

ALWAYS ON THE RUN: THE VICISSITUDES OF REALISM IN HUNGARIAN CRITICISM

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In this article I offer an overview of the ways in which the term realism has been understood and used in Hungarian literary criticism, from the introduction of the term into Hungarian discourses in the middle of the 19th century to the post-1989 period, when the term had to grapple with the legacy of its appropriation by the Socialist regime. I examine three specific junctures in the critical trajectory of Realism: the introduction of the term in the 1850s, the uses and abuses of the term by Marxist ideologues, and finally the aversion towards the term that emerged in the post-Socialist era. In addition to examining pivotal moments in the history of this critical concept in Hungarian literary discourse, my inquiry also offers a critical perspective from which to consider an enduring anxiety concerning the achievements, past and future, of Hungarian literary culture, an anxiety that finds expression in a symptomatic concern with the ways in which tendencies in Hungarian culture do or do not relate to cultural developments outside of Hungary.

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Realism has not fared well in Hungary, neither in literature nor in criticism. At times exaggerated, at other times snubbed or neglected, it has remained a sensitive and dubious issue. During its controversial career, realism has been both privileged and condemned from official critical positions, much as it has been fought both for and against from oppositional stances. Raised to the status of aesthetic ideology or despised as a decline in literary taste, realism has been seen as uncannily missing from Hungarian literary history or as something threateningly deluging Hungarian literature and depriving it of its allegedly genuine characteristics. It has been the burden of a better-to-be-forgotten past, a proof of the cultural decay of the present, or the promise of a brighter future.

In what follows I will not give a comprehensive survey of the term in Hungarian criticism, nor will I make more than passing remarks on the history of the Hungarian novel. Instead, I attempt to highlight three important and characteristic junctures in realism's critical trajectory. First, I will scrutinize how the term was

introduced during the 1850s into Hungarian critical vocabulary: attempting to track down the variety of meanings and fields in which the notion of “realism” figured at this early stage, I will delineate the diversity of literary (prose fiction, folkloristic poetry, literary history, national cultural development, reception of foreign cultures) and non-literary (philosophy, science, scholarship, economy, education, ethics) contexts that coexisted in its use. Then, taking a leap forward in chronology, I will try to uncover the intricacy of the Marxist uses and abuses of the concept of realism during the 1950–60s. And finally, with a glance at the post-Marxist trial of the term, I will touch on how and why realism has been recently dismissed from the critical vocabulary, and what prospects of revival seems to have appeared.

A Reluctant Devotion to the Real: the Polysemy of Realism in the 1850s

The way the notion of realism first appeared in Hungarian criticism somewhat foreshadowed the vicissitudes it was to go through. In literary contexts the term first showed up in the late 1850s, contemporaneously with major European literary cultures, where, despite previous scattered uses, realism as a systematical critical term came to be established when, after the self-imposed characterization of Gustave Courbet’s painting in 1855, it was extended to describe a literary style.¹ In Hungary, however, literary realism entered an intellectual landscape where the issues of “reality” and “realism” had already occupied a central place with various concepts of the “real” figuring in political, economic, cultural, philosophical, historiographic, and educational concerns. When the word acquired a literary significance, realism had to be accommodated to a wide and much-contested field of already established non-aesthetic meanings and usages. The ongoing debates over the nature of perceiving or representing reality and the role of the real (or material) in human life had decisive import on the way literary realism was conceived, received, practiced and theorized upon in decades to come.

After the fall of the 1848–49 revolution and the defeat in the war with Austria and Russia, Hungary’s political, economic, social and cultural life underwent a severe crisis. As a retribution for the “revolt”, the victorious Habsburg administration suspended political rights (military government gave way to civil administration only in 1853) and revoked the administrative independence the Hungarian Kingdom had formerly enjoyed within the Empire. In the state of nationwide depression and amid apocalyptic fears, limited public and informal discussions sought the perspectives of recovery. The debates over what kind of political attitude would be advisable, what kind of economic and cultural behavior should be adopted, and what kind of ethical stances would be agreeable, drew on the sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit dichotomy of *reality* and *illusion*. As many found

that the fading liberal and national political goals of the roaring 1830s and 1840s (in historiography labeled the Reform Era) had proved to be “illusory”, the intention to turn toward something “real” came to the fore in many intellectual and political endeavors. In his 1850 pamphlet *Forradalom után* [After the Revolution], the novelist and political journalist baron Zsigmond Kemény blamed the national predilection for “affected pathos” and “flowers of speech” in what he described as a general enmity to facing facts in a sober and rational way, and suggested that the collapse of the national cause was due to the adherence to illusions instead of rational plans.² In his claim Kemény drew on the observation made by count István Széchenyi in the early 1840s, namely that the favor of illusions and imagination was a genuine Hungarian characteristic and as such testified to the “oriental origin” of the Hungarians.³ (During the 1850s, this observation was increasingly referred to as a commonplace.) While relentlessly insisting that only “facts” should be taken into account when explaining political events, and pressing on a turn from fast-burning enthusiasm to prudence, from political daydreaming to calculation, Kemény added that the nation should “collect the remnants of its wealth, manage its estates, acquire, and labor” in “a relentless and sober way”, and as a result “we might not achieve what our sages prophesied, but could be happy after all”.⁴

Though his political judgments regarding the revolutionary years were generally disallowed, Kemény’s insistence on soberness, pragmatism, and accumulation was echoed in a wide range of discourses, voicing the imperative that the Hungarian public should make a shift from rhetoric to logic, from fancy to facts, from indulging in irrelevancies to practical occupations, from self-deception to knowledge, from falsehood to truth, all in all, from imagination to reality. Similar claims appeared in literary criticism, pressing authors to turn from lyric to epic poetry, from romance to novel, from literature proper to literary scholarship, that is, from subjective to objective genres. The critical suggestions that the exalted self-expressive outbursts of lyric poetry should be confined to a more “objectified” and “consolatory” lyrical voice equally relied on the anti-romantic eclipsing of the individual, on the post-revolutionary need for “soberness”, and on the increasing influence of positivism.⁵ In his long essay *Élet és irodalom* [Life and Literature], published in 1852–53, Kemény himself urged historical novelists to seek their sources in memoirs written in the age they aimed to depict instead of historiographic accounts in order to grasp the historical *Umwelt* of past events more immediately and more vividly, and to avoid “incongruent psychological motifs, fantastic figures and inherently untrue plots”.⁶ This claim, which Kemény supported both as a novelist and with publishing historical documents, introduced new criteria for verisimilitude and credibility in historical fiction.

In 1851 a heated debate developed in the Hungarian Academy’s periodical *Új Magyar Múzeum* [New Hungarian Museum] over the status of natural and social

disciplines. In the so called “Tudomány, magyar tudós”-debate [Science/Scholarship, Hungarian Scholar/ Scientist],⁷ the philosopher Gusztáv Szontágh argued that the propensity to illusions and the aversion to reality were the features of “young nations” like the Hungarian. His reasoning to leave the “age of idealism” behind and move on to the “age of realism” intertwined with his proposal for a new taxonomy of knowledge. Szontágh relied on an opposition between the “productive”, “state-sustaining” sciences of *realismus* (natural, military, and technical sciences, engineering, economics, etc.) and the “non-productive”, “sumptuous” field of *humanismus* (classical philology, historical scholarship, law, linguistics, etc.), and argued that financial, intellectual and institutional support should be given to the first.⁸ In the light of the fervently hoped national recovery, the contrast between the “ennobling” but otherwise “useless” humanities and the productive “realities” was reinforced by the dilemmas of educational reform, that is, whether to educate the post-revolutionary generations in “real” disciplines instead of the traditional emphasis on law and philology.⁹ Among others, Kemény again insisted on the need to popularize sciences of practical utility, and urged the Hungarian middle class (that is, small estate nobility) to turn to occupations more linked with everyday realities, both to further the development of civil (bourgeois) society and to avoid non-Hungarians taking key positions in what he predicted to be “an age of industry, commerce and money”.¹⁰ One of the novels Kemény wrote in the early 1850s, *Férj és nő* [Husband and Wife], used a marriage plot to play out the tensions between the new class of financiers and the old aristocratic order, to which he himself belonged, and related the contrast of self-delusion and self-knowledge in the disastrous fate of the main character to the clash between money and land, interest and tradition.

The urge for the realism of science and for the pragmatism of finance, however, gave rise to accompanying fears of “overstressing” material reality at the expense of the ideal aspects of life. While for many the “real” sciences appeared to be favorably supporting the nation’s recovery and development, parallel concerns emerged about how to preserve “humanistic” knowledge in the face of a “reality” where natural sciences outgrow historical scholarship and aesthetics, the search for material well-being overshadow moral principles, and mechanical laws threaten ideal standards. During the Science/Scholarship-debate, the literary historian Ferenc Toldy, opposing utilitarianism with Humboldtian notions of *Bildung*, insisted on the social value of humanities and on the utility of literature as the means that would elevate man from the “status of the animal”, and warned against the dire consequences of what he called “a realistic reaction” to the previous emphasis on the humanities.¹¹ Along with Toldy, other literati gave voice to similar fears and counterarguments. The leading poet of the age, János Arany repeatedly expressed in his correspondence, poetry, and criticism his disgust with “reality” both in life and literature. In *A lantos* [The Minstrel], written in the

autumn of 1849, the bard the poem stages is being chased by “a monstrous wraith, the *Real*”. A year later, refiguring the ancient topos of the storm-tossed vessel, he claimed in his poem *Reményem* [My Hope] to have been “exiled” from “the land of the bleak *real*”. In a letter written in 1860, looking back on this poem and the time that followed the collapse, he stresses that while seeking escape from the real, “I long for an ideal world not merely because that is the proper place for a poet, but because this daydreaming makes one forget the real, and alleviates its sufferings”.¹² In his 1861 poem *Vojtina ars poeticája* [Vojtina’s ars poetica], summarizing his aesthetic views, he emphasizes that in the “unfaithful faithfulness” characteristic of poetry “the magic of the song” depends not on the “real”, but on “its ethereal counterpart”. In his criticism, drawing on what had come to be the most prevalent critical dichotomy of the age, that of the “ideál” [ideal] and the “reál” [real], Arany maintained that “All *true* poetry is *ideal*. What is said to be *real* stands apart the boundaries of poetry”; therefore the “reál”, that is, the temporal, the contingent, the particular has to confide itself to formal features, for if “it intrudes from the surface to the substance” of the text then “it would cease to be poetry”.¹³ In his review on Friedrich Hebbel’s short epic *Mutter und Kind* (1859), Arany also argued that poetry “must remain what it is”, “a feast of the soul” and not a matter of the “everyday”. And while he admitted that Hebbel’s poem might give “a truthful picture of contemporary society”, he doubted whether the task of poetry is to thrust the reader into the very “harsh reality” that he tried to escape through reading poetry. While acknowledging that the novel could be the proper genre for real-life concerns, Arany insisted that a novel also could be remarkable “not because of, but despite” raising the issue of social suffering.¹⁴

In prose fiction, the young novelist Mór Jókai, who gained his immense and enduring popularity during the early 1850s, also confronted, in his own seemingly naïve but in fact devious way, the urge for more true-to-life stances. In his 1850 volume of short stories depicting the revolutionary days *Forradalmi és csataképek 1848 és 1849-ből* [Sketches of Battle from the Hungarian War of Freedom] the introduction of the piece *Az ércz leány* [A Girl of Ore] insisted on the peculiar need to “mythologize” the past:

Let us write mythology. Let us account the events of that year faithfully, truthfully, everything that happened, everything wonderful, superhuman, outstanding that we saw, experienced, and witnessed, and declare that it is merely a tale, otherwise no one would believe it.

The poet must have dreamt of all this.

So much grandeur, so much splendor, the reckless images of deeds exceeding human capabilities; where else could they have been born but in the phantasmagoric world of a visionary mind?

But would not the teardrop that runs the eye at the remembrance
of the names evoked tell that all this is not a dream but the dead glory
of a buried world?¹⁵

With his double-edged proposal of mythology writing, both ironic and melodramatic in kind, Jókai simultaneously accepted and eluded the reality criterion of historical representation. Being well aware of the possible objections to an idealized exaggeration of events and personalities in writing a historical “mythology”,¹⁶ Jókai here argues that in exceptional times reality can turn “mythical” and “myth” can become real. With this authorial credo, which he relentlessly followed throughout his long career, Jókai attempted to reconcile the opposition of truth and fancy in his own literary way. Through the portrayal of larger than life characters and romance-like plots Jókai not merely reversed the opposition of fact and fiction, but suggested that the two are, and better be, inherently inseparable. Here lies the irony of Jókai’s “mythology”. On the one hand, what he offered as a realistic picture of a “superhuman” past had to conceal itself as “mythological” to evade the criterion of true-to-life representation. On the other hand, by the melodrama of the “teardrop” revealing the secret common knowledge that it was not just a “dream”, he appealed to a community of remembrance with his readers, who, as he seemed to suppose, must have witnessed the same events in the same fanciful way, and thus would validate his “mythology” as a credible narration of pure reality.

As a matter of fact, Jókai had every right to assume that his readers would share his “mythological” realism. In the early 1850s the Hungarian public was immersed in a variety of spiritual practices, such as *table-dancing*, by which families sought contact with their relatives having disappeared on the battlefield with the help of the spectral world. Symptomatic of the coexistence of extreme degrees of reality-seeking and longing for consolation in illusions, the craze for table-dancing in the early 1850s showed a “suspension of disbelief” toward spiritual forces, similar to the eagerness with which the fiction-reading audience received Jókai’s exaggerations.¹⁷ The urge to encounter a spiritual or a “mythological” reality could be seen as part of the overall public longing for truth. (As an indication of the prolonged presence of this mentality even after the passing of straightforward spiritualism, Jókai’s practice of putting larger than life characters in romance-like plots continued to meet the public’s approval until the very end of his long career in the early 20th century.)

During the 1850s, the pro- and anti-reality discourses continued to run side by side. Toward the end of the decade, literary circles followed with growing impatience what they saw as the increasing influence of a not merely literary realism, but a general realism of life. The issue of *realismus* vs. *humanismus* in the taxonomy of disciplines, first discussed in 1851 during the Science/Scholarship-debate,

reappeared in 1857. In *Új Magyar Múzeum*, the editor Toldy stated that he decided to reopen the discussion because he regretfully recognized that “in the meantime the so called realism had occupied great fields of life”.¹⁸ Other literati were witnessing a growing imbalance between the real and the ideal as well. The topic was kept in focus in the newly founded *Budapesti Szemle* [Budapest Review], the leading periodical of the era, too.¹⁹ In volumes 7–8 (1858), the editor Antal Csengery started his series of essays on the world history of culture (beginning with India and China) with the exclamation: “Realism and idealism! antithetical tendencies none of which is solely able to make mankind happy.”²⁰ To enlighten “the true meanings of these two words”, Csengery defined *realismus* and *idealismus* as “labels of philosophical systems”, that is, parallel principles in the workings of world history from the earliest ages to the present, and he called for their reconciliation.

With others, however, the attempt to regain the lost balance between the real and the ideal motivated more fierce attacks. Around 1858–59 the humanistic aversion to the real or the material turned into a full-scale campaign against any kind of realism. The emergence of the notion of *literary realism*, as an application of this *general realism*, therefore signaled only a new stage in the ongoing collision between reality and ideality principles. Joining the debates over the meaning and conduciveness of “realism” of any kind, the question of literary realism was placed along these decade long intellectual anxieties. It explains, therefore, the apparent paradox why literary realism came to be snubbed by an overwhelming majority of critics, many of whom nevertheless had called for, without using the term realism, true-to-life representations in literature from the 1840s, or, on the other hand, supported the cultural program of pragmatism of the 1850s.

The campaign against literary realism culminated, finding a target in Balzac, in a lengthy summary of a prize-winning *Revue des deux Mondes* essay by the less-known French conservative critic Eugène Poitou, that appeared in the *Szemle* in 1858.²¹ Reviewing Balzac’s collected works, Poitou accused the by then deceased author of cynically and unrestrictedly representing the “hideous side of life” and of “breaking the ground for materialism and realism” in preferring the superficial “material surface” to the “substantially ideal”.²² The article, translated by the critic and historian Ferenc Salamon, served as a mouthpiece for the *Szemle*-circle’s overall opinion: with the authority drawn from the prestige of the *Revue*, it reinforced many of the remarks they had formerly made. The critic Pál Gyulai, a regular contributor to, and the future editor of the *Szemle*, had already argued in 1854 (in his review of Kemény’s novels, praising his psychological sensibility) that in Balzac “vice is always victorious”, with which he suggested that his novels gave no morally solid answer to the social and psychological questions they posed.²³ The opposition between the ideal and the real in Poitou’s argument suited perfectly the *Szemle*’s aesthetic views inasmuch as they also found disturb-

ing, not only in the realist novel but in art in general, what they saw as worldly, vulgar, and immoral in representations lacking poetic “idealization”.²⁴ With epistemology taking on a moral aspect, the question was not whether Balzac represented reality truthfully: their concern was that the way he depicted ordinary life, everyday people, and the forces that shape society displayed the immoral and the hideous in life “as the true picture of the real”.²⁵ Within the *Szemle*-circle’s idealist notion of “aesthetically true”, the representation of the “real” was supposed to point not to “mere life” but to its moral ideal: the closer art gets to “mere life”, the more inartistic it becomes. Therefore, the very impression that Balzac depicted life as realistically as a “daguerreotype” made his portraits only more “distorted”: without idealization human characters appear only from a deeply anti-poetical, ignoble physiognomic or anatomical perspective.²⁶ What the *Szemle*-critics, echoing Poitou, referred to as “idealization” was a conviction that in the ultimate instance art must reinforce and express the pre-determined (divine) ethical order of existence, and, as such, serve as consolation amid the inherently tragic conditions of human life.

With the notion of realism originating from outside literature, however, the question of realism as a literary mode was subsumed under the wider ideological issue of realism as a *world-view*. The rejection of Balzac, or what he was taken to stand for, linked the notion of literary realism to that of “materialism” which was associated not only with a nihilistic or skeptical philosophical stance but also with utilitarianism and greed. “Realism” as a style or a representational mode, therefore, merely expressed the underlying immorality of philosophical materialism and economic worldliness. In addition to vulgarity, Balzac was also found guilty of introducing “the spirit of commerce” into the literary field, which, being incompatible with the dignity of art, was felt to “degrade intellectual work to a commercial article”.²⁷ This is where the argument goes a full circle: utilitarian materialism as philosophical realism entails literary realism, which, in turn, implies the intrusion of capitalist values into a par excellence idealistic (that is, non-marketable) sphere, aesthetics. And if realism equals materialism, then the realist novel serves and promotes the immorality of business by the way it represents the world as well as by the way it turns *itself* into a commodity, a part of the commercialized world it represents. What the members of the *Szemle*-circle, along with Poitou, recoiled from was that at the intersection of economy and art human deeds would be deprived, if only apparently, of their inherent moral value which was ought to be expressed only through idealized (non-economic) and idealizing (moralistic) representations. That is, what was felt to be vulgar and materialist in realism equally applied to the style or subject of literary language and to the economic mode in which it was produced. Hence, the critique of Balzac was equally aimed at realist literature and the “realism of life” itself.

The argument of anti-realism was carried out on the largest scale by the aesthete and critic Ágost Greguss, who in his 1859 *A materialismus hatásairól* [On the Effects of Materialism], his inaugural lecture at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, gave a thorough philosophical overview of the issue. In his treatment, philosophical materialism (with its 18th century forerunners such as Holbach, La Mettrie, and Condillac) gave rise to realism in art, and it did so by permeating the principles and institutions of science/scholarship as well as the public and private morals and manners. Evoking the positions of the Science/Scholarship-debate, Greguss accused the materialism of natural sciences of “conquering” every, even non-material forms of knowledge, and saw in the intrusion of realism into education the “devilish” materialism in the disguise of “pragmatism”. As off-springs of philosophical realism, Greguss enumerated all the horrors of realism in literature and in the arts: with the depiction of the dismal, the gloomy, and the immoral in social life, realism turns character-portrayal into “anatomical description” and reduces psychology to physiology, dealing with man only as a “specimen” (*példány*) and not as an individual. Thus, the realist predilection for the “ugly” and the “sensual” in art coincides with moral nihilism and selfishness in public life, and with mechanical thinking in science. In the delight of the “ordinary” and the estrangement from “the noble” and “the superior”, Greguss predicted the general decline of the arts if they become “mere copying”.²⁸ Towards the end of the argument the lament over writers getting immersed in the material, that is, the “murderer of poetry”, rises to Carlylean outbursts against the banalities of capitalism and the rule of money that threaten to destruct the basis of social order. In conclusion, Greguss hints that materialism will ultimately lead to the “suicide” of mankind.²⁹ In the later part of his career, Greguss, as the professor of aesthetics at the university in Budapest from 1870 to 1882, continued to condemn every form of realism.³⁰ As it is clear from the volume that his pupils compiled after his death in 1882 from notes taken at his lectures, anti-realism remained the culmination point of his system: his lectures ended on mocking Zola and the “craziness” of naturalism.³¹

In the late 1850s hostile responses to realism in the form of moral dismissal or neoclassical or romantic aesthetic arguments were certainly not unique to Hungarian criticism. Poitou’s article itself, originally published in 1856, reminds us that realism was received as transgressing the acceptable and the representable in France as well.³² Nevertheless, what made the fastidious rejection of literary realism peculiar in Hungary was that the stigma of “realism” was not confined to prose fiction, but permeated the controversies around folkloric poetry as well. The translator-summarizer of Poitou’s essay, Salamon applied the same argument when assessing the poetry of the national icon, the late Sándor Petőfi, who died on the battlefield in 1849. In a long essay that appeared in 1859, also in the *Szemle*, Salamon, echoing the arguments of the Poitou-article he had translated in the pre-

vious year, claimed that in his revolutionary-political poetry Petőfi had committed “the fallacy of realism” for he failed to “idealize” his impressions.³³ Here realism is defined as the means of arousing ignoble passions instead of lofty emotions and unsettling the mind instead of raising and delighting the soul – independently of genre, for Salamon claims to base his argument on a notion of realism borrowed from the fine arts. On the one hand, he highly acclaims what he sees as “lifelikeness”, “verisimilitude”, and “honesty” in Petőfi’s amatory poetry, which, as he adds, “depicts the real in its reality”.³⁴ On the other, Salamon declines the realism of Petőfi’s political poetry, for it mistakes the role of the poet for that of the demagogue by “addressing the blood and the nerves”.³⁵ Distinguishing what he calls “the realism of the blood” from those parts of Petőfi’s poetry where “he brings the reality of life into his songs and epic poems”, Salamon stresses that the latter is *not* realism in the sense of the former, for it harmonizes “life” with the “greatest degree of ideality”.³⁶

The link Salamon made between Poitou’s anti-realist notion of prose fiction and Hungarian poetry was already anticipated in his choice of words. While describing the indecencies in Balzac’s style, Salamon’s translation used the Hungarian phrase *pórias* (rustic, coarse) which since the 1840s had been employed as a critical idiom to condemn excesses and distortions in folkloric poetry, first in Petőfi himself, then in his imitators.³⁷ In connection with this “unrefined” tradition of folkloric poetry, the term “real” acquired a further meaning: it came to figure as a counter-concept to the “ideal” in terms of historical periodization. In the 1847 essay *Egyéni és eszményi* [Individual and Ideal] by János Erdélyi, the leading Hungarian theoretician of folk poetry, the “individual” designated the true-to-life way of representation in art brought about by the national-romantic phase of cultural development, while the “ideal” referred to the bloodless style of the outdated universal-classical phase. Back then, Erdélyi argued for the “individual” in order to arrive at a genuinely national literature. He claimed that “life” exists only in individual forms, therefore the representation of the real in literature should include both the beautiful and the ugly. A decade later, however, in his 1859 essay *A legújabb magyar líra* [Recent Hungarian Lyric Poetry], the first part of which appeared in the same issue of the *Szemle* where Salamon’s essay on Petőfi ended, Erdélyi came to take an opposite view. He claimed that by the popularity of what he felt extravagant and excessively “material” in contemporary folkloric poetry (use of local dialects, blasphemous or extreme metaphors, exaggerated nationalism), the “individual” had reached an excessive measure and become a threat to aesthetical refinement. Erdélyi’s change of opinion apparently reflects the ongoing campaign against realism: in his 1859 survey, in accordance with the opposition that had become prevalent since his earlier work, he rephrased his dichotomy of ideal vs. individual as ideal vs. real. Redefining his terms according to the current realism-controversies, he also pressed, in a Hegelian fash-

ion, for a reconciliatory synthesis between a regained “ideal” and the adverse abundance of the “real”.³⁸

Similar efforts of balance-keeping characterized Gyulai’s view of the novel. In his double-front war on realism and romanticism, in which the refusal of Sue or Balzac was accompanied by that of Victor Hugo, Gyulai relentlessly criticized Jókai for “lacking the sense of reality” and for embedding his fiction “not in the idealization of the real but in its falsification and its senseless exaggeration”.³⁹ Jókai defended the conventions of his prose with a similar ambivalence. In his late autobiographical sketch in 1895 he maintained that in his own way he had been a realist all along: “I attempted to find the true figures of life (...) and that I depict extraordinary figures and unusual situations does not make neither the subject, nor the character impossible.”⁴⁰ In this self-portrayal Jókai echoed the epilogue he wrote to his 1858 novel *Az elátkozott család* [The Cursed Family]. Back then, Jókai defined his position amidst the diatribes against realism by declaring to have been part of the novelistic current under critical attack for “scrutinizing life too closely” and “eclipsing the world of ideals”. However, with a characteristic move, Jókai justified this practice by claiming that the “poet needs to study life because it is life that is poetic, not the world of ideals”.⁴¹ The hint that the task of literary realism, a term Jókai carefully evaded, is to represent life precisely because in a sense life is more pervasively poetic than the ideals, clearly follows and justifies the larger-than-life realism he first formulated in his proposal of historical and political “mythology writing”.

While the vulgar and the material in “realism” was equally attacked in French prose and Hungarian poetry, the question of realism also had affiliations with the *Szemle*-circle’s overall assessment of inter-national cultural exchanges. The condemnation of Balzac was part of a wider concern as to how conducive the appearance of foreign literary products would be to the national culture. Balzac’s *Eugénie Grandet* had already been translated in 1843, in a series of foreign novels (*Külföldi Regénytár*) by the prestigious Kisfaludy Society, the leading literary association of the era. The fact that it had been published among classic and prominent contemporary authors from Cervantes to Dickens signaled a high critical esteem and an intention to make Balzac popular in Hungary.⁴² As a representative of contemporary European fiction, Balzac was praised then, without using the term “realist”, as a faithful recorder of social facts and manners in both urban and provincial life, as someone who reveals the secrets of both high society and the underworld somewhat in the manner of Boz and Eugène Sue.⁴³ In contrast, Balzac’s Hungarian assessment came to be determined during the 1850s by the emerging critical opposition between the French and the British novel in general. The phrase “English novel” came to serve not only as a designation of cultural origin, but as a critical term that referred to a specific way of narration (psychologically motivated, coherent story-telling with a harmonious world-view) that ensured

aesthetic quality and was held up as a model to follow. By contrast, the phrase “French novel” came to point to a novelistic method (romantic adventurousness, unmotivated characters, incoherent story-telling, cheap entertainment) that the critics advised to avoid. The castigation of Balzac’s realism was, therefore, part of the general denunciation of French literature, including Sue, George Sand, and even the romanticism of Victor Hugo, as counter-examples to the moral realism of Dickens and Thackeray.⁴⁴

The argument that French and English literature provided two possible models to follow according to their respective modes of realism was most explicitly formulated in another *Szemle*-article entitled ‘The Foreign Novel’ by the critic and translator Károly Bérczy.⁴⁵ Enumerating the critical attacks against the “French novel”, which would reappear as the defects of “realism” in the Poitou-essay two issues later, Bérczy castigated Balzac, Sue, Dumas, and Sand, for they “depict society as it is” by “idolizing vice” and “naturalizing frivolity”, and, therefore, by “justifying the depravity of the world”. The “English novel”, he averred in turn, is superior both in its “artistic structure” and “moral tendency”: contrary to the “absurd characters and impossible events” in the French novel the down-to-earth characters of the English are portrayed “as we meet them in society, however, in an idealized form as necessitated by artistic form”.⁴⁶ As Bérczy added, while the English novel portrays domestic or public life in a “natural course of events”, it also “calms” the soul and makes the reader more susceptible to “the beautiful, the good, and the righteous”.⁴⁷ When Bérczy argued that the popularity of Sand and Sue in Hungary had an adverse effect on the public’s taste, he also referred to a supposed affiliation between the English and the Hungarian national characters – a commonplace at the time based on the ostensible similarities between the British and the Hungarian legal systems. However, Bérczy also doubted that the Hungarian public had the cultural abilities to appreciate the moral realism of the English novel. As he expounded, while *Hard Times* (which appeared in Hungarian translation, along with *Bleak House*, in 1855–56) and its attack on materialism was “effective” in England where the philosophy of business threatened to wipe out every poetic feature of life, it proved to be “ineffectual” in Hungary, because “in our midst, we, if in anything, differ from the English in that we do not idolize materialism, but on the contrary, like to live in the ideal world of illusions”. As such, *Hard Times* “could not arouse as much attention as an unresolved and thus discarded enigma”.⁴⁸ With some irony in connecting and distinguishing British and Hungarian mentalities, the hint that the Hungarian public, living in a not-yet industrial society, could not appreciate the antagonism *Hard Times* presents between utilitarian industrialism and the poetry of life also serves to mock the Hungarians’ reluctance to face reality. While rejecting both the British materialism of business and the Hungarian adherence to illusions, Bérczy highlights the difference between not only two social worlds, but also two senses of reality: the cri-

tique of a materialist view of reality in a British novel cannot be understood and appreciated if one is reluctant to face the very reality of materialism in the first place. (Bérczy, however, seems to have failed to acknowledge that the way Dickens portrays utilitarian education in *Hard Times* could have quite easily found a Hungarian context in the opposition introduced by the Science/Scholarship-debate between “realist” natural sciences and “fanciful” humanities.)

As far as wider critical positions were concerned, the morally determined stand against realism in prose fiction was accompanied by a general ambivalence about the genre of the novel itself. A central critical issue of the decade was whether the epic or the novel corresponded more with the requirements of the age. Many worried that with epic poetry losing ground, a genre that the critic Gyulai and the poet Arany equally prompted to identify with Hungarian national character, Hungarian literature would be distorted. The dilemmas of how to assimilate the currents of European culture without losing national identity had, therefore, implications for genre preferences. Anticipating the critical efforts of the post-revolutionary era to build a literature of *national* genres, Gyulai claimed in his 1850 *Társaséletünk* [Our Public Life] that literature as a social system had to accommodate itself to the overall cultural features that had organically developed within society.⁴⁹ From this perspective, the portrayal of “urban depravity” by Balzac or Sue appeared not only as the expression of the inferior popular taste of the French middle classes, and as such alien to the Hungarian national character, but turned the adaptation of French realism into a threat to the integrity of Hungarian literature itself.

In the apocalyptic political mood of the 1850s, fueled by the fear that the country would be assimilated into the Habsburg empire and the cultural or economic power would be taken over by non-Hungarian or cosmopolitan elements (ethnic minorities, Jews, Germans), literature was considered not only the means by which the nation could express, but by which it had to *maintain* itself. The crucial role that was attributed to literature in the nation’s recovery explains why critics refused to base that role on what they felt as immoral, hideous, depraving and vulgar in literary realism. The passionate repulsion with which they responded to it therefore did not stem from a pure idealism aimed to distance art from reality. Quite on the contrary, it showed their deep concern for their mutual determination. The relationship between everyday life and literature had already been contested in the discussion of József Eötvös’s novel *A falu jegyzője* [The Village Notary] (1845).⁵⁰ While Eötvös described the political and social critique of his novel as the necessary subordination of “beauty” to the dissemination of “truth” as exemplary for the task of literature, his opponents raised the question of the legitimacy of political critique in literature, claiming that art’s close connection with the vulgarity of the everyday world would contaminate the ideal sphere of the aesthetic.⁵¹ As a continuation of this debate, the anti-realist current of criticism in the

1850s urged for a close but ethically determined and idealistically informed relationship between life and literature.

Anti-realism as a critical principle underpinned, therefore, the cultural policy that the *Szemle*-circle envisioned, and it had clear implications for post-revolutionary politics. Aesthetic, social and ethical judgments were in a large part determined by the ultimate political goal of the nation's recovery. The harsh demand for self-analysis and self-critique that was voiced shortly after the collapse of 1849, gradually turned into a milder effort to prevent the "excesses" that would threaten the national consensus on social and political issues. The counter-concept of realism, *idealization*, evoked the need for appeasement and reconciliation with political resonances: the anti-realism of aesthetic consolation was designed to support political consolidation. In the repeated disapprovals of literary realism, the intention to regain and retain the balance of the ideal and the real in the field of literature, served as an aesthetic form of the political consensus.

One sees, then, at the turn of the 1850s a merger of similar arguments from prose fiction and poetry to painting and sculpture, cultural and educational policy, all in favor of some kind of balance between realism and idealism, acclaiming the "truthfulness" of representation only when accompanied by consolation and harmony in "idealized realism". On the one hand, these arguments endorsed the reality-claims of the natural sciences and historical scholarship, if based on "positive facts", but, on the other, they cautioned against materialism if pervading every field of knowledge and feeling. In these balance-keeping efforts realistic and anti-realistic claims frequently intertwined: the reluctance to face the non-pleasant of the real in art went hand in hand with a heightened epistemological awareness in historical scholarship. In the same issue where Poitou's anti-realist article appeared, the historian Móric Lukács started to publish his long essay, drawing on Niebuhr and Macaulay, on the question of credibility in Roman history. Picking up, probably unwittingly, the thread of Jókai's claim of factual fiction taking the guise of mythological history writing, Lukács pressed for demythologizing the sources, hence argued for realism in historiography, without using the term. On the other hand, he ultimately doubted whether truth could be completely distinguished from myth, which, he added, conveys the very beauty of Roman history.⁵²

The efforts to promote one meaning of realism and condemn the other (like in Salamon's distinction between the "realism of blood" and the harmonious "lifelikeness" in the case of Petőfi) required careful compromises between the aesthetic question of beauty, the social question of order, the moral question of virtue, and the epistemological question of truth. With all the aversion of the Hungarian critics to what they found all too real and material in life and art, and with all their sympathies for Dickens's moral realism, the "two and two are four" reality of Mr. Gradgrind from *Hard Times* still had a great share in their concerns. This interiorized contradiction between the devotion to and the recoil from the real has

been aptly labeled as the attitude of *fact-revising*.⁵³ This attitude implied that “given” facts must be revised according to consciously chosen values: in the course of the profound, scrupulous, but *not unreserved* efforts to take stock of the real, the Existent has to be compared to an ideal form of the Possible. With ideality taken as a standard (and as the essence of being human), the pure existence of a fact does not immediately entail consent or affirmation even if it refers to unalterable conditions. This rejection of ontological or epistemological *Realpolitik* underpinned the political practice of “passive resistance” (the widespread, but not general, refusal to cooperate with the Habsburg administration) as well as the outbursts against materialism. In the mutual determination of politics, literary criticism, cultural and social theory, the question of what is entailed in valid knowing implied the ultimate question of righteousness. With the politicization and moralization of values, the worship of mere facts was felt to be equal to the amorality of political survival. The insistence on the difference between what exists and what can be approved of provided a framework, both metaphysical and positivistic in its kind, which enabled this simultaneous longing for the real and the ideal, knowledge and imagination. And when it came to determining aesthetic principles, the attitude of fact-revising led to the joint rejection of “phantasms” and the reproduction of “mere reality”.⁵⁴ This explains why romanticism, which the *Szemle*-circle deemed deceptive, untrue, outdated and fueling national illusions (of which, one might add, aesthetic idealization is but a form), came to be refused along with realism.

In summary, what we see in Hungary in the 1850s is a wide and dense semantic field in which the variants and derivatives of terms like “real”, “realist”, “realism” figured as homonyms for many supplementary and contradictory senses. A “realist” could equally mean someone who worked in the field of natural sciences, a poet who exceedingly drew on the formal “materiality” of language, a novelist who depicted everyday reality “unreservedly”, or any person who lacked ideal ethical standards, had a “materialist” or utilitarian worldview, or was cynically immersed in seeking only earthly pleasures or financial gain. The use of “realism” as an umbrella term with multifarious extensions ranging from politics to morality, aesthetics to science, education to economy, served as an ambiguous focal point for the intellectual endeavors of the era and provided a site for coming to terms with the cultural and political challenges of post-revolutionary recovery. Hence, the treatment of literary realism was inseparable from political aspirations (revolution, recovery, progress, resistance), the revision of knowledge (“productive” vs. “unproductive” disciplines), ethics (how to praise virtue, how to condemn vice), aesthetics (idealization vs. mimesis), psychology (soul vs. anatomy), and the questions of national character (what are we like; what ought we to be).

During the 1850s and 1860s, Hungarian society was transforming at a relatively quick pace, but politically remained in suspension. The strategy of “passive

resistance” was a deliberate, and in a way successful, reluctance to surrender to political and social realities. Nevertheless, this strategy pointed towards the 1867 Compromise with the Habsburgs and the birth of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and was itself an ultimate attempt to reconcile illusion and reality, desire and coercion. The anxiety of having lost too much of the ideal, however, was lurking in the ideological ground of the new state, which, until its disintegration in 1918, continued to rest on suppressed desires for another reality on all political sides. These tensions are particularly clear in the conspicuous presence of Quixotean figures in the post-1849 and especially in the post-1867 Hungarian novel. The prevalence of anachronic protagonists who tend to misinterpret, misjudge, misconceive, convert or substitute the real in favor of their delightful historical, social, or emotional illusions, also highlight the emerging controversies between heroic and commercial values, tradition and modernity. The trajectory of the literary eccentric, the character who is alien in his own political, social, or cultural environment, and marginalizes and excludes himself from the accepted forms of behavior and knowledge, leads from Kemény’s 1855–57 novel *Özvegy és leánya* [Widow and Daughter] and Gyulai’s 1857 short novel, *Egy régi udvarház utolsó gazdája* [The Last Lord of the Old Manor-House] through László Arany’s 1872 epic *A délibábok hőse* [The Hero of the Mirages] and János Asbóth’s 1876 novel *Álmok álmodója* [A Dreamer of Dreams], to Sándor Bródy’s *Don Quijote kisasszony* (1886) [Ms. Don Quixote] and Kálmán Mikszáth’s *Beszterce ostroma* (1894) [The Siege of Beszterce], *A gavallérok* (1897) [The Gentlemen] and *Új Zrinyiász* (1898) [A New Zriniad]. The persistence of this tradition in late 19th century Hungarian literature reflects upon a society that was entrapped in an ambiguous division between reality and illusion, for instance, between economic modernization and a state driven ideological historicization of social practices and values.

Symptomatically, the political and economic disenchantment that followed 1867 (and the *Gründerzeit* of fully fledged capitalism with its periodical crises from the 1870s onward) was accompanied by the institutionalization of the idealist aesthetic ideologies of the 1850s. The opposition of the “ideal” and the “real” continued to permeate critical vocabulary. The most influential critic of the age, Pál Gyulai, whose aesthetic views developed along the anti-realist currents of the 1850s and came to dominate academic literary criticism until the end of the century, took pains to maintain the ambivalence of art being simultaneously “true” and “idealized”. Facing a literary scene in which realism was not merely a threat anymore, but the disturbing reality of the emerging naturalism,⁵⁵ Gyulai still insisted in his 1885 lecture *A költészet lényegéről* [On the Essence of Poetry] that “poetry, at any rate, is the faithful though idealized portrayal of life, and even the most eccentric realist could not do without a certain degree of idealization”.⁵⁶ Gyulai, whose short novel, *Udvarház* contrasted the reluctance to accept the

post-revolutionary social and political realities with the chasing of ghost-like illusions, continued to demand from the artist to be “the lofty and compassionate explainer and consoler of life”.⁵⁷

Showing No Mercy: Hungarian Marxism and its Realism

From the mid-1940s onwards, communist ideology started to pervade every field of culture and scholarship, excluding, banning, and condemning all former “bourgeois” approaches. In literary criticism, the Marxists, many of whom, including György Lukács himself, returned from their Moscow exile in 1945, attempted to radically rewrite, from a position of force, Hungarian literary history.⁵⁸ Their ambition was to reconstruct a revolutionary teleology in which previous developments led to what they called the present “democratization” of literature. As early as 1946, Lukács suggested in his essay *Demokrácia és kultúra* [Democracy and Culture] that “the whole of the past must be re-evaluated” in order to “forge a new national tradition”.⁵⁹ In this process, the concept of realism was to play a crucial though controversial role. In 1948, when the Marxists were taking over the *Magyar Irodalomtörténeti Társaság* [Hungarian Society for Literary History], a key step in the Stalinization of the institutions of Hungarian criticism, Lukács made an inaugural speech as the new head of the Society. He insisted once again on the need for “a thorough and fundamental revision of Hungarian literary history” along the “reflection theory” of Marxist aesthetics and “a new concept of realism”. And, as Lukács added, in uncovering the true yet hidden pattern of ideological evolution, that is, the “triumph of realism” as envisaged by Engels, Marxist critics “should show no mercy”.⁶⁰ Despite the ups and downs of Lukács’s position in the party hierarchy and the modifications he made (or was pressed to make) to his concept of realism with regard to *socialist realism*, his initiative remained the guiding principle for both historical scholarship and the criticism of contemporary literary production.⁶¹

The enormous ideological importance that was thus attached to the notion of realism in cultural policy required intricate interpretative maneuvers to arrive at an appropriate picture of literary development. Because Lukács had only limited familiarity with (and limited interest in) the Hungarian literary tradition, these adjustments had to be carried out mainly by others. To meet the task in a systematic way, the *Society*, still headed by Lukács, held a three-day congress in November 1955 under the title *The Questions of Realism in Hungarian Literature*. The event was attended by representatives of the other socialist countries, including the Soviet Academy. In his presidential address Lukács declared that the “ideological battle” that started in 1945 for the acknowledgement of realism being more than

just an outdated style “has been won.”⁶² Accordingly, the Congress aimed to outline the literary progress that allegedly led from rudimentary forms of realism in early Hungarian literature to the socialist realism of the present. The challenge they had to face was that the era most crucial to Lukács’s vision of realism, the mid-nineteenth century, generated only a weak tradition of realist fiction. Therefore, while critics at the Congress relentlessly insisted that “the main stream of Hungarian literature had turned into the struggle to achieve critical realism”,⁶³ and that the struggle between realism and anti-realism had been the literary equivalent of the political struggle between “progressive” and “retrograde” social elements,⁶⁴ at the same time they had to account for the “national peculiarity” of the particular absence of a genuine Hungarian realism. The impression of Hungarian literature having failed to achieve the stage of (critical) realism at its proper time led to an ideological anxiety that the national cultural heritage might not suit the pattern prescribed by Marxist literary theory.⁶⁵ In order to compensate for the ensuing feeling of cultural inferiority, national literary history had to be awkwardly adjusted to the preordained scheme of historical development.

Approaching literary history from a Marxist perspective on social and political development, the speakers attributed the backwardness or irregularity in literary evolution to the slow and fragmented nature of ideological progress. The survival of “reactionary romanticism” was assigned to what they saw as distortions in Hungarian social and political history. As to realism, most of them agreed that the “realist mainstream” did not develop in a linear fashion: the 1840s brought about “promising realistic tendencies” (labeled “revolutionary realism”), but due to the lack of a social force to lead a new revolution after the failure of 1848–49, the triumph of Hungarian critical realism was interrupted, delayed, and forced to make certain “detours” between the 1850s and the 1870s. Towards the fin de siècle the “suppressed critical realist tendencies were liberated”, although the “microscopic self-analysis” of some radical intellectuals and decadent aristocrats produced neither great nor progressive art, merely “politically impotent” forms of naturalism. Sporadic efforts to arrive at a comprehensive and critical social survey produced merely torsos (like Zsigmond Justh’s novel series, which remained unfinished due to the author’s early death) or failed to go beyond the scope of journalistic genres and short forms of prose fiction.

To avoid the embarrassment of finding realism proper a missing link in Hungarian literary evolution, its notion had to be simultaneously narrowed and overstretched. On the one hand, realism was identified with almost exclusively political meanings. It came to embrace not poetical devices or stylistic tendencies, but “progressive” political ideas (plebeian sentiments, anti-Habsburg commitment, and a zeal for national independence) entertained by certain authors and critics.⁶⁶ The more an author seemed to be devoted to these causes, the more he was taken to be a realist representative of the “true feelings” of his age.⁶⁷ Shifting realism

from “formal features” to an umbrella term for political values also helped to solve another distressful problem: if realism was *per definitionem* the highest level of aesthetic and ideological production, how were those national classics to be understood who hardly worked along realist principles, or, like Arany and Jókai, openly rejected them? The dilemma of how to retain the canonical status of the national classics if they do not fit into the ideologically favored way of writing was dissolved by simply equating realism and “great art”, regardless of genre, poetics, or style. As several speakers insisted, realism was to be taken as a “term of appraisal” and not of “classification”. Therefore, inasmuch as realism does not refer to a literary movement but to the highest aesthetic quality, every valuable work could be deemed realist. On the other hand, while reducing the meaning of realism to political progressivity and great art, its generic scope was extended way beyond prose fiction.⁶⁸ To fill up the theoretically prescribed framework, lyrical and epic poetry had to be included, so much so that due to his revolutionary and plebeian commitments the poet Sándor Petőfi was considered the greatest realist author of his era, and his romantic fairy tale *János vitéz* (1844) [John the Valiant] written in heroic stanza was declared to signal the onset of Hungarian critical realism.⁶⁹

These adjustments to the notion of realism led to considerable inconsistencies, even paradoxes. The harshest debate erupted over the question of how to account for the neglect or the explicit refusal of realism by the most prominent literati of the 1850–60s. The keynote speaker on 19th-century realism, János Barta, criticized these decades for replacing the pre-1849 commitment to social transformation with idealist moralism. As he expounded, the literature of the era staged “idealistically” determined “types”, and not social but moral conflicts, and the collision of ethical forces lacked the basic requirement of “critical realism”, namely social determination.⁷⁰ The secretary of the Society, István Király, who had been a key figure in the Stalinization of cultural policy, angrily justified in his response the anti-realist current of the 1850s, and insisted that in the post-revolutionary era the “road of progress” and “true realism” resided, for the time being, precisely in what he called an “idealized realism”, which “reached back” to romanticism in order to maintain the temporarily defeated political ideals and to keep up the national spirit.⁷¹ The paradoxical nature of these ideological maneuvers became most manifest in the treatment of Kemény. Even from a Marxist perspective, the poetics of his novels showed that he came closest to contemporary European realism. Kemény was also among the very few who dismissed the tendencies of idealization, relying on notions of biological determination and physiognomy in detailing psychological motivation. However, because his political views were unacceptable (he deemed both the revolutionary sentiments and the idea of an independent Hungary illusory or leading to catastrophic effects regarding precisely the national cause), Kemény, as Király argued, only *appeared* to be a realist, but since he opposed the course of progress, which carried the “true values of realism”

in the “mask of anti-realism”, he was in fact an anti-realist in the disguise of a realist.⁷² As the other hard-boiled party critic Pál Pándi added, in this case “anti-realism” turned out to be, on a more profound level, “true revolutionary realism”.⁷³ In the end, Kemény was condemned for confining his analysis to ethical or psychological aspects and deliberately avoiding social critique, just as Lukács criticized Flaubert. Kemény’s analytical rigor was taken as the very sign of his contemptible skepticism.⁷⁴ (Kemény’s treatment followed Lukács in another crucial respect: Lukács had already warned in 1948 that the revision of literary history must not lead to the discovery that “reactionary writers” were in fact “progressive”.⁷⁵)

In this awkward manipulation of terminology, the desperate efforts to keep the politically agreeable but non-realist national classics in high esteem in the realist canon run parallel to the banishment of politically unacceptable authors with disturbingly realist features to the margins of literary history. With “anti-realism” appearing in the guise of realism, and “true realism” refusing realist poetical devices, the debate reached ideological clarity at the expense of an ultimate conceptual confusion.

While the ideological debate on the relation between socialist realism (which I cannot discuss here) and the heritage of critical realism lingered on in the 1960s,⁷⁶ the Congress managed to ensure the position of realism as the official aesthetic ideology, determining its treatment in decades to come. The six-volume *Academic History of Hungarian Literature* (published between 1964 and 1966) dealt with the question in a more moderate fashion. Most of the key chapters on 19th century realism were written by the head of the Academy’s Institute for Literary Studies, István Sőtér. It underlined the crucial importance of the question but also signaled the intention to arrive at a conciliatory view. In Sőtér’s perspective, the 19th century Hungarian novels appeared to be stuck between romanticism and realism, merging their features but never getting properly rid of the former. In the opening sentence of his main chapter on ‘Romanticism and Realism’, Sőtér declared that “reality is in constant development and transformation”, and he went on arguing that reality is not always clearly conceivable, therefore, realism cannot be a relevant approach at every historical period, and even when it is, reality might be agreeably represented by diverse poetical devices depending on the author’s stature.⁷⁷ Neither element of this argument would have been thinkable at the 1955 Congress. Sőtér implicitly suggested that the Congress, where he chaired the session on 19th century realism but made only a few remarks, failed to produce a viable theoretical and historical framework of realism in Hungarian literature. While maintaining the key ideological aspects, Sőtér’s venture put more emphasis on poetic features, like the realistic potential of the much-blamed anecdotal tradition. He established a framework where the absence of realism proper was substituted for by “provisional and transitional forms”, such as the novel in verse, and found the true achievements of 19th century Hungarian realism outside the realm of

prose fiction, in the epic poetry of János Arany. In this light, he managed to ease some of the awkwardness of the historical scheme designed at the Congress, in which a surviving romanticism was immediately followed by a full-fledged critical realism in the early 20th century. In his treatment of realism in the *Academic Literary History* Sótér, who had to compensate throughout his career for the non-Marxist works he wrote before Stalinization, attempted to arrive at a compromise between national values and communist teleology, and to ease the contradictions between Marxist theory and the national critical heritage.

The Dismissal of Realism after Marxism

In the following decades the ideological tensions around realism, which were partly created by personal rivalries among critics, deeply compromised the whole issue, and discouraged scholars outside party circles to engage in it. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a short-lived current of Hungarian structuralism was publicly castigated precisely for being a formalistic antithesis to Lukács's theory of realism.

The only significant non-Marxist approach to the theory of realism came from Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's 1989 monograph on Kemény.⁷⁸ Its narratological perspective gave an implicit critique of the prevalent Marxist critical tradition. Disapproving both Lukács's theory of mimesis ("the correct and profound mirroring of reality") and René Wellek's definition of realism ("the objective representation of contemporary social reality"), Szegedy-Maszák insisted that "reality" is an ever-changing "system of institutionalized values" and reminded the readers that literary realism simultaneously constructs and describes its "reality".⁷⁹ Enumerating the traditional attributes of historical realism (the denial of the fantastic, clear referentiality and transparency, the neglect of inner life, omniscient narrator, and the lack of narratorial intrusion), he demonstrated their limited applicability, and showed that realism eventually failed to correspond to its ideal of language as a neutral medium of representation. Besides highlighting what he found as characteristically realist elements in prose fiction (the peculiar temporal-spatial structure of frequentative narration and the constant efforts of the narrator to maintain a dialogue with the reader through language games that are intended to create the impression of verisimilitude), he came to define realism as "a way of reading".⁸⁰ As far as Kemény's novels were concerned, the monograph focused on the way free indirect speech (and inner monologue) came to organize narrative strategies, stressing that in the psychological representations the felt inadequacies of omniscient narration resulted in the proliferation of competing meanings. Highlighting the pervasive ambiguity of Kemény's characters, the study suggested that the undecidability of moral dilemmas weakens textual transparency as well.⁸¹

The most remarkable achievement of Szegedy-Maszák's study was that it showed how Hungarian realism at its best was able to address its own controversies. After 1989, however, as a response to its Marxist overemphasis, the whole notion of literary realism tended to disappear from Hungarian critical vocabulary. If it appeared, it merely figured as a scapegoat for the distortions in critical life and was turned into a counter-concept to romantic, modernist and postmodernist aesthetic inventions. In historical surveys the term "realism" came to be substituted by "modernity", or as in the flourishing romanticism studies, was considered a temporary degradation of a romantic semiosis seen to be continuous to modernism. When mentioned at all, it was only to reinforce the uncontrollable nature of language over hopeless efforts to capture reality in representation. (To give but one example, the new current of historical novels, an emblematic genre of the 1990s, enjoyed critical welcome or refusal according to the extent at which it seemed to follow "historiographic metafiction" in leaving behind the reality-claims of 19th century historical fiction and its devotion to facts and comprehensive narratives.)

It is worth noting that realism underwent a similar loss of prestige in Western criticism, too, but there realism came to be seen as an example of philosophical and ideological naivety, or was condemned for being a means of oppressive bourgeois ideologies. Here realism was dismissed for having compromised itself with oppressive Marxist ideologies: with its dismissal Hungarian literary criticism celebrated its own liberation from politically distorted interpretations and canon-formations.

As the new critical orthodoxy was based on the denial of referentiality, the previous Marxist urge to find at least sporadic traces of realism proper in Hungarian literary history got reversed. Novels once celebrated as realist were systematically liberated from the now compromising label. Gyulai's 1857 short novel *Udvarház* is a spectacular case in this respect. In its own time, it was considered too much of a realist novel and was dismissed for giving "mere reality" without holding up something ideal.⁸² In Marxist literary history it was considered a promising though ultimately failed attempt to achieve genuine critical realism.⁸³ In a recent comprehensive Hungarian literary history, it was praised for showing remarkable "late-romantic" features of deconstructive disfiguration that were previously "mistaken" as "realist elements".⁸⁴ The same novel had thus been treated favorably or unfavorably according to whether it was "still", "already", "not-yet", or "not-at-all" realist. Along similar lines, the former condemnation turned into appraisal in the case of Jókai. His larger than life characters and romance-like plots, previously seen to be lacking realistic coherence and credibility, now appeared to testify to a very postmodern denial of narrative integrity and causality. His portrayal of personality as being dispersed in masks, roles and misrepresentations were celebrated as the generic refusals of realism.⁸⁵ The tradition of anecdotalism

in Jókai and Mikszáth, formerly disapproved as an obstacle in the way of achieving true realism, also came to be celebrated as resulting in heterogeneous and fragmentary narrative structures denying the possibility of coherent realistic plots.⁸⁶

While Lukács's legacy was severely criticized around 1990, the anti-Lukács sentiment soon turned into neglect. Recently, however, a new generation of critics rediscovered, if only critically, the Marxist heritage, and attempted to redefine the tradition of realism. It has been shown how by the metaphors of seeing "visual" realism becomes "disfigured" in Mikszáth's "skeptical modernism",⁸⁷ the role of self-restrictions in the formation of Lukács's realist canon has been studied as an instance of the *ascetic* ethical element in communist self-fashioning,⁸⁸ studies on the institutional history of the Stalinization of literary criticism in the 1950s have investigated the role realism came to play in that process.⁸⁹ Along with the discourse analysis of Hungarian Marxism and the refiguration of 19th century realist fiction, Zsolt Bagi's analysis of Péter Nádas's *Emlékiratok könyve* [Book of Memoirs] (1986) made a singular though remarkable attempt to redefine the theory of realism. Through a critical revision of Lukács, and part of a broader venture into the phenomenology of literary language, Bagi comes to recognize Nádas's prose as a genuine and intricate example of "circumscriptive realism". Distinguishing it from *description*, Bagi makes the claim that *circumscription* marks the ultimate self-consciousness of writing in a complexity that narration and description cannot achieve. Radically revising the inherited critical terms, Bagi finds as "realism" writing that creates its own "structure" and resists the temptation to acquire meaning from the integration into a story or an image. In Nádas's case, it is his page-long sentences that thwart the rule of "narrative" that would tend to turn writing into a novel or a memoir: the "reality" of the text's "world", therefore, overwrites the "ideality" of its "structure".⁹⁰ The irony of this critical experiment is that *Emlékiratok könyve* has always been praised as the key work of the anti-realist current of the 1980s – a gesture with which its admirers celebrated their own aversion to the official realist canon still prevalent when the novel appeared. Probably due to this tradition and the overall neglect to the theory of realism, Bagi's book received a high critical acclaim but failed to reintroduce realism as a critical term even in this profoundly revised sense.

Summary

For conclusion, some common patterns might be detected in the three junctures I have outlined in the treatment of realism in Hungarian critical history.

In the light of an idealist aesthetics preserving classicist values, literary realism was considered during the 1850s as a literary trend originating from the West with vulgar and immoral distortions of art (and life). While it was recognized as some-

thing, thankfully, alien to Hungarian culture, it was still felt to be disturbingly intruding into the national literary production and the manners and morals of the age. Its possible domestic spread (through the cultural import of the French novel) was felt to contaminate the national character and the national system of genres, both supposedly calling for epic poetry. To relieve the ideological anxiety realism caused, the aesthetics of idealization tried to prevent realism's intrusion into poetry, prose fiction, art, education, cultural policy, politics, and ethics. With the institutionalization of anti-realist views, an idealist notion of art became the official aesthetic ideology.

In the late 1940s, Marxist theories of realism were imported by communist émigrés returning from the East, and literary realism became the highest level of aesthetic and ideological production. According to the new critical orthodoxy, its proper form was disturbingly missing from the Hungarian literary heritage. To relieve the ideological anxiety due to the lack of realism, Marxist literary criticism tried to discover its traces, however hidden, and imposed it on poetry, prose fiction, art, education, cultural policy, politics, and ethics. With the institutionalization of pro-realism, a realist notion of art became the official aesthetic ideology.

In the light of poststructuralist theories imported from the West, literary realism came to be regarded as epistemologically naïve and poetically inferior during the 1990s. In the new critical orthodoxy, realism was recognized as alien to literature proper, but felt to have disturbingly permeated the Hungarian critical heritage. To relieve the ideological burden of realism, critics attempted to wipe out every trace of it. When post-structuralist views became institutionalized, antirealism turned into a consensual aesthetic ideology.

What one might witness in all of these formulations of realism is a profound and enduring anxiety with regard to the future prospects and past achievements of Hungarian literary culture. In one way or the other, the preoccupation with realism, or the suppression of it, seems to have always been linked to the question of how Hungarian literature and criticism relate to foreign cultural developments. With the rather obvious political connotations of this, the notion of realism in Hungarian critical history might be an emblem of the constant struggle to relocate Hungarian culture within these relations, either following or resisting influences coming from the West or the East. I see this dynamic to be latently preserved even today, when with the third juncture I discussed the issue of realism seems to have come to a standstill. With the dawn of post-structuralist obsessions, one might expect the screw to make a new turn.

Notes

- ¹ On Courbet's gesture, the French magazine *Réalisme* (1856–57) and the 1855 article 'Du Réalisme' by the poet Fernand Desnoyers, see: Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005, 16, 71; Pam Morris, *Realism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 63–4. (The early French manifestos of realism have been republished in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, 80–111, 117–19.) In the British context, the first mention of Thackeray as the "chief of the realist school" dates back to a *Fraser's Magazine* article in 1851: see Morris, *Realism*, 85.
- ² Zsigmond Kemény, 'Forradalom után' = Kemény, *Változatok a történelemre*, Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1982, 281.
- ³ István Széchenyi, *A' Kelet Népe*, Pozsony: Wigand, 1841.
- ⁴ Kemény, 'Forradalom után', 183.
- ⁵ On the concordances in this respect between Hungarian criticism and Julian Schmidt's late 1850s views on post-1848 German literary history, see Mihály Szajbély, 'Az 1849 utáni líraellenesség érvei és forrásai' = *Forradalom után – kiegészítés előtt*, ed. Béla G. Németh, Budapest: Gondolat, 1988, 58–78.
- ⁶ Zsigmond Kemény, 'Élet és irodalom' = Kemény, *Élet és irodalom*, Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1971, 138.
- ⁷ The Hungarian term "tudós" equally refers to "scholar" and "scientist".
- ⁸ Gusztáv Szontagh, 'Tudomány, magyar tudós' = *Új Magyar Múzeum*, 1, 7, 377–90.
- ⁹ Due to the pervasive Latinisms in Hungarian, by the mid-1800s the Late Latin words *realis*, *realitas* were equally prevalent as the Hungarian "való", "valóság". They have continued to coexist up to the present day.
- ¹⁰ Kemény, 'Élet és irodalom', 186.
- ¹¹ Ferenc Toldy, 'Ismét: Tudomány, magyar tudós. Értekezé levél Szontágh Gusztávhoz,' *Új Magyar Múzeum* 1851, 9, 469–86; Ferenc Toldy, 'Még egyszer magyarhoni humanismus és realismus' = *Új Magyar Múzeum*, 1857, 10, 433–41.
- ¹² János Arany to Pál Szemere, April 14 1860. = *Arany János Összes Művei, XVIII. kötet, Levelezés 3. (1857–1861)*, ed. János H. Korompay, Budapest: Universitas, 2004, 391.
- ¹³ János Arany, 'Töredékes gondolatok' = János Arany, *Tanulmányok és kritikák*, ed. Pál S. Varga, Debrecen: Kossuth, 1998, 351.
- ¹⁴ Arany, 'Anyá és gyermeke' = Arany, *Tanulmányok és kritikák*, 382, 384.
- ¹⁵ Jókai, 'Az érczeány' = *Csataképek a magyar szabadságharczából* [1850]. *Centenáriumi kiadás. 25. kötet*, Budapest: Franklin, 1925, 31. [My translation.] A selection from this volume appeared in English as early as 1854 (*Hungarian Sketches in Peace and War. From the Hungarian of Moritz Jókai*, ed. Emeric Szabad, Edinburgh, London and Dublin: Constable and Co., Hamilton, Adams and Co., and M'Glashan) in a series of *Constable's Miscellany of Foreign Literature*, but this piece was omitted.
- ¹⁶ The claim that in order to achieve the realism of knowledge history writing should dismiss any kind of mythology making would explicitly turn up next year during the already discussed Science/Scholarship-debate and would be repeatedly returned to throughout the decade. The Science/Scholarship-debate included a subtopic on Hungarian prehistory, a crucial ideological issue of the age whether the Hungarians were part of the Finno-Ugric phylum or the descendants of the Huns. This brought forth the antagonism between methodological impartiality and national bias, historical truth and national interest. Later I will touch on the 1858 essay by Móric Lukács on ancient Roman history, which programmatically attempted to face the contemporary dismissal of mythology from the sources of historical scholarship. (See note 49)

- ¹⁷ On 19th century Hungarian spiritualism and its connections with literature and art: Eszter Tarjányi, *A szellem örvényében. A magyarországi mesmerizmus, szellemidézés, teozófia története és művészeti kapcsolatai*, Budapest: Universitas, 2002. On similar “suspensions of disbelief” of the age in British contexts: Catherine Gallagher, ‘The novel and other discourses of suspended disbelief’ = Catherine Gallagher – Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000, 163–210.
- ¹⁸ Toldy, ‘Magyarhoni humanizmus és realizmus’, 172.
- ¹⁹ A review modeled after its British counterparts, the *Szemle* (1857–1944) published essays ranging from historiography, linguistics, political economy, and jurisprudence to geology, geography, and aesthetics. Its editorial board and most of its contributors rallied from what later came to be labeled as the “Deák-party”, a loosely connected group of intellectuals and politicians gathering around Ferenc Deák, the former minister of the 1848 government and the informal head of the Hungarian political opposition during the 1850–60s. Eventually, Deák led the political negotiations that concluded in the 1867 Austrian–Hungarian Compromise.
- ²⁰ Antal Csengery, ‘Képek az emberi művelődés történetéből’, *Budapesti Szemle*, 1858 (7–8) 3.
- ²¹ Ferenc Salamon, ‘Balzac összes munkái’, *Budapesti Szemle*, 1858 (6) 408–22. For the French original, see: Eugène Poitou, ‘Études Morales et Littéraires. — M. de Balzac, ses Œuvres et son Influence sur la littérature contemporaine’ = *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 2e période, tome 6, 1856, 713–67. The article can be downloaded from: http://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/M._de_Balzac,_ses_%C5%93uvres_et_son_influence_sur_la_litt%C3%A9rature_contemporaine
- ²² Salamon, ‘Balzac összes munkái’, 415, 422.
- ²³ Pál Gyulai, ‘Kemény Zsigmond regényei és beszélei’ [1854] = *Gyulai Pál Válogatott Művei*, Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1989, 98.
- ²⁴ The article aroused a long and harsh debate with the conservative periodical *Hölgyfutár*, but without anyone siding with realism. Instead, the debate staged a clash between opposing literary circles: the *Hölgyfutár*, which completely agreed with the *Szemle* on snubbing non-idealist literature, criticized the *Szemle*’s increasingly dominant role and its harsh critical tone, of which the essay on Balzac they found an example. At a later stage, however, the debate also revealed the limitations of Salamon’s command of French and even of his familiarity with Balzac’s works.
- ²⁵ Salamon, ‘Balzac összes munkái’, 411–13.
- ²⁶ Salamon, ‘Balzac összes munkái’, 414, 417.
- ²⁷ Salamon, ‘Balzac összes munkái’, 421–2.
- ²⁸ Ágost Greguss, ‘A materializmus hatásairól’ [1859] = Greguss, *Tanulmányai*, volume 1, Pest: Ráth, 1872, 20.
- ²⁹ Supporting his condemnation of realism, Greguss’s essay *A rútról* [On the Ugly], which also appeared in the *Szemle* in 1858, two issues later than Poitou’s article, stated that because in aesthetics the ugly is never autonomous, but always the negation of beauty, it is allowed to enter art only in an idealized form: when it appears in its own sake, the ugly opposes the very notion of art. Greguss, ‘A rútról’ = *Tanulmányai*, vol. 1, 276–310. As an indication of how widespread the ideas that Greguss summarized were in art criticism from the late 1850s, note the similar, though less harsh opinion on realism with regard to sculpture in Zsigmond Ormós’s *Adatok a művészet történetéhez* [Data to the History of Art] in 1859. Here Ormós asked for a unity of the real and the ideal, urging for a “lifelikeness” elevated by classic beauty. As he claimed, realism proper cannot be mere verisimilitude, for the “crudeness” of merely true-to-life representation would amount to a “coarse realism” [“vastag realizmus”] as the imprint of the “materialism” of their age.
- ³⁰ As for painting, in his 1865 essay *A torzképről* [On Caricature] Greguss mentions Courbet mockingly as the instance of the *hideously real* (“rút réal”) in art: “The realist who seeks not

beauty but everything that exists and the way it exists, soon gets to the point where he does not differentiate between the beautiful and the hideous, and the results of this disposition are paintings like Courbet's 'Bathing Women' where we even see what bathing is needed for." [My translation.] Greguss, 'A torzképről' = *Tanulmányai*, vol. 1, 333.

- 31 Ágost Greguss, *Rendszerezés széptan*, ed. Béla Liszkai, Budapest: Eggenberger, 1888, 262.
- 32 In 1857, at the trial of *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert's "realism", a characterization he relentlessly refused, was treated by the judge as "the negation of the beautiful and the good". Quoted in Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 8, 12, 71. (For the French anti-realist arguments of the 1850s, very similar to those of Greguss and his Hungarian contemporaries, see *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, 80–111, 117–19.) In Britain the term realism appeared also in connection with Balzac "as head of the realist school in France" in the *Westminster Review* in 1853, but in a much more favorable way, recommending his works to the British readers. On the British reception of French and German realism in general, see: Morris, *Realism*, 88–91.
- 33 Ferenc Salamon, 'Petőfi újabb költeményei', *Budapesti Szemle*, 1859 (16–17) 297.
- 34 Salamon, 'Petőfi újabb költeményei', 295.
- 35 Salamon, 'Petőfi újabb költeményei', 297.
- 36 Salamon, 'Petőfi újabb költeményei', 297.
- 37 Salamon's critique of Petőfi presumably was intended to reach his imitators in the first place, who came to dominate the Hungarian lyrical scene during the 1850s.
- 38 János Erdélyi, 'A legújabb magyar líra. 1859' [1859] = *Erdélyi János válogatott művei*, ed. Ilona T. Erdélyi, Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1986, 540–79.
- 39 Pál Gyulai, 'Jókai legújabb művei' = Gyulai, *Bírálatok 1861–1903*, Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1911, 82.
- 40 'Jókai önéletírása (10 évvel később)' = *A Jókai-jubileum és a nemzeti díszkiadás története*, Budapest: Révai, 1898, 142, 146.
- 41 Jókai, *Az elátkozott család* [1858], Budapest: Akadémiai, 1963, 272.
- 42 This particular novel received a more favorable judgment by Poitou, too, who took it as an exception in Balzac's immoralist tendencies.
- 43 In the editorial preface to the translation, the novelist and journalist Ignác Nagy presented Balzac according to his own commitment to the genre of *Lebensbilder*: see Balzac, *Grandet Eugénia*, trans. István Jakab, Pest: Hartleben, 1843, 11–14.
- 44 As a matter of fact, at the time in Hungary both Sue and Sand outstripped Balzac in popularity. New Hungarian translations from Balzac only sporadically appeared throughout the second half of the 19th century, while a great deal was translated from Sue even after the 1850s. Along with the preference of Thackeray and Dickens, Gyulai also felt closer to the Hungarian soul the realism of Turgenev. In 1862 in his review on Turgenev's *A Nest of Gentlefolk* (1859), Gyulai stressed that Turgenev "is a strong realist but never descends to photography". (See Pál Gyulai, 'A nemes fészek', *Szépirodalmi Figyelő*, 1862 (2) 20, 315–16.) In general, the Hungarian critics of the age felt affiliated not with the French claim to present the harshest realities, but the self-censorship of the Victorian novel. (On the avoidance or suppression of realism in the French sense in Dickens, see Brooks, *Realist vision*, 40–4. On the moral realism of the Victorian novel along these tendencies, see George Levine, *Realism, Ethics, and Secularism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.)
- 45 Károly Bérczy, 'A külföldi regényirodalom', *Budapesti Szemle*, 1858 (4) 124–34.
- 46 Bérczy, 'A külföldi regényirodalom', 124–6.
- 47 Bérczy, 'A külföldi regényirodalom', 125–6. As Bérczy added, in Thackeray's works (*Vanity Fair* appeared in Hungarian translation as early as 1853) "posterity will find the true image of the present English society". (131)
- 48 Bérczy, 'A külföldi regényirodalom', 126.

- ⁴⁹ Pál Gyulai, *Bírálatok, cikkek, tanulmányok*, eds. Gyula Bisztray – Aladár Komlós, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1961, 432–49.
- ⁵⁰ In 20th century literary historiography, *The Village Notary* was widely held to be the first “Balzacian effort” in Hungarian literature to give an all-embracing picture of social reality. Eötvös’s novel, however, shows a peculiar double-faced character as far as its realism is concerned. On the one hand, it intends to give a comprehensive survey of the social tensions and corruption in the feudal county administration, in accordance with the author’s political views which favored the introduction of a centralized government in the place of the administrative independence of the counties. On the other, it is hardly realist in the sense that it presents a deeply ironic narrator whose constant efforts to thrust himself in the forefront result in a both melodramatic and playfully metafictional narration.
- ⁵¹ On the debate over the genre of *Tendenzroman*, see Péter Dávidházi, ‘Mimetic orientation in 19th century Hungarian criticism’, *Neohelicon*, 1988 (15) 2, 180–3.
- ⁵² Móric Lukács, ‘Róma régi történeteinek hitelessége és eredete,’ *Budapesti Szemle*, 1858 (5) 220–74, (6) 289–340.
- ⁵³ On this attitude permeating the political and social thinking of the age, and the aesthetic principles and scientific methodology they entertained, see Péter Dávidházi, ‘A bevégzett tények felülvizsgálása. A kritikátörténet korszakformáló elve 1849–1867’ = *Forradalom után – kiegyezés előtt*, 1988, 79–98.
- ⁵⁴ Dávidházi, ‘A bevégzett tények felülvizsgálása’, 81–3.
- ⁵⁵ In Hungary, the appearance of Zola in translation during the 1880s was followed by a parliamentary denouncement similar to the one in Britain.
- ⁵⁶ Pál Gyulai, ‘A költészet lényegéről’ = Gyulai, *Emlékbeszédek*, vol. 2, Budapest: Franklin, 1914, 227.
- ⁵⁷ Gyulai, ‘A költészet lényegéről’, 228.
- ⁵⁸ On Lukács’s homecoming, see John Neubauer, ‘Exile: Home of the Twentieth Century’ = *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe. A Compendium*, eds. J. Neubauer and B. Zs. Török, Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009, 35–6.
- ⁵⁹ György Lukács, ‘Demokrácia és kultúra’ = Lukács, *Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra*, Budapest: Gondolat, 1970, 317.
- ⁶⁰ György Lukács, ‘A magyar irodalomtörténet revíziója’ = *Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra*, 497, 510, 513.
- ⁶¹ Although social realism was in the center of critical and ideological debates, here I restrict my analysis on the Marxist treatment of the 19th century realist heritage. On social realism in Hungary, see the chapter ‘1948: The Culture of Revolutionary Terror’ in *History of Literary Cultures in East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Vol. 1, eds. J. Neubauer and M. Cornis-Pope, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004, 107–12.
- ⁶² ‘Lukács György elnöki megnyitója’ = *A realizmus kérdései a magyar irodalomban*, ed. Tibor Klaniczay, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1956, 4.
- ⁶³ János Barta, ‘A kritikai realizmus kérdései a XIX. század magyar irodalmában’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 157.
- ⁶⁴ Béla G. Németh, ‘Hozzászólások’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 310.
- ⁶⁵ Lukács himself was well aware that his theory of the 19th century development of realism (high realism from Walter Scott to Balzac, and its decline from Flaubert to Zola) was hardly applicable to Hungarian literature.
- ⁶⁶ It is worth noticing that by the 1950s the communist notion of “progress” had been reconciled with nationalist ideologies.
- ⁶⁷ Nagy Miklós, ‘Korreferátumok’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 223.

- ⁶⁸ Lukács also shared the conviction that the revolutionary mainstream detected in lyrical poetry (Petőfi, Ady, Attila József) had been accompanied by a weaker tradition of prose fiction, and that the novel designed to represent “the totality of society” was of second rank in Hungarian literary history. See his ‘A magyar irodalomtörténet revíziója’ = *Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra*, 507.
- ⁶⁹ István Király, ‘Korreferátumok’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 209. (Nevertheless, the idea of Petőfi’s “lyrical realism” tacitly drew on the “bourgeois” literary historian János Horváth’s 1922 monograph.)
- ⁷⁰ Barta, ‘A kritikai realizmus kérdései’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 173.
- ⁷¹ Király, ‘Korreferátumok’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 203–6.
- ⁷² Király, ‘Korreferátumok’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 205–6.
- ⁷³ Pál Pándi, ‘Korreferátumok’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 218–9.
- ⁷⁴ In a similar fashion, the “monarchist illusions” of the novelist and political philosopher József Eötvös were held responsible for the “defects” of his post-1849 realism, see Pándi, ‘Korreferátumok’, 215.
- ⁷⁵ Lukács, ‘A magyar irodalomtörténet revíziója’ = *Magyar irodalom, magyar kultúra*, 510.
- ⁷⁶ See for example Tibor Klaniczay, ‘Realizmus vagy szocialista realizmus’ [1965] = Klaniczay, *Hagyományok ébresztése*, Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1976, 476–84.
- ⁷⁷ *A magyar irodalom története IV. A magyar irodalom története 1849-től 1905-ig*, ed. István Sötér, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1965, 281.
- ⁷⁸ For an excerpt in English from the theoretical introduction, see: Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, ‘Notes toward a Historical Definition of Realism’ = *Neohelicon*, 1988 (15) 2, 31–54.
- ⁷⁹ Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, *Kemény Zsigmond* [1989], Pozsony: Kalligram, 2007, 28.
- ⁸⁰ Szegedy-Maszák, *Kemény Zsigmond*, 29.
- ⁸¹ On Kemény’s novels along similar lines: Thomas Cooper, ‘Mimesis of consciousness in the fiction of Zsigmond Kemény’, *Hungarian Studies*, 2003 (17) 1.
- ⁸² Greguss, in a private letter written on December 14, 1857, described Gyulai’s novel as a timely and effective piece of journalism, lacking aesthetic quality. The reader, Greguss averred, “sees a publicist who embitters and agitates, but not the artist putting reconciliation into our hearts”; what this novel gives is “mere reality instead of poetic justice, and reality turns into untruthfulness precisely because it is only the real without the consolation of the ideal”. *Gyulai Pál levelezése 1843-tól 1867-ig*, ed. Sándor Somogyi, Budapest: Akadémiai, 1961, 339.
- ⁸³ Barta, ‘A kritikai realizmus kérdései’ = *A realizmus kérdései*, 170–1.
- ⁸⁴ György Eisemann, ‘Népiesség és klasszicitás’ = *A magyar irodalom története II. 1800-tól 1919-ig*, eds. M. Szegedy-Maszák – A. Veres, Budapest: Gondolat, 2007, 415.
- ⁸⁵ See István Margócsy, ‘Kalandorok és szirének – Jókai Mór jellembrázolásáról’ = Margócsy, “A férfikor nyarában”. *Tanulmányok a XIX. és XX. századi magyar irodalomról*, Pozsony: Kalligram, 2013, 297–330.
- ⁸⁶ A similar exoneration from the stigma of “realism” has been carried out in the case of Petőfi. See István Margócsy, *Petőfi Sándor*, Budapest: Korona, 1999.
- ⁸⁷ Levente Szabó T., *Mikszáth, a kételkedő modern. Történelmi és társadalmi reprezentációk Mikszáth Kálmán prózapoétikájában*, Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2007.
- ⁸⁸ Dávid Szolláth, *A kommunista aszketizmus esztétikája*, Budapest: Balassi, 2011.
- ⁸⁹ Tamás Scheibner, *A magyar irodalomtudomány szovjetizálása. A szocialista realista kritika és intézményei, 1945–1953*, Budapest: Ráció, 2014.
- ⁹⁰ Zsolt Bagi, *A körülírás. Nádas Péter: Emlékiratok könyve*, Pécs: Jelenkor, 2005, 28–9.

