

1968: A Turning Point in Hungarian Literary Politics and Poetry

László Bedecs

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Lasló Bedech. 1968: A TURNING POINT IN HUNGARIAN LITERARY POLITICS AND POETRY

Abstract. In my study I examine the political and poetic changes in Hungary around 1968. The way in which Hungarian cultural politics tried to control literary life after the 1956 revolution and then changed this, partly out of necessity and partly because of accumulated tensions, from 1968 onwards, should be instructive for the international academic community. A little-studied question is how the political changes might have been related to the changes in poetry at that time, and I will try to answer this question in my study. I find that the response of Hungarian poets to political repression was both an ironic rejection of the role of the missionary poet and the inclusion of neo-avant-garde solutions expressing freedom in formal and linguistic terms in their poetic toolkit.

My research required both a historical and a literary historical perspective. I began by describing the social constraints that led the political leadership to decide to relax censorship on literary life from 1968, and as a result, what was allowed to be published and what was still banned. Then I will show what poetic innovations the texts that were finally published brought to Hungarian literature.

Keywords: Hungarian literature, Kádár regime, socialist cultural policy, new sensibility, neovantgard

Ласло Бедеч. 1968 ГОДИНА – ПОВРАТНА ТОЧКА В УНГАРСКАТА ЛИТЕРАТУРНА ПОЛИТИКА И ПОЕЗИЯ

Резюме. В това изследване разглеждам политическите и поетическите промени в Унгария около 1968 г. Начинът, по който унгарската културна политика се опитва да контролира литературния живот след революцията от 1956 г., след което променя това отчасти по необходимост и отчасти поради натрупаното напрежение от 1968 г. натаък, би трябвало да бъде поучителен за международната научна общност. Малко изследван въпрос е как политическите промени са могли да бъдат свързани с промените

в поезията по това време и в статията се прави опит да се отговори на този въпрос. Може да се заключи, че отговорът на унгарските поети на политическите репресии е както ироничното отхвърляне на ролята на поета мисионер, така и включването в поетическия им инструментариум на неоавангардни решения, изразяващи свободата във формално и езиково отношение.

Изследването изисква както историческа, така и литературноисторическа перспектива. Започва с описание на социалните ограничения, довели до решението на политическото ръководство да отслаби цензурата върху литературния живот от 1968 г., и в резултат на това, какво е било разрешено да се публикува и какво все още е било забранено. След това е показано какви поетични нововъведения внасят в унгарската литература текстовете, които в крайна сметка са публикувани.

Ключови думи: унгарска литература, режим на Кадар, социалистическа културна политика, нова чувствителност, неоавангард

Research/Научно изследване

After the Second World War, Hungary, as is well known, came under the influence of the Soviet Union. Between 1949 and 1956, the country lived through a period of harshly dictatorial Stalinist rule under the name of Mátyás Rákosi, which ended with the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence. Although the revolution failed and its leaders and participants were either driven out or executed, the Socialist Party that was formed afterwards under János Kádár pursued a much softer, more permissive policy. The difference is clearly shown by the fact that while Rákosi's motto was "those who are not with us are against us", Kádár's was "those who are not against us are with us". In other words, the neutral masses, who were not very concerned with politics, were subjected to harassment under Rákosi (why don't they join the party?), while under Kádár (from 1956 to 1989) they were conditioned to retreat into their private lives, their homes, their families, their small orchards, and then they could live in peace, get ahead, build a career for themselves, and their children can study (party membership was no longer a condition for this). But the Kádár consolidation did not happen overnight. From 1956 to 1968 the regime was very cautious, and the traces of this can be seen in cultural policy.

In short, until '68, cultural policy did not allow the publication of works that were even slightly suspect and did not follow the official line, but then it published the accumulated manuscripts all at once. In the following, I would like to present the background to this turn of events.

The history of Hungarian literature is particularly concerned with this period. For example, the academic Miklós Szabolcsi compared the late 1960s to the years around the launch of the journal *Nyugat* (1908–1941), which defined the whole

of 20th century Hungarian literature.¹ A whole new generation of writers came on the scene, following completely new poetic ideas. The first significant manifestations of this generation were three notable poetry anthologies, *The First Song* ('Első ének'), *Poets Among Poets* ('Költők egymás közt') and *The Unreachable Land* (Elérhetetlen föld). These anthologies were a sign that a powerful, distinctly innovative and, not least, populous community of writers was waiting for the opportunity to present itself in its own volumes. Nearly sixty newcomers to the field were given the opportunity to publish, and the list of authors who later became important includes Dezső Tandori, György Petri, Imre Oravecz, Zsuzsa Beney and József Utassy (all of whom are also available in Bulgarian). And although these poets were oriented in different directions, they were united by a desire for something new, a desire to replace the rhetorically overstated, mission-oriented style of the previous generation (Gyula Illyés, Ferenc Juhász, László Nagy), in other words, by a capacity for self-irony. The debates surrounding the "young literature", which in part arose precisely around the anthologies, have also shown that the novelty and eventfulness of poetic change is greater than that of an average generational change. Never before have so many studies been devoted to the literary aspirations of young people, never before have so many people felt it important to write about the work of first-volume poets.²

We now know that this has led to very significant poetic changes. The question is, however, how these changes were perceived by contemporaries, whether the contemporary can be a witness to the turn of the era, or whether this is always an afterthought and, to this extent, a possible recognition. It is also a question of what institutional and literary-political framework the young poets had for publication, and what poetic modes of discourse the members of the generation that spoke out in the late sixties might have wanted to speak differently from. For "to understand something", as Ernő Kulcsár Szabó Kulcsár puts it, "means first and foremost to understand something always as a response (to something)"³.

The special attention paid to criticism and literary politics can only be understood if we at least briefly review the systems of expectations that were at work

¹ *A szocialista irodalom új szakasza: 1957–1968.* Béládi Miklós, Bata Imre, Bodnár György, Czine Mihály és Szabolcsi Miklós beszélgetése. = BÉLÁDI Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen idő. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről.* Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 196.

² Fodor, András (szerk.): *Pályakezdő költők 1971–1974.* Bp., Magyar Írók Szövetsége Költői Szakosztálya, é. n., (1975). Agárdi, Péter (szerk.): *A hetvenes évek magyar irodalmáról.* Bp., Kossuth, 1979., Vasy Géza (szerk.): *Fiatal magyar költők 1969–1978.* Bp., Akadémiai, 1980, Béládi Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen idő. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről.* Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, Dérczy, Péter (szerk.): *Fasírt. Viták a fiatal irodalomról.* Bp., Magvető, 1982, Veres, András (szerk.): *A hetvenes évek kultúrája. Az 1980 április 10-12 szimpózium anyaga.* Bp., Balassi, 1994.

³ Kulcsár Szabó, Ernő: *Az új lírai beszéd a válaszok horizontváltásában. Kísérlet a klasszikusmodern líra egy szereptípusának újraértésére.* (Petri György: A delphói jós hamiscsödöt jelent) = K. Sz. E.: *Az új kritika dilemmái.* Bp., Balassi, 1994, 139.

in Hungarian literary criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, the poetic languages that defined Hungarian lyrical discourse, and the ideological and aesthetic principles that shaped the determined and often petty cultural politics of the period. The reconstruction of the systems of expectations prevailing in each period helps the interpreter to understand how a new work relates to the norms. After all, aesthetically significant works of art are often in tension with the prevailing forms of reception of the period or era in question. In such cases, we must reckon with the possibility that significant works have already been written with a desire to reject and transcend this horizon. All the later significant authors just highlighted, and indeed most of the critics who have dealt with them, have stressed that the impetus for their poetry was precisely the search for ‚speaking otherwise‘. In other words, dissatisfaction with the prevailing poetic modes of speech. So: a basic condition for understanding the first volumes is to reconstruct the historical horizon to which they were written as a response, or even as a provocation.

The framework of the literary institutional system, which was still in place at the end of the 1960s, was developed by the Kádárist leadership between 1957 and 1962, largely through the deterrent examples of authors imprisoned for their 1956 activities (Tibor Déry, Gyula Háry, István Eörsi and others) or permanently indexed, exerting pressure on the whole of the literary community, united only in name. It was then that the principle of the “three T’s” (‘Támogat-Tűr-Tilt’ = Support, Tolerate, Forbid) was promulgated, which, after the earlier Révai-style unifying literary policy that allowed only socialist realist literature to live, was a moderate relaxation of the framework. From these years onwards, the tendency towards uniformity was partially eradicated, and the demand for diversity appeared more and more frequently in the vocabulary of criticism, although it is also symptomatic of being one of the most influential shapers of literary politics, Béla Köpeczi, the then head of the General Directorate of Publishing, who for a long time had conceived of Hungarian literature as being based solely on a „communist base”, proposed to György Aczél that the forums of writers should be more strictly supervised.⁴ And it was also almost natural that the reorganisation of the Hungarian Writers’ Union in 1961 was carried out from above, strictly along the lines of political commitments – members were invited to join the organisation by invitation, and most of them had to be party members, and that within a few years pressure forced both László Németh and Gyula Illyés to make a quasi-loyalty declaration, which was of course also used by the authorities for propaganda purposes (see the many press photos of Kádár and the smiling writers around him).⁵

⁴ Köpeczi Béla *feljegyzése Aczél György számára a magyar irodalom szerepéről*. = CSEH Gergő Bendegúz-Kalmár Melinda-PÓR Edit (szerk.): *Zárt, bizalmas, számozott. Tájékoztatáspolitikai és cenzúra 1956–1963 (dokumentumok)*. Bp., Osiris, 1999, 150–151.

⁵ Ständeisky, Éva: *Az írók és a hatalom 1956–1963*. Bp., 1956-os Intézet, 1996, 429–456.

In any case, from the mid-sixties onwards, works that had been on the shelves for a decade could slowly appear. László Nagy and Ferenc Juhász, for example, could have their books published again in 1965, after 57 and 56 respectively, and Illyés in 1963. István Király's self-critical remarks in a somewhat later conversation in 1979 about János Pilinszky, whose poetry the cultural authorities considered alien to socialist development and who was therefore obliged to remain silent for decades, are typical of the limited easing: "Literary politics made a mistake by almost completely silencing Pilinszky's efforts after 1949. In doing so, it harmed not only Hungarian literature as a whole, but also the development of socialist literature" – and then, in response to György Bodnár's interjection, he remarks: "[at the end of the 1940s] Pilinszky was hardly read by your generation. And that was our fault."⁶ This seemingly value-based, but in fact utilitarian and pragmatic opposition, which would explain the right to exist (to tolerate) Pilinszky's poetry after the ban by the fact that the making public of this poetry would make so-called socialist literature more thoughtful, would have stimulated a more thoughtful and profound search for deeper forms, but, although it gives an undeserved role to a literature that was considered ideologically inappropriate, it has nevertheless helped to initiate a history of influence and, through this, of understanding. Pilinszky's *On the Third Day* ('Harmadnapon') was published thirteen years after the first, in 1959, with a small print run (a thousand copies), of course, so that the next volume would have to wait another eleven years, but Király's statement in the same volume also highlights the equally unfortunate reasons for this: "I consider Pilinszky a true and great poet. But it is a different matter to judge a particular poetic talent and a particular trend. Marxist aesthetics rightly makes a constant distinction between historical and aesthetic value. What is problematic as a historical value can also be an aesthetic value."⁷

Whether this distinction, and especially the prohibition based on it, is legitimate or illegitimate is not the question, but it can be said that the decision-makers who often split up life's work and existences were not yet in possession of such a self-critical set of arguments in the late sixties. This can be clearly seen, for example, in the statements made by Király, who lectured the young György Petri, which were then so often echoed in the Petri reception – as a kind of argument of authority – for a long time, including during the informal ban in the 1980s. Here, Király first quoted Kádár himself: "communists must be 'on the side of the masses', 'always emotionally on the side of the pedestrians'", and then, on the same page, declared that „without concrete love of the people, national pride in the Leninist sense, so-

⁶ *Áttekintés és összefoglalás. Béládi Miklós, Bodnár György, Király István és Szabolcsi Miklós beszélgetése.* = Béládi Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen idő. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről.* Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 299–301

⁷ *Áttekintés és összefoglalás. Béládi Miklós, Bodnár György, Király István és Szabolcsi Miklós beszélgetése.* = Béládi Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen idő. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről.* Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 299.

cialist patriotism, the disguise of individualist anarchism (...) is privatisation - the much-vaunted universalism and world poetry.”⁸ But it has also been written many times in connection with Dezső Tandori’s first volumes that subjective, self-serving literature is morally questionable in a communitarian society, and Király, for example, read Tandori as a poet of “socialist disillusionment” and the “isolated self”, although he wrote his comments on this only in 1988, with some self-irony, and then already acknowledging the values of such poetry.⁹ (It is worth remembering, however, that in 1946, in a paper that silenced the lyricists of the New Moon (‘Újhold’), including Pilinszky, for practically a decade, György Lukács also spoke of the poetry of the „isolated self”, which, according to his impetuous logic, meant “the denial of the democratic movement of the country”¹⁰.) The above-mentioned “historical value”, on the other hand, was demonstrated, for example, by literature that was called, in László Németh’s words, “signposting”, i.e., literature that was committed to social service, that conceived of the writer as a signpost for the people, and that felt a quasi-moral duty to fill the place assigned to him in the social institutions. The extent to which this expectation was paramount is illustrated by the fact that István Szabó B. considered the poetry of László Nagy and Ferenc Juhász to be worthy of praise - even then (1980), questionably so – because they “expressed the international, world-historical scale of the change in the construction of socialism, with universal validity, by addressing issues of Hungarian history and society”¹¹. But what is really important for us here is that such sentences could not have been uttered about the works of the best of the new generation of poets.

In 1968, the anthology entitled *First Song* (‘Első Ének’), edited by András Mezei – who was the editor of the poetry section of the most important cultural weekly at the time, *Élet és Irodalom* – was published, followed by *Poets Among Poets* (‘Költők egymás között’) in ’69, and finally, in ’70, *The Unreachable Land* (‘Elérhetelen föld’). The mere publication of the anthologies was newsworthy, and Géza Vasy believes that by authorising them the authorities were trying to defuse the tensions caused by generational impatience.¹² Let’s not forget: at that time, it took months, sometimes even years, for an accepted poem to appear in the newspapers, and the turnaround time for the volumes was often two or three years. The impatience was therefore largely due to this delay, which was often unexplained.

⁸ Király, István: *Irodalom és társadalom*. Bp., Szépirodalmi, 1976, 166.

⁹ Király, István: *Egy befogadói élmény nyomában*. = ZSOLDOS Sándor (szerk.): *Király és Tandori*. Szeged, Gradus ad Parnassum, 1996, 45–46.

¹⁰ Lukács, György: *Újhold*. Forum, 1946/9, 112–115.

¹¹ A hetvenes évek irodalma. Agárdi Péter, Koczkás Sándor, Kulin Ferenc, Szabó B. István és Béládi Miklós beszélgetése. = BÉLÁDI Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen id. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről*. Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 212.

¹² Vasy Géza: *Az Első Ének – egy emberöltővel később*. = V. G.: *Költői világok*. Bp., Széphalom, 2003, 143.

Accordingly, in the reviews of the anthologies, besides the difference between the traditions adopted and the aspirations, the general problems of the forums of the newcomers are the main theme, while these writings also clearly show the horizon of expectations of contemporary criticism, the poetic and ideological aspects on the basis of which a rejection or acceptance statement was made. In the 1968 issue of the journal *Kritika* – that is, before the publication of *Unreachable Land* – a multi-actor debate unfolded, arguing that those who were included in the volume were to be rejected from both an aesthetic and an ideological point of view, because „while their horizon of competence embraced the world, they forgot about the Hungarian problems here and now”. In response to this, Miklós Szabolcsi spoke about the visible differences in social backgrounds, and immediately warned against reviving the rural-urban contradiction, and even then, he called the poetic aspirations of young literature extremely significant.¹³ A little later, Szabolcsi also dedicated a special study to the “young” poets, in which he drew attention to the diversity of the masters, the traditions, and the importance of this aspect of analysis, and then – emphasising the right to “differentiation” – he asked about the individual poets’ conception of the human being and their aesthetic innovations.¹⁴ Szabolcsi’s questions was thus different from that of the first speakers, he did not examine ideological and publishing problems as they did, but sought to place the poetic achievements of the emerging generation in the context of the history of lyric development over a decade. At the same time, there are many instructive observations that could be quoted from the essays that confront the anthologies, especially in those paragraphs where the critics have taken on the otherwise obligatory task of describing the future of the poets and texts, which is therefore primarily a matter of literary history.

But the anthologies were only the beginning of the process that led to an almost avalanche of first volumes of poets in the three years after 1968. Instead of the 3–4 that had been the norm up to then, 10–12 first volumes were published each year, slowly reducing the average age of the newcomers to under thirty (!). But it is also thought-provoking that István Gáll, the then secretary of the Hungarian Writers’ Union, in an interview, refers to 300 ‘young writers of good ability’, although he considers only about ten per cent of them to be ‘regularly proving themselves’¹⁵. The majority of the volumes were, of course, of dubious value despite the serious screening, but the figures are a good indication of the environment of poetic renewal, of the churning of the waters of ‘balanced and decent’ Hungarian literature. And it is not only the decisions of the two publishing houses (Magvető and Szépirodalmi) and the state office supervising them that are worth examining in analysing this process, but also the activation of criticism, which paid unprecedented attention to the works of newcomers. It is worth mentioning not only the large number (nine-

¹³ Szabolcsi Miklós: *Szabálytalan jegyzet – nehéz ügyekről*. *Kritika*, 1968/11, 3–6.

¹⁴ Szabolcsi Miklós: *Tűnődés új költkről*. *Új Írás*, 1970/3, 92–98.

¹⁵ Az új sereg és a házigazda. Párkány László beszélget GÁLL Istvánnal. *Napjaink*, 1969/8, 2.

teen!) of reviews of the first volume of the most important poet, Dezső Tandori's Fragment for Hamlet, which appeared in far fewer literary journals than at present – in other words, practically every journal published a review of the volume – but also the volumes of studies that were born under the banner of „young literature“, which were typical up to 1980 and which sought to chart the direction of emerging literature. József Tamás Reményi suspects ulterior motives in this heightened interest: he sees a parallel attempt at isolation and assimilation, in other words, a literary policy demand that the isolation and emphatic separation of young people should provide an opportunity to maintain the continuity of socialist literature.¹⁶ It is no coincidence that even critics, who are otherwise complimentary towards young people, do not forget to make the obligatory ideological arguments. For example, Géza Vasy, who edited one of the most interesting volumes of studies, also in his capacity as the then KISZ (Communist Youth League) secretary of the Hungarian Writers' Union, draws attention in his preface to the volume to the fact that “the task of shaping socialist consciousness (...) is an important work on the agenda”, since, as he puts it elsewhere: “all thinking people must realize that, although the perspective of communism is unchanged, the road to it is much slower and more complicated than we thought.”¹⁷

The two-day meeting was then organised according to the script of lecturing young people, as illustrated, for example, by the contribution of Dezső Tóth, who was present as a representative of the Communist Party of the State Party headquarters, in which Tóth declares that he is only willing to enter into a debate with those who are close to him despite his differences, with the “educable”, “with introverted, socially uninteresting, artistic artists (...) of the whole Tandori line”¹⁸, but does not even want to react to the aspirations of the “artists”. Incidentally, Tandori, along with Petri and Oravec, was not invited. The rejection of the office is also interesting because by this time, in 1969, the reviews, most of which had already appeared, were expressly sensitive and appreciative of the first Tandori book. This also shows that the literary policy at the level of the Ministry and the critical advice of the newspapers were no longer linked in the same way as in the decades before, and that censorship was more informal than direct. It is another matter that in the case of the author's second book of poems, Purification of a Found Object, this kind of open reading was no longer typical of the criticism that had been supportive up to that point, but this can be explained not only by political-ideological but also by aesthetic reasons.

However, along with the authorisation of conferences and anthologies, the policy has sought to control developments and, where it perceived a threat of exces-

¹⁶ Reményi József Tamás: *A hatyúnyakú paradoxon*. Orpheus, 1992/4, 34.

¹⁷ Vasy Géza: *Bevezetőül. Az első évtized*. = V. G. (szerk.): *Fiatall magyar költők 1969–1978*. Bp., Akadémiai, 1980, 17.

¹⁸ Zimonyi, Zoltán (szerk.): *Fiatall Írók Tanácskozása. Lillafüred, 1969. Teljes jegyzőkönyv, jegyzetek, dokumentum-melléklet*. Bp., Széphalom-Új Kiblató, 1995, 86.

sive freedom, it has taken swift and tough action. The launch of a new journal, for example, was not possible at this time, although the idea of publishing a journal primarily for young people was often mooted, including in Lillafüred. This was to have been the *Mozgó Világ*, but after lengthy negotiations it was only published as a half-yearly in 1971, only to be banned a few years later. But the case of *Esmélet*, organised in 1968-69, is also memorable, which was first authorised, then, for reasons that were said to have been made up, banned the first issue already in print, and finally a police case was created around it. The (hopeful) circle of the paper included Péter Nádas, Miklós Mészöly, Sándor Csoóri and Dezső Tandori, but the exchange of letters between Péter Nádas and the Minister of Culture, György Aczél, is most often cited in connection with the case, especially the second letter of Nádas dated 11 July 1970. In it, Nádas, outlining a brief history of *Esmélet*, rejects Aczél's double game of youth initiatives: "It seems that the barrier was built and came into operation before the road it was supposed to block could be built. The double securing device, the prevention of independent road construction and the pulling down of the barrier set up in an empty landscape, unfortunately, made us gag. Castration before and instead of intercourse." The change in Aczél's attitude is clearly indicated by the fact that his first letter begins with "Dear Peter", the next with „Dear Comrade Nádas”, and the last with „Dear Péter Nádas”, so the friendly tone of the letter soon became formal and cold, due to the writer's hard stance. The result: no book by Nádas was published between 1969 and 1977.¹⁹

However, the games of literary politics, publishing and censorship were only external signs of changes in the history of poetry. Far more important were the new poetic aspirations, which were of course also the trigger for the decisions and events that were sometimes cautious, sometimes explicitly obstructive. We have to see that the majority of the new generation questioned the undisputed poetic authority of Ferenc Juhász, László Nagy and, above all, Gyula Illyés. The models of poetry that dominated the lyrical vernacular of the second half of the 1960s, so to speak, regarded poetry as a genre of public discourse, consciously assuming the representative character of the poetic role, together with the continuation of the mission-oriented tradition, which was far removed from Tandori and his significant colleagues. We need only think of Illyés's oft-quoted poem, *The Poet's Answer*, summing up the achievements of the last decade and a half of this existentialist poetry – „I make poetry / to enrich you” – to see what it meant in its pathetic, hymn-like and often tragic tone, a lyric that by this time had become constricted and uncomfortable, favouring direct address, and which, like László Nagy's poetry, is as much about a belief in the possibility of making moral choices between right and wrong as it is about an appreciation of the poetic role of these choices. This prevailing poetic discourse, in fact, asserts a conception of the role that does not question the unity and value horizon of the personality, which was present at the turn of the

¹⁹ Révész Sándor: *Aczél és korunk*. Bp., Sík, 1997, 180–183.

sixties and seventies as something to be rejected and overridden by most of the generation of poets starting out at that time. Because for them, the fate of the poet as a derivative of the community was at most ironic.

For example, György Petri, against the pathetic, sensationalist poetry roles, formulated his often quoted words, “I simply wanted to be a professional. So I didn’t feel that I wanted to make a confession at all, (...) I simply wanted to write poetry”²⁰, as can be seen in the central cycle of Tandori’s second volume, *The Loss of Amateurism*, which also focused attention on the textuality and linguistic occurrence of the poem rather than on the moral expectations of responsibility towards the community. For the professional acts in a reflective way, is aware of the laws of language that apply to him, and therefore strives not to express the world-whole, but to grasp fragments in a self-ironic, contingent way, while poetry loses its pathos and is not an inner compulsion, but primarily a linguistic challenge, shaman, sorcerer, prophet²¹, wrote Csaba Könczöl in 1975, for example, indicating precisely the general opinion of contemporary critics about Juhász, and also the poet-imagist, in comparison to which the ironic constructions of personality or even impersonality of the poetry of Tandori, Petri and Oravecz, along with that of others, can be considered a paradigmatic novelty. For while in Juhász the Poet with capital letters – the ‘universe’s big eyeball’, the ‘heart of the world’s totality’ – tries to create order in the cosmic chaos of existence and beings through the power of words, in Tandori’s case the question of ‘What can the poet do?’ cannot even be raised, for in his case, as in Petri’s, it is primarily a question of inspiration of a ‘professional’ nature. And this inherently ironic ‘inspiration’ does not assume any unity with the lyrical tradition of either mission or confession, since here the poet, aware of all his possibilities, simply wants to write a poem, without any responsibility. In another interview, György Petri confirms this: ‘I did not want to fight personality, but the fiction of the so-called “lyrical hero”, who has nothing to do with any empirical personality, but is made up of certain poetic clichés: a system of norms that has developed spontaneously somewhere dictates what the poet should be.’ The partial or total elimination of personality, the absence of evidence, the ironic elimination of the fatefulness of the poetic role and with it the mission, the possibility of pathetic inspiration, and a fundamentally linguistic critical attitude no longer allow such a position of discourse. Or, as the poem “To Alexander” (To Sandor Petofi) indicates the invalidity, anachronism and parody of the role of the patron: “Fate, open a space for me. / It will open.”

However, not only the poetry of the early seventies and the decades after, but also the criticism and even the literary historical evaluation of the nineties confirmed – albeit with different arguments – the unviability of the community-based, experience- and confession-based poetic tradition. Few similar examples from the

²⁰ Szállóigévé lenni, az a legjobb dolog. (A kérdező: PARTI NAGY Lajos.) = Beszélgetések Petri Györggyel. Bp., Pesti Szalon, 1994, 132–133.

²¹ Könczöl, Csaba: *A hallgatás szinonimái*. = K. Cs.: *Tükörszoba*. Bp., Szépirodalmi, 1986, 249.

history of twentieth-century poetry could be used to support the reception of the poetry of Illyés, Juhász and, to some extent, Nagy, who were still considered undisputed authorities in the mid-eighties, but six or eight years later many people were already talking about the excesses, unresponsiveness and uninterestingness of these models of poetry – if they were talking about them at all. What is perhaps most evident from this reception event is that the narrow margin of manoeuvre of top-down criticism, i.e. the prohibition of raising problems for certain authors who were politically favoured, could indeed have negative consequences, the dramatic decline in the discourse around Gyula Illyés and especially Ferenc Juhász in the 1990s – after the previous circulation of 20,000 copies and readings in front of audiences of several hundred people, the leading literary journals hardly published Juhász’s new poems for several years, and his volumes are hardly noticed at all – and the parallel decline in the canonical status of these authors can certainly be paralleled with the distorted critical discourse that has developed around them. István Margócsy notes that for several generations Juhász was the only one who did not have to face serious criticism for decades, so he had to suffer the fact that „what was written about him was most certainly false, untrue, worthless.” In fact, from the mid-1960s onwards, practically no critical commentary on Juhász’s poetry could appear, and by the 1990s, when anything could have been published, Juhász’s poetry as a problem – apart from a very small circle – had simply ceased to exist. (To complete the picture, however, it is also important to note that, as already mentioned, neither Juhász nor László Nagy had any volumes published until 1965, after 1956 for the former and 1957 for the latter. In other words, both became (re)supporters of cultural policy in the second half of the 1960s, just before the generation we are now spotlighting.)

György Kálmán C. Nagy’s 1989 essay *What’s wrong with László Nagy?*, in which the author condemned Nagy for the Christian poses and sentimentality of the poetic role, the static nature of the poetic language, the immobility and monotony of the world of values and the pseudo-problems hidden in the mask of visionary-ism²². Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy also referred to this in his monograph, when he wrote that “this lyric in all its periods is devoid of reflection”, so “it consistently avoids questions of the controllability of language and the world” and “its main characteristic is monologicism”²³, while also drawing attention to the fact that “the lyric is a monologue, a monologue of the world”, that László Nagy created some of the most enduring works of the Hungarian lyrical tradition with its tragic worldview in an era that later canonised and became leading in its tendencies – we can think here of the poetry of Petri, Oravecz or Tandori – explicitly opposed the tragic.

However, it is also important to note that the poetry of the *New Moon* (‘Újhold’) poets, especially János Pilinszky and Ágnes Nemes Nagy, offered useful recipes for

²² Kálmán, C. György (1998), *Mi A Bajom Nagy Lászlóval?* = K. C. Gy.: *Mű És Valódi Élvezetek*. Pécs, Jelenkor, 1992, 25–39.

²³ Tolcsvai Nagy Gábor Nagy László. Pozsony, Kalligram, 190.

counterpointing the horizon of expectation of the lyricism that defined the period under discussion, even in the early seventies, and that this insight may also provide an answer to the problem of the much-voiced need for lyrical continuity. In Pilinsky, too, there was a transformation of the traditional poetic presence of the personality, which probably reached its peak of potential in his volumes of this period, when the hermetic mode of speech was at its height. Pilinsky's self-enclosed speaker in *The Icons of the City* (1970), oblivious to the community's system of relations but not focused on individual experience, or the paradox-laden, short, enigmatic poems of the 1972 volume *Splinters* ('Szálkák'), are clearly related to Tandori's first volumes. However, the critical resonance of the poetry of Pilinszky and Nemes Nagy could not even be compared to the positions of the three just mentioned, the former being given a menu-leaf at most by the label of 'anti-fascist', while the latter, because of its 'intellectuality', could only move towards the centre of the canon at the end of the 1980s. In a forthcoming paper, I will also address the importance of this poetic link. But suffice it to say for now that 1968 and the years that followed were a particularly important period in the history of Hungarian poetry, but for the changes to emerge, a change in cultural politics was also needed. In my study I have tried to show what this change meant: first in politics, then in poetics.

Bibliography

- A hetvenes évek irodalma. Agárdi Péter, Koczkás Sándor, Kulin Ferenc, Szabó B. István és Béládi Miklós beszélgetése. = Béládi Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen id. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről*. Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 212.
- A szocialista irodalom új szakasza. 1957–1968*. Béládi Miklós, Bata Imre, Bodnár György, Czine Mihály és Szabolcsi Miklós beszélgetése. = Béládi Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen idő. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről*. Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 196.
- Áttekintés és összefoglalás. Béládi Miklós, Bodnár György, Király István és Szabolcsi Miklós beszélgetése*. = Béládi Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen idő. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről*. Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 299.
- Áttekintés és összefoglalás. Béládi Miklós, Bodnár György, Király István és Szabolcsi Miklós beszélgetése*. = Béládi Miklós (szerk.): *Történelmi jelen idő. Beszélgetések a magyar irodalom legújabb fejezeteiről*. Bp., RTV-Minerva, 1981, 299–301
- Az új sereg és a házigazda. Párkány László beszélget GÁLL Istvánnal. *Napjaink*, 1969/8, 2.
- Fodor, A. (szerk.). *Pályakezdő költők 1971–1974*. Bp., Magyar Írók Szövetsége Költői Szakosztálya, é. n. (1975). Agárdi Péter (Szerk.): *A Hetvenes Évek Magyar Irodalmáról*. Bp., Kossuth, 1979., Vasy Géza (Szerk.): *Fiatal Magyar Költők 1969-1978*. Bp., Akadémiai, 1980. Béládi Miklós (Szerk.): *Történelmi Jelen Idő. Beszélgetések A Magyar Irodalom Legújabb Fejezeteiről*. Bp., Rtv-Minerva, 1981. Dérczy Péter (Szerk.): *Fasírt. Viták A Fiatall Irodalomról*. Bp., Magvető, 1982., Veres András (Szerk.): *A Hetvenes Évek Kultúrája*. Az 1980 Április 10-12 Szimpózium Anyaga. Bp., Balassi, 1994.

- Kálmán C. György: *Mi A Bajom Nagy Lászlóval?* = K. C. Gy.: *Mű És Valódi Élvezetek*. Pécs, Jelenkor, 1992, 25–39.
- Király István: *Egy Befogadói Élmény Nyomában*. = Zsoldos Sándor (Szerk.): *Király És Tandori*. Szeged, Gradus Ad Parnassum, 1996, 45–46.
- Király István: *Irodalom És Társadalom*. Bp., Szépirodalmi, 1976, 166.
- Könczöl Csaba: *A Hallgatás Szinonimái*. = K. Cs.: *Tükörszoba*. Bp., Szépirodalmi, 1986, 249.
- Köpeczi Béla *Feljegyzése Aczél György Számára A Magyar Irodalom Szerepéről*. = Cseh Gergő Bendegúz-Kalmár Melinda-Pór Edit (Szerk.): *Zárt, Bizalmas, Számozott. Tájékoztatópolitika És Cenzúra 1956-1963* (Dokumentumok). Bp., Osiris, 1999, 150–151.
- Kulcsár Szabó Ernő: *Az Új Lírai Beszéd A Válaszok Horizontváltásában. Kísérlet A Klaszszikusmodern Líra Egy Szereptípusának Újraértésére*. (Petri György: A Delphói Jós Hamiscsödöt Jelent) = K. Sz. E.: *Az Új Kritika Dilemmái*. Bp., Balassi, 1994, 139.
- Lukács György: *Újhold*. Forum, 1946/9, 112–115.
- Reményi József Tamás: *A Hattyúnyakú Paradoxon*. Orpheus, 1992/4, 34.
- Révész Sándor: *Aczél És Korunk*. Bp., Sík, 1997, 180–183.
- Standeisky Éva: *Az Írók És A Hatalom 1956-1963*. Bp., 1956-Os Intézet, 1996, 429–456.
- Szabolcsi Miklós: *Szabálytalan Jegyzet – Nehéz Ügyekről*. Kritika, 1968/11, 3–6.
- Szabolcsi Miklós: *Tűnődés Új Költkről*. Új Írás, 1970/3, 92–98.
- Szállóigévé Lenni, Az A Legjobb Dolog. (A Kérdez: Parti Nagy Lajos.) = Beszélgetések Petri Györggyel. Bp., Pesti Szalon, 1994, 132–133.
- Tolcsvai Nagy Gábor: Nagy László. Pozsony, Kalligram, 1998, 190.
- Vasy Géza: *Az Első Ének – Egy Emberöltővel Később*. = V. G.: *Költői Világok*. Bp., Széphalom, 2003, 143.
- Vasy Géza: *Bevezetőül. Az Első Évtized*. = V. G. (Szerk.): *Fiatal Magyar Költők 1969–1978*. Bp., Akadémiai, 1980, 17.
- Zimonyi Zoltán (Szerk.): *Fiatal Írók Tanácskozása. Lillafüred, 1969. Teljes Jegyzőkönyv, Jegyzetek, Dokumentum-Melléklet*. Bp., Széphalom-Új Kilátó, 1995, 86.

Laslo Bedech, PhD

Hungarian guest lecturer

bedecsl@gmail.com

Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

15 Tzar Osvoboditel Blvd., Sofia 1504

Bulgaria

Ласло Бедеч, д-р

гост-лектор, Унгария

bedecsl@gmail.com

Факултет по класически и нови филологии

Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“

бул. „Цар Освободител“ 15, София 1504

България