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Building Empire through Self-Colonization: Literary Canons and Budapest as Sovietized Metropolis

Abstract: The Hungarian national project integrated the civilizing mission of mediating Western culture for the peripheries. This idea was developed in competition with Habsburg colonialist models attributing the same role to Vienna. Due to the spectacular *fin-de-siècle* economic boom, Budapest replaced the Austrian capital as a major cultural centre in the imagination of a large part of the Hungarian elite. Somewhat unexpectedly, these aspirations for a regional cultural hegemony were revived after World War II in some leftist circles, where Sovietization was sometimes understood in terms of competition with neighbouring states, and as a tool for ensuring regional cultural supremacy. In the literary field, this meant that Hungary and, respectively, Budapest should emerge as a place from where the know-how of producing Soviet-type literature was transmitted to other cultures. Meanwhile, Budapest itself started to be redesigned after Moscow. I claim that plans for refashioning the city affected the ongoing reworking of the Hungarian literary canon, marginalizing authors, such as the much admired Gyula Krúdy, who were associated with peripheral or undesirable spaces in a future Soviet-type metropolis.

In January 1946, the internationally recognized communist playwright Julius Háy, who served as chief-secretary of the Hungarian-Soviet Cultural Society (HSCS) at the time, delivered a speech to the presidential body of the same organization.[1] He reported that the Society had, among other things, established a publishing house and made several Soviet books available in Hungarian translation during the first six months of its existence. Additionally, the Society mediated Soviet plays to theatres, and these according to Háy, aroused great interest. Two of these plays were staged in the National Theatre that was directed at that time by Tamás Major, another prominent member of the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP). As Háy claimed, *The Stormy Evening of Life* by Leonid Rachmanov, as well as *Russian People* by Konstantin Simonov, 'was welcomed favourably, and, today, these are played all over the country in many theatres, therefore these are going to be part of Hungary's general cultural treasure.'[2] Háy, who was bilingual and wrote some of his works in German, alluded here to the concept of *allgemeines Kulturgut* to suggest that these Soviet plays could smoothly integrate into the culture of the Hungarian people (as opposed to any elite culture). Like most communists who returned from their Moscow exile, Háy

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[1] Contribution by Gyula Háy, Minutes of the Presidential Board of the Hungarian–Soviet Cultural Society (HSCP), 10 January, 1946, National Archives of Hungary (NAH), P 2148/1/54.

[2] Ibid.

was convinced that the Hungarian people should be refashioned following Soviet models, and culture could be a major tool in the process. It was conceptualized not as the importation of foreign cultural models, but an organic development in the sense that Soviet literature would assist Hungarians in reconnecting with their 'true' character that they had betrayed in the previous hundred years.[3] This explains Háy's somewhat paradoxical suggestion that the *allgemeines Kulturgut* does not necessarily develop from 'below', but could be developed from 'above' via the capital city, the cultural centre that mediates Soviet literary products and values.

For Háy, the significance of the plays by Rachmanov and Simonov, however, was more than just that they were a successful example of how Soviet culture becomes Hungarian. He emphasized that 'not only the fame, but even the manuscripts of these plays reached the surrounding countries through Hungary.'[4] Budapest could aspire then not only to the role of Hungary's cultural centre, but in the entire region's as well. As Háy pointed out: 'They come to us from Romania for books and to be enlightened, they come to us from Bulgaria, Austria, and so on. As such, the charge of organizing culture on an international level was laid on Hungary, so to speak. If we work well, we could strengthen this position that will be an important factor in setting the base of the international authority of Hungarian culture.'[5] Here, the Sovietization of Hungarian culture is framed by one of the dominant traditional interpretations of the Hungarian historical mission.

This mission was that of the 'civilizer', a task that had been closely associated with Vienna until then. The idea that Hungary should mediate high-standard Western culture for the 'semi-barbarous' Eastern peripheries was developed in parallel with the struggles for national emancipation. Within this conception, Vienna was challenged as a regional cultural capital: as a consequence of the late 19th-century economic boom in Hungary that resulted in the truly spectacular development of Budapest, many thought that the latter could replace the Austrian city in its traditional role. This idea was nurtured during the interwar period as well, and at its most extreme, conjoined with irredentist dreams about the (re)establishment of a Hungarian empire. Motivated largely by political tactics aimed at pleasing part of the bourgeois intelligentsia, the communists revived this project after the Second World War, at least at a symbolic level. However, this time

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3 György Lukács, 'The Hungarian Communist Party and Hungarian Culture' [1948], in *The Culture of People's Democracy: Hungarian Essays on Literature, Art, and Democratic Transition, 1945-1948,* ed. and trans. by Tyrus Miller (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 241-64.

4 Háy, ibid.

5 Ibid.

the standard of civilization was not Paris as it was before, but the Soviet Union and its capital city.

As Katerina Clark has recently demonstrated, high Stalinism in the 1930s aspired to represent Moscow as the metropolitan capital of a multicultural empire.[6] It was argued that the Soviet Union became the true inheritor of European culture that the decadent West failed to preserve and nourish in an appropriate way. Moscow was to take over the role of Paris as the European cultural capital. The socialist realism that was invented at the same time was claimed to be a synthetic aesthetics that integrated all artistic techniques inasmuch as these could be surrendered to a narrative defined by Stalinist philosophy of history. In Stalin's *Gesamtkunstwerk* redrawing the cityscape and reinventing European literature as socialist realism were parts of the very same project.[7] The main ideologues of the Hungarian Communist Party had the high Stalinism of the 1930s in mind when it came to the reconfiguration of post-war Hungarian culture.[8] As Gyula Háy's report demonstrated, the imitation of an imperial enterprise was expected to result in the restoration of imperial ambitions, even though only on a limited, symbolic level. According to this logic, the more devoted a country is to cultural self-colonization,[9] the more likely it is to gain advantage over its rivals and dominate on a local scale.

Budapest as Small-Scale Moscow? Competing Visions of Urban Design

It is telling that just as the chief-secretary of the Communist Party, Mátyás Rákosi liked to be called Stalin's best student,[10] Budapest was often imagined

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6 Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2011).

7 Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin: Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion,* trans. by Gabriele Leupold (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser, 1988).

8 For a more detailed discussion see Tamás Scheibner, *A magyar irodalomtudomány szovjetizálása: A szocialista realista kritika és intézményei, 1945–1953* [The Sovietization of Hungarian Literary Studies: Socialist Realist Criticism and Its Institutions, 1945–1953] (Budapest: Ráció, 2014).

9 The admittedly problematic metaphor 'self-colonization' is employed here as an heuristic term referring to a self-emancipatory effort that, in effect, creates and reaffirms the very center/periphery dichotomy it intends to supersede. For a discussion of the metaphor with regard to 'Westernization' (and with a focus on the Balkans), see Alexander Kiossev, 'Notes on Self-Colonising Cultures', in *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, ed. by Bojana Pejić and David Elliott (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), pp. 114-17.

10 Cf. Balázs Apor, 'The Leader Cult in Communist Hungary, 1945-56: Propaganda, Institutional Background and Mass Media' in *War of Words: Culture and the Mass Media*

to be a little Moscow. However, it was far from clear what a Sovietized metropolis should look like, and there were considerable differences between the various views even among the top ranks of the HCP. Even as late as 1948, when the communist architect Gábor Preisich presented an urban development plan to the Central Committee of the Party, Rákosi and the chief ideologue, József Révai, who were both charmed by the 1935 General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow, criticized the outlined project for not foreseeing the establishment of a representative central square in Budapest, that would have been a 'Forum' following models from antiquity.[11] This would have required the demolition of a significant part of the city's historical centre: such costly undertakings were regularly disapproved by Ernő Gerő, a third Muscovite and the second man after Rákosi in the party hierarchy, who oversaw economic matters. In contrast, Gerő proposed to build high-rise buildings at significant crossroads that would meet the requirements of Stalinist urban planning in an alternative and more affordable way.[12] This was vetoed, however, by Rákosi. At the end, neither of the propositions was realized.

Earlier, between 1945 and 1948, the project of an alternative modernization of the city was even less defined: several visions competed for dominance, which were sometimes self-contradictory, vague, or sketchy. After Budapest was scathed in a siege that could be compared to those of Stalingrad, Leningrad, Warsaw, and Berlin in its scale of material destruction and civilian losses,[13] several plans were made to rebuild the city. While the reconstruction of residential houses started as private initiatives,[14] not only preservationists, but also some leading modernist architects cautioned against an extreme reshaping of historical parts of the city.[15] The first plans contrived by the Board of Public Works of the Capital City (Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsa), a relatively autonomous institution overseeing the

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in the Making of the Cold War in Europe, ed. by Judith Devlin and Christoph Hendrik Müller (Dublin: UCD Press, 2013), pp. 18-29.

11 Minutes of the Meeting of the Political Committee of the HCP, 1 November 1951, NAH, M-KS 276/53/86. See also: András Sipos, *A jövő Budapestje, 1930-1960* [Budapest of the Future, 1930-1960] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2011), p. 144.

12 Minutes of the Meeting of the HCP Committee on State Economy, 14 September 1951, NAH, M-KS 276/112/89.

13 John Lukács, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1988), pp. 219–221; Krisztián Ungváry, *The Siege of Budapest* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006), p. 257.

14 János Bonta, *A magyar építészet egy kortárs szemével, 1945–1960* [Hungarian Architecture From a Contemporary Perspective, 1945-1960] (Budapest: Terc, 2008), pp. 48-49.

15 Cf. Iván Kotsis, *Életrajzom* [My Life], ed. by Endre Prakfalvi (Budapest: HAP Galéria—Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, 2010), pp. 241-42.

rebuilding of Budapest, were much more radical than the current cityscape might suggest. The Board was led by the modernist architect József Fischer, a key member of the Hungarian faction of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in the late 1920s and 1930s—a network that was re-established after the war with Fischer leading the small Hungarian group. Like several other former representatives of CIAM, he also tended to see extensive material destruction, the new post-war political environment, and the changing status of properties as an opportunity to bring about a large-scale reshaping of the urban environment. Although Fischer was sympathetic to the Soviet Union, just like many of his fellows at the Social Democratic Party he saw no contradiction between his modernist propensities and co-presiding the Department of Architecture of the Hungarian–Soviet Cultural Society.[16] After 1945 he sought to implement a version of the 'functional city'; however, he relied extensively on interwar plans of urban development thereby maintaining considerable continuity with the previous epoch.[17]

This continuity is significant, because the idea of a metropolitan Budapest remained central from the 1920s to the Second World War,[18] and Fischer revitalized such aspirations. While Fischer was instrumental in coining the slogan 'not renovation, but rebuilding'[19] that gave priority to more experimental planning, he and the architects he favoured were far from the most radical when it came to urban planning. While the winners of

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16 Cf. NAH, P 2148, 1/57/2; 1/52/6; 1/50/22. In his groundbreaking comparative work, Anders Åman, while taking a bird's-eye perspective, seems to overemphasize the polarity between the homogenized modernist and socialist realist sides. See his *Architecture and Ideology in the Stalin Era* (New York and Cambridge, MA: The Architectural History Foundation – MIT Press, 1993). It should be added that Fischer had long nurtured illusions about Soviet urbanism: he did not entirely believe the report by his Hungarian colleague Albert Forbát, who was another CIAM member, in the mid-1930s claiming that that Soviet architecture took a traditionalist turn. See 'Fischer József emlékezései 1972-74-ből' [Recollections of József Fischer from 1972–1974], published with an introduction by Anna Kaiser, in *Lapis Angularis I. Források a Magyar Építészeti Múzeum gyűjteményéből* [Lapis Angularis I: Sources from the Collection of the Museum of Hungarian Architecture] (Budapest: Országos Műemlékvédelmi Hivatal Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, 1995), p. 342.

17 On the plans of the Board of Public Works see Sipos, ibid., pp. 77-101.

18 Ibid., 19-75.

19 See e.g., Endre Prakfalvi, 'Elmélet és gyakorlat építészetünkben, 1945–1956/1959' [Theory and Praxis in Our Architecture, 1945–1956/59] in *Építészet és tervezés Magyarországon, 1945–1959* [Architecture and Urban Planning in Hungary, 1945-1959], ed. by Endre Prakfalvi and Virág Hajdú (Budapest: Országos Műemlékvédelmi Hivatal—Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, 1996), 8; Sipos, ibid., 77.

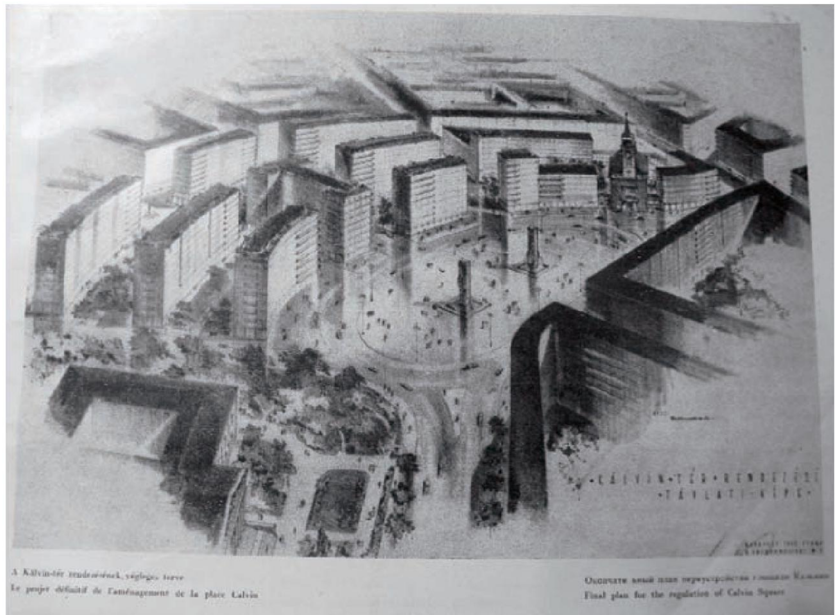

Fig. 1. Final visual plan for the regulation of Kálvin Square, City Centre, Budapest. Illustration to Kálmán Rados, 'Budapest városrendezése és a hároméves terv' [Urban Planning of Budapest and the Three Years Plan], *Általános Mérnök* [The General Engineer], 2.5 (July 1948), p. 126.

the design competition for rebuilding Budapest outlined plans that extensively reshaped the whole city,[20] and the plan that was prepared under the supervision of Fischer himself was not different in this regard, these cannot be compared to those ideas that a younger cohort of communists brought forward. At times their views disturbed even Fischer, who maintained excellent relations with a good number of high-ranking communists, including Rákosi,[21] and who became a patron of the previously

20 Endre Morvay, 'A jövő Budapestje. Ötletpályázat a korszerű városrendezésre I-II.' [The Future of Budapest], *Budapest*, 2.1 (1946), 23-27; 2.2 (1946), 68-72.

21 During World War II Fischer was hiding many communists who became key political figures after 1945 (Tamás Major, Sándor Haraszti, Ferenc Donáth, and the future secret-police chief Gábor Péter), and his flat was used for secret meetings of the underground communist party: thereby he got to know László Rajk, Géza Losonczy, Gyula Kállai, Márton Horváth, and others. Cf. 'Fischer József visszaemlékezéséből' [From the Recollections of József Fischer], published with an introduction by János M. Rainer in *Budapest Főváros Levéltára Közleményei '84* [Proceedings of the Archive of Budapest, 1984] (Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 1985), p. 406.

mentioned group of young members of the HCP.[22] According to the architect and writer Pál Granasztói, who was Fischer's closest colleague at the time, these young communists, such as László Málnai, showed absolutely no respect for the existing architectural heritage, and their way of thinking was very similar to Hungarian fascist architects under the reign of Mátyás Szálasi. Their imagination was awed by dysfunctional imperial design without any sense of social or environmental realities.[23] As one of the main promoters of Stalinist architecture, Málnai was the one who started the campaign against 'formalism' somewhat later, in the spring of 1949.[24]

Initially the Board of Public Works was dominated by that particular fraction of the social democrats who tended to prioritize Soviet cultural relations over an Anglo-Saxon orientation, though not on an exclusivist basis as the communists did.[25] However, in the course of time, the latter gradually acquired ever greater influence in the field.[26] In 1946, they launched a new journal, *Új Építészet* [New Architecture], that was envisioned to become a rival to Fischer's modernist *Tér és Forma* [Space and Form], and became the primary medium for spreading socialist realist ideals. Two of the editors, Máté Major and Imre Perényi, played a decisive role in the forthcoming years in developing a new Hungarian urban design. They both arrived from the Soviet Union, however under very different circumstances. Major was a former prisoner of war who, nevertheless, was assigned the task

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22 Pál Granasztói, *Ifjúkor a Belvárosban / Múló világom / Itthon éltem* [Youth in Belváros / My Passing World / I Lived Here, at Home] (Budapest: Magvető, 1984), p. 621; 565.

23 Ibid., pp. 563-65; p. 595.

24 Mariann Simon, '"Fordulatnak kell bekövetkeznie építészetünkben—jelentős fordulatnak." Elmélet és gyakorlat 1949-1951' ['A Change is Needed in Our Architecture—a Significant Change': Theory and Practice, 1949-1951], *Architectura Hungariae*, 1.4 (1999), available at <arch.et.bme.hu/arch_old/kortars4.html>Accessed 1 October 2014.

25 It is maintained that the principal difference between Fischer's and the communist architects' attitude was that the former tended to think in a democratic way while the latter were more inclined to dictatorial measures and strived for a total centralization of urban planning. Cf. Péter Ujlaki, 'Fischer József a Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsának élén' [József Fischer as Head of the Board of Public Works of the Capital City], in *Az ostromtól a forradalomig – adalékok Budapest múltjához, 1945–1956* [From the Siege to the Revolution: Contributions on the Past of Budapest, 1945–1956], ed. by Zsuzsanna Bencsik, Gábor Kresalek (Budapest Főváros Levéltára, n. d.), pp. 40-41. Fischer was always proud of his intellectual independence, and he was looking for inspiration both to the West and the East. He was against the fusion of the SDP and the HCP in 1948, and after he was marginalized in the same year, he became associated with the Anglo-Saxon oriented social democrats led by Anna Kéthly, and briefly joined the third government of Imre Nagy on the eve of the Soviet invasion in 1956.

26 On the institutional aspects of the takeover see e.g. Ujlaki, ibid.

there of designing new barracks and POW camps, and was introduced into the 'Soviet style' as it was manifested at the 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition.[27] Perényi, by contrast, had been living in the Soviet Union since his childhood and remained there until his repatriation in August 1945, and his Hungarian language skills were limited.[28] While Major was a member of CIAM in the 1930s, Perényi, after his graduation from the University of Architecture in Moscow, worked as an architectural engineer on Soviet flagship projects—a difference that partly explains their later conflicts.

Although Major and Perényi were initially working very closely together, that does not suggest that there was a general accordance on the meaning of socialist realism. Although Major disapproved of both the 'old, mostly bad buildings' of Budapest and the 'modernist architectural monsters' by which he implicitly referred to the agenda of Le Corbusier and the CIAM of the 1930s, he nevertheless categorically refused even the slightest architectural reference to the baroque, and claimed that secession should not be unequivocally excluded from the progressive tradition because it was a response to the historical eclecticism of 19th-century nationalism.[29] He was arguing on a (somewhat misinterpreted and vulgarized) Lukácsian basis when he asserted that an artist can, on the one hand, create historically 'positive' works despite his/her conservative political views, but, on the other hand, one should not expect Hungarian architects to design at the same level as their Soviet colleagues, because of the differences between the economic bases of the two countries.[30] In practice, even though he did not subscribe to the idea of those huge blocks of flats popular in the 1930s, he did seek a compromise between the functionalism of the CIAM and socialist realism.[31] Major's closest friend at the time, Perényi, was more explicit somewhat earlier in a monograph titled *Urbanism in the USSR* (1947):

> Modern architecture had and has outstanding representatives in the USSR, but at the beginning of the thirties they were infected by formalistic tendencies, quite foreign to Soviet society. From that time onwards, till this very day, Soviet

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27 Máté Major, *Tizenkét nehéz esztendő (1945–1956). Lapis Angularis III. Források a Magyar Építészeti Múzeum gyűjteményéből* [Twelve Hard Years (1945–1956). Lapis Angularis III: Sources from the Collection of the Museum of Hungarian Architecture], ed. by Zoltán Fehérvári and Endre Prakfalvi (Budapest: Magyar Építészeti Múzeum, 2001), p. 98.

28 Ibid., p. 153, 178.

29 Máté Major, *Az új építészet elméleti kérdései (Szocialista realizmus az építészetben)* [Theoretical Questions of the New Architecture: Socialist Realism in Architecture] (Budapest: Új Építészet Köre, 1948), p. 9, 13, 18.

30 Ibid., pp. 22, 14-15.

31 Endre Prakfalvi – György Szücs, *A szocreál Magyarországon* [The Socrealism in Hungary] (Budapest: Corvina, 2010), pp. 53-54.

> architecture has steadily been seeking satisfactory solutions for the needs of the socialist country, even at the risk of sometimes going to the extremes.[32]

What is striking here is not only that Perényi urged a selective appropriation of Soviet standards that were themselves still in the process of changes, but also the reference to the local context: it was left undecided how closely the Soviet model(s) should be followed. What is inappropriate in the Soviet Union may fit the traditions of another country. This was not in contradiction with Stalin's rather elastic cultural policy at that time,[33] which prescribed 'socialist content in nationalist form'. One still might note, though, that the book was published a few months before the Comintern was founded, which hardly came as a surprise for the communist elite,[34] and had the result of limiting local divergences in cultural agendas within the Soviet sphere of influence. Given that Perényi in his study outlined the main characteristics of socialist realism, but followed the rule of the HCP of avoiding the term itself or limiting its usage in all spheres of culture,[35] it seems plausible to argue that the publication of the manuscript served the double aims of presenting Soviet urbanism with a rich collection of images, while not deterring an audience that feared the communists would culturally isolate the country from Western trends if the HCP gained the majority in the elections that were scheduled for August 1947.[36]

Since the establishment of the Comintern, in the course of an ever accelerating process of Stalinization the accent on everyday 'beauty'[37] that

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[32] Imre Perényi, *Városépítés a Szovjetunióban* [Urbanism in the USSR] (Budapest: Új Magyar Könyvkiadó, 1947), p. 6.

[33] For a summary of the contradictory nature of the Stalinist cultural policy of the time see Ted Hopf, *Reconstructing the Cold War: The Early Years, 1945-1958* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), pp. 39-41.

[34] See e.g., Csaba Békés, 'Soviet Plans to Establish the COMINFORM in Early 1946: New Evidence from the Hungarian Archives', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, 10 (March 1998), 135–136; László Borhi, *Hungary in the Cold War, 1945-1956. Between the United States and the Soviet Union* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2004).

[35] On communist tactics and discourse see Scheibner, ibid.

[36] This fear was fuelled by the case of the Hungarian Community, a show trial in which the communists accused several prominent members of the Smallholders of being Western spies and charged them with treason, and forced the governing party to exclude a good number of its members from its ranks. See Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets: The Establishment of the Communist Regime in Hungary, 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 217-38.

[37] On the significance of 'beauty' in Stalinist urbanism see Clark, ibid., pp. 119-22; Jan C. Behrends, 'Modern Moscow: Russia's Metropolis and the State from Tsarism to Stalinism', in *Races to Modernity: Metropolitan Aspirations in Eastern Europe, 1890–1940,*

was already present in Perényi's book was highlighted and detached from 'function': an ideological shift that culminated in the 1949 campaign against architectural 'formalism.' Lajos Szíjártó had lived and worked in the USSR since 1922 and resettled in Budapest in the summer of 1948. He was soon thereafter appointed state secretary of construction, was a primary actor in the process. In the Soviet Union he not only led the Directorate of Planning and Construction at the Ministry of Electronic Industry at the highest point of his career, but also served as director of a factory that produced socialist realist decorative items. For him, the thesis that beauty is something exterior to the structure of a building wanted no extensive theoretical grounding: he unconditionally subscribed to the most vulgar version of socialist realism. He proposed the demolition of the entire Castle Hill and its replacement with residential blocks for the working class.[38] Szíjártó was not alone in conceiving such grandiose plans. According to Major's memoir, this was 'a time when certain leaders of the party wanted to create a tabula rasa' by tearing down a series of historical monuments, including the emblematic St. Stephen's Basilica.[39] Szíjártó repatriated right after the HCP and SDP merged, and a de facto one-party system was created. Sometime earlier Fischer's Board of Public Works had been dissolved, and the supervision of urban planning was taken over by Perényi and his State Centre of Architecture (later, the Institute for Architecture and Planning).

It is clear that those urbanists amenable to historical protectionism continued to live through rather stressful years even after the destructive war was over. Large factions of both the modernists and adherents of socialist realism advocated extensively reshaping the city. Although protectionists warned against such ambitious planning and urged for the preservation of the remnants of the city's rich architectural heritage, many of them shared the motivation to re-establish Budapest as a metropolis. The first mayor of the city who gained his position as a consequence of free elections, József Kővágó, a member of the Independent Smallholder's Party, was one of them. Even though the Smallholders, the primary rivals of the HCP, won both the Budapest and the countrywide elections with a large majority, Kővágó as Mayor had a rather limited influence on the rebuilding of the city: this task was sourced out to Fischer's Board of Public Work. Still, parallels between the ministerial and municipal bodies—with their rival agendas—did exist.

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ed. by Jan C. Behrends and Martin Kohlrausch (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2014), pp. 120-21.

38 Major, *Tizenkét nehéz esztendő*, pp. 205-206; Granasztói, ibid.,p. 667. See also: Preisich, ibid., p. 83.

39 Major, *Tizenkét nehéz esztendő*, p. 206.

Reading the Metropolis

Mayor Kővágó, who was soon to be removed from his position on trumped up charges (and imprisoned in 1950), also had the ambition to turn Budapest into a metropolis of global significance, but he emphasized continuity at least as much as change. In this project he ascribed considerable importance to literature, which he recognized as a primary tool for forging self-conscious citizens attached to their local environment, and thereby creating a real community of inhabitants with various (often rural) backgrounds. In a representative volume entitled *Budapesti antológia* [Budapest Anthology] (1946 and 1947) that compiled poems about the historical 'Pest, Buda, and Budapest', and was published primarily for educational purposes for the schools of the capital with the aim of awakening local patriotic sentiments,[40] Kővágó, who authored its foreword, suggested that the 'value' of a city depends on the significance of its literature on a global scale. Therefore he contended that the emergence of Budapest as a metropolis is closely connected to its potential for contributing to 'world literature.'[41]

The interdependence of urban space and literature was further emphasized by the volume's editors, the literary historian Mózes Rubinyi and the pedagogue-jurist Ferenc Szoboszlay. Their introduction presented literature as a medium that renders the urban environment 'readable'—an aspiration that was not entirely alien to the Leninist monumental propaganda either, despite its utopian project of creating *architecture parlante*.[42] The two agendas, however, were very different. One strived to inscribe the imagined glorious future into the contemporary by elevating monumental buildings of great potential significance, and in parallel aspired to create their context in the literature of socialist realism. By contrast, the other championed the insignificant, and restated the city's global status through this celebration of the peripheral. Rubinyi and Szoboszlay asserted that the anthology (re)introduces the reader to a wide variety of districts, squares, streets, and buildings, and 'unfolds the intimate family and social life of the beloved city; data are on display here that seem insignificant but without that it is impossible to write up the spiritual life of this city, and its

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40 *Budapesti antológia. Költemények Budáról, Pestről, Budapestről* [Budapest Anthology: Poems on Buda, Pest, and Budapest], ed. by Mózes Rubinyi and Ferenc Szoboszlay, foreword by József Kővágó (Budapest: Székesfővárosi Irodalmi és Művészeti Intézet, 1946; second ed. 1947).

41 József Kővágó, 'Előszó' [Foreword], in *Budapesti antológia,* p. 5.

42 Wojciech Tomasik, *Inżynieria dusz: Literatura realizmu socjalistycznego w planie 'propagandy monumentalnej'* [Soul-Engineering: The Literature of Socialist Realism in the Plan of 'Monumental Propaganda'] (Wrocław: FNP, 1999), pp. 46-48, 65-66.

development. Through the poets we get a view of the *soul of Budapest*.'[43] This quotation in itself the mimetic drive of the anthology: without the 'data' it mentions, that is, the visual objects of Budapest, there is no hope of getting access to its transcendent spiritual essence. For the editors, poetry was not sufficient in itself to ensure such a communion: what was assumed instead is a dialogue of the existing urban environment and its representations, with the practical purpose of building a Budapest identity.

From this perspective, the demolition of historical parts of the city appeared not as a prerequisite, but as a threat to this very metropolitan project. In such circumstances Budapest and its literature that, for Kővágó, 'tops that of the great world famous metropolises in its variety and richness', would be unable to regain and keep its position: it would lose its soul. Accordingly, the editors implied a certain attitude to heritage when they described the volume as a 'concert of old and new, classical and modern bards' where these do not rule each other out.[44] Such a disposition was confirmed not only by prominent historical protectionists like László Gerő (a namesake of the aforementioned Ernő Gerő), but also by many poets and writers, among whom the most active were young leftist intellectuals such as László Bóka and István Sőtér. They all saw change as necessary, but wished for an urban development that would balance the old and the new.

Linking urban space and literary canon was common in post-war Hungarian discourses. A set of authors were presented by literary critics as writers of Budapest, or of certain districts, as for example, in the book *Writers of the Metropolis* by Endre Sós.[45] Here and elsewhere, the flagship Budapest writer was Gyula Krúdy, whose short stories and novels were among the most desired products on the literary market.[46] This comes as no surprise, since his nostalgic stories usually revived an imaginary land of late 19th-century and *fin-de-siécle* bourgeois culture, and often evoked the old Budapest with its traditional restaurants, cafés, hotels, and private interiors, of which many were lost or damaged in the war. The art historian István Genthon, who was the director of the Museum of Fine Arts and one of the protagonists of historical protectionism, welcomed the republication of Krúdy's novel *Boldogult úrfikoromban* [My Glory Days as a Young Gent]

43 Mózes Rubinyi and Ferenc Szoboszlay, 'Bevezető' [Introduction], in *Budapesti antológia*, p. 8.

44 Ibid.

45 Endre Sós, 'A megelevenedett Szindbád' [Sindbad Animated], in *A nagyváros írói* [Writers of the Metropolis] (Budapest: Székesfőváros Irodalmi és Művészeti Intézet, 1947), pp. 79–95.

46 László Sziklay, 'Budapest olvasóközönsége 1945-ben' [The Reading Public of Budapest in 1945], *Magyar Könyvszemle*, 70 (1946), 75-78, 82-84; István Örkény, 'Krúdy Gyula az élen' [Krúdy is on the Lead], *A Reggel*, 12 April 1948, p. 8.

(1930) with great enthusiasm: 'It is not only the top of the "Pest novels" in a never expected high quality, but—shall I utter it, I myself being charmed by other kinds of beauties?—the crown of Hungarian novel writing.'[47]

Fig. 2. Gyula Krúdy with his son, 1906. © Petőfi Museum of Literature, Budapest.

Although Genthon was degraded by the communists in 1948, it is important to note that most of the laudations of Krúdy were authored by those who shortly became significant movers within communist cultural politics. For instance, the director of the University Library (associated with Eötvös Loránd University), discussed Krúdy, Dezső Kosztolányi and Frigyes Karinthy as three writers that represented three different faces of Budapest,[48] and saw cities and literature as intimately tied:

> The relationship of cities and writers is woven from threads not easy to unravel. It is not dependent on one's origin, but for its development into an intimate relationship it is equally not sufficient for the writer to borrow its themes and

[47] István Genthon, 'A békebeli Pest regényéről (*Boldogult úrfikoromban*)' [On the Novel of Pest in the Times of Peace], *Budapest*, 2.5 (1946), p. 185.

[48] See also László Bóka, 'Pesti utcák éneke' [The Song of Budapest Streets], *Budapest*, 2.2 (February 1946), p. 65.

> characters from the reservoir of the city. A serious, deep relationship between a city and a writer that 'lasts to the grave' will grow only if the *style* of the two become identical, as in the case of great lovers.[49]

This symbiosis is so close that, according to another article by Mátrai, it is *impossible* to write about Budapest without being affected by Krúdy's vision, because his literary works are inscribed into the materiality of the urban environment.[50] Krúdy was able to grasp that particular tension created by the immense and rapid growth of Budapest at the turn of the century, Mátrai claimed, a primary feature of which was the close coexistence of the provincial and the urban/cosmopolitan. This tension was virtually imprinted in the streets of the capital, therefore 'failing to see' the Krúdyness of the urban space 'is the equivalent of misreading the history of the city'.[51] Similar views were expressed by István Sőtér as well, who deconstructed the traditional image of conservative bourgeois Buda[52] by replacing it with the imaginary land of Krúdy, an alternative reality that left a mark on the urban space, and which is more important than the 'reactionary' Buda, a label that does not express the real spirit of this part of the city.[53]

Krúdy was so closely associated with Budapest that sometimes he was literally identified with it. Here is how István Hargitay, one of Krúdy's one-time friends, poetically depicted the writer's last day:

> He got up early in the morning, in a good mood on that sunny day in May, and left his home early. In the morning he walked through and crossed the Tabán district, he was in the Castle district around noon, in the Sándor Palace, and from here, from a balcony [...] he looked down to Pest. He heaved a sigh. In his mind, he swept over the tempestuous city where he spent so many nights and days, sometimes here, sometimes there, in happiness and torment, waiting with sweet hope and a crippling pain in the heart, at the most various places. For a long, for

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49 László Mátrai, 'Az író és a város' [The Writer and the City] (Karinthy), *Budapest*, 1.3 (December 1945), p. 124.

50 László Mátrai, 'Egy pesti regény. Kárpáti Aurél: *A nyolcadik pohár*' (Régi kövek, régi emberek) [A Novel of Pest: Aurél Kárpáti's The Eighth Glass (Old Stones and Men of Old Times], *Budapest*, 1.2 (November 1945).

51 Ibid.

52 On the social differences between Buda and Pest see Gábor Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-siécle Budapest,* trans. by Thomas J. DeKornfeld (Boulder, CO – Wayne, NJ: Social Science Monographs—Centre for Hungarian Studies and Publications, 2004), pp. 16–22.

53 István Sőtér, 'Városrészek siratása' [Mourning of Districts], *Budapest*, 1.3 (December 1945), p. 127.

> a very long time, he was watching the city of Pest that he knew so well [...] When he withdrew and lost the view of Pest, his heart was smothered.[54]

As the text suggests, this was the start of Krúdy's agony: he went home, wrote the last short story, and passed away. This excerpt shows the spiritual unity of Krúdy and the city. They are one and the same, Budapest is pervaded by Krúdy's soul. Their connection is so close that the moment they lose contact, the writer dies. It is significant that after his last spiritual reunion with the city, Krúdy writes a last piece of literature suggesting that he somehow inscribed this metaphysical unity into his texts. The *oeuvre* of Krúdy becomes a place where one could re-join the old Budapest, but in a way that allows the reader to engage with the tension between nostalgia and renewal, tradition and modernity.

Fig. 3. Dugovics Square/Tanuló Street, Óbuda, 1972. The house to the left once belonged to Krúdy. © FORTEPAN/Museum of Óbuda.

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54 István Hargitay, 'Emlékezés az álmok hősére: Beszélgetés Krúdy Gyuláról, halálának évfordulóján' [Remebering the Hero of Dreams: Conversation on Gyula Krúdy on the Anniversary of His Death], *Kis Ujság*, 11 May 1947, p. 7.

Reshaping the Literary Canon

The recreation of Budapest's identity and the growing cult of Krúdy were parallel and connected processes. But the cultic status of Krúdy was not an entirely new phenomenon: while he did not enjoy dazzling fame in the 1920s, after his death in 1933 a good number of writers and critics started to recognize him as one of the most significant authors of his time.[55] This explains why those communists who returned from their Moscow exile were quite unfamiliar with his works, while Krúdy was praised by several writers and critics on the political left who spent the interwar period in Hungary. An unpublished study by the influential communist cultural politician Márton Horváth, one of those who did not emigrate, claimed that Krúdy, along with such classic authors as Mór Jókai and Kálmán Mikszáth, belongs to the 'main line' of Hungarian literature—a heritage that he could not identify with, but one that was definitely presented as a favourable alternative to the likes of such popular conservative writers as Ferenc Herczeg.[56] This study from April 1946 was a rather significant piece that was composed following consultations within the party[57] with the intention of outlining the policy of the HCP regarding intellectuals. A few years later, however, Krúdy was not only excluded from the 'main line', but his works were not allowed to be published any longer, and from 1952 one could hardly even find his name mentioned in the press and professional organs.

The canonization and decanonization of Krúdy requires closer inspection. In the piece by Horváth mentioned above, the writer was described as part of a colonial literature in the sense that it largely served the literary needs of the gentry, that turned to be 'an almost colonial caste of officers' after the *Ausgleich* of 1867. In Horváth's view, the gentry was either directly serving an empire that in fact existed (the Monarchy), or was exhibiting an attitude 'foreign' to the Hungarian people, a 'behaviour' that prioritized feudalistic latifundia to any kind of democratic land reform. The gentry was presented not simply as a class-enemy, but also as an ethnically 'alien' class that resided in cities and administratively backed up great land owners. Horváth believed that part of the gentry did not even need to *adopt* such attitudes, since they were often non-Hungarians by their ethnic origin that in itself explained the difference. As such, both Mikszáth and Krúdy were tools of a kind of internal colonization that was primarily class-based,

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55 Gábor Bezeczky, 'Kultusz és szakirodalom. Krúdy fogadtatása' [Cult and Literature: The Reception of Krúdy], *Jelenkor*, 55 (2012), pp. 1207-16.

56 Márton Horváth, 'Értelmiség' [Intelligentsia], April 1946, The Archives of Political History and Trade Unions (APH), Márton Horváth Papers, 991/15.

57 Memorandum of the Meeting of the HCP Committee on Intellectual Issues, 18 April 1946, APH, Márton Horváth Papers, 991/15.

but underpinned by racial categories. When it came to the literary canon, key ideologues of the HCP preferred another tradition that was not associated with urban environments but with the village: the populist writers' movement, whose leftist members expressed similar views on Hungarian history. Their style came closer to the kind of realism Révai and Lukács promoted, and the communists considered them the best 'raw material' to be turned into socialist realist authors. In contrast, Krúdy's works are full of anecdotes, he often dissolves the boundary between dream and 'reality', and has a very elaborate, highly artistic style, not compatible with socialist realism in any way. Further, Krúdy, just like Mikszáth, was ambivalent about modernity.[58] He clearly had a nostalgia for the Monarchic imperial setting, which was identified with peace, and a critical view on the technological developments that played a crucial role in the First World War. Nevertheless, he did not entirely lose his faith in the progress and modernization that he, admittedly, associated with Westernization. But all these characteristics, while obviously played an important role in his neglect, do not fully explain his total exclusion from the canon.

Indeed, after the war, the communist press started to canonize the works of Krúdy, arguing that he, perhaps unintentionally, unveiled the gentry by representing his lifestyle as it was, in an authentic way.[59] The very same claims, derived from Lukács's theory of realism, were used when Krúdy's literary 'master', Mikszáth—who remained one of the most significant prose writers in the canon of the Rákosi era—was discussed. Krúdy could have also been saved for the same reasons as Mikszáth. Furthermore, a whole set of data was lined up in favour of Krúdy: his support of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919; his friendship with Endre Ady, a key poet of the literary tradition regarded to be 'progressive'; his being the first Hungarian writer who recognized the talent of Maxim Gorky, and so on. He could have been kept in the canon as a 'controversial' writer, as many others were. His drastic expulsion from the canon is even more striking if one considers his overall popularity signalled by the serial republication of his works (in 1948 alone not less than eight different volumes by Krúdy were published) and the growing number of commentaries around them. The press even interviewed politicians, like the minister of culture Gyula Ortutay (a secret member of the HCP), and the above mentioned László Bóka, who became

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58 Cf. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, 'Conservativism, Modernity, and Pluralism in Hungarian Culture', 9.1-2 (1994), p. 27; ibid., p. 217.

59 See e.g., Miklós Molnár, 'Krúdy és a magyar dzsentri' [Krúdy and the Hungarian Gentry], *Szabad Szó*, 3 April 1945, p. 4.

Ortutay's state-secretary, to foster Krúdy's case.[60] Bóka himself, already bearing his high office, published a review of one of Krúdy's works,[61] and promised to set a memorial to the writer that lives up to the extraordinary standards of his oeuvre. In early 1948, shortly before the introduction of the one party system in the summer of the same year, it seemed that leftist intellectuals would manage to fix his position as an important literary figure. However, starting in 1949 and after the nationalization of publishing houses just the opposite happened.

One crucial aspect was a new policy Rákosi initiated in the autumn of 1948: he called for a revision of members of the party that was partially motivated by an alleged lag on the 'cultural front'. From that point onward the communist leadership aspired to replace cadres of bourgeois origin with those of worker and peasant background. These latter were often uneducated and subscribed to the ideals of Soviet socialist realism presented in the short courses at the Party School. For the majority of these new cadres Krúdy was either unknown or suspicious. The massive influx of newcomers into the offices turned those who were more cultivated insecure and overly cautious. It was not wise to confront this new cohort of cadres, especially in the context of the show trial of László Rajk.

Further, the work of Krúdy had been reassessed by Georg Lukács not long before. In the spring of 1948, in a speech delivered at the Political Academy of the HCP and published shortly after as the opening piece of his widely distributed volume *Új magyar kultúráért* [For a New Hungarian Culture] (1948), he depicted Krúdy as a representative of the Hungarian national character that should be a subject of change. According to Lukács, Hungarians are prone to pointless daydreaming that prevents them from acting, and Krúdy re-enforced this character as being at 'the essence of Hungarian national fate'.[62] Lukács's claims were radicalized by one of his followers, István Király, who in his 1952 monograph on Mikszáth overstressed the social critical aspects of the work of this *fin-de-siècle* classic, and set him in opposition to Krúdy, who, in turn, was devalued as a setback in literary 'development.'[63] However, Krúdy's elimination from the canon

[60] Dezső Kiss, 'Álomvilág' [Dreamworld], *A Reggel*, 19 January 1948, p. 4; and 'A Tegnap Ködlovagja után' [After Yesterday's Chevalier of the Fog], *Világ*, 17 June 1948, p. 2.

[61] László Bóka, 'Próza (Ady Endre éjszakái)' [Prose (The Nights of Endre Ady)], *Új Magyarország*, 24 January 1948, p. 7.

[62] György Lukács, ibid., pp. 14-15.

[63] István Király, *Mikszáth Kálmán* (Budapest: Művelt Nép, 1952). For a deconstruction of Király's view on Mikszáth see Levente T. Szabó, *Mikszáth, a kételkedő modern. Történelmi és társadalmi reprezentációk Mikszáth Kálmán prózapoétikájában* [Mikszáth: A

started well before Király's work, and therefore still does not fully explain the phenomenon. My proposal here is to consider the history of literature and urban design as entangled processes.

Krúdy, Óbuda, and Memory Politics

The visions of modernist and socialist realist architects who aspired to reshape Budapest entirely in order to fit more to an imaginary *Weltstadt* did not come true, largely for economic reasons. This is not to claim that the communists, who gradually took complete political control, ceased to envision the new Budapest in Moscow's image, even though Stalin's death meant a setback in this respect. Indeed, it was only the 1955 Urban Development Plan that made it explicit that the size of the planned buildings would not be of 'Moscow-scale.'[64]

Still, they managed to undertake (or, at least, start) two prioritized projects: a second subway line and a new bridge over the Danube. Both were extremely important for the construction of a Sovietized metropolis, because the acceleration of public transport was claimed to eliminate the social characteristics of the various districts. In this new urban space, the working class permeated by Soviet values would meet more often with the petit-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie, and this would make the latter confront the ideals and practices of the new Soviet man. As was argued, this new man would embody such an irresistible model that the bourgeoisie would also want to emulate it, and, as a final consequence, a homogenous society would be created that universally shared Soviet values. Building a bridge between the district Óbuda, with its Svabian, religious, and petit-bourgeois citizens, and the Angyalföld and Újpest districts, with their working class profile, was essential for this project of building a Sovietized metropolis, even though its construction was started before the war. Appropriately enough, the new bridge, inaugurated in November 1950, was named after Stalin.

The construction of the bridge, naturally, did not leave Óbuda untouched,[65] and the district was, in general, a primary scene for almost all plans of urban development. Even some of the historical protectionists proposed large Óbuda as a scene of experimental urban planning, in order

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Modernist with Doubts: Historical and Social Representations in the Prose of Kálmán Mikszáth] (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2007).

64 Prakfalvi, 'Elmélet és gyakorlat', p. 23.

65 A number of streets were demolished when the construction of the bridgehead and the exit lines were built in 1948/49, and these divided Óbuda in the middle. See Miklós Létay, 'A szabadságharc bukásától 1950-ig' [From the Fall of the Freedom Fight to 1950], in *Óbuda évszázadai* [Centuries of Óbuda], ed. by Csongor Kiss and Ferenc Mocsy (Budapest: Kortárs, 1995), p. 253.

Fig. 4. Construction of the Stalin Bridge, 1950. © FORTEPAN/Imre.

to shift the gaze of the more radical architects from the city centre to the semi-periphery.[66] It could be justified by social reasons as well, since the living conditions in some houses and streets in the neighbourhood left much to be required. Further, it is important to remind ourselves once again not to 'envisage the war and then the Cold War as imposing a total rupture. Planning for post-war reconstruction proved the main channel for the continuity of concepts and inspirations from the 1930s to the 1950s.'[67]

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66 László Gerő, 'Újjáépítés és esztétika' [Rebuilding and Aesthetics], *Budapest,* 3.6 (June 1947), p. 195.

67 Charles S. Maier, 'City, Empire, and Imperial Aftermath: Contending Contexts for the Urban Vision', in *Shaping the Great City: Modern Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1937*, ed. by Eve Blau and Monika Platzer (Munich: Prestel, 1999), p. 38.

Indeed, it involved not only the bridge that was started to be built before the war, but also the destruction of some streets of Óbuda's historical centre that continued under communist supervision—a moderate endeavour in no way comparable to the radical reshaping of the district in the 1960s and 1970s that rebuilt Óbuda in such a way that it was almost entirely deprived of its charm. But what is really significant from the perspective of the literary canon is not urban history as such, but rather how the gradually monopolized press mediated the construction of the bridge and how it depicted old Óbuda—the 'word city', to borrow Peter Fritzsche's term,[68] but one that became increasingly dominated by a single politically motivated reading, and, finally, lost its heteroglossic character (in Bakhtin's terms). The new regime made it clear that the Stalin bridge is exclusively its own achievement, while Óbuda should be seen as worthless territory and, consequently, a possible scene of constructing a new, readily understandable urban landscape following the new Muscovite imperial model.

At the same time, Óbuda was also known as a neighbourhood where Gyula Krúdy lived and worked in his final years. This was where he retired to write his last piece of literature right before his death in the previously quoted story by Hargitay. When Krúdy gained popularity in the post-war years, he was very often represented not simply as a writer of Budapest, but was linked to a particular district. Several articles appeared in the press that explored the places he once visited and the people he had contact with. The latter provided first-hand memories of the writer. One could recognize a rivalry between the various neighbourhoods of the city for Krúdy: some claimed that the 'natural environment' for him was the Belváros, the centre; others associated Krúdy with the Tabán and its narrow, crooked streets, a district on the Buda side demolished by the order of Miklós Horthy in the mid-1930s in order to modernize the cityscape.[69] One of the most serious candidates was, certainly, Óbuda, the district that most closely resembled the once existed Tabán. Established or aspiring writers and intellectuals often visited Óbuda to rejoin with the spirit of their beloved Krúdy.

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68 Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1996), pp. 12-51.

69 See, for instance: Károly Acsády, 'Szindbád utolsó estéje: Óbudai riport Kéhlinél és a kis Bródynál Krúdy' Gyula nyomában' [The Last Evening of Sindbad: Óbuda Report at Kéhli and the little Bródy in Search for Gyula Krúdy], *Színház*, 11 December 1946, p. 15; Jenő Kálmán, 'Nekrológ a New-Yorkról' [Obituary of the Café House New York], *Színház*, 6 May 1946, p. 8; Károly Acsády, 'Tabáni litánia. Krúdy Gyulát idézi leghűbb barátja, Várkonyi Titusz' [Litany for the Tabán: Gyula Krúdy is Evoked by His Truest Friend, Titusz Várkonyi], *Színház*, 12 May 1947, p. 5; Pál Relle, 'Akikkel találkoztam—Krúdy Gyula' [Whom I Met: Gyula Krúdy], *Világ*, 14 September 1947, p. 4; Péter Ruffy, 'Krúdy', *Hírlap*, 20 October 1948, p. 5.

Fig. 5. Tavasz Street, Óbuda. Postcard from the turn of the 19th and 20th century.

In May 1947, the historian Ludwig von Gogolák, who had appreciated the art of Krúdy, made a strong claim for Óbuda being the 'real' home of the writer. As many others did, he represented the modest, impecunious Óbuda as the only place where 'Krúdy's spirit shuttles with comfort', in contrast to the Belváros, the busy city centre, where 'the dust of forgetting rapidly covers everything'.[70] Óbuda for Gogolák was a place of remembering, of nurturing a valuable literary tradition. Just one year later, after the communists extended their political control, and, significantly, published the plans for constructing the bridge between Óbuda and the workers' districts, the same Gogolák expressed the opposite view in a politically biased report. He ceased to attribute any values to preserving the local urban heritage. Making rather clear reference to articles I cited above, he asserted: 'it will do no harm to demolish the little old houses that writers from Pest come to visit, and who cry for these, because they treat them as memories of the good old world.'[71] He described Óbuda as a backward and faint land, full of 'reactionaries' who drink in Harry Truman's words, or believe in Ferenc Nagy, the former prime minister of the Smallholders who was criminalized,

70 Lajos Gogolák, 'VIII. kerület Krúdy Gyula utca' [8th District, Gyula Krúdy Street], *Új Magyarország,* 24 May 1947, p. 2.

71 Lajos Gogolák, 'Tömbgyűlés Óbudán' [Block Meeting in Óbuda], *Politika,* 8 May 1948, p. 6.

Fig. 6. Görög Street/Fehérsas Street and Mélypince, one of Krúdy's favourite taverns, Tabán, 1928. © FORTEPAN/Noémi Saly

removed, and forced into emigration right after Gogolák's previous article on Krúdy and the district was published.

The revaluation of this part of the city had serious consequences for Gogolák with respect to the literary canon. People living here are represented by him as literary figures 'who monitor the regime with a critical stance, and when speaking confidentially they augur no great future for the nationalization of properties', and, as a logical consequence, to the reshaping of Óbuda. In these poor streets 'the *gentry fictions of the old times* keep blossoming, though in a gloomy manner under a climate turned unfavourable to them.' One can hardly miss the reference to Krúdy in these

lines, in whose evaluation Gogolák managed to do a complete about-face. Indeed, he explicitly referred to the writer when described Óbuda as an environment where 'literary stereotypes inherited from Krúdy' live on.

In judging Óbuda and Krúdy the fault line did not lie, however, between the Smallholders and the labour parties. Gogolák, who tried to please the communists, marked the citizens of the district as predominantly social democrats, despite their admiration of Ferenc Nagy. This reference had an ethnic subtext for the Bratislava-born Gogolák, who had strong Slavophilic and anti-German sentiments. It is not an accident that his degrading article on Óbuda is stuffed with German names, and mentions a certain 'Celtic-Svabian barbarism' that resisted the new modernity. His references reveal that memory politics of the district was massively ethnicized at the time.

This ethnic subtext was quite obvious in several other articles as well that discussed the relationship of Krúdy and Óbuda. As the magazine *Színház* [Theatre] reported: 'we may turn to anywhere and to anybody in little Óbuda, the people of the Braunhaxlers [the local German minority] enshrine the memory of that tall gentleman with sad eyes who liked to tilt his head on one side, and who merged with them so many times and with such a pleasure.'[72] Certainly, the same issue was not always presented in such idyllic terms. 'I search reconciliation in the footsteps of Krúdy with this ferocious district [of Óbuda], that was the seed-plot of Svabians and members of the Volksbund', reads the confession of the Jewish Károly Kristóf.[73] His article suggests that Krúdy could be turned into an instrument of reconciliation between various minorities, just as he was invoked in order to consolidate Jewish–Hungarian relations.[74] As one advances in reading the piece by Kristóf, Óbuda gradually turns from a hostile environment to Krúdy's neighbourhood packed with predominantly positive characters. The district reveals itself as a crucial medium of memory politics, but it is Krúdy again who facilitates the reconciliatory project of making the 'real' face of this part of the city readable. The success of the project symbolically solicited by arriving to the one-time flat of 'the poet of Budapest' at the end of the walk, where the wanderer is welcomed 'with friendship and hospitality by an old Svabian Krúdy-like grandam.'[75] In the closing lines

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72 Acsády, 'Szindbád utolsó estéje', p. 15.

73 Károly Kristóf, 'Templom-utcai szép délután' [Sweet Afternoon on Templom Street], *Világ*, 15 June 1947, p. 9.

74 Poldi Krausz, a well-known Jewish tavern-keeper of the Tabán district, for example, recalled that Krúdy once defended the Krausz family with a sword when they were threatened by raging mob. See Ágnes Zsolt, 'A Mély-pince Poldi bácsija emlékezik' [Uncle Poldi of the Tavern Mély-pince Remembers], *Szivárvány*, 3 (1948), p. 3.

75 Kristóf, ibid.

Kristóf himself turns out to be a hero of Krúdy, just like the Svabian woman did: 'they cook stew somewhere, and its noble smell attracts me with magnetic power to one of the romantic little tavern-restaurants [*kiskocsmák*]…' The majority of these pubs were about to be demolished in a few years or decades.

Such a reconciliatory memory politics was far from the official communist agenda that rather opted for the principle of collective guilt in the case of Svabians. Accordingly, Gogolák's above cited article presented a rather different image of the locals: a uniformly retrograde mob. At the residential meeting he reported, a young communist representative of the town hall 'informed the audience about the purging of the state bureaucracy, an announcement that does not raise comfort here […] then about the Árpád bridge [to be renamed after Stalin by the time it was finished] that provokes angst among these good old Óbuda people because they fear that they will get perniciously close to Újpest.'[76] Gogolák touched upon a central theme of socialist realist urban planning here: the acceleration of movement between districts with contrasting social characters. In the urbanist discourse of the time great emphasis was placed on the elimination of the 'reservations of the middle class' by animating exchange between various social strata with the objective of homogenizing the city. As I pointed out earlier, it was maintained that contact between the bourgeoisie and the working class would enhance the creation of a new type of mankind.[77]

In a rather remarkable manner, the communist press in 1950 attempted to recruit the figure of Krúdy into service for such views. A journalist at the daily *Független Magyarország* [Independent Hungary], for instance, bewildered by his imagination (and identifying Krúdy with one of his recurrent mythic characters, Sindbad), wrote in the extremely enthusiastic style of the time:

> Sinbad [sic!] would be truly amazed now seeing the pulsating work that evolves around the construction of the new bridge that will elevate his beloved Óbuda from its backwardness. If he could see the sumptuous new blocks of houses, the squares planted with flowers and trees, and the azure coach that could fly him to Flórián Square [a central square in Óbuda] in ten minutes in contrast to a jolting fiacre […] He would stare with eyes wide open, and his heart would fill with delight.

The writer had called for the modernization of Óbuda several times in his lifetime, but certainly had less drastic changes in mind. And few readers of Krúdy would agree with the assumption that the gentleman Sindbad, a disillusioned follower of outmoded chivalrous manners, a modern Don

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[76] Gogolák, 'Tömbgyűlés Óbudán', p. 6.

[77] Prakfalvi, 'Elmélet és gyakorlat', p. 27; Clark, ibid.

Quijote, who serves as a figure of nostalgic displacement in Krúdy's oeuvre, would have been delighted by living an accelerated metropolitan life-style.

Conclusions

In 1971, a film by the director Zoltán Huszárik was released with the title *Sindbad*. The movie based on short stories by Krúdy presented a series of scenes that were chained by associations, and shortly achieved a cultic status. Its pessimistic atmosphere and the representation of life as a stand-still fitted perfectly to the era of stagnation: the post-1968 period when all illusions about socialism seemed to fade away. The popularity of the movie was, in a large part, due to the fact that it was received as an act of resistance to existing socialism, with its nostalgia for the Monarchy, its rich Biedermeier interior design, and its celebration of traditional Hungarian quality cuisine. It comes as no surprise that Krúdy and his works never surpassed the category of 'tolerated' literature until 1989.[78] His oeuvre was not only incompatible with any kind of realist aesthetics, but provided examples of multicultural coexistence, and preferred to depict the intimate lives of friends, families, and lovers to the representation of heroes acting for the sake of the public. His predilection for portraying petty-bourgeois urban environments also confronted communist cultural-political aspirations. As we can see, such obstacles could have been overcome in literary historical narratives: Mikszáth with his anecdotal style was recast as a predecessor of Béla Illés, a new 'classic' writer of socialist realism. Krúdy could have also been integrated into the canon on the coattails, for instance, of Aurél Kárpáti, who presided over the Writer's Union until 1951, and whose style was compared to that of Krúdy.[79] The opposite happened. The Rákosi regime's drastic efforts in the early 1950s to remove such a significant writer from the canon, who was widely acknowledged in the post-war years by almost the entire political left, are virtually unparalleled in Hungarian literary history. In order to fully understand his neglect, one needs to consider that he challenged official memory politics, and relatedly, frustrated the rebuilding of Budapest as a Sovietized metropolis.

To a significant extent, Krúdy was cast out of the canon to such a degree that by 1952 even his name was not written down in official literary histories because his stories would have filled readers with a sense of loss for, among other things, the reshaping and demolition of the old Óbuda. The regime built the first large residential blocks in the district only at the end of the 1950s, and the almost complete demolition of the historical part of Óbuda

[78] György Aczél, who decisively shaped the cultural policy of the Kádár-era, famously introduced a threefold system of prohibited, tolerated, and supported culture.

[79] Mátrai, 'Egy pesti regény', ibid.

was finished in the early 1970s, in times when imitation of Moscow was no longer prioritized. But in several respects this was just an end of a longer story. Already in 1948, the same year when books by Krúdy flooded the literary market, that plan for urban development, which on the one hand relied on ideas outlined in the 1930s that had the ambition of building a world metropolis, but on the other hand revised it according to the standards of socialist realism, became authoritative. This put an end to conjectures on the future of Óbuda, and the plans were further reinforced in 1951 by a renewed interest on the side of the political elite in urban planning with a representational drive, and by the so-called architectural debate that lopped the 'wilderings' of socialist realism.[80] As attested by contemporary articles that linked the reshaping of Krúdy's Óbuda with the construction of a new bridge crucial for an imagined, but never materialized new imperial/colonial metropolis, the destructive works motivated by the building of the Stalin bridge prevented Krúdy from being integrated even into the margins of the canon of the Rákosi era. One of the most popular local writers was suppressed in an act of self-colonization that, in this case, also meant the realization of an imperial project that ultimately failed.

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[80] Sipos, ibid., p. 141.