Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

Stach, Stephan, Hallama, Peter, Bohus, Kata

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Stach, Stephan, et al.

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While these narrative strategies may appear at first as a kind of “dejewification”49 of the war experience, appropriating the fates of Jews to non-Jewish characters, I would argue that a more complex phenomenon is taking place. The presence of auxiliary Jewish characters maintains a “crossover” nature for phenomena such as deportations, Labor Service, hiding, and massacres, binding both sets of victims. The strong “mirroring” aspect, expressed explicitly by Darvas’s character Béla as he skulks around 1944 Budapest, especially in the context of the politics of assimilation enforced by the regime, also produces identification, a sense of shared fate.

Fate and Memory

In some treatments, this sense of shared fate extended beyond individuals to the fate of the nation during the period. Drunken Rain is the account that most explicitly attempts to reckon with what has been created, its overriding question being “where did we (communists) go wrong?” The events of 1944 and of 1956, however politically nebulous in the latter case, form the key signposts to this investigation and self-criticism—the Jewish persecutions of the former echoed in the chaos and danger of the same Budapest streets of the latter. The setting of Cold Days, with its protagonists imprisoned and about to go on trial for the widely known crimes in question, and the representative nature of the characters themselves—with stark contrasts of class, background, character and even dialect, as well as of rank, function, and experience during the events—implies such a reckoning, though it ends before any formal judgment can take place. (After the lowly Corporal Szabó relates a scene of killings on the frozen river, including a victim that could only be Major Büky’s wife, dashing his illusory hopes that she has survived, Büky savagely beats him to death.) The testimonies that make up the bulk of the novel, presented alternately and piecemeal, add up to a chaotic tale of unclear and contradictory orders, actions at the same time random and over-determined, cruelty at top and bottom punctuated by small individual moments of compassion, yet marching overall towards the inevitable

and undeniable reality of “three thousand three hundred and nine dead”\textsuperscript{50}—the historical verdict.

The meta-issue of memory itself is also touched upon. *Cold Days*, as much as it constitutes a work of sociocultural memory, is also about the process of how such memory is created: its compulsions and silences, its intellectual pitfalls and concrete dangers, as embodied in the concluding murder. The novel’s final line, quoting the commander’s order just after the end of the massacre—“Gentlemen! Not a word of this, ever!”—sets this work squarely against the repression of memory that threatens from many sides. *Katalin Street*, in a very different way, is steeped in memories that will not fade, in the form of the ghost Henriett, and in the obsession of the other characters with her fate and, thus, with the past. Memory here is less something an individual or society must struggle to preserve than an all-encompassing ether, which returns unbidden, infusing everything with its bittersweet essence.

**Official Criticism and the Issue of Reception**

Although it is clear that these novels were widely distributed—published in relatively large quantities and in many cases reprinted multiple times within a few years—the question of reception is still difficult to gauge. To what extent and how were these works actually read when they appeared? Looking back after half a century and more, how can their effects be accessed? This literature encompassed many of the leading writers of the period: they figured prominently in publication quotas for the annual spring book fair, the prime launching point for new titles, and in lists of Hungarian works designated for translation across the socialist bloc.\textsuperscript{51} They were reviewed in the most important literary journals, often multiple times. Several were produced as plays or films. As such, they were integral to the cultural landscape of 1960s Hungary.

Criticism in the official press showed evidence of what might be seen as silencing, often avoiding mention of the Jewishness of characters, using euphemisms and, despite contrary positions seen in the literature, attributing depre-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Cseres, *Hideg napok*, 5—the opening line of the book.
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