

“THEY WOULD RATHER OUTSOURCE THE STATE SECURITY AUTHORITY THAN PUBLISHING”: HOW THE RULING POWER IN THE 1950S INTERFERED WITH A PUBLISHING ENTERPRISE IN HUNGARY

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Abstract During the period of high-Stalinism until the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the increasingly tyrannical public policy completely subdued the operation of intellectual areas. Publishing can be conceived of as a tentacle of the literary policies of the period, the principal place where state-control could be exerted.

My paper provides a picture of the inescapable paths for a publisher in this era through the analysis of samples from the operation of a state-owned publishing enterprise: the Literary Fiction Publishers' and illustrate how József Révai executed ideological control at many phases of the publishing process.

Keywords Literary Fiction Publishers', József Révai, Hungarian dictatorship of the 1950s, ideological control, state-owned publishers, publishing.

The study contributes to a better understanding of the state interference in the organs of potential critique, especially the techniques of control in the publishing industry during the dictatorship of Rákosi. It shows in the light of some historical instances, how unpredictable the shift was from critical realism to socialist realism in culture when the personal cult strengthened. Since not even those who were familiar with communist censorship practices could foresee when to publish a book unabridged or when to edit a manuscript radically, the breath of scandal always hung over the publishing houses.

From the period of high-Stalinism¹ until the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the increasingly tyrannical public policy completely subdued the operation of intellectual areas, by

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¹ János M Rainer, *Bevezetés a kádárizmusba* (Budapest: L'Harmattan K., 2011), 69.

gradually undermining professional integrity.² One of the outstanding characteristics of the restructuring, which began in 1948, is the increased ideological supervision of the intelligentsia, with special emphasis placed on culture and literature.³ This meant that the presumed impact of literature was overwhelmingly exaggerated, while, at the same time, its integrity and freedom were greatly reduced.⁴

After the communist seizure of power, the task of enforcing the specialisation of cultural institutions and the application of socialist realism in Hungarian conditions/environment were assigned to one member of the governing quadriga: József Révai.

The ruling methods of József Révai

József Révai, a member of the Political Committee and the Minister of Culture in Hungary, pursued hard-line Stalinist policies, impoverishing the cultural and intellectual life of the country. As a chief ideologue, Révai's three methods of ruling culture were

1. his public declarations in national forums,
2. his statements in individual cases, in controversies, such as the Lukács-debate, the tradition debate in architecture, or the Felelet-debate, and
3. his informal micro-management, literally "manual control", of the daily practices of personal manipulation.⁵

To create a legitimate ideology, Révai used the first two methods. How did he do this? The special phenomenon of the period until 1956 was the creation of the organizational and ideological framework of the "literary front", as well as the development of the relevant language⁶ and forums. József Révai formulated the concrete tasks of this front,⁷ his principle

² Péter Sonnevend, "Terv És Remény. A Magyarországi Könyvtárügy Története a Rákosi-Korszakban. 1945-1956.," *Könyv, Könyvtár, Könyvtáros* 23, no. 7 (2014), 7-14.

³ Melinda Kalmár, *Történelmi Galaxisok vonzásában: Magyarország és a Szovjetrendszer, 1945-1990* (Budapest: Osiris, 2014), 53-54.

⁴ János M Rainer, *Az Író Helye: Viták a Magyar Irodalmi Sajtóban 1953-1956* (Budapest: Magvető K, 1990), 12-15.

⁵ Gábor Bolvári-Takács, "Révai József És a Népművelési Minisztérium Létrehozása," *Zempléni Múzsza: Társadalomtudományi És Kulturális Folyóirat* 2, no. 4 (2002), 14-26, http://www.zemplenimuzsa.hu/02_4/bolv.htm.

⁶ The Muscovites had the language of Comintern, which "enriched" Hungarian public thinking and intellectual life for decades. The Comintern language was the most vivid weapon in self-expression of the international working class. The Muscovites spoke in German, and when they learned some Russian, the German idioms were translated literally into Russian, and finally the specific set of idioms of both languages merged into one unique language. After 1945 they were translated into Hungarian resulting grotesque phrases such as "the international situation intensifies", and many others, which cannot be

standards became literally norms, which were implemented by literary criticism and increasingly by the series of administrative measures, and irreducibly developed into limitations and benchmarks of the dialogue between the political leadership and the intellectuals.

In his public declarations in national forums, the cornerstone of the standards was socialist realism as being "the highest mode in the representation of reality".⁸

The new cultural policy no longer saw the artist as an autonomous creator, only as a propagandist for the present and "the better future that will shortly ensure". Paradoxically, the supposed representation of reality that was handed down by the party was, in point of fact, totally non-realistic. Its main function was to fabricate tales of ideological salvation from the social and intellectual poverty of the real world.⁹

To complete the propagandistic mission of "socialist realism", as the Zhdanovist pattern required, a permanent purge ensued when Révai attacked György Lukács sharply in the Lukács debate in 1950 and both Lukács and Tibor Déry in another controversy in 1952.

What these controversies made clear was the end of the era of tolerance. Anyone wishing to be published would have had to align with the Soviet model. Révai's closing statement in the Lukács debate is pivotal in highlighting the hidden agenda of all this political commotion. Révai underlined that the ideological line of Lukács was lagging behind, legitimate before but not after the communist take-over, since it corresponded to the policy of the Popular Front that had been no more than a 'historical detour which Fascism compelled us to take'. It was now clear that the party was heading directly for its sole purpose: to fortify the totalitarian regime.¹⁰

Similarly, in literary life Révai instigated the most infamous attack against Tibor Déry's *Felelet* (Answer), a novel about the interwar life of Hungarian workers and their political movements. The most serious criticism was that Déry depicted falsely the labor movement of the thirties, since the novel did not emphasise enough the future significance of the communist party. Déry should have stressed more "the historically progressive elements of life, even if they were present only in their embryonic form," rather than expressing his preference for "historical reality".

It is worth quoting Révai's concluding remarks: "In the debate on *Felelet*, Déry declared that 'the writer tries to defend his right to write about topics he wants to write about.' In our world, however, the writer does not have this 'right.' The tastes and views of the

translated, although one can conceive of them by reading how Newspeak language was devised in Orwell's 1984. See Czigány, György. *Nézz Vissza Haraggal* (Budapest: Gondolat K, 1990), 26.

⁷ Rainer, *Az író helye*, 17.

⁸ Rainer, *Az író helye*, 18.

⁹ Tibor Valuch, "A Cultural and Social History of Hungary 1948–1990" (Országos Széchényi Könyvtár 1956-Os Intézet És Oral History Archívum), accessed July 4, 2019,

http://www.rev.hu/ords/f?p=600:2:::::P2_PAGE_URI:tanulmanyok/1945_56/valuch.

¹⁰ Miklós Molnár, *The Concise History of Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 305.

writer might oppose the views and interests of the people, the state and the party. It is not the people and the state who have to adjust to the tastes and views of the writer, but the writer who has to identify himself with the interests of building socialism".¹¹

Changes in the strict control of literature have delimited possibilities also in the book trade as, when official policies (~Révai) did not apply extreme methods (~his 1-2. method) to terrorise, they still could manage to shepherd authors towards displaying the expected attitude by publishing or banning their works (~his 3. method, the "manual control"). Therefore, publishers, in particular, were institutions built into the ideological superstructure. Organising their state and political control was one of the most important tasks of the period. Publishing, thus, can be conceived of as a tentacle of the literary policies of the period, the principal place where state-control could be exerted.

My research focuses especially on the inescapable paths for a publisher in this era, which can be outlined through the analysis of the operation of a state-owned publishing enterprise: the Literary Fiction Publishers. The purview of this publishing enterprise, one of the four adult education and cultural management publishers, covered the publishing of contemporary international and Hungarian literary works.

Révai's manual control through the official channels of the Ministry of Public Education (State Regulation of publishing)

Before we discuss the particular practice of the Literary Fiction Publishers, we should overview the framework in which publishers could arrange their work.

The power mechanism of the fifties interfered with the natural evolution of the book publishing process at as many levels as possible. An underlying multi-tiered system existed to determine what was accepted and what censored for the reading public.

Superior authorities have interfered with the publishing process of every single book from the very first phase. They determined which works authors were to offer for publication, which manuscripts publishers were to accept for publication and which they were to refuse.

A request note with a brief summary always had to be submitted to the Ministry of Public Education for approval, regardless of the status of the author (equally in the case of a debutant "schematic" lad or in that of the most prominent "poet laureate"). Only this individual permission for each book ensured for the publisher to reach contract conclusion.

When the work was finished, several people had to read it and reported in a detailed publisher's reader report. Based on these, a comprehensive editorial report had to be signed by the editor, the control editor, the editor in chief, and the authorization form by the publisher, and then the whole packet of papers was sent to the ministry. If there was no

¹¹ Iván T Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 87-88.

objection, the license sheet came back sealed, without which none of the printing houses could accept the manuscript in Hungary.¹²

In addition, annual planning served as a more comprehensive regulation method over the entire book publishing industry.

The activities of publishers centred around making plans on publishing works, providing a methodology for planning and fulfilling the plan. Continuously having and controlling general, forward-looking plans on publications was supposed to ensure that publishing was ideologically well-founded and that the theoretical framework was in place.

These plans ordained centrally the socialist-realist worldview, but without any attempt to describe (in e.g. annexes and background documents) how this could exactly be implemented. Instead, in order for the plans to adhere to party policies and cultural policies, ratios for subject matters were set.¹³

These compulsory topics were: the classics of Marxism and Leninism, political literature, Hungarian literary fiction, soviet literary fiction, literary fiction of people's republics. In the contemporary Hungarian literary fiction the main subtopics were e.g. 'fight for peace against imperialism and its agents', 'our People's Army is the guardian of peace', 'our revolutionary traditions', 'the struggle of the working class for socialism', 'building socialism in the countryside', 'criticism of the past'.¹⁴

There existed a number of formats for plans, which were prepared at various intervals. The publishers had to compile their own plans during the year: according to the regulations, every six months, broken down quarterly.

The plans presented those works again that had already been forwarded individually for approval, in pursuit of the same goal: to persuade the party headquarters of publishability. The publishers' plans were summarised and tailor-made to fit ideological expectations by superiors at the ministry who, in turn, compiled yearly publication plans.

For ideological superiority, however, planning was more important than the product. The party headquarters were constantly discussing the plans, arguing for or against them, held planning sessions in the ministry and other places where simple publisher's readers, who would have clearly known the actual demand of the book market, were not invited, only the board of directors. These plans and ratios were then constantly modified but the extent to which they were realised was hardly ever checked. If demand and supply flatly contradicted,

¹² Mátyás Domokos, Pál Réz, interview by Ágnes Kelevéz, February 25, 1992, About the History of the Literary Fiction Publishers', Part 1, recording, Médiatár, K01158, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum.

¹³ A Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó munkájának néhány főbb kérdése, Series 89, file 415, M-KS 276 fonds, National Archives of Hungary, Budapest.

¹⁴ Szig. biz. Javaslat a magyar könyvkiadás 1951-es könyvkiadási tervére, November 27, 1950, Series 89, file 375, M-KS 276 fonds, National Archives of Hungary, Budapest.

that was obviously a disability of reality. This way everything seemed to be ideologically all right, except for the scandals, but those were unpredictable.¹⁵

There was some improvement between 1953 and 1956,¹⁶ nevertheless, since the lack of paper in the fifties was a continuous problem, the allocation of the fixed paper quota appeared as a new and more indirect means for control and played an increasingly important role in the regulatory mechanism of publishing policy in the next few years. The superintendents of publishing sought to determine the desirable degree of publicity of the individual works or thematic categories by controlling and limiting the paper supply, i.e. the number of copies in books was not a matter of cost-efficiency, but was the subject of political consideration. Accordingly, the National Planning Office dictated the amount of paper for publishers.

The definition of paper quota has already been included in the 1953 plan realisation, yet it became part of the indirect means for planning, the implicit implementation of cultural policy intentions only from 1954.¹⁷

All this took place under the heading of economic efficiency, which was initially demanded only in rhetoric, but later became a real constraint on the publishers. For publishers, there was a fierce battle to get the right amount of paper, and the lack of paper was an impenetrable obstacle, the only manipulative brake for book production.¹⁸

In summary, the publishers tried to comply with both predefined thematic proportions and each individual cases, i.e. to figure out whether an author could or was willing to accomplish his work during the year and whether or not approval for this particular work would be granted.

Although the ministerial stamp was crucial in the process of approval, still did not mean the end of it; while the printing press could accept the manuscript, for the time being it only produced two proofs that the ministry called in again.

Then a copy of the finished book (technical copy) had to be sent to the ministry, which gave the marketing/distributing authorization. Thus, when the ministry endorsed printing, it permitted a manuscript that was first authorized at the time of the contract, secondly, in the plan, and thirdly, de facto when it was printed. As we can see, the manuscripts had to pass through four to fivefold filters. In addition, superiors had the right to ask for a manuscript if they had any suspicions or reservations, which was quite common in the fifties.¹⁹

¹⁵ Mátyás Domokos, Pál Réz, interview by Ágnes Kelevéz, October 2, 1990, About the Literary Fiction Publishers', recording, Médiatár, K00886, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum.

¹⁶ Az állami könyvkiadás 1954. évi programterv javaslata. A könyvkiadás 1954. évi papírkereteinek terve, Series 89, file 375, M-KS 276 fonds, National Archives of Hungary, Budapest.

¹⁷ Item 0019/11/1953 A Szépirodalmi, Új Magyar, Ifjúsági és Művelt Nép könyvkiadók 1954. évi tematikai terve, Box 2, Folder Szigorúan titkos-1953 Iktatott iratok 001-0075, Fonds XIX-I-21-b, National Archives of Hungary, Budapest.

¹⁸ István Bart, *Világirodalom És Könyvkiadás a Kádár-Korszakban* (Budapest: Scholastica, 2000), 19-21.

¹⁹ Mátyás Domokos, Pál Réz, interview by Ágnes Kelevéz, February 25, 1992, About the History of the Literary Fiction Publishers', Part 1, recording, Médiatár, K01158, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum.

Révai's de facto manual control by bypassing, leaving out the Ministry of Education

However, Révai's manual control of literary policy often overrode the strengthened regulatory framework of the ministry.

At this point, it should be noted, that, similarly to plans, where losing contact with reality was also observable, in the majority of the actual cases, objections to a given manuscript were not based on some well-founded problem with publishability, such as aesthetic reasons or reasons of profitability. In other words, criticisms on manuscripts were based on an individual's whims of those actually in charge of publishing in any given period.

All this also meant that the rules to be observed were in constant change. This net of taboos, bans and expectations that people were supposed to work in, was rightly labelled the 'Chinese court hierarchy' by Mátyás Domokos, who was a publisher's reader at Literary Fiction Publishers. Thus, on one hand everything was totally soaked in ideology while, mysteriously, cadres were also selected, that is, there were actually authors who could publish provided a so-called 'red tail' or 'cutter' (comments on how to interpret the work in line with socialist realism), foreword and/or afterword with a pejorative undertone, was also included, or the works were shortened to varying extents, as length was also part of the hierarchy. Publishers tried to convince prestigious literary historians, who actively participated in creating the main literary trends, to contribute via these forewords and afterwords.²⁰

Indirect coercive methods of the government in the publisher's daily operations can be divided in many categories: interference in publishable work for ideological reasons, the elevation of the manuscript to a central ideological issue, inconsistent attitudes towards publishable works and translations due to personal favours or denunciation, abrupt assessment of distribution policies, etc.

The way the will of Révai defining literary policies influenced the day-to-day practice of publishing is best reflected in its complexity by the history of two publications, namely, an anthology of the anticlerical essays of Endre Ady (*The Black Flag*. Ady's fight against the clerical reaction) and a novel by Tibor Déry (*Answer*), since it sheds light on how inconceivably the ideological control was executed even for those who were in charge of publishing but did not belong to the innermost circle of power.

Endre Ady: *The Black Flag*²¹

Poetry (and usually any work of art, any cultural product, institution, and scientific work) is a symbol of political action, and cultural work counts as the third front of the class struggle in the Marxist concept of literature.

²⁰ Mátyás Domokos, Pál Réz, interview by Ágnes Kelevéz, October 2, 1990, *About the Literary Fiction Publishers'*, recording, Médiatár, K00886, Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum.

²¹ Endre Ady, *A Fekete Lobogó. Ady Harca a Klerikális Reakció Ellen*, ed. Gyula Földessy and István Király (Budapest: Franklin Könyvkiadó, 1950).

To canonise progressive poets demanding revolutionary social reforms in their own age, thus, was crucial for communist propaganda. Sándor Petőfi, Endre Ady and Attila József, chosen to represent the “advanced tradition” in the communist transcript of Hungarian literary history foremost by György Lukács and József Révai, became the triad of Hungarian revolutionary poetry, the main canonical formation.²²

The revolutionary yet bourgeois Ady tradition could have become part of the left-wing canon, since during the periods of anti-fascist united front and “peaceful coexistence” the bourgeois authors “underdeveloped in ideology” but “honest” and “sympathising/endorsing”, or bourgeois movements called humanistic could still make their voice heard and critical realism representing bourgeois progression could gain relative legitimacy beside or behind socialist realism until 1948.²³

The year of transition, 1948, concurring with the centennial celebration of the Hungarian revolution of 1848, provided an excellent opportunity for József Révai and Márton Horváth, the party ideologists, to ground the public acceptance of personality cult in their speeches. The poetry that postulated and predicted revolution served only to score cheap political points in agitation as they assigned the Communist Party and Mátyás Rákosi the role of a hero performing/fulfilling by deeds the rhyming dreams of the poets.

The ideological interpretation of literature, the ideological legitimation of power, “naturally” began in literary history as well. Publications that broke the politics-free aesthetics were first published in 1947, for example in the journal *Literary History*.²⁴ The displacement of non-communist authors and intellectuals increased both in politics and in literature after 1948, as the paradigm of socialist realism supplanted that of critical realism and the representatives of modern realism came under fire along with strengthening of the personality cult.²⁵ First, János Arany, Mihály Babits and Dezső Kosztolányi²⁶ were tossed overboard, later Ady and Attila

²² András Veres, “Szeretném, Ha Szeretnének. Az Ady-Kultusz Jelentése És Jelentősége,” *Kritika. Társadalomelméleti És Kulturális Lap* 43, no. 1-2 (2014), 39.

²³ Dávid Szolláth, “A Forradalmi Költőtriász: a Petőfi-Ady-József Attila-Kánon Az Ötvenes És a Hatvanas Években,” *Literatura* 35, no. 4 (2009), 446.

²⁴ Item 1437 Révai József utasítása, October 18, 1950, Box 2, Fonds XIX-I-21-b, National Archives of Hungary, Budapest.

²⁴ Gábor Vaderna, “Nemzedékek, Programok, Lehetőségek,” *Irodalomtörténet* 93, no. 3 (2012): p. 291, https://epa.oszk.hu/02500/02518/00337/pdf/EPA02518_irodalomtortenet_2012_03_279-297.pdf.

²⁵ Szolláth, A Forradalmi Költőtriász, 449-450.

²⁶ All belonged to the literary circle of the periodical *Nyugat* (“The West”; founded 1908), one of the most important critical reviews in Hungarian literary history. The Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Mihály Babits,” *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., July 31, 2019), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mihaly-Babits#ref126755>. For its history see: József Szili, “Uncompromising Standards of *Nyugat* (1908-1941),” in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2007), 70-79.

József also turned out to have flaws, only Petőfi stood above suspicion as the paragon of comprehensibility.

Reducing the already reductive triad led to the birth of the catchword "Our ensign is Petőfi" in the texts discussing his oeuvre, which we should consider as the historicisation of Rákosi's personality cult intertwined with the pursuit to create a unified society and a unified culture in the communist authoritarianism.²⁷

Ady's poetry, however, prevailed, even though he was more difficult to fit into the picture. Both the young Lukács and József Révai considered him the most important figure in Hungarian literature, only to distance themselves from him later in the twenties and thirties. Lukács's radical change towards Ady was part of his radical self-shaping process in which the philosopher destroyed/dismissed the idols of his non-communist youth, for example, in 1931, he agreed with the Hungarian proletarian writers living in Moscow on Ady's ideology being the same as that of a minor nobleman masquerading as a rebel/ who plays at a rebel.²⁸ Later, though, by introducing the concept of a revolutionary left behind in the absence of a popular movement, he rehabilitated him in an important study in 1939.²⁹

Révai's interpretation reflected the same ambivalent attitude towards Ady. Explaining Ady's "dual" attitude toward the revolution was one of the greatest challenges facing the interpreter-ideologist, for example, to clarify that Ady admired Petőfi's revolutionary fire, but considered it illusory. Interpretative difficulties of Ady's poetry even heightened, when topics such as his individualism, his romanticising of death, his French symbolism, his decadent image of love, his religious poems and his conception of the nation rooted in the cult of rebels were addressed.

On the one hand, none of his contemporaries had come in political clarity as far as Ady did, since the revolution he coveted went far beyond what bourgeois was and bore important features of the socialist revolution.

Ady, on the other hand, was the only one of the three figures affected by the retrograde, distorting effects of his environment, and that accounts for his ideological and poetic flaws otherwise inducing harsh treatment for other minor poets.³⁰

Much quoted text of this era was the speech of József Révai at the second Congress of the Hungarian Workers' Party in 1953 in which he condemned Ady and Attila József. In contrast to Petőfi, they were not cohesive enough with the revolutionary movement of their age.

A controversial figure at a historical juncture, Ady had never explicated his revolutionism and sympathy for working-class, thus those remained confusing and could not reach the cathartic denouement in the narrow framework of a dying bourgeois world drowned

²⁷ Szolláth, *A Forradalmi Költőtriász*, 449.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 447.

²⁹ András Veres, "Dilemmák És Lehetőségek a Mai Lukács-Kutatásban," *Fordulat* 3, no. 10 (2010), 113, http://fordulat.net/pdf/10/Fordulat10_Veres.pdf.

³⁰ Szolláth, *A Forradalmi Költőtriász*, 452-453.

in the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, as both Lukács and Révai concluded in their Ady-studies.³¹

Did the shift in interpretation and in cult affect how censorship regime allowed to publish the anthology?

The usual policy dictated to “correct” the texts even if the author played a prominent role in the official cult. Expurgation, or bowdlerisation, of Ady presenting him only as a “revolutionary without a revolution”, thus, was expected to lace this edition.

When the Franklin Book Publishers³² prepared a copy of Ady's anti-clerical essays for publication, while still reviewing the volume, the Department of Literature omitted sentences considered irrelevant in terms of the volume and content of the book, but still incorrect to publish in a mass publication.

István Király,³³ however, did not agree with these suggestions, and argued that the whole volume was a forceful accusation against the clerical reaction, therefore the objectionable details did not change this character of the volume at all. In fact, deleting certain details from the essays might threaten to give the “clerical reaction” the opportunity to utilise

³¹ Szolláth, *A Forradalmi Költőtíriász*, 447-449.

³² Predecessor of the Literary Fiction Publishing House.

³³ Communist cultural ideologist, influential and obsessively “Soviet” literary historian, newspaper editor, parliamentarian. First conquering literary history, Király, a great talent with ambitious plans, enjoyed a meteoric rise to power in cultural policy after 1945. Although he did not turn away from his discipline, he became a servant of the dictatorship and an enthusiastic facilitator of the political control over cultural life and cultural institutions, in return for a spectacular party-state career.

He made a lifelong commitment while entering the Communist Party at the beginning of 1945. Devoted himself with neophytic zeal and rare professional thoroughness to study Marxist literature together with his friends, he first became György Lukács’s disciple after the philosopher had returned home from emigration, then he chose József Révai as his political guide. He and his companions were ready to attack anyone in the name of the new value system, meeting the daily demands of cultural leadership (thus, Árpád Szabó denounced Kosztolányi and József Szigeti denounced Sándor Weöres). Király later turned against Lukács, when he highlighted the tradition of Zsigmond Móricz for the Hungarian novel as a model to follow. His great dream of being the “organiser” of Hungarian intellectual life with the prominence of György Aczél became increasingly unrealistic, but he was a realist and satisfied with some “hegemonic” role in literature and contemporary literary history, although he also had to share this role with other literary historians (e.g. Pál Pándi). László Vekerdí, “Király István, Lukács György, Németh László.,” *Tiszatáj* 51, no. 11 (1997), 55-62.

For his portrait see András Veres, “Hinni Muszáj! Király István Naplójáról,” *Magyar Narancs* (Magyarnarancs.hu Lapkiadó Kft., June 1, 2017), <https://magyarnarancs.hu/konyv/hinni-muszaj-104478>.

His diary is an excellent, exciting and extremely instructive read, and has received a rare quick and abundant critical response. See e.g. Zoltán Csehy, “Király István. Napló 1956–1989,” *Fórum* 21, no. 1 (2019): pp. 163-166.; Imre Monostori, “A Boldogtalan,” *Kortárs* 62, no. 2 (2018), 81-90.; Gábor Reichert, “Egy Korszerűtlen Ember. Király István: Napló 1956-1989.,” *Jelenkor* 60, no. 10 (2017): pp. 1129-1133.; Ágnes Széchenyi, “Kelet-Európában Még Hosszú Ideig Autokráciának Kell Lennie,” *Új Forrás* 49, no. 3 (2018), 21-29.

that and undermine the credibility of the entire publication. He continued then: "We did not appreciate the political maturity and consciousness of our working people if we eliminate the contradictions in advance from the revolutionary works of Ady. Ady as a whole is ours, and even his contradictions prove his revolution. We cannot let anyone use him as a weapon against us, even in his contradictions." He, therefore, found the Literature Department's cautiousness excessive and claimed that a proper preface and notes would address these issues anyway and would shed light on Ady's contradictions.

Let Király look at the publication of Petőfi's prose, a similar case with a different outcome when the party's opinion was sought - demanded the Department of Literature. In that case according to Erzsébet Andics's³⁴ answer, even the milder or less ambiguous expressions than Ady's sentences were edited out from Petőfi's texts, "so that no reader can misunderstand them." The contradictions in question, the Department of Literature argued, only characterise the young Ady, who later "progressed beyond them", thus, "we must release Ady cleansed of juvenile mistakes, and we must emphasise that this is a popular, non-scientific publication."

The editor of the book and the Department of Literature, unable to settle on a final version, forwarded the case to the Secretariat of State to say the last word, and suddenly they, or on their behalf Dezső Nemes,³⁵ (in the absence of Géza Losonczy, then Secretary of State³⁶) withdrew all abridgement.

Due to the agreement with the Catholic Church³⁷, however, the book was not marketed.

In December, the Literary Fiction Publishers' could have distributed the book, only this time on behalf of the party headquarters Ferenc Révész chided the Department of Publishing in the Ministry of Public Education and the publisher for trying to distribute the unabridged version, and warned that some articles in the book were "politically harmful". Révész led the HWP's agitation and propaganda department and was still a member of the Hungarian Workers' Party Central Leadership and the Organisation Committee until March 1, 1951, although did not belong to the inner circle. (Because of the atmosphere of distrust surrounding

³⁴ Member of the Hungarian Workers' Party Central Committee and Member of the Presidential Council, a politician and historian returned from Moscow. Then also Chair of the Book Committee. Sándor Varga, "A Magyar Könyvkiadás És Könyvkereskedelem a Fordulat Évében," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 94, no. 3-4 (1978), 294, http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00021/00303/pdf/MKSZ_EPA00021_1978_94_03-04_291-302.pdf.

³⁵ Then head of department at the Ministry of Education, otherwise a historian returned from Moscow (such as Révai). See Ignác Romsics, "Kényszerek És Választások : Történezsorsok a Második Világháború Utáni Magyarországon," in *Értelmiségi Válaszutak 1945 Után: Egy Akadémiai Ülésszak Előadásai*, ed. Gábor Papp (Budapest: Kossuth, 2017), pp. 102-127. For biography see Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), 336.

³⁶ György Kövér, *Losonczy Géza: 1917-1957* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1998). p. 210.

³⁷ Church-state agreement of 30 August 1950. The agreement hereafter defined the state-church relations during the communist era. See e. g. Nándor Dreisziger, *Church and Society in Hungary and in the Hungarian Diaspora* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 123-126.

the former Social Democrats, he could not stay in the governing bodies of the party and soon after 31 March he had to leave).³⁸

Ferenc Révész also suggested replacing the sheets containing the articles “Walking in Oradea” and “Tremor” and to market the volume only afterwards, hence the Party Centre itself criticised the same details that the Department of Literature had raised in the August record.

The “order was restored at last” and the bureaucrats already aware of the system seemed to be right, when they did not find these texts of Ady appropriate in their political and ideological agenda, and had routinely intended to ignore them.

Was the censored edition published, then?

No, in the end, still the unabridged version was placed on the market, as the supreme decision-maker, Révai himself, held the book to be marketable with no change. (Exactly enjoined: “Comrade Losonczy communicated the decision of Comrade Révai”).³⁹

The Ady anthology exemplifies how the ministry routinely runs the system of censorship, how the “practices” are already embedded, and the lack of transparency of this operation.

In this specific case, the censorship routine was functioning well, by publishing Ady as a canonised poet supporting revolution, but for its clerks it was impossible to capture the ideological delicacies: although some of Ady’s “false” sentences had to be published to convey how he showed a strong bias and why he had to be criticised, yet his entire work still showed Ady as a revolutionary prophet.

Remarkably, István Király “hit” what position was “the best” in this case, which is important to capture as the first step in the process of Király becoming the ideological Caesar. This case also shows the role of Révai, an ideologist capable of acting on all fronts, who is above all professional criteria and has the full support of the supreme party leadership, well illustrating how ruling in a one-party state works: a dual structure, state bodies - ministries,

³⁸ Ágnes Kenyeres, ed., “Révész Ferenc,” in *Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon : 1000-1990* (Budapest: Arcanum Adatbázis Kft., 2001), <https://www.arcanum.hu/en/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/r-775E4/revesz-ferenc-77795/?list=eyJxdWVyeSI6ICJyXHUwMGU5dIx1MDBlOXN6IGZlcmVuYyJ9>.

³⁹ Interestingly, the phrases to be deleted included, but were not limited to, the vilification of Churches, which was indeed not current after the agreement, as they were condemning the Russian Revolution, the people or the socialists.: „Slavs teach the world a new revolution. This revolution is the writhing of hell. Shamefully, desperately dark and horrible.” or “The Russian footsoldier throws a torch at the Nikolai Railway Station and joins armed to the mob. The mob is growing tremendously. A few days later, the whole Russia will be a mob. ” or “The fat priest full of power and blood and fanaticism in Oradea now hurts Hungarian society more than ninety socialist agitators and thousands of two-headed eagles [reference to the heraldic animal of the Habsburgs].” or “Even in the future world, we cannot hope. In the future world that our Lassalleans, Marxists are forming. After all, in the educated West, the Socialists are already racketeers.”

departments, bureaucracy - operates in a formalised way, but real control is based on personal power.

Tibor Déry: Answer

The debate that flared up apropos the second volume of Tibor Déry's novel (*Response/Answer*)⁴⁰ exposed the perils of literary public life. József Révai's criticism was not limited to writers, but he also criticized those who contributed to the publication of the volume: the *publisher's* reader.

The debate also forced the publishers of the Literary Fiction Publishing House (being the publisher of the Déry-novel) to evaluate the work of the publisher, "to find the causes of the mistakes". The discussions began with a lecture meeting held on 24 October 1952.

There is a list of documents from a record made at this time until May 15, 1953, that can be used to reconstruct the concepts of the role, responsibility of publisher's reader and the issue of publishable works, and more broadly, the ideas and policies of cultural policy management for book publishers. These sources contribute to understand how the state while looking over writers' shoulder and breathing down their necks acted as a universal publisher's reader⁴¹.

The daily newspaper *Világosság* (Lightness) idealized the relationship between the censor or lector and the writer: "The publisher supports the writer from the birth of the work. The writer first adumbrates his subject to the book publisher and from that moment on, he has a permanent relationship with the *lector*. They regularly discuss some details of the book that is in progress, and on a regular basis, the writer is aided with purposeful and enthusiastic criticism."⁴²

According to Révai's criticism, in order to approach this ideal relationship, the collaboration between publisher and writer had to be rigorously reviewed in a publisher's reader conference convened on October 30, 1952. This conference was officially organized as a joint meeting of four publishers, with the aim of "educating publisher's readers and eliminating the liberalism prevailing among publishers."⁴³

In fact, all of this served only to strengthen ideological scrutiny by the broadening of the scope of the publisher's readers.

The accusations and mistakes attributed to the publisher's staff were follow the same choreography as the Déry-dispute, which meant, that due to the lack of ambitious, grand

⁴⁰ Tibor Déry, *Felelet*, vol. 2 (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1952).

⁴¹ As the conservative writer and political economist William Hurrell Mallock explicates in his refutation of socialism. See William Hurrell Mallock, *A Critical Examination of Socialism* (London: Murray, 1908), pp. 85-86. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17416/17416-h/17416-h.htm>.

⁴² *Világosság*. 1951. január 15. cited by Sándor Varga, *A Magyar Könyvkiadás És Könyvkereskedelem* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1985), 263.

⁴³ Agitációs és Propaganda Bizottság javaslata. Ibid.

socialist realistic works, the publisher's readers were very seriously blamed, and were urged to fight. According to Révai, "we must fight against schematism in the interests of the party; we demand higher standards of the works in order to be in line with the party and to be more able to impress/influence." What had been good and was able to impact in the works, contained too much moralization, pessimism and eroticism - Révai said - and all this together gives a "petit-bourgeois" worldview.⁴⁴ (According to him, one method of implementing this fight had to be not to allow to publish works, where the hero "becomes a positive worker hero from the pimping of his own sister at the end of the book".)⁴⁵

Two major, interrelated accusations emerged to explain the deficit of the ideal socialist realist books: the rightist or leftist deviation and cliquing along this perceived ideological distortions at publishers.

Criticism of the main cultural politician of the dictatorship had to be taken aboard by the Literary Fiction Publishers. Elements of criticism coming from above had to be applied on their own publishing work and on their employee relations. Although in the case of the Literary Fiction Publishers, there was no such distinctive separation of groups as among the writers in the Déry-debate, oppression still could be perceived by the leadership's control of the two companies. One group of lectors was claimed to consist of sectarians and schematics and the other was mixed, here the "different bourgeois natures manifested in different forms", all of whom were conspicuously "individual" and "aristocratic". This grouping had no other purpose, but to increase insecurity by showing that nobody was good enough to be held as a normal or proper employee.

During the confusion and frustration caused by Révai, of course, everyone sought to overcome the legislation that endangered them. Several lectors defended with the paradox of their situation: they are not just representatives of the party's ideas, but also have to respect the authority of the great writers. "I read Déry's older writings with great respect. I was perplexed by the fact that the literary public regarded him as a very important writer."⁴⁶ Others defended with the otherwise usual working method of the publisher's reader: they read the work in progress chapter by chapter, sometimes with shorter or longer intervals between each received parts, which "could be dangerous, since could resulted the shift of emphasis, the lector might see particular details either more significant or insignificant."⁴⁷

However, someone had to be found, who could be considered responsible in miniature, as Révai had removed Déry on the main stage. Finally, criticisms and attacks rained down on the young publisher's reader of the Déry volume, Pál Réz. The fact, that he was considered almost guiltier than Déry, who wrote the novel, shows the irrationality of the

⁴⁴ As István Vas summarized Révai's expectations in a few words.

Feljegyzés a Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó 1952. október 24-én tartott lektori értekezletéről. October 24, 1952. Disorganized archival material, Fonds XXIX-I-34, National Archives of Hungary, Budapest

⁴⁵ József Jászberényi's opening address. Ibid.

⁴⁶ Réz Pál comment. Ibid.

⁴⁷ Illés Endre comment. Ibid.

accusations. “Comrade Réz could have recognized more of the mistakes and should have told the writer, genuinely honest, stubbornly justifying, why those places are false.” He “does not live closely with the party”, his viewpoint still “contains unextirpated errors”⁴⁸ - whatever that may mean.

Out of fear, nobody dared to mention anything to protect the innocent publisher’s reader, for instance, that there is often some kind of inequality in the debate of the lector and the writer. A serious writer has absorbed in his work for a long time and can advocate his interpretation always better, as Déry had his own *Felelet*-encyclopedia. Other argument could have been that essentially these problems that Révai raised, nobody could have noticed previously. This is proved by the fact that when the manuscript had been previously requested by the party headquarters (this was a normal phase in censorship), Comrade Rényi, a high-ranking cadre saw it and did not make any comment. Peter Rényi, who was sitting at the presidential table exclaimed, “Comrade Réz is very mistaken if he thinks we have not noticed the mistakes. I did notice it. Nevertheless, we did not say because we were curious whether the publisher would notice it.”⁴⁹

Although this young lector avoided serious punishment by undertaking self-criticism, a lot can be found out about the operation of the whole literary system and about Révai’s cultural dictatorship.

Without clarifying the role of publisher’s readers, one cannot understand precisely how manual control was exerted. They were those, who provided the very essence of the operation of publishers, and as professionals, used their sound aesthetic judgement in deciding which manuscript was fit for publication.

During the dictatorship, due to a lack of professional cadres, publisher’s readers and editors with at that time inappropriate social background (noble or bourgeois) were more tolerated than such experts in other professions were.

However, they were treated as second-class citizens in the era, they were the ‘slaves of the book trade’,⁵⁰ intimidated through various means so that the cultural policy could exercise ideological control, forced to base their decisions about literature on reasons other than supposed aesthetic merit. Their superiors demanded critical professionalism of them while, at the same time, the same superiors tried to ensure that their professional opinion was completely in line with the then current guidelines for literary policy in every respect. Methods to exercise control included setting the format and requirements on content of readers’ reports, fixed salaries, constant assessment of political knowledge and ideological consciousness, interfering with the relationship between readers and authors, controlling the extent to which manuscripts could be altered.

In this period, the lectors were seen as the weakest link in the writer – publisher – ministry – party headquarters relationship, a fault or kink in what Lenin would call the

⁴⁸ Ferenc Pákozdy bureau secretary’s comment. Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ferenc Botka, ed., *Kortársak Déry Tiborról* (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1994), 10.

⁵⁰ Mátyás Domokos, *Leletmentés* (Budapest: Osiris, 1996), 7-8.

transmission belt in the process of creating a dictatorship of the proles⁵¹. However, due to the small number of competent intellectual workforce, instructions from the party headquarter generally did not require personal cleansing or dismissal, did not want to hitch new horses instead of the old ones when the chariot was jammed. By pulling the bridle tighter and by re-harnessing they tried to build a new, better machine from time to time, and wanted to provide an institutionalized system for the efficient operation of the literary plant and the literary production.

The main problem for them was not that "rebellious" writers or their works could have appeared - the literary machinery for preventing that had been quickly built up, which they were not able to embrace/accept "up there" was that the editors and publishers cannot extract masterpieces from the authors. Obviously, the party/schematic writers could fulfill only the party instructions, but even the real/genuine/original writers, if they tried to comply with the directives, were not able to create aesthetically pleasing works. Here entered the publisher's reader the literary machine, as an accoucheur at the creation of the work, and was required to attend to both the political and aesthetic aspects. In other words, the publisher's

⁵¹ The "transmission belts," the "levers," and the "directing force" in their totality constitute "the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (*Lenin*), and with their help the daily work of the dictatorship of the proletariat is accomplished. What are these "transmission belts" or "levers" in the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat? The levers or transmission belts are those very mass organisations of the proletariat without the aid of which the dictatorship cannot be realised. The directing force is the advanced detachment of the proletariat, its vanguard, which is the main guiding force of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The proletariat needs these transmission belts, these levers, and this directing force, because without them, in its struggle for victory, it would be a weaponless army in face of organised and armed capital. The proletariat needs these organisations because without them it would suffer inevitable defeat in its fight for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, in its fight for the consolidation of its rule, in its fight for the building of socialism. The systematic help of these organisations and the directing force of the vanguard are needed because in the absence of these conditions it is impossible for the dictatorship of the proletariat to be at all durable and firm. What are these organisations? Firstly, there are the workers' *trade unions*, secondly, there are the *Soviets*, thirdly, there are the *co-operatives* of all kinds, with all their ramifications. These are a mass organisation of the working people, a non-Party organisation, which unites the working people primarily as consumers, and also, in the course of time, as producers (agricultural co-operatives). The co-operatives acquire special significance after the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, during the period of extensive construction. They facilitate contact between the vanguard of the proletariat and the mass of the peasantry and make it possible to draw the latter into the channel of socialist construction. For the sake of completeness I should also mention the fourth and the last organisation: there is the *Youth League*. and lastly, there is the *Party* of the proletariat, its vanguard.

Joseph Stalin, "Concerning Questions of Leninism," in *Works*, vol. 8, January-November, 1926 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1954), 13-96,
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1926/01/25.htm>.

reader was between a rock and a hard place and had to be the epitome of perfection, who combined aesthetic and political abilities – except being an author himself.

Understandably, the lecturers attempted to meet the requirements; however, the impossible was demanded namely to write, with the abandonment of their individuality, literary analyses corresponding always to the party norms faultlessly, yet being always tailored to the particular literary work.

The issue itself, that is to say, the creation of simultaneously "partisan/adherent" and "prestigious", valuable works, was essentially "an iron ring made of wood", a nonsense, an essential contradiction, and was based on a fundamental literary and political misconception. It would have made it easier to find solution for that, if everyone had cried out, that the emperor indeed had new clothes, in other words, if everyone had lowered or distorted the aesthetic norms and had proclaimed shoddy works as a masterpiece. In the Soviet Union, this "lighter" solution was chosen. In Hungary, József Révai, the cultural pope, did not want to give up - and he himself had some aesthetic judgment. Instead, he delivered/forwarded the task of squaring a circle one or two levels "down". After the death of Stalin (March 5, 1953), the transformation of literary conditions, "melting", slowly began...