

**THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL THEATER 1945-1955
AN ANALYSIS OF PERSONAL NARRATIVES**

By

Júlia Angyalka Füredi

Submitted to
Central European University
History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Gábor Gyáni
Second Reader: Professor Susan Zimmermann

Budapest, Hungary

2013

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part, may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

Abstract

The subject of the thesis is the Hungarian National theater and its relationship to politics in Hungary from 1945 until the theatrical year 1953/1954. A significant literature exists on the subject of the National Theater but this project will adopt an innovative approach by taking as its chief focus of interest a series of autobiographical memoirs of key individuals within the institution. The autobiographies of Bálint Magyar, head secretary of the National Theater; Hilda Gobbi, actress; and Gyula Háy, playwright. I am interested in the small steps, compromises and decisions they personally made, and as these are retrospective texts, and are relevant regarding their self-reflexive and subjective, even self-justifying identity construction, the question to be asked is what did these authors find important to mention, how do they present, how do they 'explain' themselves, especially in regard of the investigated time period and their relation to the prevailing political system.

Methodologically the thesis will combine a close reading of these primary texts with a contextualization within the relevant secondary literature relating to the political background and the institution of the National Theater.

The study of autobiographies written by appreciated members of the society provided an insight into the informalities of the otherwise rigid system, and on the cultural political values in practice.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude for all the professional guidance I received at the Hungarian Theater Institute. First of all I would like to thank Tamás Gajdó for his selfless help sparing time for our inspiring conversations, sharing his vast knowledge, and Anita Rákóczy for her encouragement and for her extremely useful pieces of advice.

I am tremendously thankful for my dearest aunt Borcsa and her husband Tadhg, for all their professional and moral support that put me through this academic year.

I am most grateful for my friends, my friends here, with whom we talked, and who fed me, my friends abroad supporting from faraway, my friends and comrades at ceu, my invisible friend, and my superhero friend. They all have supported me immensely all year long, and understood my disappearance from social life.

I would also like to thank my brother Misi and our dog Mazsola for their love and patience.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Table of Contents	2
Introduction	3
Historiography and Memory of Theater	6
The National Theater in Historical Studies	6
Theoretical Works on Decoding Autobiographies	13
The Personal in the National Theater	16
The National Theater in Budapest : Constant and Changing Features in its Role from its Establishment to its Sovietization (1837 - 1953)	18
A Brief Historical Overview of the National Theater from its Establishment to the End of the Second World War	19
The Sovietization in postwar Eastern Europe with a Focus on Hungary	23
The Organization of the National Theater in the Postwar Years	28
Memories of the Postwar Years	36
Bálint Magyar, head secretary of the National Theater	38
Hilda Gobbi, actress	46
Gyula Háy, playwright	52
Their Position to Power	57
Conclusion	59
Bibliography	61

Introduction

Theater is a very interesting environment where various types of professions interact. In my MA thesis I investigate the relationship between the political power and the individuals in relation with theater with a focus on the National Theater of Hungary, between 1945-1955.

Many have written on the subject of theater in Hungary, but theater-historians tend to use a different approach, they analyze plays, write the history of institutions by analyzing its program structure, and often organize it around the leading persons of a particular theater, provide a sequence of directors, and characterize it according to his or her personality, activity. Theater-historians are often writing from the inside, as they usually are to some extent involved in the theatrical world, either as directors, occasionally actors, or as scholars working at the Theater Institute of Hungary. Many are interested in the actors' personal lives, therefore interviews with actors and their autobiographies were published in great number. The story, history of the National Theater has already been explored, investigated and researched from various approaches, my thesis complements and expands on the existing literature on theater history of the time period, providing a new and fresh perspective.

In my theoretical and methodology chapter, *Historiography and Memory of Theater*, I provide an overview on the existing literature on theater, on the National Theater, and on the various methods used by theater-historians. Then I include a subsection addressing the issues raised by this particular kind of source, of autobiographies, such as to what extent can a historian use retrospectively written sources as sources for the past, and to what extent are they sources for the time of

composition. This section draws on an extensive international literature (such as Philippe Lejeune's *On Autobiography* and the works of H. Porter Abbott on autobiographies, and on narrative) but it will contextualize this material with regard to the special conditions of communist Hungary. The nature of the political system which existed means that many of the type of sources which Western historians of theater have available to them, such as minute books of theatre discussions where the participants were not concerned with possible political repercussions, or debates within a free press, do not exist for Hungary during this period. This both heightens the importance of narrative and retrospective sources for the period in Hungary and makes more urgent a sophisticated reading strategy which can utilize this material while being aware of its hazards and pitfalls.

Posterior to the methodological, theoretical chapter a section would follow on the historical background and context of the investigated time period, 1945-1955. Thus I provide a 'classical historical' approach to the National Theater, in my chapter, *The National Theater in Budapest : Constant and Changing Features in its Role from its Establishment to its Sovietization (1837 - 1953)*, I provide a brief institutional history from its establishment and a more detailed overview on its operation during the postwar years. I argue that the National Theater, despite its traditional role of being a national and bourgeois institution played a crucial role in the implementation of the sovietization. The National Theater was in a contradictional situation, but it adjusted to the new socialist values, while maintaining its characteristics and its leading role.

After the political and social context of the National Theater in my last chapter, *Memories of the Postwar Years*, I present and analyze autobiographies of prominent figures: a leading actor (Hilda Gobbi), a playwright (Gyula Háty), and the

head secretary of the National Theater (Bálint Magyar). This chapter examines the topic of self-reflection through the case studies of the sources themselves in order to find out how opinion was expressed, to what extent was there a freedom of expression, the ways and the degree of control and forms of it, such as self-control, state control, system control, and most of all how do they reflect upon these retrospectively. Analyzing these personal sources, and investigating the personal motives, acts, experience, ambivalences, personal struggles will offer a new perspective on the history of theaters and will shed light on greater social processes as well.

Historiography and Memory of Theater

Hungarian Theater in my investigated time period (1945-1955) was an ambiguous and closed environment, and its investigation can serve as a lens to view wider processes in society and in politics especially in cultural politics and its participants. Politics and the theater were vitally entwined in postwar Hungary. Theater was an environment for artistic expressions which sought to make an impact on audiences but more directly theaters were also dependent on the state and on the subsidies which they received. Theatrical artists were in a position to influence the public and thus to directly or indirectly support (or resist) the political system, which in turn had various forms to express its gratitude, by providing collaborative artists with work, or granting greater opportunities, prizes, or positions.¹ In my thesis as indicated in the title and the introduction, I deal with the National Theater, with its role in the implementation of stalinization, which I discuss in detail in the following chapter. The story, history of the National Theater has already been explored, investigated and researched from various approaches, my thesis complements and expands on the existing literature on theater history of the time period, providing a new and fresh perspective.

The National Theater in Historical Studies

A reasonable amount of literature exists on Hungarian theaters, mostly on the institutions themselves, or from a theoretical point of view on the concept of theaters. Aside from addressing theoretical issues or the organization of certain institutions, the methodology of existing work differs from my approach, as it tends

¹ Ständeisky Éva: *Gúzsba kötve. A kulturális elit és a hatalom*. [Bounded. The Cultural Elite and Power]. 1956-os intézet, ÁBTL, Budapest, 2005. p. 7.

to focus more on the repertoire of the theaters, which naturally reveals many interesting details but can become centered on the magical world of theaters, actors and plays, and fails to contextualize the world of the theater within the prevailing political and social conditions of postwar Hungary.

Most of the existing literature on the Hungarian National Theater was written from the inside: by members of the theatrical world, either as employees, directors of certain theaters or as researchers employed by the Hungarian Theater Institute. Therefore to a certain extent the history of theaters becomes the personal histories of these figures. My thesis offers an external perspective which represents a new angle to investigate this closed and interesting world.

The most common form of discussing theaters is through the history of institutions, *The Hungarian Theater History*² provides a thorough history of theaters, in three grande volumes, in which each institute is discussed in separate studies. György Székely, the acknowledged theater-historian, who was Senior Researcher at the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute, was the chief editor of the volumes. One his chapters, in the third volume, *History of Institutions. The National Theater*³, deals with the history of the institution from the 1920s to the nationalization of theaters, which is 1949. This study contributes to the background and context of the National Theater's initial postwar years. It focuses more on the National Theater's program than the political and legal guidelines it had to adjust to.

² Magyar színháztörténet. [The Hungarian Theater History], főszerk.: Székely György. Budapest, Akadémiai Nyomda, 1990. The three volumes cover different time periods, the first from 1790-1873 is edited by Ferenc Kerényi; the second and the third were both edited by Tamás Gajdó, and cover the 1873-1920, and the 1920-1949 period.

³ Székely, György: Intézménytörténet. A Nemzeti Színház. [History of Institutions. The National Theater] In.: Magyar Színháztörténet 1920-1949. <http://tbeck.beckground.hu/szinhaz/htm/07.htm> (accessed: February 11, 2013)

Accomplished theater historian Ferenc Kerényi edited the compilation *The National Theater's 150 Years*⁴, which is also an institutional history, it provides an overview of the National Theater's history from its establishment, it too mainly focuses on the program structure and the articles are organized in successive order by the directors of the theater.

Most of the seminal works on theater, or the National Theater in particular, use the above described approach, the analysis of the theaters' program to provide a history of theaters. Theater-historian István Szabó's article, *The program of the Theaters in the 1950s*⁵, is a great example to demonstrate this kind of method. The article focuses on the program of the theaters of Hungary, from which the cultural politics can be deduced. Szabó's study also elaborates on the destalinizational process, it points out that real changes appeared only in the 1954/1955 season, when the number of the Soviet plays showed decreased and the emphasis shifted to the classics and modern, new Hungarian plays, in order to ensure the national character, and to combine the old traditions with the new trend. This article provides a different, but crucial approach to the cultural politics of the time, it examines it when in practice. Therefore it contributes to the historical, political background of theaters, of the National Theater, which I discuss in further detail in my next chapter.

⁴ A nemzeti színház 150 éve. [The National Theater's 150 Years]. Szerk.: Kerényi Ferenc, Budapest, Gondolat, 1987.

⁵ Szabó, István: A színházak műsora az 1950-es években. [The program of the Theaters in the 1950s]. In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 15-36.

Many of the theater-histories were published in compilations of articles grouped around a certain theme, such collections are *Theater and Politics*⁶, *Theaters and Dictatorship in Hungary*⁷, and *Digital Theater History*⁸, all of them published by the Hungarian Theater Institute. These compilations contain articles on the National Theater itself, as well as on theater politics, history of Hungarian theaters of a certain period, in which the National Theater consists part of the studies. Tamás Gajdó, recognized theater-historian at the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute edited most of these compilations, and wrote several studies on Hungarian theater, on the organization of theaters and their political context. In one of his studies, *Dictatorship in Theaters in Hungary 1919-1962*,⁹ he examines the history of theaters during dictatorships in Hungary, their roles, their possibilities and their operation. It is a descriptive and informative article on the topic, provides a general overview on the situation of theaters. Gajdó provides a description on how theaters were used for educational purposes under different (fascist or communist) regimes, his article is extremely useful on elaborating on the concept of propaganda with practical and concrete historical examples.

⁶ Színház és politika. Színháztörténeti tanulmányok, 1949-1989. [Theater and Politics. Theater History Studies, 1949-1989.] Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2007.

⁷ Színház és diktatúra a 20. században. [Theater and Dictatorship in the 20th Century] Szerk.: Lengyel György. Corvina. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet. 2007.

⁸ Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. [Digital Theater History. Theater-History and Methodological Studies] Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009.

⁹ Gajdó, Tamás: Színházi diktatúra Magyarországon 1919-1962. [Dictatorship in Theaters in Hungary 1919-1962]. In.: Színház és diktatúra a 20. században. Szerk.: Lengyel György. Corvina. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet. 2007. p. 338-382.

Another one of his articles deals with the postwar years, *The Reorganization of Hungarian Theater in 1945*¹⁰, expands specifically on the theaters, on their reestablishment in 1945. He outlines the beginning and the establishment of the new political values by elaborating on the Fives Commission's [Ötös Bizottság] role, which started the reorganization of theaters, both by starting the work of reconstruction, and by laying down the new artistic values, artistic and organizational goals. They already in 1945 started to implement some communist values and techniques to manage and supervise this sphere of the culture. Gajdó's articles contribute to a more detailed and focused historical background on theaters, and the National Theater's role in the stalinization process, which I discuss in detail in the successive chapter of my thesis.

Another approach to tackle the relationship between theater and politics is the one theater-historian Anna Czékmány uses in her article, *The Nation(al) [Theater] Lives in its Past*¹¹: in which she focuses on the National theater's representative role in constructing and representing the nation, on the concept of nation and its role in the political power structure of the past and present. It is relevant to my topic on a very basic level, as the concept of a national institution, the national theater is the basis of its leading role among the theaters and in the establishment of the cultural political values.

¹⁰ Gajdó, Tamás: A magyar színházi élet újjászervezése 1945-ben. [The Reorganization of Hungarian Theater in 1945.] In.: Színház, 2012. május. http://www.szhaz.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36377:a-magyar-szhazi-élet-ujjaszervezése-1945-ben&catid=66:2012-majus&Itemid=7 (accessed: February 10, 2013)

¹¹ Czékmány, Anna: Múltjában él a nemzet(i). [The Nation(al) [Theater] Lives in its Past] In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 69-80.

A scholarly approach is applied by Zsuzsa Korossy, librarian, museologist. Her study, *Theater Directorship in the Rákosi-era*¹², provides a thorough overview on the theaters' organizational and directorial characteristics, it contextualizes in the political sphere the theaters' operation, the levels of censorship, it maps where were the decisions made, and how were they carried out. It introduces the nationalizations of theaters, and stresses the National Theater's role in the implementation of the sovietized system, as a role model. The article provides a thorough and slightly confusing description of the institutions, political organizations that controlled, managed theaters. It is extremely useful on gaining knowledge and information about the historical and political context of theaters in the Rákosi-era. Korossy's study based on archival research elaborates, and provides a detailed overview and description of the complex situation and relation of theaters and cultural politics of the examined time period. It mentions and elaborates on the duties and roles of the organizations that were responsible for theaters, and on the complex relations these had with theaters themselves. It does provide a good overview on the topic, although, perhaps due to the complexity of the subject itself, it is a rather confusing article, and its citations are rather poorly carried out, by looking at the endnotes only it is not clear at all, what exactly were her primary sources.

In another study written by her, *The Tale Is Not About Us. Snapshots of the Hungarian Theatrical Life*¹³, she focuses on the year of 1953, it's starting point is

¹² Korossy, Zsuzsa: Színházirányítás a Rákosi korszakban. [Theater Directorship in the Rákosi-era]. In.: Színház és politika. Színháztörténeti tanulmányok, 1949-1989. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2007. p. 45-138.

¹³ Korossy, Zsuzsa: "Rólunk nemigen szól a mese" Pillanatképek a magyar színházi életről 1953-ban. [The Tale Is Not About Us. Snapshots of the Hungarian Theatrical Life]. In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 37-60.

the guidelines provided in February 1953, which guidelines according to the author could might as well have been said in 1949, as the destalinizational process reached the theatrical sphere only in the next theatrical season, it did not have any effect on the guidelines yet. Focusing on the year 1953 she elaborates on the operation of theaters, the organizations and ministries that managed, controlled them, and the cultural political values of the time. This study as her other article also aims to describe the very complex situation of Hungarian theatrical life. Despite its limitations, it provides valuable data on the functioning of theaters, on the historical and legal background of theater management.

Another well accomplished scholar who wrote on theater, on the National Theater, and published compilations of archival sources together with archivist Orsolya Ring, but on a later time period, the Kádár-era, is Zoltán Imre. In his *Dictatorship's (Theatricality) and the Theater's (Memory). Rákosi and the National Theater's 1955 Performace of The Tragedy*¹⁴ he discusses the theatricality of the system, of politics, through the analysis of one single play in the program of the National Theater. He stresses on the theatricality of the sovietized regime, discusses the characteristics of the sovietizational process as he contextualizes the play in its historical and ideological, political circumstances, thus provides an insight into the investigated period through the analysis of that particular performance of *The Tragedy*¹⁵. His approach is somewhat similar to mine, he also uses a small

¹⁴ Imre, Zoltán: A diktatúra (teatralitása) és a színház (emlékezete). Rákosi Mátyás és a Nemzeti Színház 1955-ös Tragédia-előadása. [Dictatorship's (Theatricality) and the Theater's (Memory). Rákosi and the National Theater's 1955 Performace of The Tragedy] - In.: A kultúra átváltozásai. Kép, zene, szöveg. Szerk.: Jeney Éva, Szegedy-Maszák Mihály, Balassi, Bp, 2006. p. 209-237.

¹⁵ The Tragedy of Man [Az ember tragédiája] is a play written by Hungarian author Imre Madách in 1861. It is considered as one of the masterpieces of Hungarian literature, and is often staged, but in the communist period it was not appreciated that much, often it was banned, as it happened with this particular performance as well in 1955 in the National Theater, after a couple of shows it was taken off the program for a long time.

portion of the period as a lens to show wider processes, only that I use autobiographies as sources, instead the sources frequently used by theater historians: the program or critics of particular performances. I aim to map these various pressures and personal dilemmas in order to understand the subtle matrix of cooperation and covert opposition which governed the relationship between dramatic artists and the political system.

Scholars such as Zoltán Imre and Zsuzsa Korossy have touched on aspects of theater and politics, but again from a different perspective from my approach. In some of their articles they have looked at the directorship of theaters in the Rákosi-era and have drawn conclusions concerning cultural politics chiefly from the angle of examining incidents such as a premiered then banned play and its context, by looking at contemporary debates, press coverage and archival sources, or from the angle of reconstructing the era mostly using archival documents. My research would complement these thorough and complex analyses with the personal perspective, the memory of the participants.

Theoretical Works on Decoding Autobiographies

Personal narratives bring up many problems, most profoundly the problem of memory, of remembering and forgetting in addition to methodological problems.

I accept and apply the definition of autobiography by Philipp Lejeune that he provides in his *Autobiographical Pact*¹⁶, as a genre that fulfills all four of the following criteria: the form of language is either narrative, or prose; the subject treated is an individual life, story of a personality; situation of the author and

¹⁶ Philipp Lejeune, *The Autobiographical Pact*, in idem *On autobiography*, Philippe Lejeune ; edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin ; translated by Katherine Leary, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c1989.

narrator are identical; and regarding the position of the narrator it is required that the narrator and principal character are identical, and a retrospective point of view is used of the narrative. Other personal narrative genres closely related to autobiographies do not meet all these criteria. Such as memoirs that do not reflect only on the individual life, story of personality, or biographies where the narrator and the principal character are not identical, or journal/diary in which case there is no retrospective point of view, it is a typically contemporaneous genre.¹⁷

The uniqueness and authenticity personal narratives provide us with themselves imply the limitations of the genre, as all personal narratives have an agenda. They are in one way or another written for the future, and are often to some extent self-justifications, meaning that the past somehow legitimizes the author's present, who he or she has become.¹⁸ They may represent a resistance to forgetting or the substituting one way of remembering for another possible way of remembering.¹⁹ Although it is somehow a struggle against forgetting, against falling into oblivion, the greatest methodological problem with the use of personal narratives is indeed forgetting intentionally by applying self-censorship, or unintentionally, as each memory is necessarily a selection.²⁰ According to H. Porter Abbott, the well known scholar of personal narratives, autobiographies are acts, a

¹⁷ Philipp Lejeune, *The Autobiographical Pact*, p. 4.

¹⁸ Niedermüller Péter: *Élettörténet és életrajzi elbeszélés*. [Life history and Biographical Narration]. **In.**: *Ethnographia* 1988 (XCIX. évf.) 3-4. sz. p 381.

¹⁹ Füst Milán: *Bevezető szavak naplójegyzeteimhez*. [Introduction to My Journal] **In.**: *Uő.*: *Napló*. Magvető, Budapest, 1976. p. 18.

²⁰ Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory. Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003. p. 127.

story of a life is an action.²¹ Autobiographies are never a total history or story of a life.

Autobiographies and other personal narratives are referential texts, which intend to give information on extratextual truths, thus exposes themselves to the test of objective truth.²² The factuality of the written details derives from their verifiability, in principle the verification has to be possible, the factuality of the described events derive from their potential verifiability, thus the facts are constituted by their compliance to the reality, even if during verification they may not prove to be true, the point is that it is possible to verify them.²³ Hence according to Abbott, and many, the appropriate approach to an autobiographical text is by autographic reading, which means raising the question “How does this reveal the author? (...) Historical truth or falsity are important only insofar as they express the identity of the author.”²⁴, thus they not need to be verified or contrasted with external documents, as they are not supposed to tell an objective history, not even if such history existed.

One can investigate what sort of perception or interpretation the author had of the surrounding world and its objects, its events, and the significance he or she attributed to them.

In memoirs, autobiographies two kinds of pasts appear, the sequence of the occurred events, and the conceived or perceived past.²⁵ For the latter not only the

²¹ H. Porter Abbott, *Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories*, *New Literary History*, Vol. 19, No. 3, History, Critics, and Criticism: Some Inquiries (Spring, 1988), p. 600-601.

²² Philipp Lejeune, *The Autobiographical Pact*, p. 25-26.

²³ Vincze Hanna Orsolya: *Önéletírás, tények, toposzok*. [Autobiography, Facts, Topoi] **In.:** Ármeán Otília, Odorics Ferenc (szerk.): *Határon*. Pompeji, Kolozsvár, Szeged, 2002. p. 238.

²⁴ H. Porter Abbott *Autobiography, Autography, Fiction*, p. 613.

²⁵ Niedermüller Péter: *Élettörténet és életrajzi elbeszélés*, p. 384-386.

written words themselves, but the way they are expressed, the style, the velocity, the mode of construction and silence itself also provide information. As the author's intention is not to describe the past as it was, or as experienced, but to present the past with a meaningful experience, that confirms the present.²⁶

Despite its complexities one can analyze and use personal narratives for historical research. They provide a rich and nuanced insight into the informalities, the personal experience of the investigated time period.

The Personal in the National Theater

From a theoretical point of view, memoirs, autobiographies and diaries are extremely interesting types of sources which raise vital historiographical issues. The thesis will investigate the personal narratives of the theatrical world, probing the manner in which its inhabitants had to adapt and make compromises and the extent to which they themselves were active participants in creating and forming the prevailing political system. How did they reflect upon these questions and issues at the time and then retrospectively and how do these reflections differ? How and in what form does the clash between a political system that claimed intellectual hegemony and the artists' presumed freedom of self-expression appear in the sources? What choices and methods did they have at the time to maintain (to a certain extent) their integrity, and how do they reflect upon it?

My approach to investigate this complex relation of power and theater, particularly the National Theater is diverse to the previously described ones, as I use personal narratives, more precisely autobiographies as sources. Many personal narratives have been published by people in connection to theater, but this

²⁶ Niedermüller Péter: *Élettörténet és életrajzi elbeszélés*, p. 386.

aspect has not yet been investigated thoroughly. The theater, especially the National Theater, was an over politicized institution. In my thesis I investigate the institution's relation to power, not only in its cultural political context of the time period, which is the successive chapter of my thesis, but in my last chapter, through the comparative analysis and close reading of personal narratives of the individuals related to the National Theater.

The National Theater in Budapest Constant and Changing Features in its Role from its Establishment to its Sovietization (1837 - 1953)

A National Theater is never simply one of the theaters. It is, and always has been a political, a representative sphere, and it always had a different significance than other theaters. The Hungarian National Theater was founded during the nation building era, and carried since some nationalistic characters, most visibly in its name.²⁷ The nationalistic character faded somewhat in the postwar years, but the National Theater remained the nation's first and most important theater; it kept its leading role.

In this chapter I investigate the leading role of the National Theater of Budapest among theaters, mostly in implementing the soviet system. The description of the development and the changing role of the National Theater, a representative institution, with a brief digression to the whole theater structure, provides an insight to the prevailing political system and its transitions, and to the emergence of new social classes, the transformation of society. In this chapter I argue that the process of sovietization is represented, reflected in the institution itself, the few years during which major transformations have taken place in society: the more or less continuous development of classes and social groups, the rise of the bourgeois was abruptly interrupted, and new values were introduced.

In this time period the National Theater became a scene where its tradition clashed with the new values. It kept its leading role, but its nationalistic, national character clashed with the international values the sovietization introduced. Another contradiction was that the National Theater, as later in this chapter will be

²⁷ Czékmány, Anna: Múltjában él a nemzet(i). [The Nation(al) [Theater] Lives in its Past] In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 72-73.

described, was a metropolitan, bourgeois institution. It was a paradox situation where its traditional role clashed with the official values. By appointing a young communist generation as its leaders the National Theater diverged from its original values, while keeping its outstanding role and its function as the number one institution to preserve and facilitate Hungarian language and drama. They aspired to transform the audience to synchronize it with the ideological expectations by encouraging workers theater attendance with various techniques.

In order to contextualize the National Theater's changing role and its responsibility in the process of sovietization I first provide a brief historical overview of the institute itself, from its establishment.

A Brief Historical Overview of the National Theater from its Establishment to the End of the Second World War

Professional Hungarian language acting began in 1790 with the purpose of the cultivation of Hungarian language, the dramatization of Hungarian history, and the improvement of morality.²⁸ Up until this point Hungarian language acting did not exist, and the institutionalization took an additional half a century, as they did not have a theater building up until 1837, when the Hungarian Theater of Pest [Pesti Magyar Színház] opened, and it was maintained by the county of Pest.²⁹ Its greatest competition was the German Theater, that was established in 1812.³⁰ The

²⁸ Kerényi, Ferenc: A színház mint társaséleti színtér a 19. századi Budapesten [Theater as a Scene of Social Life in 19th Century Budapest] In.: Budapesti Negyed. 46. 2004. http://bfi.archivportal.hu/id-859-kerenyi_ferenc_szinhaz_mint.html (accessed: May 4, 2013)

²⁹ A Pesti Magyar Színháztól a Nemzeti színházig. (1837-1840) [From the Hungarian Theater in Pest to the National Theater] In. Magyar Színháztörténet 1790-1873. [Hungarian Theater-History 1790-1873] p. 264 <http://mek.oszk.hu/02000/02065/html/1kotet/28.html> (accessed: May 4, 2013); Nemzeti Színház [National Theater] In. Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon. [Encyclopedia of Hungarian Theater]. szerk. Székely György, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1994. <http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02139/html/sz16/182.html> (accessed: May 4, 2013)

³⁰ Kerényi, A színház mint társaséleti színtér a 19. századi Budapesten

bourgeois and Biedermeier habit of theater attendance had evolved in the decades between the two foundations. The Hungarian Theater was established with the help of public donations, therefore it was considered by contemporaries as a symbol of national unity.³¹ The Hungarian Theater of Pest soon, in 1840, became the National Theater, as it came under the management of the nation, rather than the county.³² Its role remained to be the preservation and development of Hungarian language and sentiment, and the unifying of Hungarian culture. It achieved these goals by offering a variety of genres, classical plays, such as Shakespeare were shown, operas were performed as well as comedies and folk plays. The latter genres could attract the public from the competing German theater.³³ From the beginning the support of Hungarian playwrights was an important agenda of the theater, which remained an important factor up to date.³⁴ A threefold show structure consisting of classics, Hungarian drama, and contemporary international plays was present from the very beginning in the National Theater.³⁵ In 1848 the theater became a political public space, and it performed folk plays, with which it reached a new audience. Not only its space, but the actors themselves took part actively in the revolution of 1848-1849. After its defeat the theater could not serve the rise of bourgeois values anymore, it was diminished to traditionalism. But the urbanization process continued, and the audience became more urbanized, the entrepreneur, mercantile

³¹ Kerényi, Ferenc: A színház mint társaséleti színtér a 19. századi Budapesten

³² A Pesti Magyar Színháztól a Nemzeti színházig. (1837-1840) [From the Hungarian Theater in Pest to the National Theater] In. Magyar Színháztörténet 1790-1873.; Nemzeti Színház [National Theater] In. Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon. [Encyclopedia of Hungarian Theater]

³³ Kerényi, Ferenc: A nemzeti romantika színháza (1837-1849). [The Theater of National Romanticism (1837-1849)] In.: A nemzeti színház 150 éve. Szerk.: Kerényi Ferenc, Budapest, Gondolat, 1987. p. 25.

³⁴ Kerényi, Ferenc: A nemzeti romantika színháza, p. 12.

³⁵ Kerényi, Ferenc: A nemzeti romantika színháza, p. 21.

strata was drawn in as audience.³⁶ In 1875 the building of the the National Theater was reconstructed, the theater had its prime years up until 1894, which was followed by a depression period.³⁷ Its audience in these years were the conservative landholders, and wealthy bourgeois.³⁸ In the second half of the 19th century the professionalization of theaters by genre began, a differentiated theater structure developed. In 1875 the Folk Theater [Népszínház] was established specifically designed for folk plays, but later operettas were performed more frequently. From 1884 the operas and ballets were performed in the newly established Opera House, which was another one of the national institutions, thus received subsidy as well. The first exclusively bourgeois theater was the Comedy Theater [Vígsház], which opened in 1896. In 1903 another operetta theater opened, which meant that by 1903 the National Theater's role was reduced to the genre of plays, classics and contemporary plays.³⁹ In the depression years of the National Theater the Hungarian plays were also performed very seldom, and finally its building demolished too, it moved into the building of the Folk Theater, as the Folk Theater closed earlier on. In the beginning of the 20th century, by 1918, the differentiation of the theater structure balanced out, each theater found its main genre and audience, the National Theater's audience remained the conservative

³⁶ Kerényi, Ferenc: A nemzeti romantika színháza, p. 35-36;
Mályuszné Császár Edit: A rendi nemzeti színháztól a polgári nemzet színháza felé (1849-1873). [From the Noblemen's National Theater towards the Bourgeois Nation's Theater (1849-1873)]. In.: A nemzeti színház 150 éve. Szerk.: Kerényi Ferenc, Budapest, Gondolat, 1987. p. 39.

³⁷ Nemzeti Színház [National Theater] In: Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon. [Encyclopedia of Hungarian Theater]

³⁸ Nagy, Ildikó: Polgárosuló színház a polgári Budapesten. [The Rise of the Bourgeois Theater in the Bourgeois Budapest] In: Lackó Miklós, szerk.: A tudománytól a tömegkultúráig. Bp., MTA TTI, 1994. p. 191,197.

³⁹ Nagy, Ildikó: Polgárosuló színház, p. 193-196.;
Kerényi Ferenc: A színház mint társaséleti színtér a 19. századi Budapesten

middle class, and its profile the classics and Hungarian plays.⁴⁰ The developed specialized structure of theaters was an indicator of the rise of bourgeoisie, and it meant the specialization and professionalization of the theater art itself as well, the theater workers became professionals.⁴¹

Between the two world wars the policy of the nation's reorganization and the education of the nation were considered as priorities.⁴² During the interval between the wars and during the second world war theaters kept their roles, with this shift of their focus, which meant that the National Theater as it received a considerable amount of subsidy from the state, that came with certain constraints, was a tool and shaping factor of the actual political system in its way, e. g. by the change of the program structure with the addition of German and Italian plays.⁴³ During the interwar years antisemitic laws were introduced, and chambers were set up from which the Jewish were excluded, but membership was obligatory in order to perform or work at a theater. The Theater and Film Chamber [Színházművészeti és Filmművészeti Kamara] was established in 1938, its leader was Ferenc Kiss.⁴⁴ The sovietizational process during the postwar years was a reaction to the antisemitism of the interwar and war years, a combat against fascism.

⁴⁰ Nagy, Ildikó: Polgárosuló színház, p. 206; 210-212.

⁴¹ Nagy, Ildikó: Polgárosuló színház, p. 214.

⁴² Gajdó, Tamás: Színházi diktatúra Magyarországon 1919-1962. [Dictatorship in Theaters in Hungary 1919-1962]. In.: Színház és diktatúra a 20. században. Szerk.: Lengyel György. Corvina. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet. 2007. p. 341.

⁴³ Magyar, Bálint: A két világháború között (1919-1944). [Between the Two World Wars (1919-1944)] In.: A nemzeti színház 150 éve. Szerk.: Kerényi Ferenc, Budapest, Gondolat, 1987. p. 98, 123, 125.

⁴⁴ Gajdó, Tamás: Színházi diktatúra, p. 350-354.

The Sovietization in postwar Eastern Europe with a Focus on Hungary

In order to investigate the postwar years of the Hungarian National Theater I present a brief overview on the implementation and establishment of the stalinist system, and of the socialist, Stalinist regimes in postwar Eastern Europe, primarily in Hungary. Subsequently I present briefly the political events, which led to the cultural political changes, and I describe the cultural political situation in Hungary in the investigated time period.

The process of sovietization is a very complex one, as each Eastern European country of the Soviet interest sphere varied greatly from one another and from the Soviet Union itself, therefore the implementation of the soviet regime, both its methods and its events varied as well, although similarities and a certain pattern or sequence of events can be detected. I concentrate on the initial period of sovietization, on the implementation of the soviet system, I only mention the de-Stalinizational period in close relevance to the aforesaid.

Many historians wrote on the topic, all had diverse approaches to it. A. E. Rees and R. J. Crampton in their chapters focus on the sequence of events, and provide an overall description of Eastern Europe, but they organize and narrate them differently. While Rees aspired to incapsulate the many aspects of sovietization in his introduction, with a focus on the studies that were published in that particular book, *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe*⁴⁵, R. J. Crampton in his chapter⁴⁶ focused more on the terror and purges of the sovietization, on this crucial and brutal aspect of sovietization, its variations, dimensions, and its function, its

⁴⁵ *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, ed. Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, and E. A. Rees. (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008)

⁴⁶ R. J. Crampton, "East European Stalinism, 1948-1953", in *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, London, Routledge, 1994. pp. 255-274.

essential role in implementing the new system that covered and converted all aspects of life. Jan T. Gross as indicated in the title of his chapter⁴⁷ concentrates on the social consequences of war, and the social aspects of sovietization. Other authors did not focus on a general overview, but dedicated their research and studies to certain aspects of the sovietization, thus wrote case studies. For example John Connelly, who in his book, *Captive University*⁴⁸, investigated the sovietization of universities, in certain Eastern European countries, in which the whole process is incapsulated, and reflected upon. Another kind of approach, where the focus is slightly narrower, is when authors investigate the sovietization in a particular country. Either by investigating the response to the process, within the country, as did István Vida in his study⁴⁹, while producing a detailed history of events. Or as Stanley M. Max⁵⁰, who also focused on the response, however of the nation's, but of the Anglo-American angle. He too provides a detailed history of political events in Hungary within the context of American and British discourse and politics. Peter Kenez in his book, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets*⁵¹ also provides a description of the events in Hungary, up until the end of the political pluralism, therefore does not describe the whole process of Sovietization, only its foundation.

⁴⁷ Jan Gross, "The Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries for the Study of the Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 3 (1989), pp. 198-214.

⁴⁸ John Connelly, *Captive university : the Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish higher education, 1945-1956*, Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

⁴⁹ István Vida, "Sovietization and the Nation's Response, 1944-1956", in *Hungary: Governments and Politics 1848-2000*, ed. Mária Ormos and Béla K. Király. Translated by Nóra Arató. (New York : Columbia University Press, 2001.) pp. 275-358.

⁵⁰ Martin Max Stanley, *The Anglo-American response to the sovietization of Hungary, 1945-1948*, Ann Arbor, Mich. : UMI, 1990, cop. 1980. p. i.
Martin Max Stanley, *The United States, Great Britain, and the sovietization of Hungary, 1945-1948*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1985.

⁵¹ Peter Kenez, *Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets : the establishment of the Communist regime in Hungary, 1944-1948*, Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Gyarmati and Valuch also wrote a history of political events, but they covered the whole socialist period in detail in their book, *Hungary Under Soviet Domination 1944-1989*⁵².

All authors agree on and emphasize the fact that sovietization was a major transformation regarding all aspects of life, it reached not only the political, social, cultural spheres, but had a great impact on the private sphere as well, it affected the private lives greatly.

One of the common characteristics of the communist parties' takeovers was that they had a relatively small support, at least initially, but their social base varied greatly among the Eastern European new people's democracies, Czechoslovakia had the broadest public support, while in Poland and Hungary the support was small.⁵³ "Of the various Eastern European countries that became sovietized, Hungary was particularly resistant to the establishment of a Communist government and was the last to adopt the constitutional form of a People's Republic."⁵⁴ In Yugoslavia and Albania the generation of wartime partisans dominated the political life, as their leaders spent the war years in Yugoslavia⁵⁵, rather than as in the other Eastern European countries, where Moscow trained leaders dominated. This difference later led to the Yugoslav-Soviet split, while "In other east European states, Stalin argued, the popular front provided a means through which the communists, whilst remaining a relatively small party, could discredit and eliminate their political opponents and sharpen social and political

⁵² György Gyarmati, Tibor Valuch, *Hungary under Soviet domination : 1944-1989*, transl. by Sean Lambert, new York : Columbia University Press, 2009.

⁵³ E. A. Rees, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe" p. 12.

⁵⁴ Martin Max Stanley, *The Anglo-American response to the sovietization of Hungary*. p. i.

⁵⁵ E. A. Rees, "The Sovietization of Eastern Europe" p. 12.;
R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, p. 255.

consciences to the degree necessary for the social transformation which was to follow.”⁵⁶ Therefore in other Eastern European countries “Sovietization was carried through by cadres who were Moscow trained, who had spent long periods in exile in the USSR, and who were themselves thoroughly sovietized. The leaders of the post-war People’s Democracies (...) represented a distinct generation of Marxist-Leninists, schooled in the Stalinist tradition and molded by the anti-fascist struggle.”⁵⁷ Apart from the important role of sovietized leaders, the soviet advisors and specialists took great part and responsibility in the implementation of sovietization in Eastern Europe.⁵⁸ Their role is significant in the elimination of political opponents as well, which procedure involved actual eliminations as well, not merely the monopolization of power by denying it to others⁵⁹, thus the transition and implementation of the soviet system in the postwar years incorporated a short period of ‘terror’ and ‘High Stalinism’, which’s impact was immense despite its relatively brief time period.⁶⁰ The terror did not stop at the cleansing of opponents of the party, nor at innocent civilians, the purges reached the high level party members, officials as well. These purges had a similar script in all Eastern European sovietized countries, the high party officials first lost their prestigious posts, and were moved to another, less important role, then were framed in some way, and they had to participate in show trials, where they were expected to accept guilt, and then were executed. The show trials were actual shows that were scripted

⁵⁶ R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, p. 256.

⁵⁷ E. A. Rees, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe”, p. 11.

⁵⁸ E. A. Rees, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe”, p. 14.;
Jan Gross, “The Social Consequences of War”, p. 206.;
István Vida, “Sovietization and the Nation’s Response, 1944-1956”, p. 279-280.

⁵⁹ Jan Gross, “The Social Consequences of War” p. 208, 210.

⁶⁰ E. A. Rees, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe”, p. 12.

and rehearsed several times before their public performance. Show trials themselves too had similar methods, similar scripts in all Eastern European countries, which were the result of Soviet advice. Not everyone was executed, some got away with degradation and humiliation, or with sentences to prisons or labour camps. Nevertheless overall “one in every four communist party members suffered some form of persecution during the years 1948-1953, and without doubt more communists died at the hands of the communist governments of Eastern Europe than under their inter-war predecessors.”⁶¹ Although an overall similarities in methodology can be detected, many variations existed, depending on the country, mostly on intensity and on timing, but also on the content, in some countries (e.g. in Czechoslovakia) the purges had anti-semitic connotations, while in others (in Hungary, or in Poland) there was no sign of it.⁶²

By 1953 the Eastern European countries for the most part had been successfully sovietized, which meant that the Communist Parties took over the political power, and “The transplantation of cultural and social practices” had taken place.⁶³

Having described the political and cultural context, I turn to the Hungarian National Theater’s process of sovietization, its exceptional role in the course of the (cultural) sovietization in Hungary. After the second world war ended, as in other Eastern European countries the stalinization of the political system begun, which is reflected in the micro world of theaters. In Hungary the Communist Party gained the leading role gradually, and obtained exclusive power in 1948 by defeating opponent

⁶¹ R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, p. 263

⁶² R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, p. 261-265.

⁶³ E. A. Rees, “The Sovietization of Eastern Europe”, p. 12.

parties in one way or another, and finally by the merger with the Social Democrat Party. Thus the Hungarian Working People's Party was born, and in 1949 the constitution of the working people was adopted, from which point Hungary became People's Republic of Hungary.

In the cultural sphere the goals of culture were the same as in every other sphere's: to build socialism, to serve as a role model for the new socialist man. From 1949 József Révai was the Minister of Culture, the main ideologist and Hungarian developer and implementer of socialist realism.⁶⁴

The Organization of the National Theater in the Postwar Years

In 1945 Hungary, The National Committee of Budapest [Budapesti Nemzeti Bizottság] appointed the Fives Commission [Ötös Bizottság]⁶⁵ which started the reorganization of theaters, both by starting the work of reconstruction, clearing rubble, and by laying down the new artistic values, artistic and organizational goals. They already started to implement some communist values and techniques to manage and supervise this sphere of culture. Their stated purpose was to make theater accessible to all, thus create popular (people's) theaters, to elevate the quality of their work, and to reestablish them on a democratic basis. In order to achieve these objectives, they had authority over the program plans and their quality. Even before the siege of Budapest was over, according to their suggestion, the theater directors, mainly loyal to the communist party, were already nominated;

⁶⁴ Gyarmati, György: A Rákosi-korszak : rendszerváltó fordulatok évtizede Magyarországon, 1945-1956. [The Rákosi-era : a Decade of Transitional Turns in Hungary, 1945-1956]. Budapest, ÁBTL : Rubicon, 2011. p. 225.

⁶⁵ The commission consisted of prominent actors: Béla Both, Hilda Gobbi, Tamás Major, Gusztáv Oláh, and Zoltán Várkonyi.

to the National Theater Tamás Major.⁶⁶ The National Theater started to perform to the public on February 28, 1945.⁶⁷

The nationalization of theaters was a long process, that practically started in 1945, with the work of the Fives Commission, which obtained more and more power over theaters, and tried to control the actual operation of the institutes as well. Only in 1949, when the Hungarian Working People's Party came to power and gained control of the state, had the actual nationalization of theaters begun. The theaters were controlled by a small group, lead by Tamás Major and István Horvai⁶⁸, through certain organizations such as the Actor's Union [Színészek Szabad Szakszervezete] founded in 1945, and the Hungarian Theater and Film Union [Magyar Színház- és Filmművészeti Szövetség] founded in 1949. The latter had two main tasks, an ideological task (the reeducation of actors, evaluation of performances, the discussion of dramaturgical issues of plays), and the personal

⁶⁶ Gajdó, Tamás: A magyar színházi élet újjászervezése 1945-ben. [The Reorganization of Hungarian Theater in 1945.] In.: Színház, 2012. május. http://www.szhaz.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36377:a-magyar-szhazi-élet-újjászervezése-1945-ben&catid=66:2012-majus&Itemid=7 (accessed: April 23, 2013);

Gajdó, Tamás: Színházi diktatúra, p. 342.

Korossy, Zsuzsa: Színházirányítás a Rákosi korszakban. [Theater Directorship in the Rákosi-era.] In.: Színház és politika. Színház történeti tanulmányok, 1949-1989. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színház történeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2007. p. 47-48.;

Lengyel, György: "Itt nem voltak színpadi események, színpadi forradalmak, nyitások?" Rendezői utak és stílusok a magyar színháztörténetben 1923-1956. ["There were no Theatrical Events, Revolutions, Openings Here?" The Careers and Style of Directors in Hungarian Theater, 1923-1956.] In.: Uő.: Színházi emberek. Corvina, Budapest, 2008. p. 242.

Tamás Major (1910–1986) was a prominent actor and director, was the director of the National Theater from February 18, 1945 to 1962. He kept his leading role in theater politics throughout his life.

⁶⁷ Székely, György: Intézménytörténet. A Nemzeti Színház. [History of Institutions. The National Theater] In.: Magyar Színház történet 1920-1949. <http://tbeck.beckground.hu/szhaz/htm/07.htm> (accessed: April 23, 2013)

⁶⁸ István Horvai (1922-2004) was a prominent director, theater director and later on professor at the Academy of Drama and Film, Budapest.

monitoring of the complete profession (the Union had recorded more observation than the records taken in the theaters).⁶⁹

The Ministry of Religion and Education was the supervisory authority of the nationalized theaters. Its Department of Arts handled the artistic and administrative issues, and had the right to decide in disputes that surfaced between state theaters. The other supervisory authority was the Ministry of Culture, which had a Department of Theaters, and which soon took over with similar tasks and rights as the Ministry of Religion and Education had previously, and coordinated the Hungarian theater life. The nationalization was only the first step in the centralization of theaters, of the Hungarian Working People's Party gaining government control over the cultural sphere, its institutions and products, amongst them theaters.⁷⁰

The next step after nationalization of theaters was to plan and distribute specific roles: their policies and programs, among the theaters, hence their profile was defined by political and ideological aspects, respecting and keeping to some extent their original profile that each of them was established for. In 1949 the Zhdanov Doctrine had reached Hungary, as a result of which the theater became determined by ideology, it compulsorily became a social forum, and degraded to a political headline.⁷¹ In the examined period cultural products, amongst them theater, as described above, came under the control of the state, and the leading political party, political aspects overruled aesthetic ones. Every theater was under the government's control, and the National Theater served as a role model for all of

⁶⁹ Gajdó, Tamás: Színházi diktatúra, p. 342.

⁷⁰ Korossy, Zsuzsa: Színházirányítás a Rákosi korszakban, p. 56-58, 66-71.

⁷¹ Gajdó, Tamás: Színházi diktatúra, p. 356.;

Lengyel, György: "Itt nem voltak színpadi események", p. 249.

them primarily in its program policy. Theaters were given a compulsory program-structure to follow, which slightly changed over time, but always consisted of Soviet plays, classics (Russian, Hungarian, and foreign classics), and at least one modern Hungarian play.⁷² All theaters had to perform from all of the categories, but the exact proportion of the types of plays was distributed amongst the theaters, as different theaters had different roles and purposes to serve, thereby a system of complementary theaters was created. The National Theater too followed the basic program structure, while it kept its original role of retaining the Hungarian dramatic tradition, exposing the actual literary language to its audience.

As stated above the National Theater played a key role both in the representation and the implementation of state and party power, of the new regime's cultural political orders, as it set an example to the other institutions. The theater has always been a representative sphere, which has an institutional and a social nature, and state could attain authority over it on several levels. "Theater as an institution is easier to manipulate"⁷³ by owning the theaters and providing its funds: the state appoints the director and has a control over the whole staff of the theater, it regulates the program structure, which was already based on authorized, approved plays, written by approved playwrights. Censorship in theater had to be applied by different standards than other types of media, as it did not have such a huge audience as had other types of media, the cinema or the press. Despite the appropriate observation that "The broader the potential audience, the narrower the

⁷² Gajdó, Tamás: Színházi diktatúra, p. 370.;

Korossy Zsuzsa: Színházirányítás a Rákosi korszakban, p. 65.

⁷³ Zygmunt Hubner, Theater & politics, edited and translated by Jadwiga Kosicka; with a foreword by Daniel Gerould and an afterword by Andrzej Wajda, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1992. p. 5-6.

margin of freedom.”⁷⁴, theaters did not have as much freedom as one would assume based solely on the fact that “theater productions reach considerably fewer people than movies”.⁷⁵ They were still under the tight and centralized control of the state’s many organizations, and were monitored and inspected often.

Theaters were part of the state’s propaganda mechanisms. Propaganda is defined by Peter Kenez as “the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people’s thinking, emotions and thereby behavior”.⁷⁶ Due to the unique characteristics of theater performances, that the actions and interactions are live and hence unrepeatable, they have some ritualistic atmosphere, the human presence carries a specific power, performances aspire to cause a cathartic experience in the viewers. Therefore “because of its direct impact, [theater] is an especially useful medium for propaganda”.⁷⁷ It was considered as an instrument of education, to elevate the cultural level and taste of the working class. The new regime encouraged workers and peasants to attend theater performances. Theaters met the requirements regarding the quota of visitors by keeping ticket prices affordable for many, as they had been receiving subsidy from the state since 1946. Theater attendance was also promoted in the trade unions, season tickets were distributed to them, and their representatives distributed cut-rate tickets to members, or free tickets as rewards or as inducements to workers.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Zygmunt Hubner, *Theater & politics*, p. 30.

⁷⁵ Peter A. Toma, Iván Völgyes, *Politics in Hungary*, San Francisco : W. H. Freeman, 1977. p. 114.

⁷⁶ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929*, Cambridge [Cambridgeshire], Cambridge University Press, 1985. p. 4.

⁷⁷ Zygmunt Hubner, *Theater & politics*, p. 89.

⁷⁸ Peter A. Toma, Iván Völgyes, *Politics in Hungary*, p. 115.

The elevation of the working class' taste and educational level (both political and aesthetical) was to be achieved not only by encouraging them to attend theater productions, but by creating performances that would address them, that would reflect on their lives, consequently performing plays in which they would recognize their own fate and purpose as members of the working class who builds and fights for socialism, and embraces the values of the new socialist positive hero.⁷⁹ "The Communists were extraordinarily ambitious. They did not simply want to take power; they also wanted to create a different kind of society and even a new kind of human being."⁸⁰ Artists and especially theater artists had the duty to help to develop this new kind of socialist person. The Union of Art Workers [Művészeti Dolgozók Szakszervezete] declared amongst their goals the development of this new socialist man, in which "the new socialist culture is an important tool" and the duty of artists is "with the means of art to inspire our workers to struggle, to be steadfast, to complete and to overachieve our Five-Year-Plan, and to love our party and our liberator, the great Soviet Union".⁸¹ These goals were strongly encouraged and emphasized in theaters, especially in the National Theater, as it was the leading theater of all. After the death of Stalin in 1953 this emphasis lightened up, as the political climate itself changed too, the political turn had an impact on the cultural life as well, although it took time for the change to realize, in the 1953/1954 theatrical season it did not show many signs of the changed climate in the theaters'

⁷⁹ Lengyel, György: "Itt nem voltak színpadi események", p. 252-253.

⁸⁰ Peter Kenez, Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets, p. 179.

⁸¹ Decision of the Presidency of the National Council of Trade Unions on the work of The Union of Art Workers, May 19, 1951. [A SZOT elnökségének határozata a Művészeti Dolgozók Szakszervezetének munkájáról. 1951. május 19.]

a document published in: A Szocialista művészetért!: a művészek és a művészeti dolgozók szakmai szervezeteinek történetéhez. [For the Socialist Art!: to the History of the Artists and their Professional Organizations]. Szerk.: Gerelyes Ede, Táncsics Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1974. p. 384.

programs or the topics of the performed plays. The real changes appeared in the 1954/1955 season, when the number of the Soviet plays decreased. The emphasis shifted to the classics and modern, new Hungarian plays, to ensure the national character, and to combine the old traditions with the new trend.⁸² The National Theater had greater responsibility on the political turn as well, not only because it set an example to all other theaters, but because it was in the first place established to give stage for the national character and the Hungarian language itself, to preserve and to develop the language, as well as to show classics, therefore the shift in the obligatory program-structure to a certain extent meant a return to its original role.

The Hungarian National Theater was considered as one of the first institutions that represented the new political and cultural values⁸³. It took great responsibility and role in the implementation of the new values of sovietization: it functioned as an educational tool for the people, its stated goal was to elevate and to meet their taste, to take part in the creation of the new socialist man. In the gradual implementation of these values and nationalization of the institution itself one can detect the patterns of sovietization, this example, case study serves as a lens to the whole process.

⁸² Szabó, István: A színházak műsora az 1950-es években. [The program of the Theaters in the 1950s]. In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 18-19.;

Korossy, Zsuzsa: "Rólunk nemigen szól a mese" Pillanatképek a magyar színházi életről 1953-ban. [The Tale Is Not About Us. Snapshots of the Hungarian Theatrical Life]. In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 37-42.

⁸³ its repertoire and program structure developed in the spirit of socialism already from 1945, therefore it served as a role model to the nationalized theaters from the very beginning of the sovietizational process.

Magyar Színházművészet 1949-1959. [Hungarian Theater 1949-1959]. Szerk.: Dr. Staud, Géza. Színháztudományi Intézet, Budapest, 1960. p. 28.

The National Theater has always been a unique, urban institution. It is a representative public space, which was always closely related and connected to political power. Almost all through its existence it received subsidy from the state, therefore it was dependent on it. The National Theater from its establishment carried certain roles, that did not change significantly, not even in the socialist period, when the audience did change largely. In fact the greatest difference was in the audience, which was a direct consequence of the changes in society and class. The unchanging roles and duties were the preservation of the language, after the initial period not so much the creation and spreading of it, but to introduce a basic but literate language to the new working class audience. Therefore this role has changed somewhat in content, but the principle role in preserving Hungarian language remained. The National Theater was established to unify the Hungarians, which goal also was maintained, but somewhat changed in content, as after the sovietization the goal was to unify the working people, which in an ethnically homogenous country basically meant the Hungarians. The National Theater's main function, to facilitate the Hungarian playwright, was never abandoned. In the initial period of the sovietization it was less emphasized, but after as part of the destalinizational process, it was remembered and strongly encouraged. The repertoire of the National Theater, the structure of plays had not changed that much either, except that the soviet and Russian plays were introduced, and a certain amount was obligatory to show.

Memories of the Postwar Years

Autobiography is a popular genre, and among them the personal narratives published by people working in the creative sphere, most commonly in the world of literature and theater are extremely popular.

Autobiographies, as described in the first chapter, are relevant sources mainly on the experience of their writers, and on their identity forming, constructing process. My chosen autobiographies were written by three people working at or in connection with the National Theater between 1945-1955. During this time period as discussed in the previous chapter, the National Theater as well as society went through major changes and transformations. 1945 was the year of liberation, and in 1955 the National Theater, among other institutions, celebrated the ten year anniversary of it, while it introduced yet another political, cultural political turn or divergence in its policy.

A theater is an institution where actors are only part of the body of people working in it, in this micro world. A single performance depends on many workers at the theater, apart from the creative and visible agents, actors and directors, many work behind the scenes, so to say. There are a number of others who are part of the creative process: playwrights, dramaturges (script writers), stage and costume designers etc. Others take part in the physical realization of the performances, the stage constructors, carpenters, lighting professionals, and other theatrical technicians, tailors, hairdressers. The operation of the institution lays on the shoulders of the theater's offices, under the head of the theater many employees work: from managers, clerks, who among their many duties are responsible for financials, for audience organization, to ticket salespersons, and ushers. In the stalizinal period during the postwar years the actor as a humble worker was

emphasized. In the complex world and society of a theater many artistic forms are encountered, it is a visual performative art form, which generally has a textual basis. Therefore I chose as sources three personal narratives, autobiographies written by people in various types of affiliation with the National Theater in the defined time frame: Bálint Magyar was head secretary of the National Theater between 1945-1955, Hilda Gobbi was a leading actress and a politically active person, a member of the National Theater, and finally Gyula Háy was a playwright, who in the postwar years was also a prestigious and politically active individual.

The writers of the investigated autobiographies were public figures, who were formers and even highly respected individuals of the political sphere, at least during the specific time period I study. Except for the second unpublished autobiography of Bálint Magyar's, they all wrote their memoirs before the political transition of 1989, but under very different circumstances, after having varying life histories, diverse paths. Bálint Magyar wrote his autobiographies, which remained unpublished, when he was well retired, and was not in the focus of the political regime for many years by then, while Hilda Gobbi was still a celebrated actress, when she published her autobiography, and Gyula Háy wrote his in German, during his exile years in Switzerland, as after 1955 he started to criticize the prevailing political order, and finally left the country in 1963. His autobiography was published in Hungarian only after 1989.

In my analysis of the three autobiographies⁸⁴ I follow the same pattern, I present briefly the author and the circumstances of the writing, their expected audience, the style in which they wrote, and what that may reveal or indicate, the topics the author focused on, first in general, then more specifically on the

⁸⁴ The sources were originally written in Hungarian – except in case of Gyula Háy, who's text was translated into Hungarian – English translations in this thesis are provided by me.

investigated time period of 1945-1955, what were emphasized by them, and by analyzing these features, traits, I investigate how do the authors reflect on the role the National Theater and their members play in the prevailing political and cultural order. I am interested in the small steps, compromises and decisions they personally made, and as these are retrospective texts, and are relevant regarding their self-reflexive and subjective, even self-justifying identity construction, the question to be asked is what did these authors find important to mention, how do they present, how do they 'explain' themselves, especially in regard of the investigated time period and their relation to the prevailing political system. Similarities can be detected not only in described events, but also in sentiments expressed in the texts, certain topics are mentioned by all three characters and members of the National Theater at this specific time period.

Bálint Magyar, head secretary of the National Theater

Bálint Magyar (1910-1992) a Hungarian theater historian, at the peak of his career, a theater director has two unpublished autobiographies. I discovered one of them, *Fifty Years of Theater*⁸⁵ written in 1979-1980, in the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library. The second, later autobiography of his, *The Blue Clock*⁸⁶ written in ca. 1990, is in the family's possession, amongst other documents, that altogether could be considered as a private archive.

Bálint Magyar was a middle class bourgeois intellectual from a distinguished family of intellectuals, publicists and actors. He was born in 1910 in Budapest, Hungary, where he lived his entire life. He graduated with a doctorate degree from

⁸⁵ Magyar, Bálint: Ötven év színház [Fifty Years of Theater]

⁸⁶ Magyar, Bálint: A kék óra [The Blue Clock]

Pázmány Péter University's (later Eötvös Loránd University) Faculty of Humanities in 1931. He became an intern at the National Theater in 1934, and later, in 1937, he was transferred to the Opera House, where he became secretary from 1941-1944. He was the head secretary of the National Theater between 1945-1955, from where he was chosen to be the director of the The Theater of Hungarian People's Army [Magyar Néphadsereg Színháza] formerly known as Comedy Theater [Vígsház] from 1955-1958. When he was removed from his position, he started to work at the Film Institute till his retirement in 1970. He published books on history of theaters, and several studies on history of film as well. He continued to write and publish after his retirement. Towards the end of his life he worked on his autobiographies, both written and audio versions. My supposition is that he endeavored to write his personal life story, his career path several times and from different approaches in order to provide answers to the questions he raised, to the problematics of memoir literature, both textually and structurally.⁸⁷

What makes Bálint Magyar's autobiographies especially intriguing is that not only two different personal narrative texts exist written by the same author at two different historical moments, but that the author was a scholar himself, who was aware of the limitations of the genre, and believed in the existence of an objective truth, thus attempted to avoid any digressions from it.

Bálint Magyar acknowledged and reflected upon the doubtful characteristic of autobiographies, as he put it: "The historical value of memoirs is already

⁸⁷ His short biography provided in this paragraph was based on his personal documents, on the Encyclopedia of Hungarian Theater [Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon] and on his autobiographies.

problematic”⁸⁸ because “[i]t is not easy to remember. Memory is unreliable.”⁸⁹, he explicitly aimed for an objective description, claiming that “all historical facts mentioned are by all means authentic. As the writer (penman) is rightly proud of his historical accuracy”⁹⁰.

The reasons, the expected audience, and the historical context for writing the two autobiographies were different. Bálint Magyar wrote *Fifty Years of Theater* in 1979-1980 with the intention of publication, to the request of a key publishing house⁹¹, but by the time he was finished with it they withdrew the offer⁹². Thus he added explanatory endnotes to the manuscript, and donated it to the National Széchényi Library to archive it with the hope that someday it would get discovered.⁹³ His second autobiography, *The Blue Clock* was written around 1990⁹⁴, it is incomplete, it covers his life events up to the 1940s, therefore in my analysis I focus more on the prior, I mention the latter only in order to reveal more about him as an author. Despite not expecting to have *The Blue Clock* published,

⁸⁸ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 2-3.

original quote: „Az emlékirodalom történeti értéke amúgy is problematikus.”

⁸⁹ Magyar, Bálint: *A kék óra*, p. 43.

original quote: „Emlékezni (...) nem könnyű. Az emlékezet nem megbízható.”

⁹⁰ Magyar, Bálint: *A kék óra*, p. 3.

original quote: „történeti adatok feltétlenül hitelesek. Az író (tollforgató) ugyanis méltán büszke történetírói pontosságára.”

⁹¹ Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, Hungary

⁹² Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház* [Fifty Years of Theater] p. 601.

⁹³ Magyar, Bálint: *A kék óra*, p. 14.

original quote: „a kézirat a levéltárba [került], hátha egy filológus egyszer majd szakdolgozatot ír belőle.” [“the manuscript landed in the archives, so maybe one day a scholar would write a thesis on it”]

⁹⁴ it does not have an exact date, one can conclude from its content, from the mentioned circumstances

“as they say, it was written for the desk drawer”⁹⁵, it was written for a potential audience, therefore both were filtered through his psyche, he carefully thought through his self-representation. He wrote both of them when he was well retired, but a decade apart, the historical moment of writing differs greatly, as in 1979-1980 Hungary was one of the socialist states, and by 1990 the transition from communism has already taken place, therefore one would expect that (self-) censorship was less of an issue. But another important factor that has to be taken in consideration about the moments of writing, is his son, also Bálint Magyar (born in 1952), who by 1979-1980 participated in the opposition, and in 1989 was one of the liberal representatives at the Hungarian Round Table Talks. His son’s emerging political career must have influenced his father’s writing process, what he included and what he did not in his memoirs, and his intention or chance on publishing them.

Bálint Magyar attempts to provide in both his autobiographies a linear narrative from the same starting point, 1934, which is often interrupted by brief descriptive, explanatory episodes relevant to the main story, that occurred either prior to or later to the given event. Even though they are structured in a similar fashion in their narrative style, they show structural and formal differences, which can be inferred from the author’s intention. *Fifty Years of Theater* is clearly a more scholarly, impersonal work, “[i]t can be referred to as a memoir merely, because the discussed events are in some way or another related to me.”⁹⁶. It was written by the theater-historian, who strives to be historically accurate while he provides a narrative description of the world of theaters. While *Fifty Years of Theater* is a rather

⁹⁵ Magyar, Bálint: A kék óra, p. 4.

original quote: „ahogy mondják – az ‘asztalfiók’ számára készült”

⁹⁶ Magyar, Bálint: Ötven év színház, p. 548.

original quote: „Csupán azért nevezhető emlékiratnak, mert a tárgyalt események valamilyen formában velem kapcsolatosak.”

coherent text, *The Blue Clock* has a looser structure, the narrator is no longer the theater historian.

In terms of content he devoted all his personal narratives to theater and structured his life stories around his career, and his relation to theater. He worked and lived a great part of his life in the environment of theaters, and prior to his autobiographies he published historical studies on the subject as well. Hence it is not surprising that his narratives revolve around theater, he states in the very beginning, that “I only refer briefly to my circumstances that are not related to theater”⁹⁷ and towards the end confirms it: “(...) I did not want to write about myself, but primarily about the theatrical world, and at most about my more or less significant role within it. Therefore I only referred to my childhood and to my private life if in some way it was related to it.”⁹⁸. Bálint Magyar touched upon the same issues in his autobiographies, such as his family origins, genealogy, the children’s place in society in his time, the closed world of the theater, or the social responsibility one has, and the above discussed question of autobiographic method, the question of memory. He followed the same narrative structure in his stories, using the milestones of his career as junctions of the narration, from which he made smaller or greater detours.

The section written on the 1945-1955 period is easily distinguishable, as it is a great milestone in his career, these are the years when he was the head secretary of the National Theater. It is discussed in *Fifty Years of Theater*, as his

⁹⁷ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 2-3.

original quote: „a színházhoz nem kapcsolódó körülményeimre csak nagyon röviden utalok.”

⁹⁸ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 2-3.

original quote: „Én azonban nem magamról akartam írni, hanem elsősorban a színházi világról és legfeljebb ezen belül a többé-kevésbé jelentős szereplésemről. Gyerekkoromra és magánéletemre tehát csak olyankor utaltam, ha az evvel valamiképp összefüggött.” p. 596-597.

other autobiography is an unfinished one, and does not reach the postwar years. He states that he already wrote a more scholarly work on this exact period, as his dissertation⁹⁹, therefore in his autobiography, as its hero is himself, rather than the theater, he applies a more personal approach, and provides an experience history of the occurred events. He uses the methodology of a theater-historian, writes about and reflects on the director of the theater, on the actors, the plays, the program-structure, and discusses the political, historical context, the changes in society, and the new ideology, and positions himself in them. He uses the same periodization as historians, he divided the 1945-1955 period to three sections, from the year of 'liberation' 1945 to the nationalization of the theater in 1949; he treats 1953 separately, and then speaks about the rest, until his transition to the Comedy Theater [Vígsház] in 1955.

Therefore he reflects on the sovietizational period, on its implementation. He recalls that the National Theater has always been a state institution, but prior its nationalization a certain chaos characterized its operation, while after 1949 it became more organized, the expectations towards them became more clear, and this was visible in their well developed program-structure.

He positions himself and his colleagues more as an observer rather than a former of the new values, although they all had to participate in the implementation of the sovietization, he recalls that "[w]e only paid attention to the positive aspects of the nationalization. The vulnerability of actors and private theaters ceased", the

⁹⁹ Magyar Bálint: *A Nemzeti Színház: 1945-55 kandidátusi értekezés tézisei*. [The National Theater in 1945-1955, candidate's dissertation]. Magyar Tudományos Akadémia 1. Osztálya, Budapest, 1960.

theater had secure supplies and stable financial status.¹⁰⁰ He claims that due to the closed society of the theater, and to the director's, Tamás Major's, strong and diplomatic personality, the current, rapidly changing political events eluded them, or reached them slower. He remembers that "At least I, who was living in the theater and in my home, at most skimmed the actualities."¹⁰¹, or elsewhere, that "I was not up to date in terms of the continuous changes".¹⁰² And that during the period of alertness, that followed the Rajk-trial in 1949, he remembers "[a]s if the National Theater had been in a windproof spot", the general atmosphere of suspicion eluded them.¹⁰³

He reflected on the new cultural political values, mentions them with mild criticism, but as in the previously mentioned examples, he does not provide an alternative to them, states them as facts, and as rules that they had to accept, but at the same time they constantly looked for an opportunity to bend them, they looked out for loopholes, in order to carry out their priority demand of quality: "We in the National Theater, whenever it was possible, were perfectionists."¹⁰⁴ as "[t]he National Theater then, as always, placed its emphasis on quality."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 326.

original quote: „Az államosításnak mi csak a jó oldalaira figyeltünk. Megszűnt a magánszínházak és színészek kiszolgáltatottsága”

¹⁰¹ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 291.

original quote: „Én mindenesetre aki a színházban és az otthonomban éltem, az aktualitásokba legfeljebb futólag pillantgattam bele.”

¹⁰² Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 389.

original quote: „nem voltam naprakész a folytonos változások terén.”

¹⁰³ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 354.

original quote: „A Nemzeti Színház mintha szélvédett helyen lett volna..”

¹⁰⁴ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 382.

original quote: „Mi a Nemzeti Színházban, amikor csak lehetett, maximalisták voltunk.”

¹⁰⁵ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 333.

original quote: „A Nemzeti Színház ekkor is, mint máskor mindig, a színvonalra helyezte a súlyt.”

He claims that to a certain extent he was an outsider, who never quite fit in the system, as in 1951 on his evaluation form (of which he later found out) he was characterized as “bourgeois” and “aristocratic”¹⁰⁶, and that although he did sympathize with certain new values that were introduced and implemented, such as ‘social equality’, he did not express these prior to the ‘liberation’, nor was an enthusiastic and apparent supporter ever. As he remembers, his “*Independence* was not programmatic, it derived from my contemplative, meditative, somewhat distant nature.”¹⁰⁷

The author attempted to avoid any form of self-justification in his narrations, and to provide what he considered an authentic overview of his impressions as a theater-person, to present a history of the theaters he worked in as he witnessed it.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless every autobiography is inevitably a self-justification, as part of the construction of identity, and Bálint Magyar’s autobiography is no exception.

¹⁰⁶ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 303.

¹⁰⁷ Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 300.

original quote: „Függetlenségem” nem programszerű volt, magától alakult ki szemlélődő, meditativ, kissé távoltartó természetemből.” – emphasis by author

¹⁰⁸ in order to achieve this goal of his he tried to cut down on his personal life events that were not closely related to the theater, as he believed that “in autobiographies the message of the author should be told as briefly as possible, and even that should be edited to half the extent, otherwise the text would end up as a lengthy twaddle with the bare pretension of self-justification.”

original quote: „emlékiratoknál a legszűkebbre kell tömöríteni a mondanivalót, majd ennek is csak a felét szabad meghagyni, különben terjengős locsogás lesz belőle, a póré öngazolás igényével.”

in.: Magyar, Bálint: *Ötven év színház*, p. 601.

Hilda Gobbi, actress

Hilda Gobbi (1913-1988), was a well known public figure and leading actress at the National Theater. She published her autobiography *Meanwhile* [Közben]¹⁰⁹ in 1982.

Hilda Gobbi was born in 1913 into a wealthy, but rapidly impoverishing bourgeois family, she reflects much on and despises his father's careless and extravagant lifestyle. Despite her family's wealthy background, they always had financial troubles, so much that she was among the poorest students attending the Actors Academy between 1933-1935. After which she became member of the National Theater, where, except for relatively brief digressions to the József Attila Theater between 1960-1970, and to the Katona József Theater from 1982-1988, she remained a respected member throughout most of her life time.

She was committed to communist values, thus had to go underground in 1944, she engaged in the Opposition during the Second World War, and participated in worker's performances in 1945. After the liberation, she became a member of the Five's Commission, which was responsible for the reorganization of theaters, and supervised this sphere of culture.¹¹⁰ She actively took part in the reopening of the National Theater, both in the physical and in the organizational works that were the preconditions of it.

Probably to her difficult financial situation during her young age, or to her empathic personality, or perhaps the communist values she considered important, she found it extremely important to support the poor, young and talented prospective actors, and the retired elderly, impoverished actors. She organized the Horváth Árpád Actor's Dormitory [Horváth Árpád Színészakadémia] in 1947, and for

¹⁰⁹ Gobbi, Hilda: *Közben*. [Meanwhile.] Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1982.

¹¹⁰ On the Five's Commission see in more detail my first chapter, where I provided a description of it.

the elderly retired actors the Jászai Mari Retirement Home for Actors [Jászai Mari Színészotthon] in 1948 and the Ódry Árpád Retirement Home for Actors [Ódry Árpád Színészotthon] in 1950.

She also considered the acting profession itself extremely valuable, and something worth preserving and exhibiting, therefore she spent tremendous time and efforts on organizing the establishment of the Bajor Gizi Theater Museum [Bajor Gizi Színézmúzeum], which opened to the public in 1952.

Hilda Gobbi published her autobiographies in 1982, when she was still a well known and respected actress, and was no longer a member of the National Theater, but went to the newly established Katona József Theater together with other prestigious and old members of the National Theater, such as Tamás Major.¹¹¹

Her narrative is organized chronologically in thematic chapters, and is mostly about her career, her personal life is considered only to the extent as it is her experience, her life story. She has six chapters, *Family, Pubs, Wars, Homes, and Cemeteries*, which incapsulates her life course from her family background to her achievements and theater, which, , as in Bálint Magyar's autobiography, is in the center of the it, she focuses on its agents, the actors, the actors in need, or on commemorating famous, well accomplished actors, she revolves around the acting profession itself as well, and is dedicated to extend the theatrical experience to wider crowds, to the working class. Her writing style is rather poor, which is in line with her being an actress and not a professional writer, and her stated purpose is to leave a mark, to serve as a window to the past for the younger generations, which

¹¹¹ Her short biography provided in this paragraph was based on the Encyclopedia of Hungarian Theater [Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon] and on her autobiographies.

is a rather educational goal.¹¹² Gobbi includes in her autobiography external texts, articles, documents, personal letters. These are not properly cited, but their origin and purpose are described in every case, and serve mainly as illustrations, demonstrations to certain described events. She focused on her achievements and expressed her enthusiasm even retrospectively, by the use of many exclamation marks and short ecstatic sentences. She was proud of her achievements: less of the ones she achieved as a professional and outstanding actress, and more of the ones she achieved as an organizer, an active person for theater and fellow actors. Although she does mention her view on the acting profession, her techniques and roles, compares them to lovers, “they are the most happy and painful relationships [of an actor’s]”.¹¹³

As I wrote above, her life and life story revolves around theater, she too, similarly to Bálint Magyar, considers theater a closed society, a closed and unique institution. She refers to it both as a family, and as an ordinary workplace, like a factory.¹¹⁴ Gobbi embraced many of the communist cultural values, among them the praise of workers, and dedicates a section to the ‘invisible workers’ of the theater, to the “tiny selves orbiting around the glory of the theater (...), whom I loved, who moved me, whom were noticed only by us – because without them theater does not

¹¹² She mentions this in the last sentences of her autobiography:

“Therefore please forgive us, illiterate ones, for using paper to preserve our memories. We might be of help for the ones who follow us, to learn about their roots where they derive from.”

original quote: „Ezért bocsássák meg nekünk, írástudatlanoknak, hogy papírt használunk emlékeink megőrzésére. Talán segítünk az utánunk következőknek – ismerjék meg azt a televényt, amelyből kinőttek.” – Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 329.

¹¹³ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 61.

original quote: „[a színész] életének azok a legboldogabb és legfájdalmasabb kapcsolatai.”

¹¹⁴ “I have become a member of a not transient, an eternal family: of the Theater!”

original quote: „egy el nem múló, örökké élő család tagja lettem: a Színházé!” – Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 34.;

“This is a workplace too.”

original quote: „Ez is munkahely.” – Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 56.

exist.”¹¹⁵ Thus she demonstrates that theater is a complex institution, where not only the visible and famous members matter, she justifies its place in a socialist worker-oriented attitude, as every member of it is a ‘worker’, who need to work together.¹¹⁶ Although she does value and illustrates the extraordinary and even magical characteristics of theater, in such claims as “the theater demands a full person, here only those remain, who are obsessed with it”.¹¹⁷ This obsession implies in my interpretation the closed and unique world of a theater as well.

Gobbi embraced many other cultural political values in the postwar years, such as the expansion of the targeted audience. She recalls that “[a] new audience had to be organized, but this new audience did not obtain a new taste at once. But we were dauntless”¹¹⁸ therefore it was “a tough job, but rewarding.”¹¹⁹ Retrospectively she expresses her doubt, that although it was “[a]ll nice and good, and maybe even necessary – but after I calmed down from my first feverish enthusiasm, I felt that the retraining went too fast and was unhealthy.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 137.

original quote: „a színház holdudvarában keringő kis egzisztenciákról (...), akiket szerettem, akik meghatottak, akiket csak mi veszünk észre – mert nélkülük nincsen színház.”

¹¹⁶ As Gobbi put it: “Surely the stage does not consist of us only. For a true theater the cooperation and every single little work of the many talented people is needed. Everything is important in the theater. Every single detail.”

“original quote: „Bizony a színpad nemcsak belőlünk, színészekből áll. Az igazi színházhoz sok-sok tehetséges ember együttműködése, apró munkája kívántatik. A színházban minden fontos. Minden mozzanat.”

– Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p.128.

¹¹⁷ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 123.

original quote: „a színház egész embert követel, itt csak az marad meg, akinek ez a mániája”

¹¹⁸ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 211.

original quote: „Új közönséget kellett szervezni, de ez a közönség nem rendelkezett egyszersmind új ízléssel is. De mi tántoríthatatlanok voltunk (...).”

¹¹⁹ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 212.

original quote: „nehéz munka volt, de szép”

¹²⁰ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 216.

original quote: „Szép volt, jó volt, talán szükséges is – de első lázaim kihunytaival úgy éreztem, túl gyors átképzés volt ez, nem egészséges”

Apart from theater's entertaining and educational role, she as previously mentioned, also thought of theater as a society, and based on the common practice of the time, the establishment and organization of profession based unions and of specific institutions for workers, she organized from scratch the establishment of homes for the young and the elderly actors. All of them were established in my investigated time period, and her relation to politics, her connections to higher officials is detectable in her recollections. Therefore she does not hide the fact that she was an appreciated member of society, who did well, as she owned a car as well, but retrospectively she expresses some mild criticism, mostly by voicing her disappointment, that the actual implementation did not bring the promised, the imagined, the expected changes "This was the first stain on the politics I believed in, and thought it was spotless – they treated my enthusiastic and penniless friends in the same manner as they treated capitalists, who later were nationalized."¹²¹ Although she does not criticize explicitly or in a harsh tone, as she emphasizes that "we actors are vulnerable and exposed"¹²² she does mention certain cases, when it comes to fellow actors, where she voices her disagreement, retrospectively, e. g. "I am not stating at all, that the death of a friend or of a colleague of mine was direct result of the offenses they suffered, but the thought merely comes to my mind, that it must have been more difficult for them to cope with mankind's eternal struggle

¹²¹ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 208.

original quote: „Ez volt az első légypiszok azon a politikán, amit makulátlannak hittem - lelkes és nincstelen barátaimat éppúgy kezelték, mint a tőkepénzeseket, akiket aztán államosítottak.”

¹²² Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 65.

original quote: „mi színészek kiszolgáltatottak vagyunk.”

with death in a social atmosphere that treated them with ignorance and injustice.”

123

Despite her active and even leading role for certain causes, and her open commitment to the political left, she claims that “I’ve always been on bad terms with conspiracy, with secrecy – that is with politics”.¹²⁴ And that her activeness was due to the extreme circumstances, when everyone is forced to take sides and position themselves, and in the beginning “My anarchist behavior was due to compensate my bourgeois origins: I wanted to prove that my feelings were true and pure.”¹²⁵ She does emphasize that she was more enthusiastic about certain causes, all of them concerning theater, e. g. she worked for the establishment of the institutions with great determination and commitment, wrote letters and met with officials, organized petitions, and took part in the physical building and furnishing as well. According to her, she was less interested in the cultural politics of the time, which is a bit controversial, as she was a member of the Fives Commission in 1945, but in her autobiography she remembers that she focused more on theater itself and only embraced the new cultural values regarding her art, she focused on the benefits of the era, that the state with the creation of awards for artists “[e]levated the prestige of dramatic art.”¹²⁶

¹²³ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 312-313.

original quote: „Távolról sem állítanám azt, hogy egy-egy barátom, pályatársam halála az őket ért sérelmek egyenes következménye volt, pusztán fölbukkan bennem a gondolat, hogy az ember örökös csatáját a halállal talán nehezebben vívták meg abban a társadalmi légkörben, amely mellőzéssel, igazságtalansággal sújtotta őket.”

¹²⁴ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 183.

original quote: „mindig rossz viszonyban voltam a konspirációval, a titkolódzással – szóval a politikával.”

¹²⁵ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 186.

original quote: „Talán akkori anarchista magatartásom polgári származásom kompenzálása volt: bizonyítani szerettem volna, hogy érzéseim igazak és tiszták.”

¹²⁶ Gobbi, Hilda: Közben, p. 69.

original quote: „Rangra emelték a színművészetet.”

Gyula Háy, playwright

Gyula Háy (1900-1975) was a playwright, who had some of his plays performed in the National Theater during the investigated time period.¹²⁷ He wrote his memoirs *Born in 1900* [Született 1900-ban]¹²⁸ between 1969-1970 in German during his exile in Switzerland. It was published in Hungarian only in 1990, after the Revolutions of 1989.

Gyula Háy was born in Abony, as a son of a wealthy family, attended the University of Technology, and was talented in arts, both in visual arts and writing. He became a communist at a young age, he joined the Aster Revolution in 1919, worked at the People's Commissariat of Education, afterwards the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic he spent four years in Germany, mostly in Berlin as a stage-designer and painter, from where he returned in 1923, but soon enough had to flee the country once again, from the fascists. After some journey in Europe, during which his plays were performed mostly in Germany, and he joined the German Communist Party, and studied marxism, he ended up in the Soviet Union in 1935. He was among the respected playwrights in the Soviet Union as well, his plays were performed, so on his return to Hungary at the liberation, in 1945, he was already a world famous and politically trusted, respected person. He stayed in this role for a decade, enjoyed its benefits, in 1951 he received the most prestigious cultural award from the state, the Kossuth Prize, he traveled abroad, mostly in Germany for the premiers of his plays, and wrote mediocre plays (at the time). When the Rákosi-era came to an end, he changed sides, he started to criticize the

¹²⁷ Both in the National Theater and in its Chamber Theater, the Magyar Theater [Magyar Színház]. In the 1945/1946 season: *Tiszazug*; *Isten, császár, paraszt* [God, Emperor, Peasant]; In the following 1946/1947 season: *Romok* [Ruins]; and in the 1950/1951 season: *Az élet hídjá* [The Bridge of Life]; *Erő* [Power].

¹²⁸ Háy, Gyula: *Született 1900-ban. Emlékezések*. [Born in 1900. Memoirs.] Interart, Budapest, 1990.

system, first from a marxist, communist point of view, later from an anti-communist perspective. He was sentenced to six years of prison after the 1956 revolution, from where he was released after four years with amnesty, in 1963 he left the country and stayed abroad, in 1965 he moved to Switzerland, Ascona, where he spent the rest of his life.

Asides from being a playwright and in his early years a stage-designer, he worked as a literary translator as well, as he was fluent in German, and Russian. He wrote his plays, his literary works both in Hungarian and in German, as he basically was bilingual. The only exception was his autobiography, which he did not have time, the chance to write in Hungarian as well, it remained in German. He wrote it in 1969-1970 in Ascona, the original title was *Geboren 1900*, and was first published in 1971 in Hamburg.¹²⁹ The Hungarian edition was translated and edited by Éva Majoros, his widow, who managed to publish a full version of Gyula Háy's memoirs, according to his intentions, as she could include the additional sections written by him as well, therefore the originally planned more detailed (compared to the German version) Hungarian edition was born. The Hungarian edition was translated in 1988-1989, and was published in 1990, after the revolution of 1989.¹³⁰

Gyula Háy's autobiography is a work of literature, it is easy to read, and he uses literary methods in his narration, such as rhetorical questions. He divided his narration in four sections, and to many chapters, which all have many short titles, similar to a telegraph, that anticipate the contents of the chapter. He structured his narration in a chronological order, and contrary to the previously presented

¹²⁹ Julius Hay: *Geboren 1900*, Christian Wegner Verlag, Hamburg, 1971.

¹³⁰ His short biography provided in this paragraph was based on the entry in Hegedüs Géza: *A magyar irodalom arcképcsarnoka*. [The Portrait Gallery of Hungarian Literature]. Trezor, Budapest, 1992. <http://www.mek.oszk.hu/01100/01149/html/hay.htm> (Accessed: May 29, 2013), and on his autobiography, and its foreword written by the translator, Éva Majoros.

autobiographies he casts himself as the protagonist of it. He refers to himself in third person, using his initials HGY, and adding his age, which, as he was born in 1900, matches the current year of the twentieth century, and in his narrations writes up until HGY60. He discusses his personal life, but focuses more on his professional life, although not as much as Bálint Magyar or Hilda Gobbi have done. Háy talks more about his private life, and expresses his views more openly, or rather strongly. During his exile years, or even in his prison years he became especially anti-communist, which was in great contrast to his younger self. Therefore in his identity construction in his narratives he reflects on his beliefs, and presents them retrospectively as something that he used to believe in, but is very distant from him now, and regarding the decade he spent in high positions and appreciation during the postwar years in Hungary, he expresses his disappointment with the implementation of socialism. As he was so closely linked to politics and historical situations, he provides a historical overview of his life time, so to say a history with his eyes, thus he does not merely write his personal life story and his experiences.

On the 1945-1955 period, after expressing his expectations and enthusiasm in the year of 1945, he writes mostly about his international success, his travels to Germany to see the premiers of his plays, and talks about his personal life as well, how he met his second wife, and how did their relationship develop. He talks more about the end of the decade as well, where his disappointment became more and more intense.

Although in this decade several of his plays were performed in the National Theater, he only mentions the first staged play of his, the performance of *Tiszazug* in 1945. He was extremely pleased that his play, thus his thoughts and views are

finally performed on stage in Hungary. He remembers the premier, which he was looking forward to greatly, and recalls the wonderful reception of it, the joy the audience gave with its enthusiasm to the author, to the theater, its company and to life itself.¹³¹ Therefore in the closed world of theater the whole society, life itself is mirrored, the great expectations they were looking forward to in the May of 1945, when he too was still rather optimistic, and ahead of him was a bright future. His enthusiasm was followed by his growing disappointment and by the end of the decade his shift from the communists values to the revolutionary side.

His controversial personality regarding politics is expressed in his autobiography, he does not deny his communist past (it would be rather difficult to do so) but strongly rejects it in the moment of writing. In most of the cases he reflects on politics emotionally, as when referring to Ernő Gerő, the leader of the Hungarian Communist Party: “At that time I respected this Ernő Gerő very much, from October 23rd, 1956 I despise and I curse him.”¹³² He indeed used intense words describing those, with whom he once was on the same side, he calls József Révai, the minister of culture, a “cultural dictator”¹³³.

In his view, the root of his disappointment is, that the implementation of the system was far from the original ideology and plans they all believed in and waited for. “In 1919 as youngsters we congratulated each other when they proclaimed the

¹³¹ Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 346.

¹³² Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 337.

original quote: „Ezt a Gerő Ernőt akkorban nagyra értékeltem. 1956. október 23. óta gyűlölöm és elátkozom.”

¹³³ Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 345.
in the original: „kultúrdiktátor”

dictatorship of the proletariat. Back then we imagined it otherwise.”¹³⁴ He thinks that they did not keep to the ideology, they turned their back on it for their personal advancement: “as in case of many other members of the communist leaders, a certain change has taken place in him. The sentiment of revolutionary passion has decreased, and was replaced by the pleasure that power provided them with.”¹³⁵ He was disappointed, and according to his narration at the time too, “Aren’t we living in a new world? In the world of liberty?”¹³⁶ It took him a while to realize that this is not the expected world, current political events had a direct impact on his art as well, his artistic works of the time represent the political and general atmosphere of the decade. He claims that real tragedies happened quite often and at the time he, as many, could not reflect on them: “One lived through them, but did not comprehend them, and – did not *write* them, but tragedies need to be written.”¹³⁷ His explanation is that “we slowly learnt to live in narrow, extremely narrow emotional dimensions. Even I, whose profession was to write dramas passed by the great tragedies and wrote insignificant pieces.”¹³⁸ But he does reflect on his role in the system, he does not find a justification for it, and apparently does not

¹³⁴ Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 381.

original quote: „1919-ben fiatal fejjel még gratuláltunk egymásnak, amikor kikiáltották a proletárdiktatúrát. Akkor még másképp képzeltük el.”

¹³⁵ Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 345.

original quote: „mint a kommunista vezető réteg sok más tagjában, változás ment végbe. A forradalmi szenvedély heve alábbhagyott, de a hatalom nyújtotta élvezet teljesen birtokába vette.”

¹³⁶ Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 372.

original quote: „Hát nem új világban élünk? A szabadság világában?”

¹³⁷ Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 368.

original quote: „az ember átélte, de nem fogta föl – és nem *írta meg*, pedig a tragédiákat meg kell írni.” – emphasis by the author

¹³⁸ Háý, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 369.

original quote: „(...) lassan megtanultunk szűk, egészen szűk lelki dimenziókban élni. Én, akinek pedig hivatása volt drámákat írni, elmentem a nagy tragédiák mellett és jelentéktelen dolgokat írtam.”

legitimize his past explicitly, he raises many self-reflective questions, such as “What entitled us to live the way we lived? The belief that meanwhile we are building a new world? Wasn’t this just a lie?”¹³⁹ He claims that his personal success seeing all the sufferings around him did not cause him happiness, and after a long journey he reached to the point where he wanted to “to help my country, my nation, my fellow human beings to create a better existence.”¹⁴⁰ In his personal journey this meant his participation in the 1956 revolution.

Their Position to Power

The authors of the investigated autobiographies worked in the same environment, or in connection with the National Theater, they held very different positions, both in the institution itself and in the political system, and its implementation, in the building of the regime. I explored their separate life paths at the time period of 1945-1955.

All three authors reflect on the political context and expressed their retrospective opinion, so to say they all found ‘excuses’ for their political standing and behavior during the postwar years. They all claim to have expected something else, something better, but their level of disappointment and their expectations differ greatly.

In the case of Bálint Magyar, as he provides a theater history, with a theater-historian’s approach and methodology, it is inevitable for him not to mention the political context of the time period, and his position. He describes that decade as if

¹³⁹ Háy, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 377.

original quote: „Mi jogosított fel minket úgy élni, ahogy élünk? A hit, hogy eközben az új világot építjük? Nem volt-e ez hazugság?”

¹⁴⁰ Háy, Gyula: Született 1900-ban, p. 378.

original quote: „hogyan hazámnak, népemnek, embertársaimnak segítek egy jobb létet teremteni”

he was an objective, yet not up to date figure of the time, to whom things happened, he never really participated in any actions, his life was the world of theater, the National Theater, and his home, of which we gain very little information from his autobiographies. He describes himself as a quiet, polite, somewhat timid person, who accepted or lived through the political changes, he did not anticipate the implementation of socialism, was not a member of the illegal communist party in his youth, but did see the benefits, and could accept some of its values, mostly its human values.

Hilda Gobbi remembers her achievements, as organizer and builder of actor homes and shelters, she portrays herself as a great enthusiast of theater, of actors, who has done much for the appreciation and elevation of the profession, by founding the Theater Museum, and by having managed to provide social help for the young or the elderly and impoverished retired actors. She believed that her communist identity is secondary to her theater enthusiasm for the acting profession, and it served only the latter, which was according to her autobiographies her life. To use a metaphor from her profession, one could say, that she believed that although she was often cast in leading roles, both on stage and in life, “it wasn’t me, who made the decision”, but the director, or in life the circumstances.¹⁴¹

Gyula Háry also reflects on the political context and trends of the postwar decade, as he used to be a communist from a very young age, he was very much appreciated and celebrated by the strengthening regime, until in 1956 he opposed the party and his previous views, therefore in his autobiography he expresses his disappointment with the prevailing regime, he presents it as something he was waiting for, but did not fulfill its promises.

¹⁴¹ Gobbi, Hilda: *Közben*, p. 66.
original quote: „nem én döntöttem”

Conclusion

The subject of my thesis was the Hungarian National theater and its relationship to politics in Hungary during the postwar years, from 1945 until 1955. I was particularly interested in the individuals' – working at or in connection with the National Theater at the time – experiences on their personal relation to power.

A significant literature exists on the subject of the National Theater but this project used a diverse approach by taking as its chief focus of interest a series of autobiographical memoirs of key individuals within the institution. I investigated the autobiographies of Bálint Magyar, head secretary of the National Theater; Hilda Gobbi, actress; and Gyula Háy, playwright. Methodologically the thesis combined a close reading of these primary texts with a contextualization within the relevant secondary literature relating to the political background, the sovietizational process and the institution of the National Theater.

I argued that the National Theater, despite its traditional role of being a national and bourgeois institution played a crucial role in the implementation of the sovietization. The National Theater was in a contradictional situation, but it adjusted to the new socialist values, while maintaining its features and its leading role. This transitional characteristic of the institution is reflected in the autobiographies as well. The analysis of the sources served as an insight to how opinion was expressed, to what extent was there a freedom of expression, and to the ways and the degree of control and forms of it, such as self-control, state control, system control, and most of all how do they reflect upon these retrospectively, what do they remember. The analysis of the personal experiences shed light on greater social processes as well, through their personal experiences we gained an insight on the

cultural political values and their practice, the loopholes and informalities, but on the political atmosphere as well.

Bibliography

- H. Porter Abbott *Autobiography, Autography, Fiction: Groundwork for a Taxonomy of Textual Categories*, *New Literary History*, Vol. 19, No. 3, History, Critics, and Criticism: Some Inquiries (Spring, 1988), p. 597-615.
- John Connelly, *Captive university : the Sovietization of East German, Czech and Polish higher education, 1945-1956*, Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, London, Routledge, 1994.
- Czékmány, Anna: *Múltjában él a nemzet(i). [The Nation(al) [Theater] Lives in its Past]* In.: *Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok*. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 69-80.
- Füst Milán: *Bevezető szavak naplójegyzeteimhez. [Introduction to My Journal]* In.: *Uő.: Napló. Magvető, Budapest, 1976. p. 17-20.*
- Gajdó, Tamás: *A magyar színházi élet újjászervezése 1945-ben. [The Reorganization of Hungarian Theater in 1945.]* In.: *Színház, 2012. május.* http://www.szinhaz.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36377:a-magyar-szinhazi-elet-ujjaszervezese-1945-ben&catid=66:2012-majus&Itemid=7 (accessed: April 23, 2013)
- Gajdó, Tamás: *Színházi diktatúra Magyarországon 1919-1962. [Dictatorship in Theaters in Hungary 1919-1962].* In.: *Színház és diktatúra a 20. században.* Szerk.: Lengyel György. Corvina. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet. 2007. p. 338-382.
- Gobbi, Hilda: *Közben. [Meanwhile.]* Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1982.
- Jan Gross, "The Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries for the Study of the Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 3 (1989), p. 198-214.
- György Gyarmati, Tibor Valuch, *Hungary under Soviet domination : 1944-1989*, transl. by Sean Lambert, new York : Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Gyarmati, György: *A Rákosi-korszak : rendszerváltó fordulatok évtizede Magyarországon, 1945-1956, [The Rákosi-era : a Decade of Transitional Turns in Hungary, 1945-1956].* ÁBTL : Rubicon, Budapest, 2011.
- Háy, Gyula: *Született 1900-ban. Emlékezések. [Born in 1900. Memoirs.]* Interart, Budapest, 1990.

- Zygmunt Hubner, Theater & politics, edited and translated by Jadwiga Kosicka; with a foreword by Daniel Gerould and an afterword by Andrzej Wajda, Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1992.
- Imre, Zoltán: A diktatúra (teatralitása) és a színház (emlékezete). Rákosi Mátyás és a Nemzeti Színház 1955-ös Tragédia-előadása. [Dictatorship's (Theatricality) and the Theater's (Memory). Rákosi and the National Theater's 1955 Performance of The Tragedy] - In.: A kultúra átváltozásai. Kép, zene, szöveg. Szerk.: Jeney Éva, Szegedy-Maszák Mihály, Balassi, Bp, 2006. p. 209-237.
- Peter Kenez, The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929, Cambridge [Cambridgeshire], Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Peter Kenez, Hungary from the Nazis to the Soviets : the establishment of the Communist regime in Hungary, 1944-1948, Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Kerényi, Ferenc: A nemzeti romantika színháza (1837-1849). [The Theater of National Romanticism (1837-1849). In.: A nemzeti színház 150 éve. Szerk.: Kerényi Ferenc, Gondolat, Budapest, 1987. p. 11-36.
- Kerényi, Ferenc: A színház mint társaséleti színtér a 19. századi Budapesten [Theater as a Scene of Social Life in 19th Century Budapest] In.: Budapesti Negyed. 46. 2004. <http://bfl.archivportal.hu/id-859-kerenyi-ferenc-szinhaz-mint.html> (accessed: May 4, 2013)
- Korossy, Zsuzsa: "Rólunk nemigen szól a mese" Pillanatképek a magyar színházi életről 1953-ban. [The Tale Is Not About Us. Snapshots of the Hungarian Theatrical Life]. In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 37-60.
- Korossy, Zsuzsa: Színházirányítás a Rákosi korszakban. [Theater Directorship in the Rákosi-era]. In.: Színház és politika. Színháztörténeti tanulmányok, 1949-1989. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2007. p. 45-138.
- Philipp Lejeune, The Autobiographical Pact, in idem On autobiography, Philippe Lejeune ; edited and with a foreword by Paul John Eakin ; translated by Katherine Leary, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c1989.
- Lengyel, György: "Itt nem voltak színpadi események, színpadi forradalmak, nyitások?" Rendezői utak és stílusok a magyar színháztörténetben 1923-1956. ["There were no Theatrical Events, Revolutions, Openings Here?" The Careers and Style of Directors in Hungarian Theater, 1923-1956.] In.: Uő.: Színházi emberek. Corvina, Budapest, 2008. p. 228-291.

- Mályuszné Császár, Edit: A rendi nemzeti színháztól a polgári nemzet színháza felé (1849-1873). [From the Noblemen's National Theater towards the Bourgeois Nation's Theater (1849-1873)]. In.: A nemzeti színház 150 éve. Szerk.: Kerényi Ferenc, Gondolat, Budapest, 1987. p. 39.
- Magyar, Bálint: A két világháború között (1919-1944). [Between the Two World Wars (1919-1944)] In.: A nemzeti színház 150 éve. Szerk.: Kerényi Ferenc, Gondolat, Budapest, 1987. p.97-130.
- Magyar, Bálint: A kék óra [The Blue Clock], [ca. 1990], manuscript
- Magyar, Bálint: Ötven év színház [Fifty Years of Theater], [1980], manuscript.
- Magyar Színházművészet 1949-1959. [Hungarian Theater 1949-1959]. Szerk.: Dr. Staud, Géza. Színháztudományi Intézet, Budapest, 1960.
- Magyar Színházművészeti Lexikon. [Encyclopedia of Hungarian Theater]. szerk. Székely György, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1994. <http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02139/html/index.html> (accessed: May 4, 2013)
- Magyar Színháztörténet 1790-1873. [Hungarian Theater-History 1790-1873] Szerk. Székely György, Kerényi Ferenc. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1990. <http://mek.oszk.hu/02000/02065/html/1kotet/index.html> (accessed: May 4, 2013)
- Nagy, Ildikó: Polgárosuló színház a polgári Budapesten. [The Rise of the Bourgeois Theater in the Bourgeois Budapest] In: Lackó Miklós, szerk.: A tudománytól a tömegkultúráig. Bp., MTA TTI, 1994. 191-216.
- Niedermüller Péter: *Élettörténet és életrajzi elbeszélés*. [Life history and Biographical Narration]. In.: Ethnographia 1988 (XCIX. évf.) 3-4. sz. p. 376-389.
- E. A. Rees, "Introduction, The Sovietization of Eastern Europe", in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, ed. Balázs Apór, Péter Apór, and E. A. Rees, Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008, p. 1-27.
- Ständeisky Éva: Gúzsba kötve. A kulturális elit és a hatalom. [Bounded. The Cultural Elite and Power]. 1956-os intézet, ÁBTL, Bp, 2005.
- Martin Max Stanley, The Anglo-American response to the sovietization of Hungary, 1945-1948, Ann Arbor, Mich. : UMI, 1990, cop. 1980.
- Martin Max Stanley, The United States, Great Britain, and the sovietization of Hungary, 1945-1948, New York : Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Szabó, István: A színházak műsora az 1950-es években. [The program of the Theaters in the 1950s]. In.: Digitális Színháztörténet. Színháztörténeti és módszertani tanulmányok. Szerk.: Gajdó Tamás. Országos Színháztörténeti Múzeum és Intézet, Budapest, 2009. p. 15-36.

- Székely, György: Intézménytörténet. A Nemzeti Színház. [History of Institutions. The National Theater] In.: Magyar Színháztörténet 1920-1949. <http://tbeck.beckground.hu/szinhaz/htm/07.htm> (accessed: April 23, 2013)
- A Szocialista művészetért!: a művészek és a művészeti dolgozók szakmai szervezeteinek történetéhez. [For the Socialist Art!: to the History of the Artists and their Professional Organizations]. Szerk.: Gerelyes Ede, Táncsics Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1974.
- Peter A. Toma, Iván Völgyes, Politics in Hungary, San Francisco : W. H. Freeman, 1977.
- Tzvetan Todorov, Hope and Memory. Lessons from the Twentieth Century, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- István Vida, "Sovietization and the Nation's Response, 1944-1956", in Hungary: Governments and Politics 1848-2000, ed. Mária Ormos and Béla K. Király. Translated by Nóra Arató, New York : Columbia University Press, 2001. p. 275-358.
- Vincze Hanna Orsolya: *Önéletírás, tények, toposzok*. [Autobiography, Facts, Topoi] In.: Ármeán Otília, Odorics Ferenc (szerk.): Határon. Pompeji, Kolozsvár, Szeged, 2002. p. 235-244.