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WESTWARD HOE

OR

HALF-WAY BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE

This is a discussion of Volume I (“Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries”) of the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, a four volume synthetic enterprise in the framework of the *Literary History Project* of the AILC/ ICLA. The editors, Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, rightly claim that the work helps lay the spiritual foundations of European integration. “East-Central Europe” seems to be the most acceptable term to define a part of Europe exposed for centuries to German and Russian hegemonic threats. Today there is a chance for regional rapprochement and it is a primary task to defeat nationalism with national myths and “great narratives” as its main spiritual ammunition. Their criticism is, however, not an international, but a strictly national affair, a *self-addressing dialogue*. The method of “temporal nodes”, applied as a structural principle by the editors, may help unveil “great narratives”, as the reader, faced with a kaleidoscopic arrangement of “micro-histories”, is provoked to discover realistic and meaningful correspondences.

“Mythologically the story of Europe is that of a rape, semantically it is the story of an assault: no concept has been misused more than the concept ‘Europe’. For many people it expresses desire, for some others, nostalgia, and for all of them it is a word of incantation.”<sup>1</sup> In 2003 in a somewhat pessimistic essay on the future of the European Community Rudolf Burger conjectured that by a strictly centralized policy the European Union advanced to closer economic cooperation with the consequence that the democratic influence of the member nations on the administration diminished. But when the means of democratic representation prove more efficient, the generative dream of the Founding Fathers about an ideal “United States of Europe” will submerge below futuristic horizons.

<sup>1</sup> “Mythologisch ist die Geschichte Europas die Geschichte einer Entführung, semantisch ist sie die Geschichte einer Vergewaltigung: Kaum ein Begriff wurde mehr mißbraucht als der Begriff ‘Europa’. Er ist eine Sehnsuchtsvokabel für die einen, ein Nostalgiewort für die anderen, eine Beschwörungsformel aber für alle.” Rudolf Burger, “Kontinentalverschmelzung? Die europäische Frage und die Zukunft der EU”, *MERKUR Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, Heft 3, 57. Jahrgang, März 2003, 187.

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There is a great variety of the interpretations of that ideal as the concepts of “Europe” are not uniform at all. As Rudolf Burger puts it, “the term ‘Middle-Europe’ signals only a milestone on the way to the West, where all are drawn today. Thus in Europe today ‘Europe’ is, for the time being, the latest European utopia.”<sup>2</sup>

We who live here, half-way between the East and the West, take this utopia as a Janus-faced program. It is utopian as it predicts an unprecedented state of affairs. It is realistic because much has been done so far to make it real, and there are signs to suggest that our efforts do not necessarily end in fiasco. Perhaps it is no more than an honestly hopeful ideal, yet it seems worth having firm belief in a thoroughly humane credo.

Many of us hope that this utopian union or the progress made towards it will disperse the atmosphere of veiled hostility or open animosity, a state of affairs familiar for centuries to the peoples of the region. What they had in common was their quest for national identity and their striving to set up independent nation-states. Meanwhile the words “Europe” and “European” expressed a kind of cosmopolitan attitude and the rejection of the extreme forms of nationalism. In a poem written by a Hungarian poet, Attila József (1905–1937) the word “European” is part of the closing remark based on a distinction between “white men” and “Europeans”. The poem was to be read as an address to Thomas Mann at a reading session he gave in Budapest on 13 January 1937. (He read a part of the opening chapter of *Lotte in Weimar*, a work-in-progress then.) Due to police intervention the poem was not recited at the event. Here is the closure of the poem in my translation:

[...]  
 Gnawn off by cancer our poor Kosztolányi  
 has just left us.<sup>3</sup> Mankind is gnawn by many  
 cancer-like states: in terror we ask what hideous  
 fates will pursue us, what sordid ideas,  
 what fresh dangers, what bright new brands of poison?...  
 Will they let you read yet at any horizon?  
 Your word shall break the spell of that ill omen,  
 lets us remain men and women be women,  
 all of us free and ravishing and kind,  
 a humane vein in a waning mankind.  
 Please take the chair and let us hear you talk.  
 We listen but here is one just to look

<sup>2</sup> “‘Mitteleuropa’ selbst ist nur eine Etappe gewesen auf dem Weg in den Westen, wohin heute alles drängt. So ist ‘Europa’ heute in Europe die vorläufig letzte euopäische Utopie.” (Ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> The poet Dezső Kosztolányi died in November, 1936. On the poet Kosztolányi see “Dezső Kosztolányi and ‘Darker Muses’” by George F. Cushing in his posthumous *The Passionate Outsider: Studies on Hungarian Literature*. Selected and edited by Lóránt Czigány. Budapest: Corvina Books Ltd., 2000. 246–263.

at you, content among white men to see an  
exemplar of a real European.<sup>4</sup>

Attila József is one of the two poets (the other is a Rumanian poet, Mircea Dinescu) whose poems are introductory mottoes in Volume I of the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, a series of studies published in four volumes in the framework of a program of the AILC/ ICLA.<sup>5</sup> The monumental program is part of the *Literary History Project* presided by Mario J. Valdes (University of Toronto) who first convened a talk at Bellagio, Italy, in 1994, to discuss the possibility of joint work on regional literary histories. In 1995 two major philological projects were started on the literary cultures of two distant parts of the world, Latin America and East-Central Europe.

Introducing Volume I the editors rightly claim that the enterprise helps lay the spiritual foundations of European integration.

“For integration can only succeed if the individual nations are willing and able to surrender some of their autonomy in exchange for a recognition of inner diversity as well as of an external commonwealth with the neighbors. In other words, the rapprochement between East and West can only progress if there will be rapprochement among the nations within East-Central Europe, based on a recognition of their differences and commonalities. In each of the present countries of the region, literature and literary scholarship have made key contributions to a sense of national identity and to the variegated cultural manifestations that this identity engendered. But myths, legends, and literature in the narrower sense, have also been at work in the construction of various national stories of identity that fomented tensions, strifes, wars, and even ethnic cleansings. We hope that our *History* will better familiarize each ethnic and national community with the literary culture of its neighbors so that it can perceive itself not in isolation but as part of a family of people.”<sup>6</sup>

Based on reading a single volume of a four volume work (further three volumes are forthcoming) it would be presumptuous to discuss the merits or short-comings of the project. So far the achievement seems to be in accord with the intentions of the editors, Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer. Their comprehensive introductory chapters to major structural parts are of special interest. The editors individually or with combined effort, relying on contributions by regional experts, present perspicacious studies of the flow of events, their immediate historical context and their placement in

<sup>4</sup> “Most temettük el szegény Kosztolányit / s az emberségen, mint rajta a rák, / nem egy szörny-állam iszonyata rág / s mi borzadozva kérdezzük, mi lesz még, / honnan uszulkan ránk új ordas eszmék, / fő-e új méreg, mely közénk hatol? ... / meddig lesz hely, hol fölolvasható?... / Arról van szó, ha te szólsz, ne lohadjunk, / de mi férfiak férfiak maradjunk / és nők a nők – szabadok, kedvesek / s mind ember, mert ez egyre kevesebb... / Foglalj helyet. Kezdd el a mesét szépen. / Mi hallgatunk és lesz, aki csak éppen / néz téged, mert örül, hogy lát ma itt / fehérek közt egy európaít.” József Attila, *Thomas Mann üdvözlése* (The Greeting of Thomas Mann).

<sup>5</sup> Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (eds.), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Vol. I., Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., xi.

world history. A curiously appealing quality of these highly informative passages is that in these explanatory parts one is less confronted with one's unfamiliarity with local specialties than in essays which elaborate some particular issue with numerous persons in the cast and a background of complex cultural components. These integrative studies are the backbone of the "story"; they are clear, purposeful and they provide a key to the fore- and the background alike. I do not underestimate the value of the essays specialized in important details, but it must be admitted that integrated cultural histories of the region are in short supply and this is an obstacle to understand them fully. I agree with the editors' reluctance to condescend to biographical data or produce encyclopedic summaries: "Though the final product will be several times larger than originally planned, we have tried to avoid an encyclopedic representation of writers and works".<sup>7</sup> In any case, the flood of less known names, works, events and contexts may oblige the devout reader to keep a couple of encyclopedias at hand.

For a special pleading here is a case which may puzzle readers unfamiliar with Hungarian peculiarities. Of István Örkény, who introduced a kind of literary minimalism as early as 1966, we learn that "though he became internationally recognized in the 1960s and 70s, to the very end of his life he had to accept 'advice' from György Aczél, who coached (rather than censored) writers on making their manuscripts acceptable."<sup>8</sup> The situation is characteristic of shamefaced dictatorship but a few words of explanation are needed. Some information is available via the *Index of East-Central-European Names*: "József Révai was replaced by György Aczél, who made a distinction between tolerated and banned literature. Concurrently, more and more writers were forced to compromise with the authorities."<sup>9</sup>

A similar recourse to the "Index" is however of no help when István Csurka is compèred as Hungary's vice president. In a well informed piece by Marcel Cornis-Pope on the writers' plight and the polyphony of postmodern orientations in and around 1989 an enumeration is run of politicians who "pursued ethnically 'pure' countries and new political empires (Yugoslavia's president Milošević, Hungary's Vice President István Csurka, Croatia's President Franjo Tuđman, Romania's National Unity Party president Gheorghe Funar, and so on)".<sup>10</sup> In the book another reference to István Csurka is that "a number of writers took on public roles and nurtured their own development into national institutions (Csurka, but also Göncz and Konrád)".<sup>11</sup> The fact that Árpád Göncz was president of the Hungarian republic in 1990–2000 may enhance disorientation. In 1991–1992 István Csurka was indeed vice-president, not of Hungary, but the Hungarian Democratic Party (MDF). This item belongs of course to the scope of "corrigenda" and a brief note in the "Index" would suffice. Perhaps with a hint at the enormous difference between the institutions they nurtured their own development into...

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., 17.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., 163.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., 88–89. The first occurrence of the name (above) is not indexed.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit., 47.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., 78.

Another point in these marginal incidentals is that it is not easy to realize the literary values of the works, writers, and critics mentioned. Again an annotated “Index” could be of some help. Or perhaps cross-reference by an “Index” which is not restricted to East-Central-European names. Here is e. g. Jaroslav Hašek’s *Švejk* which “has often been compared to Joyce’s *Ulysses*”.<sup>12</sup> One instance is given: “John Willett, referring to the German editions of the two novels, writes: ‘*Schweik* with its interweaving of real life incidents and characters, its anecdotes and quotations and shifts of linguistic level, appeared in 1926; *Ulysses*, with its journalistic parodies and its alternation of styles, in 1927’.”<sup>13</sup> The publication dates of the original works fell similarly close to one another, which means that a similar conjecture could have been based on that coincidence. (*The Little Review* serialized *Ulysses* as early as March 1918 and the book was published in 1922; the *Švejk* dates from the years 1920–1923.) But what intrigues me is not the ranking of *Švejk* which is high enough with or without reference to Joyce, but the chance a non-regional Index could provide for comparison between western authors and less canonized East-Central-European writers. Quite apart from the present limitation of the “Index” it would be thought-provoking to explore contextual relations between writers in East-Central-Europe and those at the other loose end of Central Europe, i. e. their West-Central European colleagues. Such names come up to represent minority literary revivals at the West End as William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, Sean O’Casey, Brendan Behan, Hugh MacDiarmid, Sidney Goodsir Smith, Frédéric Mistral, Émile Verhaeren, Hugo Claus, Maurice Roelants, Maurice Careme, etc., etc.

My burgeoning East-Central-European chauvinism suggests to vice the European literary canons (especially the West-Central European ones) between the claws of the East and the West. If need be, auxiliary forces from the Far East of Europe (Tolstoys, Dostoevskys, Pasternaks etc., etc.) are welcome.

#### CENTRAL EUROPEAN ECCENTRICITIES

“East-Central Europe” is not a harmless geographical definition. As a politically and culturally loaded expression and an asset of geopolitical strivings it is discussed thoroughly in an introductory chapter by the editors under subtitles “Mitteleuropa”, “Eastern Europe”, “Central Europe” and “Defining East-Central Europe”.<sup>14</sup> Another introductory chapter is devoted to a geographical verification of the definition of “East-Central Europe”.<sup>15</sup>

A map is supplemented but it is less informative than the studies are.

These geographical denominations sound different in different languages. I accept that “*Mitteleuropa* (and to a lesser degree *Zentraleuropa*) is a historically loaded term

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., 229.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., 1–12.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Robert Magocsi, “Geography and Borders”, op. cit., 19–30.

then, which focalizes the eastern part of Europe from a German perspective, with explicit or implicit hegemonic intentions”.<sup>16</sup> But in Hungarian translation *Mitteleuropa*, *Zentraleuropa* (or Central-Europe) are invariably “Középeurópa”.

A geographical term like East-Central Europe will only make sense on a metaphorical plain. After all, the “Eastern Block” was situated in Eastern Europe. After all, Prague is west from Vienna. The geographical prospects of the book are based on historical insights:

“The unifying feature of East-Central Europe is the struggle of its people against the German and Russian hegemonic threats. In this sense, the region is a liminal and transitional space between the powers in the west and the east; a long but relatively narrow strip stretching from the Baltic countries in the North to Macedonia in the south. To the west it is clearly bounded by the hegemonic German cultures of Germany and Austria; to the east it is hemmed in by Russia’s political and cultural sphere, but the border is, admittedly, less distinct, for the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldavia were both part of Russia’s hegemonic power and suppressed by it.”<sup>17</sup>

The tendency is clearly political as it is linked to the political past of the region. (A strange coincidence is lurking in the last sentence of the excerpt: Hungary – to the west – was, for centuries, both part of Austria’s hegemonic power and suppressed by it.) Admittedly its presentation of the future also appears as a political issue: the aim is to eliminate obstacles of the rapprochement between the nations living in this area.

In Hungary there is a tradition of attaching local political and historical connotations to terms which ought to refer simply to the geographical definition of the country’s localization on the continent: Central Europe, Eastern Europe, the Danube basin, etc., etc. Apart from the geographical differentiation they imply historical affinities and political connotations. In a recent discussion of the theme Endre Bojtár, having spent four decades in Central and East European studies and schemes of scholarly cooperation, answered the question “Is a regional history of literature possible?” with a flat refusal. His point is purely “literary”, so much so that it is perhaps improper to confront it with a work whose field is defined not by “literature” in the poetical sense of the word but by “literary culture”. Apart from this he is also reluctant to agree with any past or current definition of the region:

“The problem is made even more complex by the fact that the culture of the area, especially its ‘high culture’, is, as a rule, of the western type while its politico-economic structure, by and large its ‘way of life’, is eastern. Historians of economy who are interested in the ‘basis’, rate, with a clear conscience, a large part of the region to Eastern Europe, while scholars of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, similarly on the basis of undeniable facts, attach it to Western Europe. As Pál Engel put it, ‘Central-Europe is characterized by the fact that it is situated in Eastern Europe but it yearns to belong to Western Europe’.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (eds), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Vol. I, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> “Bonyolítja a helyzetet, hogy a térség kultúrája, főként ‘magas’ kultúrája többnyire nyugati típusú, míg politikai-gazdasági szerkezetei, általában az ‘élete’ keleties. Evvel magyarázható,

Endre Bojtár's essay abounds in reference to a broad informative background. This source-material is however not available for foreign research as it has been written in Hungarian.

“Due to the fact that any definition and denomination of the region (Mitteleuropa, Zwischeneuropa, Südosteuropa, Central Europe, East-Central Europe, Central-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, Central- and Eastern Europe, Carpathian Europe, Danube-region, Balkan-Europe, borderlands of Western civilizations) would include Hungary, the most voluminous special literature of the issue is to be found in Hungarian. Based on this it comes clear that eventual definitions of the term have been less dependent on historical study than the (daily) needs of political issues deriving, as a rule, from big powers situated outside the region.”<sup>19</sup>

An important quarry of facts, details, ideas and evaluations is a work by Ferenc L. Lendvai, providing data and comments since the earliest times, the era of Charles Martel, i. e. the establishment of what is referred to as “Europa Occidens”, to make it distinct less from the barbarian Eastern Europe of the time, but from Byzantium.<sup>20</sup> As part of the pre-history of the term the book presents a description of the relation of Austria, the Ottoman Empire and Hungary to the process which led, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to the establishment of the “Donaumonarchie”.<sup>21</sup>

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hogy az ‘alapra’ figyelő gazdaságtörténészek régióink nagy részét jó lelkiismerettel Kelet-Európához sorolhatják, míg a szellemtudományok képviselői, ugyancsak cáfolhatatlan tények alapján, Nyugat-Európához. Ahogy Engel Pál megfogalmazta: Közép-Európa ‘az a terület, amelynek jellemzője, hogy főként Kelet-Európában fekszik, de jobban szeretne Nyugat-Európában feküdni.’” Endre Bojtár, “Lehetséges-e regionális irodalomtörténet” (Is a regional history of literature possible?) in András Veres (ed.), *Az irodalomtörténet esélye* (The Chance of Literary History), Budapest, Gondolat Publishing House, 2004, 170. – The quotation is from Pál Engel, “Hol van Közép-Európa, és ha megvan, kell-e?” (Where is Central Europe, and if it exists, is there a need for it?) *Holmi*, Vol. 2 (1990), No. 1, 108–109. – See also Endre Bojtár, *Kelet-Európa vagy Közép-Európa?* (Eastern Europe or Central Europe?) Budapest: Századvég, 1993. – István Fried, *Irodalomtörténetek Kelet-Közép-Európában* (Literature-happenings in East-Central Europe), Budapest: ISTER, 1999. – István Fried, *A névadás lehetőségessége (Nemzetiség, régió, Európa)* (The possibility of denomination: nationality, region, Europe), Bratislava: Madách-Posonium, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> “Tekintve, hogy a régió akármilyen körülhatárolása és elnevezése (*Mitteleuropa, Zwischen-europa, Südosteuropa, Central Europe, East-Central Europe, Central-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, Central- and Eastern Europe, Kárpát-Európa, Dunatáj, Balkán-Európa, borderlands of Western civilizations*) magában foglalja Magyarországot, a kérdésnek magyarul van talán a legbőségebb szakirodalma. Ebből az derül ki, hogy a fogalom mindenkori meghatározását nem is hogy történelmi, mint inkább egyenesen (napi) politikai szempontok irányították, amelyek ráadásul legtöbbször a térségen kívül eső nagyhatalmaktól származtak.” Bojtár, op. cit., 171–172.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ferenc L. Lendvai, *Közép-Európa koncepciók* (Central Europe Concepts), Budapest: Áron Kiadó, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Chapters 1–3, op. cit., 25–80.

The *Sodalitas Litteraria Danubiana*, a society of humanist scholars established by Conrad Celtis simultaneously in Vienna and Buda in 1497 may be regarded as an early prefiguration of idealistic projects for an intellectuals' confederation in the Danube basin. Certain elements of a plan for a confederation of the peoples of the "Donaumonarchie" appeared in the theories of Ignác Martinovics and the "Hungarian Jacobins" in their "conspiracy" disclosed by the police of the Habsburg ruler in 1795.

Ferenc L. Lendvai discusses the geopolitical and political reasons why the Austrian rulers failed to integrate Hungary in their empire and arrives at the conclusion that all 19<sup>th</sup> century projects to save the Donaumonarchie pointed towards some kind of confederation.

"Most plan for confederation expressed Slavic orientation, a necessary consequence of the continuous growth of the Slavic element within the Austrian Empire: to the original Czech-Moravian, and to the Slavic population in Austria and Hungary the Slavic population of Galicia and Dalmatia-Bosnia was added. Rumanians, whose number was considerable, were linked by their orthodox religion to Slavic people. The 18<sup>th</sup> century 'Slavic renaissance' and the entrance of Russia as a big power in the European political arena from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (opening with Peter the Great who already laid claim to the patronage of the Slavic population of the Balkan) invigorated these efforts – which however does not mean that all of them came about in consequence of pan-Slavic ideas."<sup>22</sup>

Lendvai adds that all these confederation projects were similar in that they did not plan radical change but only a re-arrangement of the traditional structure of the Habsburg provinces. The earliest project drawn up by František Palacký was not concerned with Hungary, but his further projects envisaged the total division of the country. Similar plans were prepared by Aurel C. Popovici who received strong support from crown prince Franz Ferdinand.<sup>23</sup>

Progressive Hungarian thinkers also planned a confederative re-arrangement of what was known then as the Hungarian Empire (consisting of two associate countries, Hungary and Croatia). In his emigration Lajos Kossuth, the former political leader of the democratic revolution and the war of independence in 1848 and 1849, prepared a confederation project including the autonomy of Croatia, Transylvania and an area with overwhelming Serb population in what was then Southern Hungary. Lendvai mentions that in 1918 "the last important such project (though too late to be efficient)

<sup>22</sup> "A legtöbb föderációs terv szláv indíttatású volt, szükségszerű folyamatként annak, hogy a szláv elem folyamatosan növekedett az Ausztriai Birodalmon belül: az eredeti cseh-morva, valamint magyarországi és ausztriai szláv népességhez a továbbiakban a galíciai és a dalmáciai-boszniai szláv lakosság járult. A jelentős számú románságot vallása kapcsolta a részben szintén ortodox vallású szlávsághoz. A XVIII. századi 'szláv újjászületés' valamint az orosz nagyhatalom föllépése az európai politikában ugyancsak a XVIII. század óta (kezdvé a balkáni szlávok patronálására már igényt tartó Nagy Pétertől) igencsak fölerősítette e törekvéseket – ami nem azt jelenti, hogy mindegyikük a pánszlávizmus jegyében fogant volna."

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., 90–91.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., 91–92.



– as a natural sequel to Kossuth’s design – was the one outlined by Oszkár Jászi on a Danubian United States”.<sup>24</sup>

Discussion on a confederation of states in Central and Eastern Europe to fill in the space opened by the collapse of the Habsburg-Monarchy was resumed time and again by Hungarian public writers, among them Dezső Szabó and László Németh. A studiously theoretical approach to the problem is to be found in several essays of *Apollo* (1934–1939), a “Central-European humanist” little review edited by István Gál. In the review which was dedicated to a rapprochement between Hungarians and the peoples of the surrounding countries, Mihály Ferdinándi discussed “The beginnings of Central-Europe”,<sup>25</sup> Béla Csiszár “Endeavours at a Danubian Cooperation: From the Tardieu-plan to the Hodja-plan”,<sup>26</sup> and Tamás Lengyel “The Hungarian Emigration and the Nationalities after Világos”.<sup>27</sup> Scholarly studies were published in foreign languages in *Archivum Europae Centro-Orientalis* (1935–1944) on the culture of the peoples of the region by Béla Bartók (“La musique populaire de Hongrois et des peuples voisins”, vol. II, 197–232), László Gáldi, László Hadrovics, István Kniezsa, Gyula Laziczius, Jules Moravcsik, Julius Németh and Lajos Tamás.

The problem of which part of Europe Hungary belongs to was raised several times after World War II. According to Iván Berend T. all positions on the issue had political motivations. He quotes a spirited (and perhaps realistic) idea that the western half of Hungary (Transdanubia) belongs to West-Central Europe while the rest of the country to East-Central Europe. In his view writers who emphasize that Hungary is situated in Central Europe are inclined to draw a line between Hungary and the East, while those who delineate the whereabouts of the country in Eastern Europe are more open to cooperation with the peoples of the surrounding countries.<sup>28</sup>

Endre Bojtár’s conclusion on the chance of a regional rapprochement is that “the geopolitical situation has never for a long time been as favourable as it is today. The only hindrance to surmounting or mitigating ‘the misery of the small states of Eastern Europe’ (as István Bibó put it) is the omnipresent growth of a self-destructively anti-national nationalism.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> “Az utolsó jelentős (bár hatást gyakorolni már nem tudó) ilyen terv Jászi Oszkár tervezete volt a ‘Dunai Egyesült Államok’-ról – természetesen Kossuth tervének folytatása.” 93–94.

<sup>25</sup> Mihály Ferdinándi, “Középeurópa kezdetei”, *Apollo*, vol. 8, 43–54.

<sup>26</sup> Béla Csiszár, “A dunai együttműködés kísérletei (A Tardieu-tervtől a Hodzsa-tervig)”, *Apollo*, vol. 6, 50–57.

<sup>27</sup> Tamás Lengyel, “A magyar emigráció és a nemzetiségek Világos után”, *Apollo*, vol. 7, 131–148. (The Hungarian army capitulated to the Russian army at Világos in August 1849.)

<sup>28</sup> Iván T. Berend, “Magyarország helye Európában. Hol a helyünk Európában, Európa mely régiójához tartozunk?” (The Place of Hungary in Europe: Where is our Place in Europe, to which Region of Europe do We Belong?) *Valóság*, Vol. 25 (1982), no. 12, 11–21.

<sup>29</sup> Endre Bojtár, op. cit., 178.

GREAT NARRATIVES ON THE SPECIALIZED GROUNDS OF NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

National myths and great narratives preserve spiritual ammunition for “a self-destructively anti-national nationalism”. The system of national mythology also exists in the form of “nation religion”<sup>30</sup> and a national narrative may assume the character of a full-fledged scholarly theorem.

National narratives do not lend themselves readily to an international critical dialogue. Their criticism is a strictly national affair. Any foreign intrusion will only aggravate the situation. The proper form of discussion is that of a *self-addressing dialogue*.

The discovery of the illusion of grand narratives is not a *par excellence* postmodern achievement. T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and John Crowe Ransom were all convinced that the doctrine of the original sin has an ominous meaning as to the fate of mankind and cannot be set aside for the sake of a lay belief in evolution, human progress, or “humanism”. The fiasco of the Soviet Union as a world power and as communistic utopia seems to be ample proof of the indefensible nature of quasi religious beliefs in humanistic salvation stories. Their fate in the literature of the period which began in the 1970s is described by Péter Krasztev as a release from the prison of “arrested time”:

“The literature of the following period began deconstructing the central belief in redemption – the socialist myth itself – even though this ‘great narrative’ was still unfinished when the writings of Danilo Kiš, Péter Esterházy, Péter Nádas, Milan Kundera, and Ismail Kadare were already preparing a burial place for it. Milan Kundera was first to realize that the notion of attained utopia had to be re-historicized, its temporal dimension restored.”<sup>31</sup>

This assertion means that the poetical procedure to deal with the problem of attained utopia is its re-historicization.

In another chapter of the book Péter Krasztev provides us with a succinct characterization of the national myths of the region:

“Each ethnic group constructed national myths to forge a cultural identity: these included an ancient Bulgarian-Thracian-Slavic league of nations, an Albanian, Serbian, and Croatian Illyria, a Daco-Romania, a brotherhood of Huns and Hungarians, a Great Moravian Empire clad in Slovakian mist, and a Polish Sarmatism. Since the public tended to accept these nineteenth-century myth constructions as historical verities, they resisted demythologizing and scholarly refutation, and survived the decline of the sociopolitical conditions that engendered them. The national myths continued to live on, alongside the new ideas and artistic currents that fostered individualism and cosmopolitanism. This persistence of national myths explains

<sup>30</sup> Cf. József Szili, “Nation-Religion in Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Poetry”, *Hungarian Studies*, Vol. 16 (2002), no. 1, 3–28.

<sup>31</sup> Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (eds.), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Vol. I. 73.

in part the emergence of strong chauvinistic and racist trends in the 1930s and the disturbing reemergence of nationalist movements in the 1980s and 90s.”<sup>32</sup>

The myths resist scholarly refutation and the more so because they have developed about themselves a “scholarly” basis in the so called “national sciences”. As László Péter (School of Slavonic and East European Studies of the University of London) put it,

“The attitude of the historian may vary. At times he meets social expectations and cultivates ‘national science’ consciously, makes research about what is readily pliable in the contemporary ideological framework of national history and ‘drips patriotic feeling into the hearts of readers and students’.”<sup>33</sup>

László Péter is convinced that from the 1960s and 1970s there was a definite turn towards the demythologization of national history in Hungarian historiography:

“Historiography turned against its old ‘nationalist’ ways. It abandoned the apology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian policy towards the nationalities and plucked out the weeds of the cycle of legends flourishing in the mould of Hungarian claims for supremacy: the special sense of Hungarians for politics and constitutionalism, their cultural superiority or their talent to engender assimilation”.<sup>34</sup>

In the study of literary history one great historical narrative, the gist of which is that the beginning of Hungarian literature coincided with the establishment of the Hungarian state, still survives based on the prestige of some scholars.

From the initiation of professional studies of Hungarian literature in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars of literature were exposed to an irresistible temptation to extend the continuity of Hungarian literature as far back in the past as possible. Ferenc Toldy (1805–1875), “the father of the historiography of Hungarian literature”, was convinced that the historian’s task was to create a great factual narrative to replace contemporary attempts at the creation of a national epic.<sup>35</sup> In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century an influential “theoretical” argumentation was developed by János Horváth

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit., 332–333.

<sup>33</sup> “A történész magatartása sokféle lehet. Néha eleget tesz a társadalmi elvárásoknak, és tudatosan ‘nemzeti tudományt’ művel; mindenekelőtt azt kutatja, ami könnyen beilleszthető a nemzeti történet éppen érvényesülő szemléleti keretei közé, és ‘a hazaszeretet érzetét csepegteti’ olvasói, tanítványai szívébe.” László Péter, *Az Elbától keletre. Tanulmányok a magyar és kelet-európai történelemből* (East of the Elba: Studies in Hungarian and East European History). Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1998, 92.

<sup>34</sup> “A történetírás szembefordult a régi ‘nacionalista’ historiográfiával. Felhagyott a XIX. századi magyar nemzetiségi politika apológiájával, és kitepette a magyar szupremáciaigények televényében virító legendakör növényeit: a magyarság különleges politikai és alkotmányos érzékét, kulturális felsőbbrendűségét vagy beolvasztó erejét.” Op. cit., 93.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Péter Dávidházi, *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése – Toldy Ferenc és a magyar irodalomtörténet* (The Birth of a National Science: Ferenc Toldy and the History of Hungarian Literature). Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004. Especially 503–538, 672–693, 693–704, 726–730.

(1878–1961) based on an “evolutionary” or “changing” concept of Hungarian literature.<sup>36</sup> According to this “theory of the evolution of Hungarian literature” the epochal changes of literature found close reflection in the “historical concept of Hungarian literature”. From the establishment of the Hungarian state in early 11<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the concept of Hungarian literature covered any written or printed material. A new phase in the evolution of the concept began at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: from that time on only texts written in Hungarian count as Hungarian literature. The next stage inaugurated the victory of the national literary genius: from the 1820s the concept of Hungarian literature covered only those works in Hungarian which represented the true spirit and idiom of the nation. In all these phases of its “evolution” the concept referred to all kinds of written material, scholarly works, journals, theological treatises, vocabularies etc., etc. According to János Horváth’s theorem the concept of Hungarian literature refers to literary works of art only from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The immediate merit of the historical concept of Hungarian literature was that it covered the written culture of the country from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

An important conclusive segment of this grand-scale historical evolution was the period which began with the poetry of Sándor Petőfi. In a scholarly study of Sándor Petőfi’s poetry János Horváth explained how the low and mixed forms of the popular song were raised by the poet to high poetic form, and how the folkloristic idiom was elevated by him to high poetic style.<sup>37</sup> By the integration of the folk-element into an all-national poetic idiom Hungarian literature reached its highest standards. The two great poets, Sándor Petőfi and János Arany, became the model classics of the new era and this stage of the national literature was described as “national classicism”. According to Horváth’s theory “national classicism” set the form and idiom of Hungarian literature once and for all so that no further idiomatic development could be expected. As a literary critic János Horváth did his best to debunk the new generation of poets, first and foremost Endre Ady for their violation of the tenets of the doctrine of “national classicism”. (Endre Ady is the greatest figure of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian poetry.)

Studies by János Horváth encompassed practically all periods of the history of Hungarian literary culture and served as a warrant for the scholarly value of his theorem whose main ideological benefit was that it granted Hungarian literature nine centuries of historical continuity.

Thus a theoretical construct concerning the historical past of Hungarian literature took the role of a grand-scale national narrative. By this achievement the continuity of Hungarian literature was proved to outstrip all other national literatures in East-Central Europe. Or indeed all over Europe. For comparison’s sake I quote Heinz Schaffler who, studying the continuity of German literary tradition, found that its span was hardly more than two and a half centuries:

<sup>36</sup> Horváth, János, *A magyar irodalom fejlődéstörténete* (The Evolutionary History of Hungarian Literature), Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976, 1980.

<sup>37</sup> Horváth, János, *Petőfi Sándor*, Budapest: Pallas, 1922.

“It must seem contradictory that while Germans belong to the old people of culture in Europe, in the middle ages as a central power they referred to themselves as the heirs of the traditions of the *Imperium Romanum*, and yet they have had a continuously effective literary tradition only for 250 years. With other European nations it covers 500 years – e. g. in France, England and Spain, – or even 700 years as in Italy where the memory of Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio is still alive. The German texts from the middle ages and the early modern age appear today as a foreign literature, outside rather than inside the literary tradition of Germany.”<sup>38</sup>

We should keep in mind that János Horváth’s great national narrative (i. e. his scholarly scheme proving the continuity of Hungarian literary history by means of a “historically changing concept of Hungarian literature”) encompasses a time-span of 1000 years. No wonder that there is a strong adherence to his theories in the ranks of literary scholarship.

For a deconstruction of this sample of national pride we have to recall that according to *the law of identity* it has to be assumed that a word or other symbol must have a fixed referent in its various occurrences in a given context.

In the interpretation given by János Horváth the concept of Hungarian literature consists of an ensemble of at least four different concepts. Its identity is not preserved by reference to “written or printed material” as a common ground as it is understood for the first phase of its “development” when its meaning coincides with that of the old Latin term “*litterae*”. The temporal development of the concept covers three subsequent varieties: 1. any text (Latin text as a rule); 2. texts in Hungarian; 3. texts in Hungarian expressing national spirituality. These are three different concepts. At its modern phase (4.) the concept coincides with literature *as a form of art*. Literature as a form of art is certainly different from “literature” covering any text.

Another problem is (and this reveals the mythmaking character of the procedure) that the theoretician failed to take into account a polar change in the meaning of the adjective “Hungarian”.

In the middle ages “Hungary” meant the Hungarian Kingdom with all territories subordinated to the Crown. As to the population, ordinary people (artisans, peasants and serves) did not count as constitutional elements: the only political body to have legal rights, a definite state in jurisdiction and a word in the national assembly were the noblemen. They constituted the Hungarian nobility indifferent from their national descent or their mother tongue. Latin was the official language, the language of jurisprudence and the language of the national assembly. As Ferenc L. Lendvai put it in a study on Hungary as a transmitter between western and eastern Culture,

<sup>38</sup> “widersprüchlich muß es erscheinen, daß die Deutschen zu den alten Kulturvölkern Europas gehören, im Mittelalter als Zentralmacht sich auf die Tradition des Imperium Romanum beriefen, und daß dennoch eine kontinuierlich wirksame literarische Überlieferung erst seit 250 Jahren besteht. Bei anderen europäischen Nationen besteht sie seit 500 Jahren – so in Frankreich, England, Spanien – oder gar seit 700 Jahren – so in Italien, wo sich die Erinnerung an Dante, Petrarca und Boccaccio bis heute nicht verloren hat. Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit hingegen stehen wie eine fremde Literatur mehr außer- als innerhalb der literarischen Tradition in Deutschland.” Heinz Schlaffer, *Die kurze Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH & Co.KG, 2003. 18.

“In the middle ages in Western Europe the *natio*, in Eastern Europe the *gens* emerged in general as the community consciousness. On the other hand Middle-Europe again represented a transitional stage. E. g. in Hungary everyone counted to the *natio hungarica* who was rightfully a member of the organs of the feudal state, of whatever descent he was or whatever his mother tongue was. Consequently numerous non Hungarian persons belonged to the Hungarian nobility who also counted as *hungari*.”<sup>39</sup>

The national awakening of the Hungarians was linked with the return of the litterati and the national-minded nobility to their vernacular. From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century one of their main endeavours was to make Hungarian the official language of the country instead of Latin. The fervour of nationalism was high indeed. The Hungarian national assembly made special efforts to achieve that the national assembly of Croatia, an equal partner country of Hungary within the framework of the Hungarian kingdom, should accept Hungarian their official language.

“Until 1847, Latin was the official language in Croatia; the nobility, the only politically active part of the population then, rejected it when the Hungarian nationalists tried to impose Hungarian as the official language. They embraced Croatian as the official language in order to protect their ‘historical rights’.”<sup>40</sup>

This development throws light on the questionable nature of the continuity based on the adjective “Hungarian”. In a study in 1961 Andor Tarnai pointed out that “on the soil of feudal Hungary at least two other literatures in vulgar tongue, the Slovak and the German, grew up into national literatures”.<sup>41</sup> He added that “a large part of the works in Latin may be considered as belonging to all the three literatures in national vernacular”.<sup>42</sup>

The categorical difference between feudal Hungary and the plebeian-bourgeois-democratic and finally republican social and political establishment was also

<sup>39</sup> “Im Mittelalter kam in Westeuropa das Gemeinschaftsbewußtsein der *natio*, in Osteuropa im allgemeinen der *gens* zur Geltung. Mittel-Osteuropa hingegen hat wiederum einen Übergang repräsentiert. In Ungarn z.B. zählte jeder zur *natio hungarica*, dem ein über Rechte verfügendes Mitglied in den Organen des ungarischen Ständestaates war, egal welcher Abstammung er war oder welche Sprache er beherrschte. Somit gehörten dem ungarischen Adel zahlreiche nicht-ungarische Personen an, die aber ebenfalls als *hungarus* galten.”

Ferenc L. Lendvai, “Ungarn als Vermittler zwischen westlicher und östlicher Kultur”. In Wolfram Högbe (Hrsg.), *Philosophia Hungarica: Profile zeitgenössischer philosophischer Forschung in Ungarn*. Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2001. 21. – See also Ferenc L. Lendvai, “Von der mitteleuropäischen Identität”, in Dittmar Schorkowitz (Hrsg.), *Transition – Erosion – Reaktion: Zehn Jahre Transformation in Osteuropa*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2002. 130–148.

<sup>40</sup> Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (eds), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Vol. I, 279.

<sup>41</sup> “...a feudális Magyarország talajából a miénk mellett legalább még két vulgáris nyelvű irodalom nőtt fel nemzetivé, a szlovák és a német”, Tarnai Andor: *Tanulmányok a magyarországi historia litteraria történetéről*. 7.

<sup>42</sup> “A latin művek tekintélyes része mindhárom nemzeti nyelvű irodalom tartozékának tekinthető.” Ibid.

disregarded by the great narrative of the unified continuity of Hungarian literature from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. To take cognizance of the difference implies an understanding that the literary culture of ancient Hungary is a common heritage of the nations which centuries later developed their own national identity in this region. In volume I of the 6-volume history of Hungarian literature edited by the Institute for Literary History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Tibor Klaniczay did his best to make this point clear:

“Before the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century it is difficult to distinguish ‘Hungarian’ literature from ‘literature written in Hungary’ ” (...) “Ancient Hungary was a country of many nations and in the cultivation of her literature several other peoples participated actively and fruitfully besides the Hungarians. And because the feudal, political and constitutional framework did not segregate but sooner it helped integrate the various nationalities, and what is more, the individual churches expressed national differences only in a measure, there exists a literature of Hungary, a common product of the peoples that lived in ancient Hungary, a common predecessor and cultural heritage of the national literatures which developed later on the territory of the one-time state...”<sup>43</sup>

This is the kind of approach I suggest to vindicate in the form of a “self addressing” dialogue.

The best way to expose the real nature of great narratives is, as the example of Milan Kundera indicates, “the restoration of their temporal dimension”. This implies the deconstruction of allegedly authentic stories and a re-estimation of their actual historical character. The specification of the irreversible sequence of events is inevitable.

Faced with a kaleidoscopic arrangement of historical elements one may be interested in correspondences (or the lack of such) which otherwise remain meaningless or invisible. Thus the method of temporal nodes may help one to remove the camouflage of latent great narratives.

<sup>43</sup> “A 18. század végéig a ‘magyar’ irodalom nehezen választható külön a ‘magyarországi’-tól.” (...) “A régi Magyarország soknemzetiségű állam volt, s irodalmának művelésében a magyar mellett több más nép is tevékenyen és eredményesen vett részt. S mivel a rendi, politikai, állami keretek nem elkülönítették, hanem inkább szoros egységbe fogták a különböző nemzetiségeket, sőt az egyes egyházak is csak részben fejeztek ki nemzeti különbségeket, létezik egy magyarországi irodalom, mely közös produktuma a régi Magyarországon élt népeknek, közös elődje, kulturális öröksége az egykori állam területén kisarjadó nemzeti irodalmaknak” Klaniczay Tibor (ed.), *A magyar irodalom története, I, A magyar irodalom története 1600-ig* (The History of Hungarian Literature, vol. I, The History of Hungarian Literature till 1600), Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1964, 6–7.

