimated;⁴ nor should it be underestimated in connection to the subject at hand, since, as the author states, "Paradoxes surrounding the cult and personality of Kádár are not primarily characteristic of the general secretary himself. The public image of the dictator was a product of compromises and attempts among his contemporaries to find a way to cope successfully with the prevailing circumstances" (pp.103–4).

(The reviewer notes that the author occasionally deviates from the historical approach described above, appearing to suggest that he knows who Kádár really was. For example, Kádár's secretary indicated that the party leader worked at his office until 10 p.m.; Majtényi refutes this assertion based on his examination of evidence on table calendars (pp.78–79), though subsequently states as fact that "available sources" show that he quit working at 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. (p.110). However, the table calendars actually only display events not connected to daily routine and undoubtedly do not show times of arrival and departure. Memories cannot, naturally, be regarded as "the truth," because the myth of the hard-working Kádár exercised an impact on these recollections as well—it is precisely for this reason, and not in order to correct its "factual" errors, that the text is worthy of attention.)

The author does not devote much effort to substantiating the premise that there really was a cult surrounding Kádár (which is understandable inasmuch as this does not represent the theme of his book) and the evidence he presents

4 Cf. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

is not too convincing. According to Majtényi, the following circumstances represented elements of the Kádár cult: praise appearing for published collections of Kádár's speeches and writings in the party's theoretical review, *Társadalmi Szemle* ("Social Review"); greetings on his birthday (primarily from school children); postcards he received from Hungarian athletes competing abroad; and the party leader's strict observance of protocol and formality (pp.116–7).

Cult building is aimed at occupying public space; its two fundamental vehicles are the cultic manner of speech and practice, that is, praise and ritual.⁵ The greetings sent to Kádár were not, however, collected and published in representative albums, thus they did not appear in the public space. The praise published in *Társadalmi Szemle* can be interpreted as a ritual act, though the publication had minimal impact on the masses, to say the least. And it is an exaggeration to state that calling into question the protocol-dictated seating arrangement of government members was tantamount to calling into question "the absolute rule of the paramount leader." (A minor correction: Gyula Kállai's proposal to this effect and Kádár's annoyed response did not take place at the November 17, 1961 meeting of the Central Committee, but at the November 14, 1961 meeting of the Political Committee of the Communist party.) Neither did portraits of Kádár appear regularly in public and semi-public spaces: only at the time of the annual May 1 parades did such portraits turn up on the streets, and even then only in the company of other state leaders (the Council of Ministers Chairman and the Presidential Council Chairman).

The Kádár cult, supposing that such a cult existed whatsoever, occupied public spaces to only a limited degree and was hardly even perceptible in comparison to that built around the person of Mátyás Rákosi. (Portraits and busts of the Stalinist leader inundated Hungary, factories and institutions were named after him, "spontaneous" workers' assemblies were called to discuss his published writings, the mere mention of his name elicited rhythmic applause, etc.) It was not only in comparison to Rákosi that Kádár can be characterized,

5 Balázs Apór, "Spatial Aspects of the Communist Leader Cult: The Case of Mátyás Rákosi in Hungary," in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, ed. Balázs Apór, Péter Apór, and E. A. Rees (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 149–70; Balázs Apór, "Communist Leader Cults in Eastern Europe: Concepts and Recent Debates," in *Cultic Revelations: Studies in Modern Historical Cult Personalities and Phenomena (Spectrum Hungarologicum 4)*, ed. Anssi Halmesvirta (Jyväskylä–Pécs: University of Jyväskylä, 2010), 37–62; Cf. Jan Plamper, "Introduction: Modern Personality Cults," in *Personality Cults in Stalinism – Personenkulte im Stalinismus*, ed. Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004), 13–42.

to use the words of János M. Rainer, as “a person without a cult.” Following the Soviet model, though drawing lessons from his experiences in Hungary, János Kádár decided based on political considerations not to have a cult built around him as Rákosi had prior to 1956.⁶

Translated by Sean Lambert

Tibor Takács

⁶ János M. Rainer, “A kultusz nélküli ember” [The Person without a Cult], in *Bevezetés a kádárizmusba* [Introduction to Kádárism] (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet–L’Harmattan, 2011), 200–14.

Politikai rendőrség a Rákosi-korszakban [Political Police in the Rákosi Era]. By Rolf Müller. Budapest: Jaffa, 2012. 240 pp.

Although the history of the political police in the 1950s remains a topic of intense interest, new archival findings struggle to find their way to the wider public and academic history books are seldom easily comprehensible, especially those that examine the organizational structures of governmental bodies. Belonging to the younger generation of Hungarian historians, *Rolf Müller* set out to write a volume regarding the political police in the Rákosi era summarizing the results of his research over the past 14 years on the history of the infamous organization. An employee of the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security, Müller has published several books and articles on the topic, though the present volume from the Jaffa Publishing House is designed and written in a youthful style to reach a wider audience. The challenge was complex: to publish a book about a contested era that is informal in style and has no footnotes in it, but at the same time remains authentic; and also to write the history of the political police precisely from the archival material they produced.

The author decided to choose well-known or interesting topics and episodes to serve as the main links for the structure: the problem of the exact name of the organization, the person of its notorious leader, Gábor Péter, and such *lieux de mémoire* as the Golden Team (the famous Hungarian football team in the 1950s featuring Ferenc Puskás), the White House (the notorious Interior Ministry building along the Danube in Budapest) and the dreaded black automobiles of the police. Throughout the book, Müller depicts the topic with flashes of frames, giving impressions rather than over-explaining. What is also detectable is the rich archival material that forms the background of the seemingly easy-going descriptions.

In the first part of the book the backdrop is depicted by listing the organizational transformations of the political police, and the reader is surprised to find that even the history of an organization can be both interesting and enjoyable. The genealogy traces back to (and even before) the end of the Second World War, as the author is firm in his opinion that “with respect to the political police, the Rákosi era started in January 1945”.

Having its origins in the political-police squads formed at the end of 1944 in the parts of Hungary controlled by the Soviet army, the Hungarian Communist Party exercised decisive influence from the very beginning over the political police,

which began its work in Budapest in the party's headquarters located on Kálmán Tisza Square (later renamed Republic Square, the location of the notoriously bloody events during the 1956 revolution). Ironically, when the squad arrived to Budapest under the leadership of András Tömpe following its formation in the city of Debrecen, it encountered at the Kálmán Tisza Square headquarters a rival organization under the command of Gábor Péter. Among the first prisoners arrested by the two branches of the political police were the underground leaders of the previously illegal communist party (e.g., Pál Demény and János Dobos), who had quite soon become uncomfortable for the Muscovite communist élite.

The chaotic situation was settled by May 1945, when two political security departments (*politikai rendészeti osztály*, or PRO) were established: one to operate in Budapest (headed by Péter); and the other outside the capital city with Tömpe as its leader.

Organizational transformations are portrayed in parallel with the most important political trials in the first part of the book. The two political security departments were merged into the State Protection Department (*Államvédelmi Osztály*, or ÁVO) in October 1946, a few months before launching the arrests in preparation for the first big political trial (that of the “Hungarian Fraternity”) used to suppress the Smallholder’s Party rivalling the communists. From then on, in the words of a political police leader, “the emphasis shifted from the past to the present”—from the sins of the past to unveiling alleged conspiracies against the “democratic state order.” In November 1948, the task of economic law-enforcement was likewise assigned to the political police, reorganized two months earlier as the State Protection Authority of the Ministry of the Interior (*belügyminisztérium államvédelmi hatósága*, or BM ÁVH). From then on a wave of political show-trials started against commercial companies, the most prominent being the MAORT (Hungarian–American Oil Company) trial. It was not until the beginning of the year 1950 that an independent State Security Authority (*államvédelmi hatóság*, or ÁVH) had been established by merging the former organization with the military border guards. One month later, in February 1950, the military-intelligence service was also attached to the State Protection Authority. Thus a quasi state-security ministry was formed that was directly subordinated to the Council of Ministers. The three years until Péter’s arrest at the beginning of 1953 signaled the height of the ÁVH’s power and one of the darkest periods for the Hungarian population, characterized by state terror and purges that affected even communists, the most well-known instance being the trial and execution of former communist minister László Rajk.

In February of the same year, military counter-intelligence was also integrated into the State Protection Authority, although ÁVH leader Béla Janikovszky, who had acted as Rajk's interrogator, was obliged to report to the minister of defense. With these transformations, the organization increased exponentially in number of personnel: the staff grew from about 500 members in 1946 to almost 2,000 in two years, while its successor, the BM ÁVH, worked just more than 5,000 personnel in January 1949, though rose to 9,000 employees by the end of the year. By adding the border guards and other sections that formerly belonged to the Ministry of Defense, the ÁVH gathered information about 1.2 million people, functioning with a staff of between 35,000 and 45,000. It sought to control all parts of public and everyday life and was especially active and effective in prominent areas, one of them being academic life for example, where the political police was actively involved in granting academic degrees. The author refers to a letter written in 1952 confirming that even doctoral or (the roughly equivalent) "candidate" degrees were awarded with the consent of not only the Administrative Department of the Communist Party Politburo and the ministry concerned, but with that of the ÁVH as well.

Similarly, special attention was turned to sports, especially to football, which was at its zenith in Hungary in the 1950s, and the author devotes a chapter to the ÁVH operations lurking behind the football achievements of the legendary Golden Team. If the advice of the ÁVH had been taken, six footballers out of the starting eleven would not have been allowed to play at the Helsinki Olympic Games in 1952, including team captain Ferenc Puskás, as the political police commented on the composition of sport teams travelling abroad as well. Furthermore, out of the entire 1952 Olympic team, almost fifty members were found problematic in the first round of examination. The criticized athletes then won five gold medals, one silver medal and one bronze medal of the forty-two Hungarian medals, thus contributing to Hungary's biggest success in the history of the Olympic Games.

Against the backdrop of this organizational structure, the main characters are portrayed in the next chapters with detailed biographies of the leaders and gray eminences. Starting with the protagonist, Gábor Péter, unfolding his life story from his birth in a distant region of Hungary as Benjamin Eisenberger at the beginning of the twentieth century, through the start of his career as a tailor's apprentice, finding his way to the communist movement and gaining a key position after 1945, until his spectacular fall and his sentence to life in prison following Stalin's death. Thus the outbreak of the 1956 revolution found Péter

in prison, right in the middle of an interrogation. After crushing the revolution, prison life continued for him unchanged, but in the years of the early Kádár era, Péter and his fellows sailed with the new political wind and his earlier sentence was mitigated to 14 years. Péter was then released in January 1959 and lived happily until his death in 1993, outliving Rákosi, Kádár and the communist régime itself. The techniques of the Péter-led organization, by which it was able to gain information on practically the entire society, are discussed in detail in the fourth part of the book.

The strength of the volume lies in the rich details and episodes that are collected in the third and the last parts. Here scenes from the functioning of the political police and the whole milieu of the 1950s are listed, with outstanding chapters about the contradictory attitude of the Rákosi régime towards the veterans of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, as well as the way leaders of the ÁVH, especially Péter, communicated with their superiors on slips of paper, and a remarkable section on the logistics of the political police, the real estate and car fleet that served to maintain the terror. Another positive feature is that the author maintains distance from his subject and from the archival material he uses, carefully considering the credibility of his sources.

Rolf Müller's book on this key area of Hungary's recent history represents a successful attempt to bridge the gap between academic and popular writing, conveying heavy content in a light package.

Éva Tulipán

Trianon Again and Again

Rozpad Uhorska a Trianonská mierová zmluva. K politikám pamäti na Slovensku a v Maďarsku. [The Disintegration of Historical Hungary and the Trianon Peace Treaty. Politics of Memory in Slovakia and Hungary.] Edited by Miroslav Michela and László Vörös. Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2013. 336 pp.¹

Issues related to the so-called “Trianon complex”—preoccupation with the disintegration of historical Hungary, the peace treaty that sanctified it and the consequences thereof—represent the subject of public discourse in some form or another in both Hungary and its neighboring countries. Moreover, these issues not only engage the attention of historians, intellectuals and, occasionally, political officials, but filter into everyday discourse as well (albeit often under the influence of opinion makers). The events themselves—the collapse of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, the political reorganization of the territory of the former dualist state and the new foundations underpinning relations between Hungarians and their neighbors—have been examined rather comprehensively, therefore the authors of the volume under consideration chose rather to investigate how Hungarians and Slovaks have remembered and continue to remember the Treaty of Trianon.² That is, how do we interpret the treaty, how do we experience it, how do we recall it and think about it, how do we construct it and, finally, how do we pass this complex phenomenon on to subsequent generations? How does an event build itself into our lives that affects many

1 <http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/documents/10180/286159/trianon.pdf>, accessed June 09, 2014. The reviewer must disclose that he served as one of the professional editors of the book and thus should not be expected to voice heavy criticism of it.

2 Several works of significantly varying quality have been published in Hungarian on this subject. Noteworthy among them are Ignác Romsics, ed., *Trianon és a magyar politikai gondolkodás 1920–1953* [Trianon and Hungarian Political Thinking 1920–1953] (Budapest: Osiris, 1998); Archimédész Szidiropulosz, ed., *Trianon utóélete. A magyar társadalom Trianon-képe az ezredfordulón* [The Afterlife of Trianon: The Image of Trianon in Hungarian Society at the Turn of the Century] (Budapest: Kairosz Kiadó, n.d.); Miklós Zeidler, ed., *Trianon* (Budapest: Osiris, 2003); Gergely Romsics, *Mítosz és emlékezet. A Habsburg Birodalom felbomlása az osztrák és a magyar politikai elit emlékirat-irodalmában* [Myth and Memory: The Collapse of the Habsburg Empire in the Memoirs of the Austrian and Hungarian Political Elite] (Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2004); Miklós György Száraz, ed., *Fájó Trianon. A Trianon-jelenség* [The Pain of Trianon: The Trianon Phenomenon] (Budapest: M-érték Kiadó Kft., 2011); and, finally, the periodical launched in 2009 and devoted specifically to the subject of Trianon, *Trianoni Szemle*.

people only distantly or indirectly and, furthermore, continues to draw farther away from us year by year, thus making our knowledge of it increasingly derivative?

The Disintegration of Historical Hungary signifies the conclusion of a multi-year Slovak–Hungarian project. Much of the content of the book is based on presentations held at a conference organized by the editors in Nové Zámky (Érsekújvár), Slovakia with the support of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian–Slovak Historians’ Mixed Committee in 2010. Some of these presentations have already been published in Hungarian,³ although *The Disintegration of Historical Hungary* in its present form is the product of long and thorough editorial process that has provided the Slovak reading public with a truly mature work. The composition of the authors in terms of nationality, age and academic discipline already provides an indication of the diversity of the book’s content: in addition to Slovaks, Hungarians and members of the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia, there is a French historian among the contributors, which include both the relatively young and well-known researchers as well as representatives from several subject areas—history, political science, sociology and didactics. Interdisciplinarity characterizes the entire volume; its contributors frequently show that they are not afraid to step out of their narrowly defined academic disciplines in order to utilize the methods and results of related fields of study. From the historian’s viewpoint, perhaps the most exciting aspect of the book is that it contains several approaches to the theme in question, varying from the “national” to the “analytical.” It is a tribute to the editors that this heterogeneity does not have a disturbing effect on the reader and does not pull the volume apart—the texts complement one another well and, in the end, present an organic unity. The final product cannot, however, be regarded as a monolithic whole, thereby more accurately reflecting reality in all its paradoxical aspects.

The decision of the editors to juxtapose presentations of popular Slovak and Hungarian attitudes toward Trianon is exemplary from several perspectives. For one, it directs attention to the issue of the degree to which we (do not) understand one another, showing how Slovaks, Romanians and citizens of other countries surrounding Hungary comprehend the “Trianon complex” of the Hungarians and how the latter perceive the grievances of their neighbors and how aware we all are of our *own* traumas. The overall impression emerging

3 *Limes* 23, no. 4 (2010) and 24, no. 1 (2011).

from the book is not exactly encouraging: it appears that people are preoccupied with their own problems and are not even aware of the problems of others (and often seem to not even care)(p.290, 302). This is, unfortunately, not too surprising, just as the obvious incompatibility of the two “national viewpoints” represents nothing out of the ordinary.

The two editors of the book, Miroslav Michela and László Vörös, belong to the young generation of historians from Slovakia that is actively conducting research of high academic quality regarding the common Hungarian–Slovak past, frequently in close cooperation with historians and social scientists from Hungary. Michela and Vörös are well suited for the job of editing the book not only because they are comfortable working with sources in both Slovak and Hungarian (and other languages as well), but because they maintain a proper distance from ethnocentric or explicitly nationalist schools of thought and are not afraid to enter into disagreement with the “mainstream” representatives of the traditional “national” approach to the issue of Trianon.

The Disintegration of Historical Hungary provides an answer to the frequently posed question: is there any reason at all to deal with Trianon? Does keeping the issue of Trianon on the agenda merely serve to intensify the trauma surrounding the treaty, to rub salt in unhealed wounds, often for concrete political purposes? Although the authors of the various chapters in the book express divergent opinions in this regard, in general they appear to believe that the scientific thematization of the issue of Trianon and “talking through” problems connected to the treaty could encourage more constructive dialogue between Hungarians and their neighbors and raise the level of self-awareness among all concerned, thus alleviating tension stemming from the injuries of Trianon. Contributors to the book emphasize the importance of approaching the issue of Trianon with the objective of understanding the opinion of others or presenting the cultured expression of one’s own viewpoint rather than placing the subject in its trauma-enhancing nationalist context. It is also important to continue dialogue surrounding Trianon as it pertains to relations between Hungarians and their neighbors because the majority nations of the states surrounding Hungary regard the Treaty of Trianon as a symbol of their self-determination and the foundation of their national statehood. Members of these nations widely consider Trianon to have been a “rightful decision” representing “historical justice” (p.285, 290)⁴ judgments that have solidified into a dogma of sorts within their

4 Trianon was portrayed in this way in Czech and Slovak history textbooks as well. See Slávka Otčenášová,

national identities and thus immediately provoke charges of “Greater Hungarian nationalism” and “irredentism” if questioned in any regard. The intelligentsia of the majority nations in the countries neighboring Hungary has in this way used Trianon (particularly before 1989) as a means of legitimizing often heavily discriminatory minority policy, which may be a comfortable position, though is untenable from a professional standpoint. Seen from the latter perspective, the objective of conducting critical—and unbiased—analysis of the “Trianon status quo” is just as legitimate as the examination of previous conditions.

Not including the introduction and the concluding text, *The Disintegration of Historical Hungary* is composed of five parts, each with different chapters covering a distinct subject area: “Historical Perspectives” by László Vörös and Etienne Boisserie; “The Treaty of Trianon in Political Discourse” by Ignác Romsics, Štefan Šutaj, Attila Simon, Roman Holec and Peter Macho; “Education, Textbooks and Didactics of History” by György Jakab, Viliam Kratochvíl and Barnabás Vajda; “The Ritualisation of Public Remembering” by Miklós Zeidler, Balázs Ablonczy, József Demmel and Miroslav Michela; and “The End of the Kingdom of Hungary and the Treaty of Trianon as a Cultural Trauma” by Éva Kovács, Dagmar Kusá and Miroslav Michela.

The chapters of the book touch upon important themes that cannot be introduced within the scope of the present text. The reviewer will thus examine issues that arise primarily in the chapters by László Vörös and Éva Kovács, though surface to a greater and lesser degree elsewhere as well. Both Vörös and Kovács object to the use of the “language of trauma” in discourse surrounding Trianon as well as the “nationalization” of this discourse stemming from the national (or nationalist) perspective of the majority of participants. Although this observation is valid in several regards, it would nevertheless be worthwhile to first separate historiography from public discourse in order to analyze them separately.

If we take a look at Hungarian historiography, one sees that the most prominent Hungarian historians, including those who live outside Hungary, abandoned the national-ethnocentric (“nation-building”) approach decades ago (pp.38–41) (though serious academic and political debate continues to take place in this regard). The nationalist perspective exercises considerable force only on the Hungarian historiographical periphery, where it strengthens and weakens in waves; this perspective is, however, characteristic of mainstream Slovak

Schválená minulosť. Kolektívna identita v československých a slovenských učebniciach dejepisu (1918–1989) [Approved Past: Collective Identity in Czechoslovak and Slovak History Textbooks (1918–1989)] (Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2010), 52.

historiography as well (p.50). The particularly important “nation-building” and legitimization function that historiography performs for the Slovak political and cultural élite, one which implicitly limits self-reflection, obviously plays a major role in this phenomenon. This applies as well to the “language of trauma,” which a considerable proportion of active Slovak historians utilize in connection to Slovak national grievances (dualism, the First Vienna Award, etc.) rather than to Trianon. The ethnocentric perspective and use of the “language of trauma” are strongly characteristic of both Hungarian and Slovak public discourse in a broadly defined sense. Therefore it would be necessary to use increasingly prudent and precise language in order to avoid the “traumatization” of discourse pertaining to Trianon, particularly, though not exclusively, among Hungarian participants. However, approaching the issue of Trianon from a *national* point of view is not in itself tantamount to the acceptance of the *nationalistic-ethnocentric* perspective; it merely indicates the use of a certain—in the present case “national”—interpretative framework. This framework has become increasingly relevant with the spread of the national idea (and nationalism) over the last century and a half and continues to hold up strong with a foundation of support in the form of the nation state. Viewing history through the “national prism” does not necessarily distort an understanding of past events, whereas such distortion is a natural product of the “nationalist-ethnocentric” approach and thus represents an inherent infringement upon professional standards. Debate regarding the use and validity of the “national” interpretive framework is naturally necessary, though it is important to keep in mind that the total omission of this structure can lead to the same dead end as its absolute, uncritical use. Instead of summarily rejecting this framework, it would perhaps be better to consider the degree to which the nationalist perspective influences the discourse in question while maintaining the expectations of consistency, precise and objective phraseology and avoidance of double standards.

If one accepts the legitimacy of the national interpretive framework, then the appraisal of Trianon as a “national catastrophe” is indeed valid from the Hungarian (national) viewpoint. This approach cannot be regarded as either “nationalist” or “traumatizing”: it merely expresses the fact that the Treaty of Trianon represented a heavy blow to the Hungarian national concept and the nationality-based Hungarian community (as well as the Hungarian national consciousness).⁵ This is true even if the construction of the Hungarian nation-

5 In more detail see Csaba Zahorán, “A trianoni labirintus. A Trianon-jelenség és okai a mai magyar

state often occurred to the detriment of non-Hungarian nationalities and ethnicities until the end of 1918. Criticism, expressed most prominently by Éva Kovács, of the language of trauma and the national approach within discourse regarding Trianon seems to miss the target because it focuses on consequences of rather than causes. The issue of Trianon has remained active not as a result of the actual historical events that culminated in the conclusion of the treaty in 1920, but due to the disorder that continues to surround the situation of Hungarian minorities living in the countries surrounding Hungary. The “resentful” Hungarian discourse serving to “traumatize” discourse pertaining to Trianon to which some of the contributors voice objection can frequently be interpreted as a reaction to the national/nation-state mechanism that often serves to harm the interests of Hungarians living in these countries and not simply as the manifestation of a nostalgic or frustrated yearning for the former “Hungarian empire.” As long as Romania and Slovakia, just to mention the two countries with the largest Hungarian national-minority populations,⁶ continue to operate as (nation) states aiming to achieve the integration of minorities through assimilation (just as historical Hungary did before 1918), attempts to neutralize discourse surrounding Trianon from a national perspective will fail. These efforts can succeed only if minority policies in states neighboring Hungary also become neutral in national terms; that is, if the majority élites in these countries discontinue their efforts to “nationalize” their countries.

The Disintegration of Historical Hungary is also valuable because it presents the various trends *within* Hungarian and Slovak historiography, from the classical “national” (though not nationalist) narrative to the “analytical” orientation calling into question the national interpretive framework.⁷ Slovak readers will encounter in the book evidence of the diversity of the “Hungarian viewpoint,” which is often considered to be homogenous. Éva Kovács’s chapter rejecting the traumatization of Trianon from a rigorously academic perspective provides an excellent example of this diversity (though this viewpoint is naturally subject to

közgondolkodásban” [The Trianon Labyrinth: The Causes of the Trianon Phenomenon in Contemporary Hungarian Thought], in *A nemzeti mítoszok szerkezete és funkciója Kelet-Európában* [The Structure and Function of National Myth in Eastern Europe], ed. László Szalai (Budapest: L’Harmattan–ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék, 2013), 9–54.

6 According to census data from the year 2011, there are nearly 460,000 Hungarians living in Slovakia and 1.24 million Hungarians living in Romania.

7 See László Vörös, “How to Define a ‘Nation?’ A Thing, a Group, or a Category?” in *Overcoming the Old Borders: Beyond the Paradigm of Slovak National History*, ed. Adam Hudek et al. (Bratislava: Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences in Prodama, 2013), 11–23.

debate, as can be seen in the polemics regarding the treaty and its consequences that took place within the Hungarian periodical *Élet és Irodalom* a few years ago).⁸ *The Disintegration of Historical Hungary* also provides demonstration of the more subtle nuances within Slovak discourse regarding Trianon.

Although the editors and publisher of *The Disintegration of Historical Hungary* are from Slovakia, one can still consider the book to be a joint Hungarian–Slovak enterprise (especially if one takes the 2010 conference into account) that fits into the process of multi-faceted cooperation between Hungarian and Slovak historians and social scientists. One can only welcome the book’s message that it is worthwhile to extend research related to Trianon (and ethnicity in general) to other levels and domains, such as the history of everyday life (p.63).⁹ However, the focus of *The Disintegration of Historical Hungary* on the “analytical” approach directs attention to those methods that are capable of providing momentum and, in certain instances, totally new foundations for Hungarian–Slovak professional dialogue, which occasionally falters as a result of the exclusivity of national truths.

The Disintegration of Historical Hungary has only a few minor shortcomings. Some of the chapters contain redundancies, such as the examinations of the origins of the Slovak historical canon in the chapters by László Vörös and Dagmar Kusá and Miroslav Michela. The theoretical portion of the chapter by the latter authors, moreover, seems to be somewhat overstated. The chapter by György Jakab and Viliam Kratochvíl could have placed greater emphasis on Trianon itself, thereby providing practical assistance to those who teach the history of the treaty and its consequences.¹⁰ The chapter by Ignác Romsics is distinctly terse in light of the fact that he is one of the most highly recognized authorities on the issue of Trianon of Hungary;¹¹ Slovak readers, especially, would have been

8 See Éva Kovács, “Jeder Nachkrieg ist ein Vorkrieg – Trianon traumatikus emlékezetéről” [Every Postwar is a Prewar – The Traumatic Memory of Trianon], *Élet és Irodalom* 54 (2010): 39; Krisztián Ungváry, “A meg nem értett Trianon” [The Misunderstood Trianon], *Élet és Irodalom* 54 (2010): 49; Éva Kovács, “Csak azért is: neurózis” [Just for the Sake of It: Neurosis], *Élet és Irodalom* 55 (2011): 4; Krisztián Ungváry, Egy hitelrontás ellenében [In Return for Ruined Credit], *Élet és Irodalom* 55 (2011): 10; Éva Kovács, “Az a konok okság” [That Stubborn Causality], *Élet és Irodalom* 55 (2011): 12; and Pál Tamás, “A Trianon-vitához” [With Regard to the Trianon Debate], *Élet és Irodalom* 55 (2011): 17.

9 See Gábor Egry, “Navigating the Straits: Changing Borders, Changing Rules and Practices of Ethnicity and Loyalty in Romania after 1918,” *The Hungarian Historical Review* 2, no. 3 (2013): 449–76.

10 See <http://www.tte.hu/toertenelemtanitas/egyvezzenk-ki-a-multtal/6630-trianon-8211-tortenelemora>, accessed June 10, 2014.

11 See Ignác Romsics, *Dismantling of Historic Hungary: the Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2002).

interested in a more detailed treatment of the theme from the noted Hungarian historian. Géza Boros's article would have served as an appropriate supplement to Miklós Zeidler's essay on the current situation with regard to Trianon memorials.¹² Several recently published works have, additionally, contributed to the continually growing discourse surrounding Trianon:¹³ in connection to Hungarian–Slovak relations, it would be worth noting another work from Roman Holec examining recent developments in Hungarian historiography and public discourse in a critical, polemic tone¹⁴ (which elicited two published responses) or Slovak film director Dušan Trancík's excellent documentary film *Hodina dejepisu* [History Lesson].¹⁵

Perhaps it is not too naive to believe—or perhaps to hope—that *The Disintegration of Historical Hungary* will promote development in Slovak and Hungarian thought connected to Trianon, thus increasing awareness of the fact that the disintegration of historical Hungary did not resolve national-nationality problems in the Carpathian Basin, but simply moved them beyond the borders of Hungary. A (positive) solution to these problems has yet to arrive.

Translated by Sean Lambert

Csaba Zahorán

12 Géza Boros, “Trianon köztéri revíziója 1990–2002” [The Revision of Trianon in Public Spaces], *Mozgó Világ* 29, no. 2 (2003): 3–21.

13 See Péter György, *Allatkert Kolozsváron – Képzelt Erdély* [Zoo in Kolozsvár—Imagined Transylvania] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 2013); and Margit Feischmidt, “Populáris emlékezetpolitikák és az újnacionalizmus: a Trianon-kultusz társadalmi alapjai” [Popular Politics of Memory and the New Nationalism: the Social Foundations of the Trianon Cult], in *Nemzet a mindennapokban. Az újnacionalizmus populáris kultúrája* [Nation in Everyday Life: The Popular Culture of the New Nationalism], ed. idem (Budapest: L'Harmattan–MTA Társadalomtudományi Kutatóközpont, 2014), 51–81.

14 Roman Holec, “Trianon Rituals or Considerations of Some Features of Hungarian Historiography,” *Historical Journal Issue Supplement* 59 (2011): 25–48.

15 <http://www.filmpark.sk/production/production/the-lesson-of-history/>, accessed June 10, 2014. Review of the film in Hungarian: http://indafilm.blog.hu/2013/12/30/mit_keresnek_itt_a_magyarok, accessed June 10, 2014.

Rozpad Uhorska a Trianonská mierová zmluva. K politikám pamäti na Slovensku a v Maďarsku. [The Disintegration of Historical Hungary and the Trianon Peace Treaty. Politics of Memory in Slovakia and Hungary.] Edited by Miroslav Michela and László Vörös. Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2013. 336 pp.

“National narratives usually deal with acts of aggression, hostile neighbors and international conflicts across borders, and present history as a national suffering and victories. Major victories for one nation are invariably tragedies for the others. Thus, what nations set out to accomplish creates a European map of conflicting and often overlapping narratives, the (re)representation of the national past(s) and the reciprocal harm done by nations and nation-states to one another.”¹

This quote points out the essential problem that one has to tackle when trying to reconcile conflicting ethnocentric narratives based on adversarial interpretations of the “common past.”

The authors of the book *The Disintegration of the Historic Hungary and the Treaty of Trianon* are well aware of the implications of this problem. Their assumption, according to which mutual understanding is impossible unless both Slovak and Hungarian historiographies (and societies as a whole) break out from their closed ethnocentric narratives, is explicitly or implicitly present in all of the articles of the publication.

The book is divided into five main chapters: *Historical Perspectives, Political Discourse, Education, Textbooks and Didactics of History, Ritualisation of Cultural Memory and Cultural Trauma*. The main finding of the first chapter is that the debates regarding Trianon in both countries are highly uneven, and the comparison is very asymmetrical. The first article offers a comparison of Slovak and Hungarian historiographical production dealing with Trianon. The well-written text by László Vörös accentuates several important facts regarding the different understanding and significance of Trianon in Slovak and Hungarian national narratives. While in the Hungarian narrative, the concept of Trianon involves the events of 1918–1920 and represents the crucial trauma of twentieth-century national history, in the Slovak narrative it is merely a historical fact connected solely with the peace treaty signed on 4 July, 1920, and it has no significant place

1 Tibor Frank and Frank Hadler, “Nations, Borders and the Historical Profession: On the Complexity of Historical Overlaps in Europe,” in *Disputed Territories and Shared Pasts: Overlapping National Histories in Modern Europe*, ed. Tibor Frank and Frank Hadler (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

in the national narrative. As the article by Peter Macho demonstrates, this Slovak “disinterest” can be dated back to the 1920s. In his article, Etienne Boisserie questions the traditional Slovak assertion according to which the year 1918 represents a radical break in every direction of Slovak political life. He writes about continuity in discontinuity in the sense that many “Hungarian patterns” survived the border changes and continued to influence Slovak developments. While this notion is not entirely new, it is still marginal in Slovak historiography.

Despite the qualities of Vörös’s writing, there are a few minor inaccuracies in his text. The continuity of the Slovak Marxist narrative of the 1950s with the “bourgeois” interpretation of the past was not as smooth as he indicates (he makes this assessment based on the contrast with radical discontinuity in the case of the “bourgeois” and Marxist narratives in Hungary). For example, much as Hungarian historians had to reinterpret Trianon, their Slovak colleagues rewrote the narrative about Slovak participation in the 1848 revolution. What had been characterized as a heroic event became a damnable struggle against the allegedly progressive Hungarian revolution. Even the formally existing concept of the Slovak nation was nearly completely overshadowed by the idea of the Czechoslovak working class. Only the resurgence of national identity-building master-narratives in the late 1960s² enabled the partial return of pre-Marxist nationalist patterns, both in Slovakia and Hungary.

It is perhaps symptomatic of the Hungarian–Slovak discussions about Trianon that even in a book criticizing the hegemony of political history, the chapter on political discourse is the longest. It consists of five articles. Ignác Romsics deals with the presence of Trianon in Hungarian political thought. For a Hungarian reader, his text would probably be just a collection of well-known facts; but a Slovak reader in all likelihood is far less informed on this topic. At the end of his article, Romsics suggests that a significant number of Hungarians still could not handle the dissolution of “historical Hungary,” and there is little hope of changing these sentiments in the near future (p.96).

The situation seems different in Slovakia. According to surveys presented in the article about Trianon in the collective memory in Slovakia by Štefan Šutaj, the vast majority of Hungarians in Slovakia regard the Beneš decrees (and not Trianon) as their biggest “historical trauma.” This seems logical, in part because there are still many people who have direct experiences with the

2 Bogdan Cristian Iacob, “Stalinism, Historians and the Nation: History-Production under Communism in Romania 1955–1966.” (PhD diss., Central European University, 2011), 524.

postwar developments, but no one has first-hand memory of Trianon anymore. However, these findings regarding the purported relative insignificance of the Trianon trauma among Hungarians in Slovakia in comparison with the key role of this topic in Hungary deserve more elaborate analysis than they are given here.

The article by Attila Simon about “loyalist Hungarians” in interwar Czechoslovakia also deconstructs the generalizing topoi of Trianon as the national trauma. The author emphasizes that the traditional closed agrarian communities were affected to a significantly smaller extent than the Hungarian elites in the cities (p.118). However, the attitudes of representatives of the political left among the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia would constitute an even more interesting factor, and while Simon makes mention of this, he does not give it adequate analysis. Their opinions represented a unique approach to the solution of the post-Trianon problems, an approach that differed strikingly from the visions of the ruling elite in both Budapest and Prague.

Roman Holec presents the image of Trianon in Slovak fiction, offering the reader yet another perspective on perceptions of the period between 1918 and 1920. The analysis of contemporary Slovak novels confirms the assumption that the concepts of national identity in twentieth-century Central Europe were very flexible, especially among local elites.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the three articles in the chapter dealing with the teaching of history reach fairly similar conclusions. The authors (György Jakab, Viliam Kratochvíl and Barnabás Vajda) criticize the anachronistic system of history teaching, which is designed to produce citizens educated in the national canon. According to the experts, students should learn to “comprehend differences,” be empathetic with so-called “others,” and be able to analyze different primary sources. However, the “progressive” history teaching of the Anglo-Saxon countries highlighted by György Jakab should not be regarded as the ideal solution to all the problems of the teaching of Central European history, without mentioning the existing criticism of the concept and practice of “progressive teaching”.³

In the chapter dealing with the ritualization of public memory, Miklós Zeidler offers an excellent analysis of the interwar public manifestations of Hungarian irredentism. Zeidler’s concluding remarks regarding irredentism

3 See: Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder, *Rethinking the Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 265–6.

(and nationalism) as a form of “therapy for traumatized society” based on a “mistaken diagnosis” that only leads to greater frustration and political blunders (p.232) is clearly pertinent to both the Slovak and the Hungarian situation today. The equally interesting article by Balázs Ablonczy handles the development of five Hungarian refugee associations during the interwar period. According to the author, these organizations were unable to process the Treaty of Trianon in interwar Hungary, but at the same time their histories can offer answers to the question regarding how to speak about “traumas of the past” correctly (p.243). A local case study on the history of the János Tuba memorial in Komárno authored by József Demmel and Miroslav Michela analyzes the connection between local and national interest in a town with a Hungarian-speaking majority that found itself outside the borders of the “mother state.”

The last chapter deals with Trianon as a cultural trauma. The essay by Éva Kovács entitled *On the Traumatic Memory of Trianon* is an accurate, highly critical analysis of the Trianon discourse in both Hungary and Slovakia today, as well as the stereotypes and modes of thinking on which this discourse rests, including essentialism, ethnocentrism, unacceptable generalizations, and disinterest in the findings of the “other” historiography. Kovács raises fundamental questions regarding the term “Trianon trauma”: is it even legitimate to use such a psychological term? How can a heterogeneous “imagined society” be unanimously traumatized? Can we speak about a collective Trianon trauma when we know very little about individual reactions to this event?

The second article of the last chapter, which was written by Dagmar Kusá and M. Michela, offers a general, comparative analysis regarding the Slovak and Hungarian national narratives, politics of memory, instrumentalization of history and concepts of cultural trauma. This text provides a well-written methodological and theoretical overview regarding the abovementioned ideas, which are utilized in the majority of articles in this publication. In fact, this text should have been put right after the introduction. It is a little bit difficult to understand why it was made the last article of the book.

One could conclude by asking the question raised by Ablonczy, “What are the results of all of this” (p.243)? In general, the Trianon discourse is still an ideological and often politically shaped one. Historians are largely responsible for the emergence and persistence of a situation in which the word Trianon triggers a stream of associations instead of useful knowledge. As Timothy Snyder comments with regards to the trope of victimhood, “the debate had shifted to contentious claims and counter-claims: who suffered, at whose hands and

how much? Who had a bigger trauma?”⁴ Both Slovak and Hungarian narratives vividly accentuate national suffering while strongly rejecting the possibility that the “victimized nation” might have caused suffering to others (the Holocaust discourse is a striking example).

One of the results is the specific language of the “national tragedy and trauma,” which is also used in academic texts, even in the texts published in this book. However, its authors recognize that it is not a homogenous publication, and it can be only a first step towards mutual understanding between two discourses. This could be only done through comparative research on historiography and national historical cultures, with the emphasis on social history (p.307). On the other hand, is the mission of the historian to mediate “national reconciliation”? First and foremost, history should bring information about the past to light and explain why people made particular decisions in the context of the dilemmas faced. If a historian manages to do this without resorting to nationalist bias or discourses of competitive suffering, a more nuanced understanding of “others” should be the natural outcome of his or her work. There is no need to moralize over justice or injustice. However, meaningful discussion of the alleged traumas is possible only outside the paradigm of ethnocentric narratives. Without doubt, this publication provides several useful examples to learn from.

Adam Hudek

4 Judt and Snyder, *Rethinking the Twentieth Century*, 322. For more on the problem of victimhood see Włodzimierz Borodziej, “Geschichtspolitik und ‘Konkurrenz der Opfer’” in *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989*, ed. Etienne François, Kornelia Kończal, and Stefan Troebst (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 159–68.

Notes on Contributors

- APOR, PÉTER (Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences), apor.peter@btk.mta.hu
- BALEVA, MARTINA (Kompetenzzentrum Kulturelle Topographien, University of Basel), martina.baleva-at-unibas.ch
- BIRKÁS, ANNA (Atelier Department of European Social Science and History of Historical Science, Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest), annabiri@yahoo.com
- BRZEHCZYN, KRZYSZTOF (Institute of Philosophy, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Department of Scientific Research, Poznań Branch, Institute of National Remembrance), brzech@amu.edu.pl
- GORI, MAJA (New Perspectives on Ancient Pottery project, University of Amsterdam), m.gori.sk@gmail.com
- HUDEK, ADAM (Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences), adamhudek@gmail.com
- K. HORVÁTH, ZSOLT (Institute for Art Theory and Media Studies, Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest), khzs@hotmail.com
- KISANTAL, TAMÁS (Department of Modern Literature, University of Pécs), kisantal_tamas@yahoo.com
- LACZÓ, FERENC (Imre Kertész Kolleg, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena), laczofl@yahoo.com
- SOMMER, ŁUKASZ (Department of Hungarian Studies, University of Warsaw), lukaszsommer@gmail.com
- TAKÁCS, TIBOR (Research Department, Historical Archives of the State Security Services, Budapest), takacs.tibor@abtl.hu
- TULIPÁN, ÉVA (Institute for Military History, Budapest), tulipan.eva@gmail.com
- ZAHORÁN, CSABA (Hungarian Institute in Bratislava), zahorancsaba@gmail.com

