
The “Lukács Effect” in Twentieth-Century Hungarian Literature and Film

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At the turn of the twentieth century, the young philosopher György Lukács wanted to bring changes to the old Hungarian feudal system, but for “all [his] condemnation of conditions in Hungary” he could not, and neither would he accept, Anglo-Western empiricist and positivist progress (Rees 2-3). He considered both inadequate for his time and for the future of Hungary. His denunciation of the outdated social forms of Hungary and his rejection of bourgeois capitalism, this “double rejection” (Rees 3), caught Lukács in a paradox. My intention, however, is not to compose an analysis of Lukács’ psyche, especially because he did not care for psychology or psychoanalysis, nor to rescue Lukács’ situation from this paradox. Instead, I propose to see Lukács’ paradoxical situation as a Hungarian worldview of being caught between nostalgia and hope. Twentieth-century Hungarian culture is very much the testimony to and legacy of this Lukácsian situation of paradox, or the “Lukács effect.” Application of the “Lukács effect” to Imre Kertész’ novel *Fateless* (1992)—first published as *Sorstalanság* (1975)—and István Szabó’s narrative film *Father (Apa)* (1966) problematizes the question of what is a Hungarian worldview.

If we try to untangle this Lukácsian paradox from a Hungarian worldview, it is desirable to first consider such themes as nation, home, and the self. 1895 marked the one-thousandth year anniversary of the Hungarian state (Nemeskürty). This “Millennium moment” was concentrated in the capital city of Budapest (cf. Gerő), and it was meant to express “the immutability of the Hungarian concept of state ... [the] consolidated state existence, which enjoyed a full existence at one time [and hence was] to be immortalized and made visible,” explained Kálmán Thaly of the Hungarian Academy of Science in 1882 (qtd. in Gerő 182). To give this concept and sensibility a lasting expression, a yearlong celebration included festivals, the launching of the first underground train on the continent, and the creation of memorial sites that offer a sense of permanence with an aesthetic value. The most colossal among these was the Millennium Monument. While its construction began in 1896 the Monument was not completed until 1926.

The finished Monument comprises fourteen individual statues of outstanding Hungarian leaders from the first Christian king, St. Stephen, to the 1849 Regent-President, Lajos Kossuth, two statue clusters representing the seven tribes that founded Hungary, with Archangel Gabriel installed on the top of an obelisk. With the Millennium Monument in Budapest peace, prosperity, labor, knowledge, and Hungary's historic glory as a nation were all celebrated and represented at once.

Budapest thus became a "national space" as a result of the "deliberate process with a nationalist end" (Gerő 175). Hungarian nationalism, however, had to succeed within the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, where the elite relied heavily on Jewish financial backing for maintaining political liberalism. Nationalization then also meant assimilation whereby a great number of the population became Hungarianized. Around this time, in 1901, Lukács' father, József Löwinger, changed his German Jewish name to the solid sounding Hungarian *Lukács*, and also converted to Christianity. In addition, he received the noble title "Szegeci von"¹ for his exemplary achievements in the finance industry, and he was promoted to court counselor (Kadarkay 6). Hence, the young György inherited this change of name, social status, and faith. While he snubbed the lineage of his mother, Adel Wertheimer, which can be traced back to the fourteenth century, as one of the wealthiest Jewish families in Eastern Europe (Kadarkay 4), he took pride in his father's family that established strong nationalistic roots in Hungary. Lukács' paternal grandfather, Jakob Löwinger, fought in Kossuth's rebel army against the Hapsburgs in 1848-49. As Árpád Kadarkay, a leading expert on Lukács explains, "it was at Szeged that Kossuth," in recognition of their support in the Revolution and War, "proclaimed the emancipation of the Jews" (8). Lukács asserted that he inherited his paternal grandfather's revolutionary genes. With the grandiose events of Hungary's Millennium celebrations that continued into the early 1900s, the Lukács family's assimilation was also complete. The Jewish population of Hungary enjoyed equality and liberty until the nationalist surges in the 1930s.

For Hungarians, it is not whether one nation, one home or one self is more true than another, but *what it means* to be or have a nation, a home or a self. What is its implicit degree of understanding (cf. Žižek, *Žižek*)? The Hungarian-born sociologist, Károly Mannheim, Lukács' friend from his Sunday Circle, in his 1922 "Heidelberg Letters" asks whether Hungarians belong to a nation and a home, because, as he says, "We Hungarians live dispersed, one here one there" (80). In these early letters of observation Mannheim coalesces the feelings of fellow Hungarian émigrés, and offers didactic insights into German culture. Like Lukács, he too was forced into exile after the fall of the Republic of Councils in 1919. In fact, Mannheim took a chief role in Lukács' escape from the Horthy regime's list

of “most wanted” communists awaiting execution (Kadarkay 237). Following a short interlude in Vienna, the two of them parted, with Lukács settling in the Soviet Union and Mannheim in Germany for the time being. In the foreground Hungary’s fate had just been decided at Versailles. Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and people to the newly formed neighboring countries of Romania, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.² The devastation had lasting effects on the nation in and outside of its freshly drawn borders. Mannheim’s letters express both desperation and hope: “I cannot find my place. I want to know not only the fate of each one but also everything that he has seen with Hungarian eyes” (81). He is trying to make sense of *his* Hungary by advocating lessons of the German experience to Hungarians: “I am interested above all in the lives of those to whom I belong” (82). A sense of homelessness was more than poignant for Mannheim and other émigrés, and for those who were now forced to live as part of another nation. “The problem,” Mannheim continues, is “of finding a home for the spirit somewhere on earth” (83). He searches for a self that has lost its home when he proposes that “We want to find a home, a world, because we sense that we will find no place in this world” (83); “With us it is only possible to live from soul to soul” (94). Mannheim’s efforts found a temporary resting point in a “recovery of religious belief” and identification with “neo-Romantic ideal[s]” (Kettler and Loader 79-80). Lukács, on the other hand, took a different turn and immersed himself in a new reading of Marx’s concepts to find *his* soul’s home.

Already in his first book, *A lélek és a formák* (1910)—published as *Soul and Form* in 1980—Lukács presents this soul-seeking salvation for the distraught and decadent culture of Hungary. He sees a complete breakdown in human order, a sudden slump in humanity (Kadarkay 40). His hero at this early time is the Hungarian poet Endre Ady³ through whom Lukács finds “expression to his fury of Magyar reality” (Kadarkay 24), “the hellish breath of the Magyar wasteland” (68). Lukács “denounces the celebratory pride of the 1000 year old nation” (Kadarkay 25). At the same time, he devalues modern culture, diagnosing it as degenerate, thus setting out on a “long quest to save humanity” (Kadarkay 41). However, Lukács is trapped in a culture, a Hungarian worldview that does not respond to his spiritual needs (cf. Kadarkay 59). Hungarian intellectuals, many of them Jewish—and in the eyes of Christian Hungarians, “overdeveloped” for Hungarian society—seek resolution to the Magyar desolation (cf. Kadarkay 61). Lukács explains his generation’s ravenous appetites for redemption and rebirth:

Everywhere the Hungarians are the most modern. How pitifully grotesque that they are the radical leaders of every new artistic and philosophic movement! It is

all the more grotesque because, insofar as they are honest and truly Hungarian, they cannot identify with the national culture. And the old European culture, from our perspective, is useless. Only the future holds out the promise of a much needed human community. (qtd. in Kadarkay 61)

As Kadarkay explains, “a hybrid Hungarian society, neither wholly feudal nor wholly bourgeois, seemed to have broken the continuity in the western tradition” (102). That is what Lukács recognized and tapped into when in the winter of 1914-15 he wrote *The Theory of the Novel* (*Die Theorie des Romans*) as a means of seeking refuge from current events. As Lukács explains in the Preface: “The immediate motive for writing was supplied by the outbreak of the First World War and the effect which its acclamation by the social-democratic parties had upon the European left” (11). Here, Lukács describes both his political outlook and attitude as “romantic anti-capitalism” (Rees 4). It is in a mood of despair that he asks, “who was to save us from Western civilization?” John Neubauer points out that for Lukács a crisis in reality means a “crisis of the arts [which] became an index of the spirit’s general alienation” (533). The novel, as Lukács sees it, mediates this alienation between the subject and objective reality. Although Lukács embraced Hegel and Dostoevsky, he also developed a heightened interest in literary criticism combined with the kind of *Geisteswissenschaft* philosophy established by one of his teachers in Germany, Wilhelm Dilthey. In fact, under their influence, by the mid-1910s, Lukács disposed with his Hungarian mother tongue and wrote in German until his return to Hungary in 1945.⁴ *The Theory of the Novel* is one of the first published examples of his linguistic transformation.

Lukács seeks to resolve the conflict between subject and society, the paradox of being trapped between nostalgia and hope. Galin Tihanov, the Bulgarian-born Lukács scholar, argues that while Lukács does not consider himself a literary theorist, he turns to conceptualizing the social aspects of literature in an effort to realize a synthesis between literature and society. As such, for Lukács the novel becomes the “apex to problematize the relations between culture and theory” (Tihanov 7). Lukács deems *The Theory of the Novel* to be “subversive” because he is not looking for “a new literary form but, quite explicitly, for a ‘new world’” (20). While he proclaims to have arrived in his study at a “comprehensive overall worldview” (13), I consider this study also as a comment on the Hungarian worldview, which he cannot get out of, and which in fact, leaves its legacy behind. Lukács’ views for overcoming the economic and social spheres in order to reach the aesthetic are still considered groundbreaking for their time.

By applying Hegel’s dictum of *becoming*, Lukács advances the dialectic that bonds and releases masters and slaves from their own trappings. With its depiction

of the “process of *becoming-man*” the novel replaces the epic (Lukács 62). The totality of life that the epic represents no longer accomplishes its goals in modernity. The process of becoming reaches its maturation in the novel, because as Tihanov explains, in Lukács’ view “life itself ‘has become more novelistic than ever’” (51). Lukács, in accordance with Hegel, regards the novel as the late stage in the history of consciousness, civilization and nature, and as in the practices of *Bildung*, brings harmony to these tensions. Like Hegel, Lukács argues for a growth in consciousness from the epic to the novel similar to the individual’s growth of self-awareness from the self of childhood to adulthood. For Lukács, as Neubauer contends, “all great novels are pervaded by an adult melancholy, mourning for the lost *Heimat* of childhood” (543). Lukács believes in “looking back” in order to “facilitate proper understanding” of the novel’s development (12). This looking back is *nostalgia* for Lukács, a homesickness (29), and he argues that the “created reality of the novel” is an abstraction (70). To overcome this abstraction the characters of the novel develop nostalgia for a “utopian perfection” (70). I propose to see Imre Kertész’ novel *Fateless* through this Lukácsian “utopian perfection.”

Imre Kertész (b. 1929), the 2002 Nobel laureate of literature, uses the form of the autobiographical novel to depict the experiences of a young Jewish Hungarian boy in the Nazi concentration camps. Kertész overcomes historical memory by looking back at his own time in the camps with an ironic feeling of nostalgia and self-parody. Kertész endured the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald in his teens, transported from Budapest in cattle-wagons among thousands of other Jewish children in 1944 (Adelman 261). After the war, he faced decades of more persecution by the communist government in Hungary. Eventually, scholarships in Germany enabled him to leave Hungary for longer periods, where he has also worked as a journalist, translator and novelist. With the fall of communism, Kertész has been regaining his well-deserved reputation. His novel, *Sorstalanság*, which he began writing in 1960, however, was promoted to the Swedish Academy in its German translation (Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Central and East” 343). Like Lukács, he too has found another language (i.e., German) to convey a particular discursive force. In Europe the German language is the most radically used metaphor for facing up to the history of holocaust (Sándor; my trans.). *Sorstalanság* was first translated from Hungarian into English by Christopher C. Wilson and Katharina M. Wilson in 1992 under the title *Fateless*.⁵ In the wake of Kertész’ prestigious award, the novel’s popularity has grown worldwide and it was published again in a new translation by Tim Wilkinson in 2004.⁶ Wilkinson titled the book *Fatelessness*, turning the adjective into a noun that offers a closer translation of the word’s Hungarian meaning. It

expresses a condition, a way of being without fate. One is not only fateless but moreover lives in a world without fate. While both translations of Kertész' novel are eloquent, I feel, however, that Wilson and Wilson's work better transform the nuances in the particular parts of the novel I am interested in highlighting. And for that reason, I rely on Wilson and Wilson's translation for my analysis of Kertész' novel.

In *Fateless*, we follow the young Hungarian protagonist, George⁷ Köves in his journey of longing and homelessness. Set during World War II, the novel exposes George's lack of a deep attachment to his Jewish faith and family. When his father is conscripted in to a labor camp in the summer of 1943, George remains untouched by his Uncle Lajos' instructive words: "Now ... you too are part of the common Jewish fate" (15). He admits that he does not understand Uncle Lajos' "train of thought exactly" (16), and that he has not prayed for his father: "I wouldn't have thought of this on my own. But now, since he raised this subject with me, I immediately began to feel it like a burden" (16). A few months after his father's deportation, George too is picked up by the military police and taken first to Auschwitz then to Buchenwald and Zietz. George narrates his story without fear or indignation, and displays travesty. He describes how he felt a "sort of marveling amusement at the sheer simplicity" (42) of marching in a row with many other young Jews in the busy streets of Budapest on their way to the trains that would haul them to Auschwitz.

At the concentration camps George does not question the state he finds himself in. He follows orders while securing detachment. He lives each day as it comes: eats, works, barter for food, learns to speak German to become more useful for the guards, and indifferently expects no help and offers none either. What confuses him is that his identity crisis does not rise simply from being Jewish but equally from being Hungarian. As a double blow, he is mocked by the other prisoners for his Hungarian identity. In Hungary, as a Jew, he already suffered an outsider status and thus, a feeling of not belonging. But here at the labor camp it is, ironically, only in the language of Hungarian that he could fend himself from disdain. George is surprised when someone rescues him half dead from the pile of corpses set to be buried in one of the mass graves, and when a German prison doctor takes him to the camp hospital where Polish orderlies treat him with dignity and kindness. The concentration camps become his home in his state of homelessness. When he is transferred to Buchenwald, a place he has thought of with a curious association ever since he first saw it on his way to Auschwitz many months ago, it does not interest him anymore: "I no longer cared that I had arrived at Buchenwald, and I had long since forgotten that this was the place I had yearned for so much. I had no idea

where I was: at the train station or further along. I didn't recognize the area and didn't see the country houses or the statue that I still remember so well" (135).

How is it possible to yearn for Buchenwald? Lukács' theory of the novel can assist us in better understanding Kertész' unconventional methodology for conceptualizing experiences at the labor camps. The self in the modern novel, according to Lukács, is eternally homeless and thus, nostalgic. It longs for its home; the soul's "selfhood is its home" (Lukács 87). Lukács sees "nostalgia that feels itself and its desires to be the only true reality" (70). For George the camps represent the loci of his developing selfhood. George nostalgically links the idea of home that existed for him before in Budapest with that of Buchenwald. George's soliloquy provides him with a cool reassurance for his own paradoxical view of the camp that he compares to home:

"When I return home," I thought (and I thought this in a simple, self-explanatory way like one who is interested in nothing but questions following a perfectly natural turn of events), "when I return, then I shall put an end to all this." There had to be peace, I decided. (115-116)

George survives the concentration camps and at the end of the war, when he finally arrives back in Budapest on a late afternoon, feeling desperately lonely, he stops for a moment as memory seizes him: "It was that special hour, I recognized it now, I recognized it here—my favourite hour in the camp, and a sharp, painful, futile desire grasped my heart: homesickness" (190). I propose to understand George's homesickness as "nostalgia." Upon learning that his father did not survive the labor camp in Mauthausen, George explains to the bewildered neighbors in his old apartment building why he felt "almost happy" in the camps: "Why can't you see that if there is no such thing as fate, then there is no freedom? If, on the other hand, there is freedom, then there is no fate. That is ... we ourselves are fate" (189). George rejects the comparison of his experiences in Auschwitz to hell, because he has no knowledge of the latter, only of the labor camps. In pronouncing *fate* in opposition to hell Kertész conveys a condition that exists between remembering and hope. It is a method of distancing that emphasizes how George is both Jewish and Hungarian at once but cannot relate to either identity. George's experience is located in an interstice. In this interval space George, as an alienated outsider, embodies human fate that cannot be categorized as either the victim or the aggressor.

Lukács sees a "heterogeneous totality" in the genre of the novel (128). In *Fateless*, through this heterogeneity, the subject is able to return home, to itself. George Köves is able to complete what "was begun, interrupted and allowed to fall by the way," although now alienated (Lukács 128). This alienation is what

helps Kertész' protagonist survive; this distancing is what gives him hope. George's sense of humor intertwines with his sense of adventure: "I also figured that I'd get to travel and see a bit of the world" (48). Kertész' use of ironic parody can be further illuminated by using Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts, which locate the roots of the "serio-comical genres" in the ancient Greek Menippean satire (846). Travesty, according to Bakhtin, provides relief from "lofty models" in the form of parody enacted in "an everyday environment, in the ... language of contemporaneity," such as those of the folklore (846). Equally, Kertész extends the symbols of folktales to George, where the young lad sets out to try his luck and see the world, in an effort to juxtapose the political ideology of Fascism and the audacity of George's experience. Kertész' method of distancing creates a "new zone" (cf. Bakhtin), a detachment and numbness that are curiously woven through nostalgia and hope. This new zone of distancing questions the self's belonging to a community—i.e., Jewish, Hungarian—as taken for granted. George's diary-like account of the events, such as the opening sentence, "I didn't go to school today," enables this distance and muddles the space between past and present in order to give force to the inexplicable. George's narrative about himself maintains a more objective view of his experiences and self's development. He is both observer and observed at once. With this structure Kertész warns against falling into the traps of similes, and by doing so he enables a survival, a self-mocking sense of survival that has been the fate of Jewish people in Hungary for centuries.

Lukács suggests that it is in the novelistic condition that "man became lonely and could find meaning and substance only in his own soul, whose home was nowhere" (103). This is the expression of "transcendental homelessness" (Lukács 41) in the "human order of social relations" (61). Memory, or rather the act of "remembering" and "forgetting," according to Lukács, is the "affirmative experience of the life process": one's "living present has grown from the stream of his past life dammed up within his own memory" (127).

Kertész not only captures memory in a Lukácsian sense, he also advances it by creating a theoretical horizon for the dilemma of the Holocaust that has engaged writers' and the academy's attention for the last fifty years. As the Hungarian writer Iván Sándor argues, Kertész tells the story of twentieth-century Hungarian history from an entirely different perspective. Accordingly, Kertész' method is subversive, that is, it is insubordinate or almost defiant of the traditional literary modes of the novel. This subversion emphasizes the dignity that is derived from everyday language. This "everydayness" makes Kertész' the language of opposition. The self for Kertész, which since Proust is the central topic of literature, is at once obscure and solid so that it offers a phenomenon of creativity. As Sándor suggests, this self

in Kertész' novel provokes both catharsis and aggression, a sense of responsibility for not only what he wants to do but also for his thoughts about himself.

Kertész has often explained that he does not consider himself an anti-fascist writer, but as one who problematizes a universal human condition that Auschwitz generated, be it from a Hungarian standpoint (cf. Ascherson). Defining himself as neither Jewish, nor as Hungarian, not even as a hyphenated Jewish-Hungarian (cf. Marsovszky 152), Kertész sees himself as an outsider. He has developed an "in-between" existence in culture, space and time (cf. Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Imre Kertész's Nobel" 237). Kertész' outsider status is represented by George, who upon returning to Budapest, resists taking part in his self's politicization by others who want to hear the horrors of the camps. And it is because of his commitment to a marginalized status that Kertész' depiction of the concentration camps seems unaffectionate, and where Buchenwald can be seen as George's home. Kertész emphasizes a more complex worldview that questions fate independent of society. As he explains in his Nobel Prize speech, what he "discovered in Auschwitz is the human condition, the end-point of a great adventure, where the European traveler arrived after his two-thousand-year-old moral and cultural history... Auschwitz suspended literature" (qtd. in Ascherson 25). In these statements, one finds similarity to Theodor W. Adorno's 1949 dictum, which claims that "To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric" (qtd. in Hofmann 182). As Adorno intercedes his argument in a subsequent sentence, explaining that "It has become impossible to write poems today," so too does Kertész remain separated from literature's haughty ideals (Ascherson 25). In the final analysis of the theory of the novel, ideals perhaps are no more the chief questions of literature but increasingly the writer's ability to speak from suspension. Hence, if a "left ethic," for which Lukács intended his study of the novel, tries to make do with a conventional "exegesis of reality" it can still keep the gate open for "radical revolution" on the pages (*Theory* 21). Kertész' self-proclaimed outsider status, this "in-between-ness," propels the disturbing tone of the everyday language he uses in his novel, which can be seen as such radical revolution.

Created ten years prior to the publication of Kertész' novel, screenwriter and director István Szabó's film *Father* (1966) presents a certain posteriori of the novel *Fateless*. Szabó examines a Hungarian fate in the social turmoil and political upheaval of post World War II by following a boy, Bence Takó, into adulthood in his film. The film is also a commemoration of his generation, which often grew up without parents, or lost its fathers in the war and concentration camps. Furthermore, it provides an autobiographical allusion because Szabó's father, too, died right after the war, and Szabó as a young boy also created fantasy-images about

his father. In the film the self becomes obsessed with fantasy. Szabó formulates the vivid imagination of his protagonist on the narrative level. This story-telling fantasy self is the young Bence's identity that he appropriates from his deceased father. Like George's in *Fateless*, Bence's first-person narration gives the film a certain aspect of reality that illuminates the locus between nostalgia and hope. With this Szabó's aim is to lend prominence for interpreting ideology over style (Marx 129; my trans.). While the question of cinematic form and style, arguably, has been one of its most significant issues, it is also important to consider how ideology relates to film.

Since the 1960s the prevailing tension in film theory has been between Marxism and psychoanalysis, both of which address the central issue of ideology. Psychoanalysis contributes to the theorization of a Marxian definition of ideology and in turn, this Marxian theorization itself has produced a shift in modernism. Slavoj Žižek suggests that ideology is the hidden master (*Pervert's Guide*). Ideology in Hegelian terms is based on the structure of power relations of masters and slaves that are enacted in material reality. In this dialectic of master and slave, ideology is dependent on work or production of culture, where those in power (masters) strive for self-consciousness, but "[self-consciousness] so exists for another" (Hegel 111). Furthermore, ideology, or the power relations it materializes, is not void of contradictions, repressions, and false-consciousness, and in turn these become embroiled in representations of human beings' relation to *relations of production* (cf. Althusser). This relation is in fact a perception of the real world, an imaginary representation that is born from ideology, in a sense from Plato's "copy world." What we see is only a reflection of the perfect Forms or Ideas, according to Plato, because we cannot know the real world directly, only its representation. This representation becomes internalized. In *Enjoy Your Symptom* Žižek reminds us after Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," that it is the imaginary through which human beings relate their existence to the outside world. Through the imaginary that is maintained by ideology, ideology addresses and creates us. As Althusser argues, "*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject" (173). I propose to consider interpellation in terms of re-production.

In Szabó's film this re-production links Bence and his father. After his father's funeral, Bence creates complex fantasies surrounding the personality of the father he hardly knew. He re-produces the image of his father into a mythical figure behind whom he re-lives his father's life until he is finally able to break free and invent his own self. Because the theme of children mystifying their fathers' image is rather universal, I suggest that what helps make Szabó's film "Hungarian" is the carefully

assembled semiological detail. Szabó pays attention to important historical signposts to give credence to the passing of time both in Hungary and in Bence's life. As a result of the 1948 nationalization movement, the religious name and displayed symbols of his elementary school change to reflect the new socialist ideologies, and a young and righteous female teacher replaces the respected priest teacher. When Bence becomes the pioneer leader in his class he tries to convince his teacher to accept Miki Nádasdy, the son of a noble family, into the line of Pioneers,⁸ to no avail, until another student shouts out that Karl Marx' mother was also a countess. Szabó puts into Bence's mouth the well-known argument that "Jesus and the communists want the same thing: to help the poor and oppressed.... But who are the oppressed now?" asks a friend, to which Bence confidently points at Miki: "They are!" (my trans.).

Szabó's aim in the mid-1960s is to face up to the particularities of Hungary's communist dictatorship of the early 1950s, and make a claim for Marxism without dogmatism (Marx 130). Illustrating this is Bence's radical leftist imagination. It turns his medical doctor father into a communist Partisan who fights off the Nazis. But this myth haunts Bence during the 1956 revolutionary events when he is accused for his father's left-leaning political activities. The ghost of his father figure is now meshed with the Party. Psychoanalytic theory defines the father as ever domineering and the ultimate source of anxiety, which Szabó extends to the Party. They are the "big Other," to borrow Jacques Lacan's concept, which Žižek explains as the not-namable, God, authority, nation, reason, and an entity of a "subject supposed to know" (39f). From their fear of persecution Bence and his mother remove the bust of Lenin from the late Dr. Takó's bookcase in their home. Didactic in his use of methodology that emphasizes the overcoming of the self, Szabó daringly counters Stalinist communist party ideologies by interlinking historical and personal events. He denies Bence a renewed affiliation between his father and the party, thereby warning against the dangers of the cult of personality. And he is also careful about mythologizing one's generation.

Žižek's Marxist-psychoanalytic concepts further aid our understanding of Szabó's focus on the father figure. The father is the ultimate source of threat, alive or dead. The father is the phallus, "father qua Name of the Father, reduced to a figure of symbolic authority" (Žižek 124). But it is the reverse version of the phallic father, the "anal father," the uncanny phantom who does not leave Bence alone. I would identify Bence's father phantom with what Žižek suggests: "He is the subject's double who accompanies him like a shadow and gives body to a certain surplus, to what is 'in the subject more than subject himself'; this surplus represents what the subject must renounce, sacrifice even; the part in himself that the subject must murder in order to start to live as a 'normal' member of community" (125). The Freudian

concept of the “father complex” includes a “son’s grief at the loss of his father [that] cannot suppress his satisfaction at having at length won his freedom” (Žižek 167). Moreover, as Žižek stresses, both a dead mother and a dead father represent the superego. The superego takes on a ventriloquist role in the agency through voice and objects. Bence, by wearing his dead father’s watch and coat, and playing with his medical instruments, embodies the “undead,” the dead that lives on through “partial objects” (Žižek 124). In fact, Bence comes to this realization only after interviewing his father’s old colleagues at the small town hospital, learning from them that his father was simply a nice man who is remembered most for being the first to use a particular brand of anesthetic during surgery. Metaphorically, the anesthetic is important for Szabó to foster the image for Bence that his father had power to soothe, to take the pain away and lull one into sleep. Through anesthetic the father lives on, like a ghost, enabling Bence’s self-consciousness.

In its contradictory nature, ideology at once eliminates the distance between ideas and reality and also reproduces those constantly in spacio-temporal dimensions. Lukács’ life-long friend, the Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs is among the first to declare the imbedded ideological feature of cinema in his *Theory of the Film* in the 1940s. Film, according to Balázs, “not only does away with the distance between the spectator and the work of art but deliberately creates the illusion in the spectator that he is in the middle of the action reproduced in the fictional space of the film” (50). These reproductions can be understood as representations of real ideas. We internalize them and turn them into assumptions. The devices of cinema—e.g., close-up, angle, montage, and editing—promote a “new psychological effect.... This new psychological effect is identification” (Balázs 46) that includes contradictions, repressions, and false-consciousness. Internalization is also the imaginary through which human beings relate their existence to the outside world. Production and psychology combined in film, as Balázs suggests,

show not other things, but the same things shown in a different way—that in the film the permanent distance from the work fades out of the consciousness of the spectator and with it that inner distance as well, which hitherto was a part of the experience of art. (47-48).

Balázs links the Marxist concept of ideology and production with that of psychology in cinema, and argues, “film does not reproduce but produces” (46).

Szabó illuminates Balázs’ concepts profoundly in the scene of the production of a film in the film. He interrogates mediated culture when we no longer care. Showing the deportation of hundreds of Jews in Budapest, crossing a bridge over the Danube, Bence as an extra in the film, is metamorphosized from a weary Jew into a clumsy

Nazi soldier pushing the slow-moving line of deportees. However, it is not Bence who suffers an identity crisis, but his girlfriend Anni, whose father indeed fell victim to the Nazi concentration camps. The method of meta-film plants the seed of her question, which in turn, interpellates the viewers. Consequently, interpellation is the “precise operation” (Althusser 174) that promotes the kind of self-consciousness or recognition of the self that Hegel posits in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. This recognition of the addressed self is the “becom[ing] of the subject” (Althusser 174; cf. Hegel, 1977) “through work,” whereby work is “desire held in check ... work forms and shapes the thing, ... [and] it is in this way that consciousness, *qua* worker, comes to see in the independent being [of the object] its *own* independence” (Hegel 118). This internalization is what I have suggested earlier as the imaginary. Žižek interprets this “hailing” or addressing in psychoanalytical terms as the “primal scene of ideology,” whereby the individual achieves self-recognition through the Other who has addressed him or her as a traumatic experience of consciousness. Szabó’s brilliance is how he turns Bence’s father-myth problem into Anni’s dilemma about her fate that negotiates past and present:

You know what is terrible? For the longest time I have denied that my father died in Mauthausen. I used to make up stories about him to avoid admitting that we are Jews. And then all of a sudden I realized that it is all in vain. I began to take responsibility for who I am. I went to Auschwitz with a tour group, and took pictures of everything so that I can show them to everyone at home. But on these pictures you only see well-dressed tourists.... I still feel ashamed, and then pretend I don’t belong to them [Jews]. I am Hungarian. Simply Hungarian. I have made up my mind. There is no past; there is nothing.... And then the vicious cycle starts up again.... I don’t know where I belong, where I should belong. (*Father*; my trans.)

The myth of the father is now turned into a question of the nation. Anni’s dilemma about father and patriarchy can be seen as a response to Lukács’ question of belonging. The Lukácsian paradox of being caught in our fate plays out the kind of Oedipal revolt in the characters of Anni and Bence, hence Szabó’s generation and their fathers (cf. Kadarkay 25). Moreover, Anni’s monologue illuminates the fact that cinema’s production of reality is always dependent on the degree of success in interpellating the viewers. Following contemporary American social theorist Jonathan Beller’s concept of the “cinematic mode of production,” cinematic reality has to be understood in the context of the “cinematization of social relations” (67). Beller considers psychoanalysis as “proto-film theory,” and cinema as an “emerging paradigm for the total reorganization of society and of the subject” (13). Cinema then “releases ... the condensed accretion of historical cognitions in matter” (Beller 40). Like Balázs suggested earlier, Beller sees that “cinematization” produces and

reproduces the past in our present. Beller emphasizes the role of the “cinematic image” in forming our lives through “a matrix of socio-psycho-material relations” (1). In turn, it affords a context for the condition between nostalgia and hope.

Szabó executes this by destroying the myth of the father with Bence throwing off his father’s coat to set out to swim across the Danube. The symbolic meaning is clear as Bence narrates his thoughts: “I must swim across the Danube.... I have to do something on my own ... only the weak ones make up stories” (my trans.). Although Bence confesses that his swim across the Danube is a pretense, this gesture also provides him with an immediate satisfaction since in the middle of the river he can only count on himself (Marx 132). He becomes his own double. But only temporarily until the camera pulls back revealing a large throng of swimmers behind him. They are all Bence’s double. Here, there is a Lacanian mirror image that Žižek explains as the fundamental motif that gives way to recognizing the self: “the double is ‘myself’” (125). The double image in turn becomes the *objet petit a*, the very thing that is desired but never attained (Žižek 126). Szabó insists on seeing the self in an endless struggle with its own double.

Through the figure of György Lukács, and illuminated in Imre Kertész’ *Bildungsroman*, *Fateless*, and Istvan Szabó’s film *Father*, Hungarian culture and Hungarianness is problematized as trapped between nostalgia and hope. Lukács’ influence is still very much prevalent in Hungarian culture; he defied Hungarian culture and his Hungarianness. He is a loner, a radical idealist and cynic, yet he exemplifies a hopeful pessimism, which in my view actually makes him a prototypical Hungarian. Lukács’ paradox is what, along with his contemporaries, was constantly forcing him to seek out the *soul* or *spirit* of Hungary. An excerpt from his letter in 1908 further elucidates this point:

There are those who understand me yet do not live and there are those who live but do not understand me.... I am glad you don’t understand me, for I can hardly expect from you any understanding of my spiritual state of mind. (qtd. in Kadarkay 109)

Lukács’ collaborator, Béla Balázs appears to expand on this in his diary:

I believe, I deeply believe, in the Hungarian soul. I search for the great Hungarian sadness that nibbles at my soul. I have resolved to write a drama entitled *The Hungarians*. It will depict the Magyar wasteland, the great sadness around us, and the tragedy of the Hungarian Nirvana. (qtd. in Kadarkay 22)

Both Lukács and Balázs talk about a soul or spirit that is particular to the Hungarian identity. What does it mean then to have a soul or spirit? Is the soul or the spirit a particular element of Hungarian identity? Disturbed by not being able to locate

it, Lukács settles with a largely universalistic *Weltanschauung* that does not depend on nationalistic features, but mostly on aesthetics, along with politically and praxis driven ideological concepts. There is nothing rational about the spirit or its sublimation [*Aufhebung*], as Hegel describes them, nor in Kierkegaard's "leap" for the soul's passion. On the other hand, there is also no clear concept of identity in social theory. Identity can be juxtaposed with the notion of self. The self belongs to a certain spiritual identity—not in the religious sense for my purposes. In Lukács' case, this spiritual identity takes on a paradox; like Kertész', it experiences *fatelessness*.

Hannah Arendt argues for ways of "belonging" that are not comparable with the idea of the nation state, nor with religious and racial categories: i.e., Jewish (cf. Butler 26). Against these, Arendt proposes "modes of cultural belonging" (26). The shared way of life in the concept of *nation* refers to polity or political identity, but in *culture* it stands for values, ideas, and artifacts that are handed down and carried on by subsequent generations. The concept of cultural belonging is helpful to our understanding of the soul or spirit that is particular to "Hungarianness." It eases the anguish over the issue of national identity, which easily slips into fervent nationalism that over emphasizes the distinctive characteristics of a group and one's sense of belonging to it. We can now better grasp the particular Hungarian context that shaped Lukács' generation, and which Balázs, in his "Hungarian Letter," expresses as "the overpowering urge ... to create a 'new European' culture" in Hungary (Kadarkay 64). I think theirs is a dilemma that has a specific grounding yet also seeks to ask universal questions.

Lukács and his contemporaries, Balázs and Mannheim, were searching for a universal spirit that is housed in a Hungarian culture, and which they could not shake. Lukács' fear of another spirit, the bourgeois culture, materialized in his study of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' works, and resulted in numerous texts, among them the seminal *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). Upon his return to Hungary after more than twenty-five years of exile, Lukács relentlessly continued praxis-based theoretical work, teaching, and political activism. His aim was to change society, equally through polity and by linking theory to action. To critique established modes of understanding the world around us, Lukács used the means made available by the very culture in which he existed. ✱

Notes

¹The Löwingers, Lukács' paternal ancestors lived in Hungary's southeast corner, in the town of Szeged.

²These nations form Yugoslavia in 1929.

³Endre Ady (1877-1919) was one of the most revered poets of 20th-century Hungary.

⁴ I thank Dr. Miklós Mesterházi at the Lukács Archive in Budapest for clarifying this contested issue.

⁵ Imre Kertész. *Sorstalanság*. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1975.

⁶ Imre Kertész. *Fatelessness*. Translated by Tim Wilkinson. New York: Vintage International, 2004.

⁷ George is the English equivalent of György. In the original Hungarian text, Kertész uses the nickname version of György, calling his protagonist Gyuri.

⁸ Founded in 1946, during socialism in Hungary, the Pioneers' movement [*úttörőmozgalom*] was a youth organization in grade schools for children aged 6-14, operating as a subdivision of KISZ or the Young Communists' Alliance, with the aim of preparing children for becoming dedicated members of the state.

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