



BOOK REVIEWS

The Culture of the Aristocracy in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1750–1820.
Edited by Gábor Vaderna. Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2022. 422 pp.

The book under review is based on the conference “The Culture of the Aristocracy in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1750–1820,” held between May 30 and June 1, 2019 to mark the bicentenary of the death of Count György Festetics in Keszthely, in the Baroque castle of the Festetics family (today the Helikon Palace Museum). The event was organized in cooperation with the research groups “Literary Culture in Western Hungary, 1770–1820” of the Institute for Literary Studies of the Research Centre for the Humanities and “The Patterns of the Circulation of Scientific Knowledge in Hungary, 1770–1830” of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE). Although the studies pursued by the two research groups cover similar periods, they focus on different aspects of the vibrant intellectual life at the turn of the century. While the former focused on the regional context of literature and the cultural life of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Transdanubian region, the latter dealt with the production and circulation of scientific knowledge in Hungary on the basis of examples from various disciplines, from medicine to agronomy. The main aim of the conference and also of the edited volume was to link the findings of the research groups and of the outcomes of other experts in Hungary and abroad under the aegis of the flexible concept of “the culture of aristocracy.” Together with the introduction, written by the editor, Gábor Vaderna, senior research fellow of the Institute of Humanities, Budapest, the volume contains 24 papers written by 23 authors. Since the book is not divided into separate sub-chapters, for the sake of clarity, the articles are discussed below in thematic blocks into which I myself have organized them. In total, I have distinguished five thematic blocks: the social history of the aristocracy, educational issues, academic knowledge transfers, patronage and literature, and aristocratic constructed spaces (such as castles and gardens).

Four studies deal with the social history of the aristocracy in a narrower sense. Two of them offer overviews of the Croatian-Slavonian aristocratic families and the social history of politics in the second half of the eighteenth century. Ivana Horbec, scientific advisor at the Croatian Institute of History, discusses the role of the Croatian-Slavic aristocracy in local politics. In legal terms, the Croatian-Slavonian nobility considered themselves Hungarian, but as Horbec

argues, it also constituted a distinct entity within the Kingdom. In contrast to the previous period, from the 1760s, the aristocracy became increasingly interested in local public life, as indicated also by the construction of palaces in the larger towns. Suzanna Coha and Nikola Vukobratović from the University of Zagreb focus on the links between the Croatian national awakening and the role of the Ban, who could either defend Croatian rights or hinder national efforts. The collective identity pattern of a separate “*natio croatica*” was present in the early modern era, based on the forged *Pacta conventa* treaty of 1102, and it later became a cornerstone of modern national ideology. Through a Latin poem which was written to the Ban, the authors demonstrate how a distinctively anti-Hungarian position was established in the late eighteenth century.

Zsolt Kökényesi, senior lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University, focuses on the Hungarian members of the Order of the Star Cross (Sternkreuzorden) of the Habsburg Monarchy, which was awarded to women of aristocratic birth. The study also provides a list of the “Ordensdamen” in Hungary for the period. Kökényesi stresses that the acquisition of the Order was a family strategy. It delivered a kind of “symbolic capital” for the individuals and their families. Its holders included not only the wives of conservative figures but also wives of progressive aristocratic lords. Eva Kowalská, leading senior researcher at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, deals with the Lutheran noble family of Zay in various contexts. Members of the family held the baronial title from the sixteenth century and became counts in 1830. Kowalská describes the family’s relationship with the Silesian Protestant exile Calisius family, to whom the Zays were linked through marriage, as well as the role of the Lutheran general inspector Péter Zay in Lutheran Church reform. The cultural representation of the family is also discussed, with reference to the family’s manor and private collections.

The next major unit deals with aristocratic education. Olga Khavanova, a fellow at the Russian Academy of Sciences, looks at the Theresianum, the Viennese school for the nobility, and the extent to which the Hungarian aristocracy was represented in it. Hungarians and Transylvanians made up one fifth of the students during the period, but they did not form a homogeneous group. Khavanova identifies five sub-groups from the perspective of the social backgrounds of the students: the children of leading magnates, the new aristocracy, Catholic Transylvanian aristocrats and noblemen, old county nobility, and newcomers and aliens. According to Khavanova, the pupils were bound more by the merits of their fathers in the eyes of the ruler than by their own convictions or achievements. Theodora Shek Brnardić, senior researcher at

the Croatian Institute of History, examines how the Enlightenment transformed the perception of paternal authority during the eighteenth century and the consequences for the educational practices of the children of aristocrats. Paternal authority was increasingly built on obligation and reciprocity rather than on mere power, at the same time acquiring a sentimental dimension illustrated by the examples of two counts, the Bohemian Franz Joseph Kinsky and the Croatian Ivan Draskovich. The former, who also authored treatises on education, implemented the new principles as the head of the Theresian Military Academy and his family, while the latter implemented Masonic morals into his children's education.

The next major section deals with the issue of patronage and aristocratic literature. In his case study, Gábor Vaderna examines the functions of the occasional poetry of the late eighteenth century through the figure of the Protestant Transylvanian lord Count László Teleki. Vaderna concludes that poetry at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was situated at the intersection of the private and the political public spheres, with virtue being its central theme. Béla Hegedüs, a senior researcher at the Institute of Literary Studies, deals with a German novel by Heinrich Gottfried von Bretschneider, director of the Buda University Library. Hegedüs juxtaposes the fictional reality of the novel with a history that could be reconstructed on the basis of sources, revealing that the figure of the unnamed bishop in the novel was based on Baron Ádám Patachich, Bishop of Kalocsa, while the novel's protagonist, an archivist, draws on the work of the linguist György Kalmár.

Réka Lengyel, research fellow at the Institute of Literary Studies, offers new insights concerning the beliefs of György Festetics. It is well known that Festetics was influenced by Masonic ideology, but there are no direct sources to support this. Lengyel attempts to reconstruct Festetics' place in the Masonic movement and shows how these influences appear in his writings, literary patronage, and life practices. István Rumen Csörsz, a senior researcher at the Institute of Literary Studies, focuses on the literary collecting activities of Miklós Jankovich, who belonged to the well-to-do landed gentry. At the end of the eighteenth century, the traditional practices of noble collections and the emergence of new types of institutions coexisted. Jankovich was a protagonist in these processes and was among the first collectors who sought to preserve old Hungarian literary treasures for posterity. For this purpose, he sacrificed his family's wealth. Eventually, his collection was purchased by the National Museum at the initiative of Archduke Joseph. Jankovich wanted to publish a

collection of so-called “Hungarian national songs,” a thematic edition of older and newer popular songs, a “living museum of texts.” Ferenc Toldy, one of his successors, selected pieces from the corpus with the intention of creating a canon. In contrast, Kálmán Thaly, under the influence of post-independence nostalgia, once again valorized the collection.

The articles by Ágnes Dóbék and Gábor Mészáros, junior researchers at the Institute of Literary Studies, deal with the phenomenon of literary patronage. Dóbék shows, through the example of Miklós Révai and his patrons, how the institution of patronage functioned in the world of the eighteenth-century literature. Révai’s three patrons embodied three different types. The fact that Bishop János Szily provided support shows that the high clergy at the time was already open to secular culture. The cases of Baron Lőrinc Orczy and Révai shed light on the conditions for the publication of literature: the former was not only the latter’s patron, but also a poet whose publishing activity was facilitated by those he patronized. The case of János Somogyi Medgyesi, nobleman and royal chancellor, illustrates that although they were not on the same social level as Révai they could have a mutual relationship through the enjoyment of literature. Gábor Mészáros examines the question of patronage through the relationship between Count Ferenc Széchenyi and the prolific Transdanubian poet, Ádám Pálóczi Horváth. Their relationship was not limited to patronage. Both were committed to the development of Hungarian literature. This shared commitment led to a meeting at Széchenyi’s house (*Litterarius Consessus*), attended by aristocrats, poets, and members of the reform-minded nobility, where the idea of founding a literary and scientific society was raised. Horváth’s example was also used to show that the visits of writers had a community-organizing force in literary life and could serve as a basis for subsequent institution-building. Olga Granasztói, senior research fellow at the Research Group of Textology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Debrecen, discusses an unsuccessful attempt to establish a society. In 1791, the ambitious literary organizer, writer, and county nobleman Ferenc Kazinczy wrote to Prince Lajos (II) Batthyány-Strattmann, a Freemason and amateur poet, and encouraged him to become the president of a literary society which Kazinczy wanted to organize. Kazinczy himself attended the meeting of the aforementioned *Litterarius Consessus*. Granasztói persuasively shows how Kazinczy’s project failed, even though the prince and Kazinczy shared an intellectual platform.

Three papers on the history of science deal with the Festetics family. Piroska Balogh, associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, deals with

the transfer of knowledge between the aristocracy and scientists through the example of György Festetics' son László and Johann Ludwig Schedius. Balogh uses the example of Festetics to show how the relationship between scholars and aristocrats became more balanced in the eighteenth century. Although the relationship between Schedius and Festetics did not conform to the traditional pattern, there was a degree of reciprocity between the two, and they both benefited from their study trips abroad. György Kurucz, Director of the Institute of History at the Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, deals with György Festetics as a key figure in Hungarian agronomy and agricultural education. Festetics embraced the contemporary Göttingen idea of the unity of practical and theoretical training. In this spirit, he sent two professors from the Georgikon agricultural college on a study trip to Western Europe to gather knowledge and experience. The professors were given detailed instructions and had to carry out market research for Festetics' estate.

Lilla Krász, associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University, examined the volumes on medicine in the library of the Festetics manor, which also hosted the conference. Krász traces the “discursive concepts” that emerge from the Festetics medical collection and discusses the issue of patronage. The library had a vast medical collection: 1,070 titles in nearly 2,500 volumes, which embodied both the vision of the Enlightenment and the personal tastes of its aristocratic owner. Annamária Bíró, senior lecturer at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, focuses on the development of the scientific and cultural infrastructure of eighteenth-century Transylvania, in which Count Samuel Teleki and his son Domokos played a key role. Dezső Gurka, associate professor at Gál Ferenc University in Szarvas, deals with the relationship between German mineralogy and Hungarian magnates. One of the most important mineralogical societies of the time was based in Jena, which had a surprisingly large number of members from Hungary. The reason for this was that “Montanistik” was in its second heyday in Hungary, and the society also hoped to attract patrons through the honorary membership of wealthy magnates. The contacts in Jena contributed to the reception of Schelling's natural philosophy in Hungary and of Abraham Gottlob Werner's systematic system of mineralogical classification.

The last major section of the volume deals with the built culture of the aristocracy. Andrea Seidler, professor at the University of Vienna, presents three reports on how contemporaries viewed the palace and the cultural life of Miklós Esterházy. Four studies deal with the garden architecture of the aristocracy. Ivo Cerman, associate professor at the University of South Bohemia, shows

how Count Johann Rudolph Chotek's English garden at Veltrusy, near Prague, represented patriotism and loyalty to the Habsburgs. The layout of the garden and the celebrations held in it served as symbols of this patriotism. István Szabó, professor emeritus at Szent István University, looks at how the Festetics family transformed their natural environment. Borbála D. Mohay, PhD graduate at Eötvös Loránd University, uses extensive archival material to examine how Ferenc Széchenyi's English landscape garden in Cenk was shaped by its changing political and social meanings over time. The garden took on an oppositional function in the second half of the 1780s, but as Széchenyi's views changed, it increasingly became a place of relaxation and intellectual pleasure. Victoria Frede, associate professor at the University of California, explores the garden as a special place that provided a space for the highest level of diplomacy through the visit of Joseph II and his visit to St. Petersburg in 1780. She calls the phenomenon "garden diplomacy." According to Frede, paradoxically, the personal dispositions of rulers came to the fore at a time when the bureaucratic control of the state was increasing.

As the volume is based on a conference organized around a rather broadly defined phenomenon, the studies cover a diverse array of topics. As a result, the thematic, geographical, and cultural distribution of the contributions, as well as the length and methodological depth of the individual studies, vary widely. The volume follows the recent though controversial international trend of including both German-language and English-language contributions, an approach that is intentionally or unintentionally reflected on the cover. Nevertheless, the volume offers a kaleidoscopic snapshot of the state of contemporary scholarship on the subject, and in doing so, it represents a valuable attempt to bring together scholars from different countries working on different aspects of aristocratic culture in the Habsburg Monarchy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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East Central Europe between the Colonial and the Postcolonial in the Twentieth Century. Edited by Siegfried Huigen and Dorota Kołodziejczyk. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023. 265 pp.

In recent years, we have witnessed an explosion of scholarly interest in deciphering the in-between position of East Central Europe (ECE), analyzing its numerous and contended connections with the “First” and “Third” World, making sense of its place in global power relations and its recognized or blocked out “complicity” in global practices of domination. The topic resonates especially in Poland, where the works of Piotr Puchalski (*Poland in a Colonial World Order. Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939*), Marta Grzechnik (*The Missing Second World: On Poland and Postcolonial Studies*), and Mariusz Kalczewiak and Magdalena Kozłowska (*The World beyond the West. Perspectives from Eastern Europe*) lately contributed to the study of Eastern European participation in “Othering” the non-Europeans and their colonial fantasies. We also have the seminal works of Manuela Boatcă (*European Elsenheres. Global Sociologies of Space and Europe*), Zoltán Ginelli (*Opening the Semi-periphery: Hungary and Decolonisation*), and most recently Ivan Kalmár (*White but not Quite. Central Europe’s Illiberal Revolt*), which, however, met with some criticism from Eastern European scholars. These studies at least partially placed Eastern Europe (or ECE) in the field of postcolonial studies, and they substantially reworked our knowledge of European colonialism, imperialism, and racialized thinking. It is true that ECE was long overlooked by the postcolonial critique, but since about 2000, many social scientists began to look at it through the prism of its quasi-colonial dependence on the Soviet Union as well as its quasi-postcolonial relations to Western Europe. I was therefore intrigued to learn in what ways *Eastern Europe between Colonial and Postcolonial* contributes to the existing scholarship and viability of postcolonial approaches to the history of (post)communist East Central Europe.

Given the popularity of postcolonial studies in Poland, it perhaps comes as no surprise that the majority of contributors to the volume come from Polish academia, not to mention the fact that the publication is available through open access thanks to the Polish Ministry of Education. The editors also could not have wished for a better timing for publication. Postcolonialism as a perspective is now gaining new momentum in ECE, as it becomes a basis for political narratives of “decolonization from EU,” most notably in Hungary, but Slovakia seems to have embarked on similar path after the last parliamentary elections. In the introductory chapter, Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Siegfried Huigen properly

contextualize the volume within the current political trends in ECE, namely the co-optation of the notion of the postcolonial condition by the modern right and the use of this notion as a tool for mobilization of the rhetoric of ethnic and national emancipation. The authors' primary objective is thus to demonstrate the various forms of intra-European dependence and how they are reflected in the present political and social milieus. They call for the "postcolonizing of postcommunist Europe" and offer a "more nuanced model of scholarly inquiry" into the cultural, literary, and historical imageries which have created East Central Europe's ambiguous identity between colonial and postcolonial. Despite the ambitious claims, the collected case studies only very loosely managed to connect the present situation with the historical preconditions that contributed to the dependent status of ECE. I first briefly sum up the main points of the chapters and then discuss what I miss in the volume. However, my comments should not be read as a criticism but rather as a vantage point for further scholarly inquiry.

The book's layout copies the traditional structure of edited volumes, with a theoretical introduction and nine case studies. The introduction is followed by two more theoretically oriented chapters. Claudia Kraft considers the potentials of the category of "East Central Europe" for historical analyses of the region and persuasively characterizes it as a great terrain for experimentation with postcolonial methods. Tomasz Zarycki explores the Polish mechanisms of Orientalization (or Eastness) and demonstrates how it helped legitimize and reproduce social, economic, and political inequalities inside and outside Poland. He claims that a typical feature of East Central European Orientalization is its "fractality," e. g., a tendency to "transfer one's Eastness" to more eastern neighbors.

In the second part, the authors seek to explore the ambivalent experience of ECE with colonialism. Róisín Healy, comparing the Polish and Irish relationships with colonialism, argues that there is no simple equation between exposure to colonial practices at home, participation in colonial projects abroad, and attitudes towards colonialism after independence. The origins of the differing attitudes towards colonialism can be traced back to the 1930s. She argues that Polish colonial fantasies which were kindled at that time were fueled in part by the sense of threat from Nazi Germany and USSR. The acquisition of colonies was supposed to compensate for this geopolitical fragility. Raul Cârstocea decided to take a biographical approach. He interprets Mircea Eliade's interwar fascination with India as an attempt to escape the ambiguity of Romania's position in ECE by adopting its status as "Europe's wholly Other." Agnieszka Sadecka further

elaborates on the Indian trajectory in her analysis of Polish travelogues on postcolonial India written during the socialist period. She comments on the paradoxical nature of this encounter, in which socialist and orientalist discourses overlap. Similarly to Healy, she also refers to the sense of insecurity as a fuel for degrading (colonial) attitudes towards non-Europeans. But in this story, it is the adoption of the socialist model of development by the peoples of India that is supposed to sanctify the Eastern European authority vis-à-vis the Western powers. The element of compensation is also central to Jagoda Wierzejska's study of the life of Andrzej Bobkowski in Guatemala. She interprets Bobkowski's mimicking of the role of white colonizer as a strategy to escape a traumatic memory of a subordinate status of Eastern Europe in the West.

The third section shifts the focus to colonial practices directed towards the peoples inside ECE. Kinga Siewior deciphers the Polish discourse of "Regained Territories," or the territories formerly belonging to Germany, which Poland gained after World War II in exchange for the so-called Eastern borderland taken by the USSR. As most of the new settlers came from the lost borderlands, Siewior demonstrates which strategies were adopted by the communist authorities to transfer the narrative of the "mythical cradle of Polishness" to the new landscape. Emilia Kledzik uses the postcolonial critique to analyze the depiction of Roma populations in the East Central European "necessary fictions" after World War II. By "necessary fiction," she refers to a genre specifically developed by the socialist authorities with the objective of educating non-Roma people about the Roma which, however, helped strengthen various anti-Roma stereotypes. Miriam Finkelstein offers the final discussion. Unlike the other contributors, Finkelstein analyses reciprocal representations of citizens of post-Soviet Russia and different East Central European states in the current migrant literature. She demonstrates the continual presence of colonial attitudes towards Eastern Europeans in the literary works of Russian migrant authors and, simultaneously, the efforts of East Central European authors to refute these Russian attempts to dominate the space.

As this brief outline makes clear, the research questions, analytical strategies, and individual authors' styles are so diverse that the chapters are better read as standalone texts only tenuously linked with the research aims discussed in the introductory chapter. I would welcome more texts dedicated to the present-day situation or, at least, more discussion of the connections between the historical, intellectual, and literary imageries and current political narratives. Similarly, the vantage point of analysis is dominantly Polish. Are the mentions of a few Czech

writers and a Romanian philosopher enough to make claims applicable to East Central Europe as a whole? The editors thus seem to fall into a common trap of edited volumes, e. g., how to glue together independent works by several authors from different disciplines who may or may not know one another's work. Given the claims for "more nuanced models" and "new patterns" in studies of East Central Europe, I also expected to see more theoretical experimentation of the postcolonial approach with world system theory, such as, for example, Zoltán Ginelli's discussion of the notion of transperiphery or the contribution by Andrzej W. Nowak. For these and other scholars, it is particularly the desire for advancement combined with a fear of regress to a lower, peripheral position that informs the notion of East Central Europe's in-betweenness. A more innovative combination of these approaches might provide a more nuanced reading of the element of fear or sense of threat which is mentioned by almost all the authors. The reason for this disregard may lie in the fact that most of the contributors come from the field of literary studies, and they are much more familiar with the postcolonial critiques of Homi Bhabha than they are with the work of Wallerstein.

Despite these weak points, any attempt by East European (or East Central European) scholars to enter the field of postcolonial studies, which is still dominated by Western (or Western-educated) scientists, is very welcome. Apart from a few exceptions, many studies on East Central Europe's postcolonialism have been published in the languages of the region and thus remain largely inaccessible (and overlooked) by the global academic community. As a historian from former Eastern Europe, I gladly noticed that most of the works cited in the lists of references were written by East Europeans (or East Central Europeans), which is not common. I see such publications as a way to contest what some scholars call "Anglo-American neo-colonialism in academia." Paraphrasing the famous essay by Gayatri Spivak, letting the subaltern speak is, after all, an unofficial motto of postcolonial studies. Moreover, perhaps inconsistent in their style and focus, the authors unanimously managed to counter the victim narratives that are widespread, not only in the Polish and Hungarian but also the Czech, Slovak, and other Eastern European national historiographies, by portraying plentiful variations of the double status of East Central Europe as colonizer and colonized. I read the volume as a window to further inquiry into the subject of ECE's in-betweenness, and I hope that a publication which would enrich the topic with the addition of Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian perspectives will follow in the near future. The publication will capture the interest of anyone

curious to know more about the history of East Central Europe and postcolonial studies, and it will be useful for historians, social and literary scientists, and students from neighboring fields.

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Agitátorok: Kommunista mozgósítás a pártállam kiépítésének mindennapjaiban (1948–1953) [Agitators: Communist mobilization in the everyday life of the construction of the party state, 1948–1953]. By Heléna Huhák. Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2022. 271 pp.

The new monograph by Heléna Huhák links the history of the construction of the Rákosi regime and its grand narrative of party history (told as a romance) with the microhistories of the agitators who translated this narrative into the language of everyday people. Huhák shows “how agitation, meaning the implementation in practice of the propaganda based on the ideology of the communist system, was actually carried out” (p.10). As her point of departure, she asks the following question: how did the state manage to mobilize the masses to take part in political events, for instance by showing support for the party state at celebrations and demonstrations, in spite of the fact that their everyday experiences (falling standards of living, economic problems, systemic violation of rights, and repression) contradicted the propaganda messages?

Huhák offers analyses of the social mobilization campaigns introduced in Hungary on the Soviet model and then ventures answers based on these analyses to her fundamental question of how state socialist propaganda worked in the Rákosi era. She presents the images of enemies in the propaganda slogans (as G. K. Chesterton reminds us, after all, it is hatred that unites people, not love, a notion that George Orwell presented with dramatic force in his dystopic novel *1984*), as well as the various topoi and interpretive schemata. Alongside this, the book’s discussion of political and social history examines the methods used to recruit agents and set up the agitation and propaganda network of the Hungarian Workers’ Party (the communist party in Hungary). The continuous campaigns required the creation of a layer of party workers who were engaged “full-time” in agitation. The book examines the so-called “people’s educators” (who for instance held talks on history, culture, and social issues that harmonized with the party ideology) as a social group, presenting their activities as part of “everyday socialist life,” focusing thus on the implementation of propaganda on the local level rather than grand policy decisions.

The perspective that Huhák adopts places her book among the representatives of *Alltagsgeschichte*, which proposes to look at politics from below. Huhák omits the “party” as a collective subject from her narrative (thus breaking from common practice in the literature, where one can all too easily find examples of phrases such as “ordered by the party” “implemented by the party,” etc.). Huhák

thus emphasizes that the party state “apparatus” should not be imagined as a monolith which simply implemented decisions like some kind of automaton. Nor does she see the masses (the citizenry) to be persuaded and mobilized by the agitators as passive recipients or even helpless victims (as the proponents of the notion of totalitarianism as an exhaustive principle of explanation have tended to do, though this notion has been somewhat anachronistic for a good half century now). Rather, Huhák calls attention to the strategies used by “everyday people,” which included forms of cooperation, manipulation, and even resistance in the party state.

Although there are seemingly innumerable works of secondary literature on communist propaganda in Hungary (one should certainly mention Viktor Szabó’s 2019 book *A kommunizmus bűvöletében*, or “In the Thrall of Communism,” on the propaganda of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 and Balázs Apor’s 2017 work *The Invisible Shining* on the cult of Mátyás Rákosi), almost none of them consider the roles and activities of agitators (though there are works of Hungarian fiction which touch on this question, for instance Ervin Sinkó’s novel *Optimisták*, or “Optimistics”). Part of the explanation for this lacuna in the literature undoubtedly lies in the simple fact that it is more difficult to pass moral judgment on the lower-ranking functionaries involved in the running of the partystate. It is not hard to pass judgment on Erzsébet Andics, for instance, a historian and communist politician who played prominent roles under the Rákosi regime (one often hears the contention that “the historian is not a judge,” but judgment is inescapably coded into any historical narrative). The case of Vera Angi, however, was more complex (Vera Angi is the protagonist and titular character of Pál Gábor’s 1979 film). It is morally and intellectually more comfortable to deal with perpetrators and victims, and not with the grey zone in between, though as Huhák reminds us, “the communist parties did not function as isolated and closed organizations in the individual socialist states, but rather were an integral part of society” (p.14).

The research is based primarily on the vast array of surviving party documents, mainly from 1948–1952, and the documents of the district party leaderships, including the reports of the people’s educators. Of these, Huhák has chosen the documents of the party organization of District XIII, as the study of the propaganda campaigns in this district promised to be particularly exciting. In 1950, the neighborhood known as Újlipótváros, which had been part of District V and was home, in general, to people who belonged to the more educated social classes, was annexed to the neighborhood known as

Angyalföld, the population of which was 72 percent working class. The strong differences between these two neighborhoods and the various images people associated with each clearly could have had some impact on the organization of propaganda campaigns and the ways in which mobilization was carried out. In order to draw a contrast with the various methods and approaches used in District XIII, Huhák also examines the work and activities of the people's educators in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, drawing on district party committees reports on prevailing mood and agitation efforts. She thus offers an opportunity to compare the propaganda campaigns in the capital city and the rural periphery. (In her study of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, Huhák seems to have been inspired and have drawn on Tamás Kende's *Az intézményes forradalom* [The Institutional Revolution] published in 2014, in which Kende examines the village customs of the county. Kende's discussion is one of several important works in the literature on the basic organization of the party which show that the party state was not as monolithic as it attempted to portray itself in its own propaganda.

Huhák notes, however, that party documents are hardly reliable sources if one seeks to craft a reliable picture of social realities at the time, since "reports prepared for internal use distorted information about the functioning of the socialist dictatorship" (p.17). Reports on propaganda efforts cannot be understood as trustworthy sources which offer glimpses of reality. Rather, they offer glimpses of the ways in which the people's educators sought to portray reality. Although neither Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's seminal 1966 work *The Social Construction of Reality* nor anything by Michel Foucault (who devoted a lifetime of work to the intertwining of discourse and power and the constructive power of groupings) appear in bibliography, the indirect influence of the ideas of these authors on the approach adopted in *Agitátorok* is evident. One could cite the following sentence as an example: "In the process of writing the report, the people's educator grouped the residents with whom he had spent time into the categories used in the report and created stories about them to match" (p.11).

The people who trained to become agitators learned the propagandistic stories (which were intended to shed light on the connections between big politics and everyday life and which were also the inspiration for the reports that were later submitted) from the various brochures and through on-site exercises. The most important publications in this body of brochure literature were *Népnevelő* (People's Educator) and *Agitátor* (Agitator), of which between

some 170,000 to 180,000 copies were printed in 1949 (p.43). The catechisms (such as, “What should we talk about in the village?” or “Mrs. Optimist talks to Mrs. Pessimist”) provided ammunition for the popular educators and for their reports on their work by offering sample questions and answers, instant argumentative principles, and data. As Huhák notes, “in the narratives of the reports, the characters in the *Népnevelő* booklets appeared in the tenement houses, the grocery stores, and the churches of Angyalföld, and they behaved in noticeably similar ways. The propaganda stories thus changed perceptions of reality” (p.50).

Analyses of the discourses of the agitator reports and discussion of their plot patterns, *sujets*, fables, and recurring *topoi*—for example, the story template about “apolitical women” (p.67)—could well have filled an exciting volume on their own. But what is particularly interesting is that the reports, which used the language of the propaganda of power (and thus constructed rather than described the world), were then submitted back to the party apparatus, which read them as “authentic” accounts of “reality.” It is thus hardly surprising that the party state “broke from the masses” (to quote a recurring phrase used in self-criticism of the party leadership).

One of the essential thesis statements of *Agitátorok* is that the reports that were submitted by the agitators should not be regarded as documentation of the efforts to “educate the people” but rather as key elements of the work these agitators performed. As Lenin himself emphasized, “the educators must be educated,” which meant learning the communist discourses (and word games, which Stephen Kotkin has characterized as “speaking Bolshevik”) through the process of writing reports. In her analyses of the reports, however, Huhák comes to the conclusion that the agitators often did not manage to master this language. According to a September 1954 memo, many propagandists “were not even familiar with such basic concepts as class, class struggle, the people, or the mode of production” (p.42). This was because the more talented members of the agitator cadre were promoted to higher levels to perform more important tasks, and thus the ideologically poorly trained people’s educators often had a grasp of their tasks and the ideas behind them that hardly went beyond mere recantation of key terms and phrases.

Before 1948, agitation mainly meant recruiting people to join the party, and by the time the Hungarian Workers’ Party was created in 1948 with the forced merger of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary and the Hungarian Communist Party (which really meant the liquidation of the Social Democratic

Party), the party already numbered some 887,000 members. This huge mass had to be mobilized by the agitators during the elections and other campaigns (such as the campaign to call for the “peace loan” or the anti-clerical campaign that accompanied the arrest of Archbishop of Esztergom, József Mindszenty). The number of agitators always swelled before elections, for example from 70,000 to 250,000 during the 1949 elections. But how many of these people were simply educators “on paper,” i.e., agents who did very little actual work? According to Huhák, the inclusion of someone’s name on the lists of agitators did not necessarily mean active participation, agitation often took place only on paper. In addition, party members sometimes did not even know that, under pressure to show results, in the reports submitted to the Agitation and Propaganda Department, the party secretary characterized them as people’s educators. The people’s educators often sought to find ways to get out of doing the tasks with which they were charged, and the high turnover rate among the agitators suggests that the number of “passive participants” was high and the work of agitation was often unrewarding.

Huhák also persuasively shows how the stories written on the basis of the plot models learned by the agitators in the training processes were shaped by the people’s educators according to their own goals. During the local agitation campaigns, there was room for people to pursue their own interests, and not only in one direction. In other words, the people who were the objects of these campaigns could use the agitators (and through them, the reports that were submitted to the higher authorities) as a channel of information, bringing their housing and public utility complaints to the party leadership. The most entertaining example of this was perhaps the case of women lobbying for cooking classes for men. They managed to send, through the agitators, the following message: “we are trying to study, to do party work, but we don’t have time for everything, so I ask the party organization to start a cooking course for our husbands so that we too can have some free time” (p.140).

People had to be cautious with their complaints, however. Anyone who went too far risked being labeled “politically underdeveloped,” “under the influence of the enemy,” or “reactionary.” As Huhák observes, “the individuals targeted by the people’s educators had to find a balance between complaining and expressing faith in the party” (pp.218–219). With her new book, Heléna Huhák offers a superb example of a deconstructive reading of sources on which a critical narrative of history can be based. She dismantles a series of topoi related

to the Rákosi regime by adopting a perspective from below and using micro-level analyses. She also offers an array of insights and valuable conclusions for those who are interested in party history and propaganda history in state socialist dictatorships.¹

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