

## Losing Touch, Keeping in Touch, Out of Touch: The Reintegration of Hungarian Literary Exile after 1989

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To begin with I recall two events as allegories of Hungarian literary exile in the second half of the twentieth century. The first relates to the 1944–49 wave of *émigrés*, the second to that of 1956. Both represent notions and experiences of a “return.”

László Cs. Szabó, a well-known essayist of the 1930–40s, was aware of the approaching communist takeover; he left for Italy in 1948 and settled later in England. In exile he enjoyed the highest reputation as critical authority, organizer, and spokesman. Among the later *émigrés* and those few domestic scholars and writers who were luckily allowed to visit England during the Kádár era it became customary to pay one’s respect to him in his solitary London flat. Cs. Szabó strictly opposed cooperation with the communist authorities, even when they initiated contacts in the late 1960s to get some recognition for the regime. After decades of absence, and years of informal preparation by the influential writer Gyula Illyés, Cs. Szabó eventually visited Budapest in 1980, on the stipulation that some of his works be published and he could give a lecture at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he used to lecture on art history. Facing a crowded classroom, Cs. Szabó opened his lecture with the ironic remark: “As I said in my last class.” Alluding to a lecture thirty-two years earlier, he insisted on both the possibility and the absurdity of restoring continuity with the pre-communist era, probably not merely on a personal level.

Cs. Szabó’s attitude may be generalized insofar as the self-image of the 1944–49 exiles continued to adhere to a virtually frozen domestic perspective, no matter how much they differed from each other in all respects. For them, going home meant resuming what had been interrupted, even if some of them admitted that Hungary had become different from what the *émigrés* once knew; “we are not the very same either” (Kovács 4). However, a belief in continuity could be sustained only as long as official exclusion could be blamed

for its absence. Cs. Szabó died in 1984 during a Budapest visit. Had he lived to see the 1990s, he might have agreed with Gyula Borbándi, another prominent exiled man of letters in Munich, who admitted in 1996 that he never thought that geographical distance from people at home would create such a gap between their views (“Küldetésem” 92).

The political exclusion of exiles was terminated in 1989, but new problems emerged, especially for those who left in 1956 and started their literary career in exile. László Márton, a co-founder of the prominent Parisian exile literary journal *Magyar Műhely* (*MM*), entered the domestic literary scene with a collection of short stories, and subsequently announced in 1992 his long-felt wish that his namesake in Budapest, the novelist László Márton, should use a pen name to avoid confusion (“Törvényen kívül”). An article by Borbándi, editor of the periodical *Új Látóhatár* (*ÚL*) in Munich, supported his case, for it broached the subject of namesakes at home and abroad (“Névazonosságok”). The domestic László Márton was much younger but ranked among the most promising novelists. Refusing the demand, he claimed in an interview with Lajos Márton Varga titled “Who is the real László Márton?” that he had priority for he had already published his books years before his Parisian namesake managed to release in 1989 his first publication in Hungary. Answering under the same title, the ex-exile Márton recalled that he had appeared in exilic journals and anthologies. He felt especially offended that the other Márton questioned his literary credentials. Bitterly complaining that his namesake considered him “non-existent,” and his claim as an external threat, he concluded that former émigrés remained “outlaws.” The Parisian Márton brought the case to court, whereas domestic writers and intellectuals defended the domestic Márton and joined a press campaign, imploring the Parisian in a private letter to abandon his claim. The case ended with an out-of-court settlement that stipulated that each must add something distinctive to his name in journal publications. The 1993 edition of the *New Hungarian Literary Encyclopedia* distinguished the two authors but still mixed up some of their publications.

Theoretically, controversies of this kind can easily be solved by convention. However, in this peculiar case the rule was hard to apply. The exilic Márton was known only within very small circles in Hungary, but justifiably he regarded the criterion of book publication in Hungary a sophistry, since exiles could not publish in the country. He rightly claimed also that his publications in exilic periodicals and anthologies should be regarded as presence in what émigrés were keen to call “global Hungarian culture,” even if he was not allowed to publish in Hungary. In a sense, the incident revealed that introducing émigré authors in Hungary led to a collision of two distinct although in-

terrelated Hungarian literatures. The extreme case of the homonyms emblemized the collision. The exilic Márton represented those who had to wait for decades to make their debut in their homeland, whereas the domestic one spoke, if only unwittingly, for those who necessarily considered themselves the “genuine” Hungarian literature because they had little information about the ones abroad. Notice that the exilic Márton had next to his fellow MM editors also Borbándi’s backing; those who were at odds, or even hostile to each other during their exile years, often joined forces when they returned. Similarly, those who asked him to yield to his domestic namesake were exclusively domestic intellectuals; it represented a well-mannered but clear unity against a former émigré – which the latter uniformly resented.

The Márton vs. Márton case created little public stir, but may be treated as an allegory of exclusion. The domestic Márton became one of the main novelists on the Hungarian scene, while his exilic namesake, who moved home in 1994, remained an active contributor to the press and has recently published a biography of Arthur Koestler, thus moving away from fiction writing. The incident may have helped weaken his ambition and struggle to become a writer, a struggle that preoccupied all the young literati of 1956: they were rather unknown at home when leaving and had difficulty in getting recognition even after 1990. The title short story of Márton’s *L’égiposta* (Airmail/Mail from Heaven) may indicate, next to doubts about his own talent, a complaint common among exiles writers that they get no responses. It could be also taken as his anticipation of the later controversy. When the narrator, a neurotic writer, gets no reactions to his works, he suspects a global conspiracy against him. His stream-of-consciousness monologue, punctured by brutal sexual desires, by allusions to a father complex, and by references to Jewish fate in twentieth century, ends when he receives a letter with characters cut out of a paper, probably self-written: “Seeking advice, eh? Or some direction? There’s none, all run out of it there. You cannot even properly finish off your own story, you moron ... leave all this, leave it, shut up. Are you still unable to keep your mouth shut ...?” That was their message” (21).

### 1. Closely Watched Connections

A history of Hungarian literary exile in the second half of the twentieth-century could be depicted as a series of misunderstandings and misconceptions. After 1989, when the motives for going into emigration were gone, the problem did not get resolved, and in a way its irresolvable character came to light.

The post-45 exiles and émigrés were in a double bind from the very beginning. They declared their independence from or hostility towards the communist regime, even if they happened to have been devoted Party members, as it was not that rare among the '56ers. Yet, Hungary never ceased to be the focus of their attention and ambition, in contrast to other East-European exile writers and some Hungarian émigrés from the interwar period, like the Polányi-brothers, the classical scholar Károly Kerényi, the political journalist Ferenc Fejtő, or the humorist writer George Mikes, who all became successful on the international scene. Those who left between 1944 and 1949 were mostly convinced, for various reasons, that literary exile would *substitute* for Hungarian culture, which was oppressed at home. In the 1950s many held that Hungarian literature *itself* emigrated. Those 1956ers who had already had a literary career at home also adopted this approach, declaring in the headline of the first issue of *Irodalmi Újság* on March 15, 1957 that it was to represent the “writers of an exiled nation.”

In the 1960s, particularly when the young '56ers with literary ambitions came forward, making exile literature even more multilayered, this ideology of substitution faded or became less attractive. The editors of *MM*, whose avant-garde orientation was already a provocation to many, urged several times the admission that exile can only make a limited contribution to the big picture, and the domestic scene will never cease to be the “genuine home” of Hungarian literature. Other young exiles of 1956 also tried to detach their literary ambitions from political standpoints. As Endre Karátson suggested answering a questionnaire by the *IÚ*, it makes no sense to turn literature into a means of political struggle aiming to liberate the homeland, for a work would thus become a “monument” of that struggle and lose its specific literary character. In the late 1960s, as the Kádár regime consolidated its power and the hope of an imminent political solution vanished, the exiles came to realize that their absence will be lasting. Hence harsh disputes emerged in the *ÚL* in 1967–69 over the question whether, and if so how, to start a dialogue with people at home.

Though émigré literati could rely on their own quite well developed network of periodicals and publishers, their ultimate aim was to publish in Hungary. Although some of Sándor Márai's, Lajos Zilahy's, Győző Határ's work was translated, and Kriszta Arnóthy, Ágota Kristóf and a handful of other writers decided to change language, Cs. Szabó must have expressed a fairly common view by asking the émigrés to continue to write for their fellow Hungarians and not for “the English, the American, the French, the Germans or the Swedes” (“Még vagyunk” 29). Their desires and efforts to gain or regain domestic audience, or to have at least some response, were enhanced by the

indifference of the Hungarian Diaspora. Exilic journals had to cope with constant financial problems for the lack of patrons. Most writers resorted to self-publication with subscribers. They came to realize that they would never have a proper audience unless they get home, at least via their writings.

Craving for publishing at home found a new ideology when in the 1970s the opening dialogue with the home-folks converted the notion of substitution into *correction*. The exiles intended to follow attentively, and, as far as possible, to influence the homeland's cultural and political life, in order to correct what they considered communism's distortions in taste, historical consciousness, and public opinion. Despite their deep disagreements, they tacitly agreed that the exile is to keep up values and measures discredited or pushed into the background at home. As Cs. Szabó envisaged at a 1975 Netherlands conference titled "Hungarian Literature in the West," the émigré efforts should lead to an "intellectual blood transfusion" back home. The concept of correction was expressed in the profile of the exile periodicals as well: *ÚL* and *IÚ* took up the cause in the political-historical sense, *MM* in the aesthetic-poetical one.

This ambition was based upon the conviction that exilic literature was, in contrast to the one at home, "authentic," because it was free of political constraints. The other source of the émigré commitment, as Áron Kibédi Varga expounded it, was to consider Hungarian culture genuinely oriented toward the West, an orientation temporarily surrendered in communist Hungary but still held up by the émigrés. Accordingly, the exiles and the émigrés had become part of the West, and could, by virtue of their status, serve as mediators ("Nyugati magyar irodalom"). Both arguments held only partially. Though Hungarian writers abroad did not need to follow what Party authorities said, personal relations and political biases did influence the Hungarian literary culture abroad. Patrons had, for instance, an influence on the choices made in anthologies. As to the second point, a scholar like the Hungarian born but Western trained Kibédi Varga, who achieved a respectable international career in literary theory, could certainly consider himself Western-minded; but the majority of émigré authors encountered the new trends as readers at best, without applying it to their art (Karátson, "Milyen magyar író lettem" 129). Older generations understandably held on to their earlier orientation, which in many instances ironically coincided with some views still prevailing at home. The young '56ers were more receptive to new Western cultural, poetical, and philosophical movements, for they adapted more to their new home. The *MM* editors Pál Nagy and Tibor Papp had connections with the *Tel Quel* circle and were more open to structuralism and deconstruction than any of the other exile circles.

In pursuit of the mission of “correcting” things in Hungary, literary exiles certainly had great achievements, even if their attempts to mediate Hungarian literature to Western countries met with only limited success. Nevertheless, they invited Miklós Mészöly, Sándor Weöres, Miklós Erdély, and other authors marginalized Hungary to deliver lectures at the meetings of the *Mikes Kelemen Society* in the Netherlands and the *Magyar Műhely Munkaközösség* in France. They also offered the possibility of uncensored but potentially damaging foreign publication for those who dared. MM published not only the works of underground authors like Erdély, but also a volume of Weöres’s poetry (1964), which the author was forced to declare in Hungary as unauthorized. They also reviewed significant works by Lajos Kassák and Miklós Szentkuthy, which were all but ignored at home. Some texts of the literary tradition that did not fit into Hungary’s cultural policy also appeared in exile. In 1981, *Arkánium* in Chicago published Attila József’s psychoanalytic diaries, which did not dovetail with the Hungarian view of him as a “proletarian poet.” Understandably sensitive to the fact that one third of the Hungarians lived outside the country, émigrés also promoted the cause of the Hungarian minorities in the surrounding countries, an issue ignored or mistreated by official Hungarian politics. They tried to reach and include in their activities Hungarian writers from Romania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. In return, émigrés appeared in the *Új Szimposion* and other minority periodicals in the more liberal Yugoslavia. The most ambitious project gathered Hungarian culture in the motherland, in Diaspora, and in the minority cultures that lived beyond the Versailles Treaty borders. A triple workshop on these entitled “Magyar Mérleg (Hungarian Balance)” was held in Switzerland in 1979–80.

The attitude of the communist authorities toward exile was marked by somewhat similar tendencies. In the 1950s and early 60s, émigrés were treated within the cold war, as agents of American intelligence services and enemies of the socialist democracies. Yet short reviews from the middle 1960s onward gradually revealed more conciliatory approaches, which, to be sure, still strictly separated political exile from “cultural Diaspora.” As a sign of easing, the very designations changed. From the 1970s onward, the label changed from “exilic literature” to “Hungarian literature in the West.” However, a recently recovered secret document of the Publishing Office (Kiadói Főigazgatóság), which dealt with censorial issues, shows that the sporadic critical attention was governed by the Party doctrine that only those authors living abroad should be given permission to publish at home, who emigrated before World War II, namely those who fled from the Nazis and not from communism (Tóth and Veres 373). This is why the French short stories of László Dormándi (left in 1938) could appear in translation in 1965.

The *Anyanyelvi Konferencia* (Workshop on the Mother tongue), first held in 1970 in Hungary, was a conciliatory move of the Hungarian officials, but it was actually one of several publicity attempts to legalize the Kádár regime via Western émigré guests who longed for a recognition at home. Only a select number of émigrés wanted or were allowed to participate. Authorities even tried to enlist some to report on their fellow exiles, baiting them with promises of publishing, further entry permits, or passport for their relatives. The Hungarian officials made it clear, however, that nothing would be allowed that touches on ideological taboos, such as the Soviet subjection, memories of '56, or the revisions of Versailles Treaty. Cs. Szabó cherished hopes of publishing in Hungary through the 1970s, but when he gave an interview to Radio Free Europe, this was taken off the agenda for a while. The same happened to György Faludy after he published a poem on Kádár in 1981. Some scholarly works, for instances by Lóránt Czigány or by Kibédi Varga, managed to slip through somewhat easier, giving a boost to domestic research as well.

Some émigrés accepted compromises, others did not. Issues of MM free of political statements somehow appeared on the open shelves at the National Széchényi Library, while other exilic materials were kept in sequestered collections. Márai refused a publishing offer to him, by making free elections a condition of his permission; but the popular novelist Lajos Zilahy of the interwar era, who left for the United States in 1947, was republished in Hungary in the 1970s and enjoyed a great success. He died while planning to move home. Even Cs. Szabó accepted mild censorship to have his essays *On the Greeks* (which formed the background of his mentioned 1980 lecture) and several works be published in Hungary. It must have given him pleasure that, although ancient Greek culture seemed to be a safe topic, he could slip in some messages. For instance, he started his opening chapter entitled "Spread out into the world," by defining culture as diasporic in its Greek origins. However, he hurt the sensitivity of his former exilic publisher, Aurora, by remarking that the release of one of his books in Hungary made him feel like a real writer again.

Others followed, though in limited numbers. The most striking case was that of András Domahidy, who went in 1956 to Australia. His novels made a favorable impression on Péter Nagy, an influential literary historian and Party member, and thus permission was given to release them in the mid 1980s. Domahidy's poetically sophisticated way of portraying in *Vénasszonyok nyara* (Indian Summer; 1969) the fate of aristocrats during the early years of communism, and his stream-of-consciousness analysis of an exilic psyche in *Árnyak és asszonyok* (Shades and Women; 1979), brought him success as well as critical attention. Ironically Domahidy became a household name in the Hungarian

Diaspora once his novels were published in Hungary: his second novel was translated and published in Australia in 1989.

With the easing political climate, publishing and republishing gathered speed. During the 1980s, anthologies of exile poetry, prose, and essays were simultaneously released by émigré and domestic publishing houses. However, Béla Pomogáts's collection *Párbeszéd Magyarországgal* (Dialogue with Hungary), a volume of studies on touchy historical and political issues, was published only in 1991, after the changeover. Next to the anthologies, a systematic elaboration of exilic literature also started in Hungary. In the fourth part of the seventh volume (1945–75) in the Literary History of the Academy, Miklós Béládi and his co-editors surveyed the minority Hungarian writers of the surrounding countries under the general title *Hungarian literature Abroad*, and they “smuggled” in a chapter on exile literature. After some delay, the same scholars came forth with the more comprehensive *Hungarian Literature in the West after 1945*. Both volumes attributed excessively painful and nostalgic emotions to the émigrés. Those abroad, strongly criticized the volume for praising as reasonable those who were reluctant to criticize communism in a direct way, and for regarding exilic literature merely as an expression of lost perspectives. Still, it is ironic that a synthesis was only attempted in Hungary; the émigrés themselves did not venture to give a comprehensive picture of their own achievements.

## 2. Encounter of an Ambivalent Kind: Inside and Outside in the 1990s

Most émigrés saw in the collapse of communism a mission accomplished; the long-awaited “homecoming” had arrived. Realizing that they no longer had a purpose, *IÚ* and *ÚL* closed down. *MM*, *Katolikus Szemle* (Catholic Review) in Rome, and *Szivárvány* (Rainbow) in Chicago, and other journals moved their editorial offices to Hungary. Publishing houses like Arkánium in Washington, Aurora in Munich, Occidental Press in Washington closed down, Püski moved from New York to Budapest and maintained its profile of publishing populist writers. In the enthusiastic years after 1989 many held that the overcoming of separation restored the “organic” form of Hungarian culture, and that censor-free exile publication could actually become a model at home (Pomogáts, “A nyugati magyar irodalom” 42). Instead, the return of the exiles sharpened the differences within Hungarian culture.

A major distinction soon became evident between those émigrés who had started their literary career at home, and those who entered it only in exile.

The former counted as household names and were more likely to be noted, even if most of them, including Cs. Szabó, Márai, Zoltán Szabó, or Nyírő, did not live to see the end of emigration. Their reception involved recalling their works published at home. Old copies survived in family libraries and in the special sections of public collections. New editions of their works were started. Some received state decorations from the new governments as a compensation, and they regained their memberships in the Academy and in the Writer's Association, be it posthumously. The poet György Faludy was one of the few survivors who soon re-settled in Budapest. During the communist era, handwritten copies of his poems had a limited illegal circulation, but his autobiographical volume *My Happy Days in Hell*, first in samizdat (1987) then legally (1989), instantaneously regained for him an immense popularity. Győző Határ, who left for the UK in 1956, did not give up his residence in Wimbledon, but self-editions of his huge oeuvre, which ranges from fiction and drama to philosophy, started to appear in Hungary from the late 1980s onward. His eccentric poetics, often likened to that of Joyce and Sterne, intrigued writers and evoked a more professional interest than that of Faludy. Határ started to publish in the later 1940s, but he was silenced: the Stalinist critic István Király called him "anti-humanist," and he was jailed between 1950 and 1952 for attempting to cross the border illegally. The 1991 facsimile edition of his first novel *Heliane* (1948) suggested a continuity with the short-lived democratic post-war intermezzo.

Prose writers like György Ferdinandy, Endre Karátson, Mátyás Sárközi, and poets like József Bakucz, Elemér Horváth, László Kemenes Géfin, Géza Thinsz, and György Vitéz, did not publish in Hungary before leaving and could not reestablish continuity. Some domestic critical surveys introduced them in the 1980s, but this could not compensate for their disadvantage, as some of their works were not available, not even in the prohibited collections of public libraries. These authors had to find an audience and interpreters not only for what they had already written but for their forthcoming works as well. They differed from earlier exiles in that most of them avoided the extremes of complete assimilation or nostalgically clinging to a domestic perspective. Márai, who left already in 1948, thought that his European culture was disappearing; going into exile seemed to him as losing the last possibility of feeling at home anywhere. In contrast, those who left in 1956 led a double life well after 1990. For some, a respectable academic career was still running in their new home, which they would not give up merely for moving home; only a few settled in Hungary even after their retirement. As Kibédi Varga set forth in his aphoristic diary titled *Amsterdam Chronicle* (1999), and Karátson in his two-volume autobiographical essay titled *Otthonok* (2007), they felt at

home at several places and in several cultures. For Márai and his contemporaries, being at home meant an intimate, though problematically maintained, relation with the Hungarian language; the young ones developed a multilingual identity, even if they often continued writing literature in their mother tongue and publish only their scholarly works in their second or third language.

In search of historical precedents, one might refer to the return of the 1848 exiles after the 1867 Compromise with the Habsburgs, and the return of the 1919 exiles from Moscow in 1945. Both groups gained key positions in the new cultural and political establishment. Those returning after 1989 did not even attempt to do this, although decades of absence and failed, or partially successful, attempts to publish raised their expectations. The last issues of *ÚL* revealed that to gain impact at home, or even to get involved, would be harder than expected. Contributors returning from their recent first visit to Hungary noted that they and their works were little known at home (Sztáray 153). Further complaints about domestic reception were voiced at a conference on exile held in Debrecen in 1989, which intended to pay tribute to the “home comers.” Actually most émigré authors frequently published in Hungary after 1989, although, as they rightly anticipated, their critical reception remained low keyed.

A workshop in Hévíz in 1994 titled “Who’s afraid of Hungarian literature from the West?” was symptomatic of the emerging mutual disappointments and frustrations. The debate concerned the responsibility for the failure of “normal” returns. While the chief organizer rather naively hoped for an era in which “natural reception” would overcome ideological stances and exaggerated expectations (Pomogáts, “A befogadás” 100), the émigrés insisted that their exclusion continued and “Hungarian literature” remained “domestic literature” (András 89). Accusing the writers at home that they fear competition, some revived the cold-war accusation that émigrés were “boycotted” at home (Kemenes Géfin 137). However, their expectations were sometimes contradictory. On the one hand, they missed critics who would be devoted exclusively to their works to systematically locate the “Western” achievements in the big picture. On the other, they disliked the notion of a “Western” Hungarian literature, for they quite rightly considered themselves simply Hungarian writers. Paradoxically, they longed for a special treatment while claiming to be ordinary. Some had an impact with their scholarly work while their poetry or fiction remained unacknowledged; some had not managed to find a *modus vivendi*, others did. The poet and art historian László Baránszky remarked that when he started to frequent Budapest he could continue the conversations once “suspended” (107).

Those with an international academic career expected domestic intellectuals to turn to them for help and advice how to find cultural and scholarly connections in the West. Their disappointment was deepened when they recognized that their competence was not needed or even questioned. Anticipating controversies on the question, who might be given authority to judge Hungarian culture, Péter Balassa in Hungary responded to one of Határ's essays with the remark that émigré notions of literature and nation had become awfully obsolete (440). László Kósa pointed out in more general terms that due to ageing and loss of an oppositional task the intellectual contribution of émigrés to domestic affairs regrettably proved less than impressive (71). While admitting that distance also provides a unique perspective, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák suggested that sketchy knowledge of the domestic conditions was a severe handicap ("hontalanság" 165–67). Memoirs of political refugees and émigré historians writing on World War II, Hungarian Stalinism, or 1956 received wider attention than exilic poetry or fiction, though at times they also had to face devastating domestic critiques. The Frankfurt Book Fair chose in 1999 Hungarian literature as its special concern, but this great opportunity for self-representation aroused hot debates. Former émigrés found it another occasion to complain that they were depreciated, that their works were under-represented, and that the Hungarian organizers failed to contact them.

After 1990, exilic writers came to realize that the political piquancy attributed to them was quickly fading away. During the economic crisis after 1989 public interest in literature appeared to be vanishing, in part also because it no longer functioned as a spearhead in the fight against censorship. The loss of literature's social significance led the Chicago linguist and poet Ádám Makkai to diagnose a decline of literary culture in Hungary, and to suggest that if he moved home he would paradoxically be even more homesick for Hungarian literature. The reintegration of exilic literature proceeded parallel with greater challenges to Hungarian society, namely a redefinition of national culture and local integrity amidst globalization and Europeanization. Former émigrés had to find their space in a deeply divided society. Intense political hostilities shortly followed the democratic transition, reviving the controversies between the "populists" (*népies*) and the urbanists that prevailed the 1930–40s. Domestic literati got deeply involved in what some have called a new *Kulturkampf*. It roused some émigrés to express their disapproval, although, ironically, that division also allowed others – e.g. Borbándi on first side and Fejtő or Méray on the other – to rejoin their former circles.

Émigré authors did not get integrated into the domestic scene, but this was only partly due to the minor role delegated to émigré critics after 1989. The return of the émigrés coincided with a change of guard in Hungary's intellec-

tual life, which deprived those abroad of some informal though supportive personal connections. The younger domestic critics were keen to canonize in the 1980s the “postmodern turn” of domestic authors like Péter Nádas and Péter Esterházy, thereby also establishing their own critical authority. Exilic literature was not treated as entirely irrelevant. Still, when a “potential place” in recent literary history was ascribed to Hungarian authors in the West, this meant insertion into a framework that had been established without recognizing their works and achievements. Reintegration was carried out as necessary domestication. Some émigré works obviously corresponded to new-found canonical values at home: those of Karátson to the poetics of metafiction and those of Ferdinandy to the avant-garde syntax in prose. Though Határ’s novels could have made him a forerunner of Joyce in Hungary, his late reception turned him into a latecomer

Hungarian literary exile had no canon of its own. The connections between the exile writers were too loose and remote to form an interpretive community. Moreover, the most qualified literary historians and theoreticians in exile did not exclusively study Hungarian literature, or did not study it at all. Another source of misunderstanding was that some of the “home-comers” held on to a canon of yesteryears with writers like Gyula Illyés or László Németh who no longer, or no longer exclusively, prevailed in Hungary. That was why Ernő Kulcsár Szabó’s impressive study of Hungarian literature between 1947 and 1991 was rejected by George Gömöri and some other émigrés, though it actually did attempt to integrate the exilic literature into the domestic one. Kulcsár Szabó’s much debated concept of an “interrupted continuity” in the Hungarian literature of the 1950–60s was loosely based on the émigré notion that “a whole literature went into exile.” Kulcsár Szabó assigned significant canonic positions to Domahidy, Ferdinandy, Határ, Kemenes Géfin, Márai, Vitéz, the MM-writers, and other émigré authors, writers who could be considered excluded representatives of a fading modernism or as yet unregistered forerunners of postmodernism.

Before 1989, émigrés disagreed about the domestic literary canon mainly on political grounds. However, as disagreements survived at the end of exile, it became evident that the differences were mostly due to personal predilections. Kibédi Varga claimed that he could ascribe the worshipping of the poet Imre Oravecz only to domestic misconceptions about poetry (*Amszterdami* 34). His exaggerated generalization ascribed a matter of personal taste to cultural differences. Nevertheless, in an interview he pointed out that it was illusory to believe that the collapse of communism would make the writing of a “true” Hungarian literary history possible (“Legyőzhetetlen” 62).

### 3. Redefining Exile, Redefining the Canon

Towards the millennium, the discussion on exile that started around 1989 exhausted itself and became repetitious. Exilic organizations still in Diaspora came to realize that “cooperation” with the homeland would never reach the level and form they desired, thus they ceased to attempt to interfere directly with domestic affairs. The *Svájci Magyar Irodalmi és Képzőművészeti Kör* (Swiss-Hungarian Society of Literature and Art) gave up, for instance, its Lugano-conferences, due to lack of interest from home. As they bitterly commented on their homepage, they turned “back unto themselves”: henceforth they would maintain, register, and preserve in archives the cultural life of local Hungarian communities, and support Hungarian minorities in their proceedings and programs. The Mikes Circle, however, goes on with its conferences, dedicating its activities to a syncretic view of a “global” Hungarian culture.

Around the millennium, exile was redefined in the domestic critical scene. Instead of the earlier, ethically or ideologically motivated welcoming gestures, a more formalist approach came to prevail, as in Zsófia Szilágyi’s monograph on Ferdinandy, which refused the “melancholic myth” of emigration and considered tracing the author’s exilic experiences in literary texts as irrelevant. Gábor Csordás tried to universalize the notion of exile by asking whether it was at all possible “to feel at home.” He vigorously claimed that *Unheimlichkeit* was an insurmountable human condition, and the alienation of exilic writers exemplified par excellence the general impossibility of being at home in Western culture. With the widening of focus, interest developed also for those previously disregarded authors who had appeared on the international scene in another language, like Kriszta Arnóthy, or writers that did not write in their mother tongue, which they forgot having left the country as a child, like Tomasso Kemény. The periodical *Hungaricum*, launched in 2006, is entirely devoted to writers and artists with Hungarian background around the globe, whatever their language. In addition, second generation authors of exilic families start to get special attention. Books of Tibor Fischer, a noteworthy British novelist and a descendant of ’56 exiles, have been translated into Hungarian, for they have evident connections to Hungarian history and culture. A chapter on his novels in the latest Hungarian literary history suggests that authors may appear in the future without a definite national identity (Szegegy-Maszák, “A magyarság” 837).

In the meantime, the cultural scene has reached a medialized phase, and this transforms the way literature, even that of former exiles, is consumed. Faludy’s marriage over ninety and his declared bisexuality entered the tabloids and TV-shows, making him something of a celebrity. Bestseller writers of the

interwar era who went into exile and became fairly unknown at home, started to attain attention. The novelist Ferenc Kőrmendi, for instance, who had a great international success in the 1930s, left for the US in 1939 and worked for the Voice of America; Jolán Földes, who won first prize at an international novel contest in 1936, sold millions of copies in a dozen languages, emigrated to Britain in 1941, and switched to writing in English under the penname Yolanda Clarent. Both authors reappeared in the Hungarian series “forgotten classics” in 2006. Their posthumous “return” was due to the current wave of interwar nostalgia and the market’s need for quality light reading. However, they also moved some to urge that the ascension of popular genres should redefine the canon and the process of canonizing. Földes’s reappearance was especially appreciated by the feminist.

The reception of two emblematic exile writers around the millennium stirred up such interest that it all but transformed the whole Hungarian literary scene: Sándor Márai and Albert Wass have rather unexpectedly become the most popular and best selling writers on the Hungarian literary market. Their lives and novels were both put on the screen recently. During the Hungarian “Big Read campaign” in 2005, which franchised the original British campaign, three of Wass’s titles made the “Top 50” most popular Hungarian novels of all time, one of them even getting into the final twelve. With Faludy’s *My Happy Days in Hell* and Márai’s *Embers* and *Bekanntnisse eines Bürgers* in the Top 50, the campaign revealed that these emblematic figures of exile reach a wide public.

Márai’s works were republished in Hungary only after his death. As one who committed suicide at the age of 89, and as an emblematic anti-communist, Márai became a symbolic figure of exile. He represented “the writers of the bourgeoisie” and the lost continuity with pre-communist Hungarian society. After the democratic transition he received a keen though ambivalent scholarly attention as one who had been excluded from the literary traditions. Kulcsár Szabó has emphasized that his classical modernism revealed a broken continuity with Europe but provided Hungarian postmodernism with a useful link to world-literature (22–23). Szegedy-Maszák’s study aimed at getting Márai posthumous appreciation, but well in advance it warned against overestimating him or turning him into a cult figure. His popular reception was at the outset not overwhelming. Many copies of a new complete edition of his works, which counted on elderly readers still recalling his former success, ended up in street-vendor sales. Thus the international fame that Márai received around the millennium in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and England, was quite a surprise to many, not only in Hungary but also among his fellow émigrés, since he had already appeared on the European scene in translations decades earlier without much notice. The Frankfurt Book Fair in

1999 was the breakthrough. His *Glut* (original title *A gyertyák csonkig égnek*), considered by Hungarian critics as one of his weakest works, sold hundred-thousands of copies in Germany. Recognizing that his works of lesser importance achieved international success, even István Fried, an admirer of Márai, labeled his success a possible “misunderstanding,” finding it an enigma that still needs to be puzzled out (185–98).

Wass, a Transylvanian novelist who wrote parables of the Trianon trauma that were repressed during the communist era, had not attracted much attention until his suicide in 1998, certainly not one that could be compared to his recent inexplicably vast popularity (see John Neubauer’s essay in this volume). He became a right-wing cult figure, a code for ideological identification: admiring him or being indignant about him reveals political predilections. The leftist philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás labeled him “our only entertaining fascist,” others find his new-fangled cult of myths and counter-myths rather psychotic. From the extreme right some label him “the last Hungarian writer with a true national sentiment.” Wass’ enormous success is not the product of new critical currents, but ideology and interest in minority issues do not explain it fully either. Being a right-wing Transylvanian author did not bring him much popularity in the early 1990s; he became an object of worship only when a younger right-wing generation appeared on the scene. Some of his less politicized fans probably enjoy just his old fashioned storytelling, a counterpart to “postmodern decadence.” According to the latest news he dominates the prison libraries.

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