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The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Philosophy of the Research Centre for the Humanities (used to be the Institute for Philosophical Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences before 2012; and the Institute of Philosophy of the Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences before 2019) have been collaborating in the field of Polish and Hungarian comparative intellectual history over last ten years. Their first initiative included a short-term project entitled *Affectivity and its Vicissitudes in Contemporary Humanities and Social Sciences*, supported by the Visegrad Fund. Our cooperation became more established within the frames of projects funded by the bilateral programme of the Polish and Hungarian Academies, entitled *The Impact of Noble Legacy in Shaping Citizenship in Central Europe* (2014–2016, project leaders: Gábor Gángó and Rafał Smoczyński); *The Role of Intelligentsia in Shaping Collective Identities of Poles and Hungarians in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (2017–2019; project leaders: Béla Mester and Rafał Smoczyński); and our ongoing research entitled *Westernisers and ‘Narodniks’*. *Dichotomous Identity-Generating Narratives in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish and Hungarian Intellectual History* (planned for 2020–2022, renewed until 2023 due to the pandemic; project leaders: Béla Mester and Rafał Smoczyński). This volume mirrors the present status of our research based on papers presented during the workshops held in Budapest on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019, in Warsaw on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2019, and in Budapest on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2020; collected and selected for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our cooperation. The editors and authors would like to express their gratitude to the Waclaw Felczak Foundation, which supported the publication of the present book.

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Edited by  
BÉLA MESTER  
RAFAŁ SMOCZYŃSKI

Lords and Boors  
Westernisers and ‘Narodniks’



CHAPTERS FROM POLISH AND HUNGARIAN  
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

# Lords and Boors Westernisers and ‘Narodniks’

Edited by

Béla Mester & Rafał Smoczyński

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**Chapters from Polish and Hungarian  
Intellectual History**

erco

Series editor

BÉLA MESTER

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for this volume were reviewed by

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of Transylvania in Romania

**Chapters from Polish and Hungarian  
Intellectual History**

# Lords and Boors Westernisers and ‘Narodniks’

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Edited by  
Béla Mester & Rafał Smoczyński

Research Centre for the Humanities,  
Institute of Philosophy – Gondolat Publishers  
Budapest, 2020

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## **The Philosopher as a(n anti-)Hero**

### **The Literary Representations of Georg Lukács**

#### **I. Introduction**

The œuvre of Georg Lukács has been influenced many thinkers like Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, or Theodor W. Adorno, although it is not only his writings that had a strong impact. Lukács's personality, his attitude and his way of thinking also became an inspiration for many artists. One of the well-known international examples is the famous opus by Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain* in English, published first in 1924), where Lukács's characteristics can be recognized in Naptha's figure.<sup>1</sup> Hungarian literature reflected on Lukács in many different ways as well: in some of these literary works he is the protagonist; in other works he plays only a small but significant part. Although for a wider national or rather international interest, these writings are almost unknown because of their language (they are written in Hungarian, and most of them have not been translated) and they were also left out of the literary canon. A slow process of (re)discovery has begun, where the writings of some authors have been republished and they are becoming a centre of discussion.<sup>2</sup> Why these literary works are worth discussing, it is not always for their aesthetic value, but

<sup>1</sup> The reminiscences are often inconsistent. In the taped interview with István Eörsi Lukács remembers so, that there is no doubt at all that he was the model for Naptha (Lukács 1983: 94). In Katia Mann's memoir, Mann recognized afterwards that he had partly modelled Lukács in Naptha (Mann 1976: 74–75).

<sup>2</sup> Anna Lesznai (1885–1966) is an example of this. Her novel *Kezdetben volt a kert* (in English *In the Beginning was the Garden*, first published in 1966) was republished in 2015 (Lesznai 2015). Before this rediscovery, there are infinitesimal amounts of academic literature which focus on Lesznai, except Erzsébet Vezér's biography about Lesznai (Vezér 1979) and the journal *Enigma*. The *Enigma* devoted two issues to Lesznai in 2007 (*Enigma* no. 51 and 52) and was edited by Petra Török, who wrote not just a doctoral thesis about Lesznai in 2012, but also published a selection of Lesznai's diary in 2010. Another doctoral thesis must be mentioned here by Fiona Stewart, who wrote about Lesznai and Hungarian modernism at the turn of the century (Stewart 2011). Furthermore, in 2015, Sándor Radnóti wrote a criticism about the republished novel of Lesznai (Radnóti 2015).



their interpretation and reflections. As László Percz stated, these novels primarily mirror Lukács's disposition, his attitude and most importantly his position in the Hungarian history and culture (Percz 1991), instead of his ideas.

Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* published in 1916 gave a review of sociological criticism in the form of literary criticism. The unity of 'inside' and 'outside', "a sign of the essential difference between the self and the world, the incongruence of soul and deed" (Lukács 1971. 11) has vanished together with the integrated civilisations. The disintegration of this unity has left its mark on the arts, too. Literary forms, especially novels, are the sign of the shattered totality.

This exaggeration of the substantiality of art is bound to weigh too heavily upon its forms: they have to produce out of themselves all that was once simply accepted as given; in other words, before their own a priori effectiveness can begin to manifest itself, they must create by their own power alone the preconditions for such effectiveness – an object and its environment. A totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the forms of art: therefore they must either narrow down and volatilise whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it, or else they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means. And in this case they carry the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms. (Lukács 1971. 15–16.)

So, in Lukács's interpretation, novels are a kind of contemporary documentation (*Zeitdokument*), because they express the intellectual, sociological and historical changes of their era. The novels, where Lukács appears as a literary character, reflect often on the changing historical and sociological situation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on the Great War, on the Revolution in 1918, on the Hungarian Soviet Republic and on the first year of emigration after the fall of the Republic. They not only portray history, but also the *Zeitgeist*, therefore these literary works could bring new addition to different fields, such as the history of philosophy and the history of ideas, and they could also illuminate the figure of Georg Lukács better.

Thus, the main aim of this paper is to give an overview about specific literary works which characterize Georg Lukács and to reflect on a troubled period in which the idea of a profane redemption dominated. So, the era, which this paper focuses on is the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1900–1920), because these years brought important and sudden changes: the ideas which had the greatest influence at the turn of the century shaped the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was the period in which Lukács tried to find his way in the maze of his ethical dilemmas and made a lifelong theoretical and practical decision to be a member of the Hungarian Communist Party and to be a theorist of Marxism. The problems of these two decades are also significant in the literary works regarding how Lukács's contemporaries tried to interpret and understand the

sudden changes. These works mediate their authors' moral standpoint as well and based on their beliefs, Lukács's figure becomes either a hero or an anti-hero.

Therefore, this paper will not list all of the writings in which Lukács is a literary character, I only discusses some chosen works where Lukács's ideas and his position in the era in question (1900–1920) are principal. Moreover, my research focuses only on the Hungarian prose and belles-lettres because my aim is to bring these works back into a wider discussion. Because of this, the non-Hungarian-speaking writings are not a part of my focus.<sup>3</sup> The primary questions of this paper are, how Lukács's character is portrayed, how his ideas are represented and what role he plays in the literary works, and in conclusion, what moral position the author would like to express with Lukács's character. In other words, the goal of the paper is to outline Lukács's personality, attitude and his development of thinking based on different literary writings.

The selected literary works discussed in this paper include a feuilleton, two novels and a drama.<sup>4</sup> The author, the title in Hungarian and English and the year of the first publication are given in sequence: Béla Balázs: *Barátság* (*Friendship*, 1911); Emma Ritoók: *A szellem kalandorai* (*Spiritual Adventurers*, 1922); Anna Lesznai: *Kezdetben volt a kert* (*In the Beginning Was the Garden*, 1966); István Eörsi: *Az interjú* (*The Interview*, 1983).

The reason why I have selected these literary works is that these four writings represent an era in Lukács's life and thinking. Another important rea-

<sup>3</sup> A brief part of this research has been already published as an educational writing for the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Georg Lukács's death (see Szabados 2020a) and it has been presented at a conference organized by Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFiS PAN) in Warsaw, on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2019. The title of the conference was *The evolution of social elites in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond*. For further research, the author of this paper relies on the study by László Percz (see Percz 1991), where Percz systematically interprets the various Lukács portraits in the belles-lettres.

<sup>4</sup> The study of László Percz already listed the most significant novels and dramas which portray Lukács (see Percz 1991); therefore, this paper would like to give another aspect of some selected works. The literary writings (including the literature written in a diary form), where Lukács is characterized, but will not be mentioned in this paper are the following (the author, the title in Hungarian and in English and the year of the first publication are given in sequence): Marcell Benedek: *Vulkán* (*Volcano*, 1918); Cécile Tormay: *Bujdosó könyv* (*An Outlaw's Diary*, 1920); Frigyes Karinthy: *Balázs Béla* (1920); Elek Benedek: *Édes anyaföldem!* (*My Sweet Motherland!* 1920); Ferenc Herczeg: *Északi fény* (*Northern Light*, 1929); Dezső Szabó: *Megered az eső* (*It Is Starting to Rain*, 1931); Lajos Kassák: *Egy ember élete* (*A Man's Life*, 1934–1936); György Faludy: *Levél Lukács Györgyhez* (*Letter to György Lukács*, 1948–1949); Ervin Sinkó: *Optimisták* (*Optimists*, 1953–1955); József Lengyel: *Prenn Ferenc hányatott élete* (*The Troubled Life of Ferenc Prenn*, 1959); Marcell Benedek: *Naplómat olvasom* (*Reading My Diary*, 1965); Béla Balázs: *Napló I–II.* (*Diary I–II.*, 1982); András Nagy: *Kedves Lukács* (*Dear Lukács*, 1984).

son is how all of the authors were Lukács's contemporaries and they knew him from closer. This means that the claim expressed in the beginning of this paper, namely that literary works is a form of contemporary documentation (*Zeitdokument* or *Zeitroman*) is the most significant in the writings of Lukács's *comrades-in-arms*.<sup>5</sup> The authors redefine and interpret Lukács's character and attitude, and in these interpretations, they express their own standpoints to Lukács and his ideas.

## II. The Idol

### 1. Béla Balázs: *Barátság* (Friendship, November 1911)

The earliest and almost unknown short story in which Lukács's character can be recognized has been published anonymously in the journal *Világ* in November 1911. The journal *Világ* was launched on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1910, and its aim was to create a radical daily paper where political issues could be discussed. In 1911, the journal had a call for feuilletons, the prize of which was five hundred *Koronas*. Some of the competition essays have been published and the readers could decide who could win the prize eventually (see *Világ* [1912] 3/27. 9). On the short list was a feuilleton with the title *Barátság* (Friendship), whose motto was "It happened" (Balázs 1911) and its author was probably Béla Balázs.<sup>6</sup> According to the letters between Lukács and Balázs, moreover Balázs's diary, Balázs played a significant part in the suicide of Irma Seidler. In May 1911, Irma Seidler committed suicide (see the letter of Leó Popper on 24 May 1911 in Lukács 1981. 381) and in Balázs's diary and in his letters we can find some reference that Balázs feels himself guilty about Lukács (see Balázs 1982a. 518) and fears that Lukács could have known "his affair with Irma" (ibid.). In August 1911, Lukács wrote his most personal essay with the title *Von der Armut am Geiste* (see Lukács 1977. 537–551)<sup>7</sup> to face with his own sense of responsibility for Irma Seidler's death. When Balázs read this essay, he wrote a long letter to Lukács in which he tries to give a criticism about Lukács's writings (see the letter of Balázs on 16 August 1916 in Lukács 1981. 408–413) and claims

<sup>5</sup> Júlia Lenkei calls the friendship between Georg Lukács and Béla Balázs "comrades-in-arms" (in Hungarian "fegyverbarátság", see Lenkei's *Preface* in Balázs 1982b). This paper takes over this terminology in order to express the close intellectual and ethical interest between Lukács and his contemporaries.

<sup>6</sup> Balázs's feuilleton did not win; it only got 12 votes (see *Világ* [1912] 3/29. 7).

<sup>7</sup> The essay *Von der Armut am Geiste* was translated by Béla Balázs and was published first in Hungarian in the journal *Szellem* in 1911, No. 2. 202–214. The original German essay was published next year, in 1912 in the journal *Neue Blätter*, No. 5–6. 67–92.

that Lukács's essay had a strong impact on him because of "personal reasons" (Ibid.)<sup>8</sup>.

However, Lukács's dialogue *Von der Armut am Geiste* and the collection of his early essays, *The Soul and Form* are more complex and not only for biographical reasons. In the *Soul and Form*, Lukács wrote an essay about Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen, where Lukács:

[...] meditates on the way that literary form takes up the sacrifice and loss of love. Kierkegaard's guilt and suffering raise the question of whether literary form can offer redemption of some kind, and Lukács clearly opposes the idea that life can find a full or ultimate redemption in form. Kierkegaard is always attempting to give form to existence, but he fails, and the singularity of his existence proves to resist all efforts to become generalized, or, indeed, communicated, through form. [...] What Kierkegaard offers is less an innovation of form or genre than the introduction of the *gesture*. The gesture expresses life, even absolutely, but it can only do this by withdrawing from life, by being merely a gesture. That Kierkegaard sacrifices his fiancée, Regine Olsen, is interpreted by Lukács as a necessary sacrifice, one that underwrites his entire aesthetic practice, a withdrawal that conditions form-making itself. (Butler 2010. 9.)

In the spirit of the collection of the *Soul and Form*, the essay *Von der Armut am Geiste* written in 1911, already searches for an answer or possibility of redemption, which has to be over the forms (Lukács 1977. 539). Lukács describes two ways of redemption where one is the destruction of the forms with goodness. The forms belong to an ethical sphere, where the obligations (*Sollen*) are primarily and as Lukács wrote, vital life is above the forms, while ordinary life is bound to the strictness and obligations of the forms (ibid. 540). Only essential goodness could break the forms and bring an immanent and transcendent redemption (Ibid.). Essential goodness is a divine ability and those who have the ability of goodness do not consider the consequences of an act. These are the characters of Dostoevsky, Prince Myshkin, Alyosha Karamazov or Abraham, the king of faith from Kirkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, who do not theorize the Other. Goodness is not an ethical category: "[the goodness is] miracle, mercy and redemption" (ibid. 541). Lukács describes those who have the ability of goodness, that they are fanatic, obsessed; they are ready to act at all cost (ibid. 543). However, this obsession is the true sign of goodness because goodness could accept sin in order to bring redemption to the immanent and the transcendent (ibid. 544). This obsession is what breaks the strict ethical forms, the cruel theorising. Lukács here gives an interpretation of redemption and refers to a detour: the character of the dialogue considers himself as one who took a

<sup>8</sup>Lukács did not consider Balázs's suggestions (see the letter of Balázs on 16 August 1916 in Lukács 1981. 408–413).

detour in order to remain sinless (ibid. 544), but also has redemption. However, redemption is not possible without sin (ibid.). As Lukács wrote, the sin was that he could not break the forms of (his own) ethic – Lukács’s gesture became meaningless here.<sup>9</sup> At the end of the essay, Lukács still searches for a solution of redemption, however he does not have the ability of goodness, though he could work for it. Lukács describes the pureness of the soul, which is the other way for redemption. The Biblical story of Martha and Mary shows that those who do not have goodness and could not turn towards redemption, have to work for it (ibid. 542). Creation is the only way, whereby the creator lives only for the work – this creation can form such homogeneity and understanding in the ordinary and chaotic world as goodness can with its simple act (Ibid. 550).

While Lukács faced his own ethical dilemmas in his essays, Balázs, who also fought with his own guilt, wrote a widely different feuilleton for the journal *Világ* (see Balázs 1911).<sup>10</sup> In this short story, the protagonist visits his friend to accompany him to a wedding only to find him in agony. The narrative is very simple: the friend, named Ervin, has proposed to his love, Klára, but the woman rejected it and now the protagonist wants to take revenge for the sake of his friend. The protagonist shatters when he sees Ervin weeping like a “sick child” (ibid.) and decides to travel to Italy with him. However, he first heads to the wedding where he finds Klára, who is seemingly enjoying the party. This encourages the idea in the protagonist that Klára humiliated his friend in his “nature” (ibid.). Namely, he believes that Klára did not find Ervin to be man enough and therefore he seduces the woman to take revenge on behalf of Ervin. The tragedy of the story, i.e. that Ervin finds them together and the act of the protagonist turned from rightful revenge into a sin. He realizes that he betrayed not only his friend, but he also sinned against Klára. The feuilleton ends with the realization that everything happened for Ervin (ibid.). However, even though Ervin is in the centre of the story, he remains silent. The protagonist narrates the story in the first person, and the only dialogue is when he has a conversation with Klára. Ervin stays in the distance where the main characters, the protagonist and Klára, speak about him and act for him, but could not get in contact with him. This distance is also symbolic, Ervin is described as a man of the *soul* (*Geist*) who only lives within his ideas:

<sup>9</sup> According to a letter from Marianne Weber, Lukács wrote his essay *Von der Armut am Geiste* about himself and his guilt (see the letter of Marianne Weber on 31 July 1912 in Lukács 1981. 491–492). Lukács’s essay had a significant impact on the Webers and Marianne Weber also mentioned it in her memoir (see Weber 1948. 380).

<sup>10</sup> Balázs mentions in his letters to Lukács that he sent some of his writings to the journal *Világ* (see the letters of Béla Balázs on 6 July 1911 and on 16 August 1911 in Lukács 1981. 385 and 412).

Klára folded her hands: – No, no, no! I did want it! My God, how I wanted to love Ervin! He could have been the redemption of my life. Because everything, which is good in me pulled me to his sphere. I could feel myself human only there. I could only appreciate myself since he has loved me. He raised me out of the rabble, I lived thanks to him. I wanted to belong to him. Because I respect and admire him so infinitely. I almost loved him. He could have been the only solution to my life. But all is in vain! *He always remains a spirit to me; he always will be just a soul to me.* I tried, struggled for years in vain. His body seemed to be a pure idol made of porcelain, which I can only worship. If he touched me, my blood and nerves were horrified. All was in vain! And I – I got tired. I got tired in this never-ending heavy intellectual fight [...]. (Balázs 1911; my italics.)<sup>11</sup>

Béla Balázs portrays Lukács as a someone who will make his mark in the world because he is another kind, another “caste” (ibid.). Ervin’s character is already a great scholar, a glorious thinker (ibid.) and despite of this cult of brilliance, he is described as a “weak child” (ibid.). However, this intellectual greatness is not enough for the beloved woman because Ervin/Lukács is unapproachable: he is seen as an idol that lives only for his ideas. The true tragedy is not the treachery of the protagonist but the impotence of Ervin/Lukács, who realises the impossibility between ideas and life. This early feuilleton of Balázs’s has many biographical references, but the reason why it is cited here is because of how Balázs described Lukács as someone who forms his life as he forms his philosophy.<sup>12</sup> This thought can also be discovered in a novel written by Emma Ritoók which was first published at the turn of 1921–1922.

<sup>11</sup> “Klára összekulcsolta a kezét: – Nem, nem, nem! Én akartam! Istenem, hogy akartam szeretni Ervint! Az életem megváltása lett volna. Hiszen minden, ami jó volt bennem, az ő szférájába húzott. Csak ott éreztem magam embernek. Csak azóta becsülöm magam, mióta ő szeret. Kiemelt a csócselékből, belőle éltem. Hozzája akartam tartozni. Hiszen olyan végtelenül tisztetem és csodálom. Hiszen majdnem szerettem. Egyetlen megoldása lett volna életemnek. És hiába! Mindig csak szellem, mindig csak lélek maradt ő nekem. Hiába erőlködtem két évig. A teste ugy[sic!] hatott rám, mint valami finom, porcelán bálvány, melyet imádni kell. Ha hozzám ért, megborzadt az idegzetem és a vérem. Hiába volt minden! És én – én elfáradtam. Elfáradtam ebben a szakadatlan nehéz szellemi tornában [...].” (Balázs 1911.) Translated from the original by B.Sz.

<sup>12</sup> There is no proof, if Lukács had ever read Balázs’s feuilleton. However, Balázs described a moment in his diary when he had a conversation with Lukács about Irma and how he (Balázs) sinned against Lukács (see Balázs 1982a. 617–618).

### III. The Path Finder

#### 1. *Emma Ritoók: A szellem kalandorai (Spiritual Adventurers, 1921)*

One of the first novels which outlines the fundamental ideas of her generation is the novel by Emma Ritoók called *A szellem kalandorai (Spiritual Adventurers)* and it was published first at the turn of 1921–1922.<sup>13</sup> Emma Ritoók got in contact with Lukács before the Great War and after 1915, she became a regular member of the Sunday's meeting at Béla Balázs's. The gatherings were later known as the *Vasárnapi Kör (Sunday Circle)*, the intellectual leader of which was Georg Lukács.<sup>14</sup> The idea and mentality of the Circle also had a significant impact on Emma Ritoók's novel, it was made by inlaid technique (see Percz 1991. 40), where the characters combine the typical features of a real person (see *ibid.*). However, Ritoók portrays Lukács as one of the supporting characters but his characteristics can be recognized in the protagonist too. The protagonist, named Ervin Donáth mostly embodies Béla Zalai and Ernst Bloch, but Georg Lukács could also have been a model for the character.

In the novel, Emma Ritoók portrays a new generation full of ideas through the struggles of the two main characters, Ervin Donáth and Héva Bartoldy, who are destined for great acts and with the assertion of their ideas, this generation is capable of changing the society radical. Still, the mentality of the novel remains negative and disillusioned due to the fact that Emma Ritoók uses her personal and historical experiences as the basis for writing the novel. The author became disappointed in the great ideas of her generation as she witnessed the Aster Revolution and underwent the 133 days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. It is visible as Ritoók became estranged from her former comrade-in-arms and this estrangement also appears in the novel:

Those who came along with Donáth stopped at an advertisement board of a daily paper; the bloody and horrible sacrifices of the last fights could have been foreseen in the sentences of the report. Then they went along uninterested. One part of the youth lived

<sup>13</sup> The first novel where Lukács is characterized is the novel by Marcell Benedek called *Vulkán (Volcano)* and was published first in 1918. However, the story of Benedek's novel focuses only on the period between 1904 and 1914, therefore Lukács's turn to Marxism is not a part of it. Benedek took part in the society named *Thália*, but in 1905, the relation between Lukács and Benedek became loose because of a political disagreement and as their activity in the *Thália* ended, their contact ended too (see Bendl 1994. 51–57). Benedek portrays Lukács in his novel as a revolutionary, however he changes when he gets married to an actress. After the marriage, the former revolutionary is already a traditionalist who acknowledges the priority of the nobles (see also Percz 1991. 39–40).

<sup>14</sup> Lukács mentions the gatherings of the Sunday Circle in an interview with István Eörsi (see Lukács 1983. 49–51).

outside history, the other part arranged history with words inside, and the city was in a great distance, which was between those who sacrifice their own life and those who sacrifice their words. In this distance the city let people in who are in fever with a red idea, and – the city has been sleeping. (Ritoók 1993. 485.)<sup>15</sup>

Ritoók describes the characters in the novel as they play with the idea of redemption: they are adventurers who sacrifice others for their philosophy. The spiritual adventurers believe deeply that if their philosophy will be recognized and acknowledged, that will bring the triumph of the idea and enlightenment (ibid. 483). One of the adventurers is Jenő Illés, whose character was based on Georg Lukács. He comes from a converted Jewish family of a provincial town. Illés only lives for work and seeks his way in an academic career in Germany; therefore, at the beginning he is sceptical about Socialism. Illés believes that Socialism cannot be the right goal of the future, it is just a tool of a possible revolution (ibid. 212), and he also keeps himself away from the war. However, at one point he converts himself and he is the first who joins the Bolshevism influenced by the Russian Revolution. The atmosphere of the Sunday Circle is evoked, as the characters discuss their ideas. At these meetings, Illés explains the demands of the revolution, however, it is not a bourgeois revolution (ibid. 481), it is a world revolution, which comes with destruction and raising. The ethic of this revolution converts the ethic of everyday life with the help of philosophy and mysticism to interpret the necessity of killing and sacrifice (ibid. 482). The ideas expressed here strongly relate to Georg Lukács's article *Tactics and Ethics* written in 1919. In this famous article, Georg Lukács expresses that a thoughtful progress, explained in his writing *Bolshevism as a Moral Problem* (December 1918), is not possible since the solidarity with an existing order only holds up the world-historical consciousness.

That means concretely that every gesture of solidarity with the existing order is fraught with such danger. Deriving though they may well do from true inner conviction, our insistent protests that such and such a gesture of solidarity indicates only a momentary, immediate community of interests, nothing more than a provisional alliance for the attainment of a concrete goal, nevertheless do not obviate the danger that the feeling of solidarity will take root in that form of consciousness which necessarily obscures the world-historical consciousness, the awakening of humanity to

<sup>15</sup>“A Donáthtal tartók megállottak egy napilap hirdetési táblája mellett; az utolsó ütközetek véres és borzalmas áldozatait sejteni lehetett a jelentés sorai között. Aztán közönyösen mentek tovább. Az egyik fiatalság odakint élte a történelmet, a másik idebent szavakkal készítette elő, s az élet- és szóáldozók nagy távolsága közt a város és az eljövendők minden sejtelme nélkül engedte vonulni csendes falai közt a gondolat vörös lázának embereit, és – aludt.” (Ritoók 1993. 485.) Translated from the original by B.Sz.



self-consciousness. The class struggle of the proletariat is not merely a class struggle (if it were, it would indeed be governed simply by Realpolitik), but a means whereby humanity liberates itself, a means to the true beginning of human history. Every compromise made obscures precisely this aspect of the struggle and is therefore – despite all its possible, short-term (but extremely problematical) advantages – fatal to the achievement of this true ultimate objective. (Lukács 1972; Lukács 1987. 127–128.)

Therefore, the tactics here is the realization of a different social order with short- and long-term efforts “which differs from that of every previous society in that it no longer knows either oppressors or oppressed” (ibid. and Lukács 1987. 126). The ethics of these efforts has to be qualitatively different because their aim is a historical demand, which is the stimulation of the necessary historical-philosophical consciousness in the individual (ibid. and Lukács 1987. 129). János Kis compares Lukács’s ethical certitude to the *negative responsibility doctrine* (see Kis 2004. 646), where the individual is responsible for not just his own actions, but for the actions of others as well, which he could have prevented. However, instead, he chose not to take any action (ibid.). As Lukács wrote:

[The] ethics relate to the individual and the necessary consequence of this relationship is that the individual’s conscience and sense of responsibility are confronted with the postulate that he must act as if on his action or inaction depended the changing of the world’s destiny (Lukács 1972; 1987. 129).

According to Lukács, there is no ethical neutrality, to take action is always the obligation of the individual, and as the result of the action he must take individual responsibility for all sacrifices (ibid.). Only this ethical commitment justifies the tactical actions.<sup>16</sup> The significance of Lukács’s ethical turn is the conscious acceptance of sin in order to bring redemption. Emma Ritoók’s novel enlightens Lukács’s ethical dilemma in Illés’s character: Illés also expresses his mystical belief in the revolution, where the acceptance of sin is the only way for possible redemption (see Ritoók 1993. 482–483). Illés and the members of this circle are characterized as they want to free themselves of real responsibility with the help of their philosophical ideas. Their appearance also changes as they accept the idea of sin, which leads them to redemption.<sup>17</sup>

Illés spoke further in a calm, low, but steady voice with the belief of those who are self-willed and fanatic, [he spoke] with the fatalist belief of youth of high-reaching

<sup>16</sup> Ottó Hévízi describes the ethical complexity of Lukács’s turn, where Lukács’s ethics is interpreted based on Kierkegaard’s, Kant’s, and Hegel’s dilemmas (see Hévízi 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Ritoók calls it “sin of redemption” (in Hungarian “megváltó bűn” see Ritoók 1993. 482).

souls and the only in the predominance living and breathing; alongside Donáth, he had in himself the most intense feeling of the conviction that his predominance will be the victory of the idea at the same time. [...] The precise and specified sentences of Illés fell to the audience; his eyes started to light up, a kind of murderous cold fanaticism moved to his facial features, and slowly everyone started to mimic this in various tones, as if they were all siblings. (See Ritoók 1993. 483.)<sup>18</sup>

Although Illés is a strong supporting character, the protagonist is Ervin Donáth, whose life story is the plot of the novel and Georg Lukács can be identified within some of his characteristic. As it was already stated, Béla Zalai and Ernst Bloch were the models for Ervin's character, but some similarities with Lukács can also be recognized.

From his childhood on, Ervin felt that he was determined to create great things, like he had a mission: he sought power and fame (see Percz 1991. 40).<sup>19</sup> Ervin Donáth wanted to live his philosophy as his life, therefore he created new philosophical systems, but these seemed to be failures. In Budapest, he could not find the ground for his philosophy, so he moved to Germany trying to make a career and to habilitate there, only to face rejection. Donáth had no systematic works, only his mystic philosophy of redemption. Returning to his homeland, he begins to find his community in politics. He lectured regularly, where he spread his beliefs, and he continued to work on his philosophy of redemption. Donáth waited for a world-historical moment, when he could take action. This moment was the Russian Revolution and Ervin considered Bolshevism as the new church. Therefore, he took on a leading role in the Hungarian movement and became a people's commissar. However, the movement proved to be a failure and it collapsed: after the downfall, Donáth tried to flee abroad, because in spite of his philosophical belief, he did not want to take responsibility for his action. At the end of the novel, his friend, Gyula Wéber, who truly believed in Ervin's philosophy, shoots him (see Ritoók 1993. 508). Some moments of Lukács's life are easy to recognize on Ervin's path: Lukács also struggled between an academic and a political career and tried to habilitate in Germany (see Szabados 2020b),

<sup>18</sup> "Illés nyugodt, halk, de biztos hangon beszélt tovább, a makacsok és fanatikusok, az ambíció marta lelkeket és csak az érvényesülésben élő és lélegző fiatalság fatalisztikus hitével; ő benne volt meg Donáthon kívül a legerősebben a meggyőződés, hogy a saját érvényesülése egyszersmind az eszme győzelme is. [...] Az Illés pontos, körülhatárolt mondatai tovább hullottak a hallgatók közé; most már az ő szeme is égni kezdett, valami gyilkosan hideg fanatizmus ült ki a vonásaira, és lassankint mindnek az arca ezt a kifejezést vette fel más-más árnyalattal, mintha mind testvérek volnának." (See Ritoók 1993. 483.) Translated from the original by B.Sz.

<sup>19</sup> As Agata Schwartz points out, a familiarity with contemporary ideas can be recognized in the novel and in Ervin's character, "such as Freud's theories: the shaping of Ervin's character reveals a narcissistic disorder" (see Schwartz 2002. 299).

and returning to Hungary, he gave lectures in the Szellemi Tudományok Szabad Iskolája (Free School of the Humanities).<sup>20</sup> At the turn of 1918–1919, Lukács also chose to take part in the movement and became a people's commissar in the Hungarian Soviet Republic. However, the novel differs from reality and ends with Ervin's death – Ritoók became disappointed in their generation, and the novel had strong anti-Semitism. I must mention that Ritoók already began to work on his novel in 1916 (see Balázs 1982a. 144) and the members of the Sunday Circle read her work in progress entitled *A lélek kalandorai* (*Adventurer of the Soul*) back then. Béla Balázs noted down his impressions about Ritoók's novel in his diary on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1916:

Emma Ritoók's novel: The Adventurer of the Soul. It is a bad novel. It has no vision, it is deaf, transparent, has no atmosphere. It is not the experience of an *artist*. But it is a great human experience. Nevertheless, it made a great impression on me. How great is the generation, whose storm she got caught in. But she got only the flu from it, poor creature. [...] It frightened me in the novel, that somebody who took part in it, *could have been disappointed* in our generation. (Balázs 1982a. 144.)<sup>21</sup>

So, in 1916 there was already an ideological difference between the members of the *Sunday Circle*, however most of the members of the Circle shared Lukács's philosophical attitude (for example Béla Balázs, Károly Mannheim or Béla Fogarasi). As the novel was first published in 1921 and republished in 1922 after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the idea of "White Terror" (1919–1921) already deeply affected the author and the novel itself. Lukács pointed out in a later interview that Ritoók falsely describes the Sunday Circle as a Bolshevik society; she only joined the discourse of the "counter-revolution".

Of course, our radicalism should not be over-estimated: it was not radical in the modern, let alone a Bolshevik sense. I myself had to overcome a number of crises before the member of the Sunday Club could turn into a communist. It is absolutely untrue that the Sunday Club was a Bolshevik society, as was later claimed by the counter-

<sup>20</sup> The novel evokes these lectures, see for example Ritoók 1993. 441–446. Lukács also mentions in his late interview with István Eörsi, that they "were vigorously opposed to their freethinking positivism, but this alliance led to the Free School of the Humanities, which began its activities in 1917. Talks were given by Lajos Fülep, Béla Balázs, Emma Ritoók and also Mannheim. I gave lectures as well." (See Lukács 1983. 50.)

<sup>21</sup> "Ritoók Emma regénye: A lélek kalandorai. Rossz regény. Nincs víziója, süket, átlátszó, atmoszférátlan. Nem művész élménye. De nagy emberi élmény. Mégis nagyon megfogott. Milyen nagy generáció az, melynek vihara őt is elkapta! De ő csak influenzát kapott tőle szegény. [...] Ijesztett a regényben, hogy valaki, aki részese volt, csalódhatott a generációkban." (Balázs 1982a. 144.) Translated from the original by B.Sz.

revolution, by Emma Ritoók, for example. It is typical of the wide range of opinions within the Sunday Club that I was the only one to begin defending a Hegelian-Marxist position. Apart from myself only Frederik Antal had any Marxist leanings. Lajos Fülep took up a position based on the humanities, while Emma Ritoók was basically conservative. Anna Lesznai cannot really be classified in this way. It is not possible to turn the Sunday Club retrospectively into a Bolshevik or even a pre-Bolshevik grouping. (Lukács 1983. 50–51.)

So, Emma Ritoók portrayed her generation in a deeply critical or rather, as Agata Schwartz assumes, a *caricatured way* (see Schwartz 2002. 209), and this intention of the author has been expressed to the greatest extent in Ervin's character, who is the parody of a genius. However, not all members of the Sunday Circle became disillusioned in their generation. Another member, Anna Lesznai, worked on her novel for almost thirty years and she was influenced also by the atmosphere of the Circle's ideas.

*2. Anna Lesznai: Kezdetben volt a kert (In the Beginning was the Garden, 1966)*

Anna Lesznai was a multi-faceted artist; she was a designer, a graphic artist, a painter, a poet and a writer, besides that she was a regular member of the Sunday Circle. Lesznai worked on her two-volume novel called *Kezdetben volt a kert (In the Beginning was the Garden)* for almost thirty years and published it first in German in 1965 and in Hungarian in the following year. Despite of Ritoók's disillusionment, Lesznai shared the ideological attitude of the Sunday Circle and got involved in the Hungarian Soviet Republic. After its collapse, she emigrated to Vienna, where the members of the Circle reunited and Lesznai continued to visit these gatherings.<sup>22</sup>

Her novel *In the Beginning was the Garden* is a monumental literary work, where parallel timelines appear next to each other in order to portray different social classes. The opus documents the changes in society of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century trustworthily, besides, it portrays the historical events from the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 to the first years of her emigration to Vienna. The novel is also a biographical piece, since the protagonist named Lizó Berkovics, represents the author herself, who tries to find her path as an

<sup>22</sup> In the emigration the members of the Circle faced their responsibility in the Hungarian Soviet Republic individually and processed it differently in their works (cf. Karádi 1987. 601–611).

artist and as a woman, while she discovers her talent in poetry and experiments with her writing skills. The novel is significant from the point of view of explicit biographical facts, although the aesthetic quality thereof must be mentioned as well: a recurring motif in the novel is the garden of the Berkovics family. The description and portrayal of the garden create an original literary atmosphere. Georg Lukács also appreciated Lesznai's novel and admitted its great aesthetic quality: according to him, the first volume was a masterpiece, while the second one is a good novel (Radnóti 2015).

In the second volume of the novel, Lizó Berkovics would like to leave her garden behind and concentrate on finding her poetic voice, while she became a member of the Sunday Circle, which is also evoked in the novel. Lesznai portrays the members, the atmosphere and mentality of these Sunday's gatherings specifically. In one of the central characters of these gatherings Georg Lukács can be recognized and some strong biographical parallels are visible between Lukács and the supporting character, László Aranyossy.

The first moment when the character of László, who embodies Lukács, appears is at the end of the first volume, where the protagonist, Lizó is at a dinner party with her husband, where the wealthy host introduces his son to her:

This is my son, László – said Aranyossy and pointed to the scrawny and dull-looking young man sitting next to Lizó. – He came home yesterday from Heidelberg, where he wraps his head around knowledge. (Lesznai 2019. Vol. 1. 675.)<sup>23</sup>

The second volume of the novel portrays not just the biographical facts about Lukács but outlines his development of thinking as well. It gives an accurate picture about his characteristics. According to this, László Aranyossy is very sensitive to ethical dilemmas, who feel responsibility for social injustice, and he sentences his life to the solution of theoretical and practical problems. Lesznai mirrors Lukács's attitude in the novel perfectly:

László was in silence for a while, but now, maybe to calm György down, he began to speak. [...] – Thinking is nowadays the most exciting mission, like never before. We constantly have to make concrete decisions which come with great responsibility, particularly if man obtains power. It is always an inspiring, but often inconvenient mission; it is an inspiring torture, because this exists as well. – He spoke

<sup>23</sup>“Ez itt a László fiam – mondotta Aranyossy a Lizó mellett ülő sovány, seszínű fiatalemberre mutatva. – Tegnap ért haza Heidelbergből, ahol nagykanállal tömik bele a tudományt.” (Lesznai 2019. Vol. 1. 675.) Translated by B.Sz. It must be mentioned, that Lukács lived in Heidelberg between 1912 and 1917 with some short interruptions. During these times Lukács got in contact with Max Weber and became a regular member in Weber's private gatherings.

slowly. As he spoke, the horn-rimmed spectacles tipped on his nose, and he tried to adjust the clumsily, so he leaned his head forward like a wise owl. (Lesznai 2019. Vol. 2. 499.)<sup>24</sup>

Most of the members from the Circle, like their real alter ego, took part in the Hungarian Soviet Republic and had a position, a function. So did Lukács's alter ego, whose ethical dilemma and turn to Marxism are also portrayed in the novel, as well as how he sought a path for an immanent and transcendent redemption. As László Percz points out, it seems like Lukács's alter ego has two options in the novel: one option is metaphysical, which effects his praxis directly. This means that László Aranyossy finds the possibility of how to live his theory in practice. The other motif is practical and social: László always had a privileged position and now he must atone for it (Percz 1991. 47). After the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the members of the Sunday Circle have to flee abroad, facing their responsibility and the loss of their ideas, illusions. However, Lukács's alter ego, László Aranyossy, decides not to flee, because he must live his theories, even if this means he will be executed. The protagonist, Lizó Berkovics, is already in emigration when she remembers back on the last day of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. In the novel, László's death is described as it was inevitable, because this was the way for him to fulfil his destiny (Lesznai 2019. Vol. 2. 600). Lizó recalls the last occasion with László in the shadow of this sense of fate:

It cannot be forgotten. It cannot be forgotten either when she said goodbye to László in a cobwebbed, dusty attic, where he hid from the whites [...] I am ashamed to flee from Pest, complained [Lizó] to László, I will never walk along the path; I will never do the hundredth step! – Do not blame yourself, Lizó. Ninety-nine steps are a lot, they reach their limit; the hundredth step normally leads to death. – But you will not stop at the ninety-ninth step; she said to László, you will not hide abroad like us, your Sunday-friends. (Lesznai 2019. Vol. 2. 568.)<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "László egy ideje hallgatott, de most, talán hogy Györgyöt lecsendesítse, beszélni kezdett. [...] – A gondolkodás ma izgalmasabb feladat, mint valaha. Folyton konkrét döntéseket kell hoznunk, ami súlyos felelősséggel jár, főleg, ha némi hatalom is adatott az ember kezébe. Mindig lelkesítő, de gyakran kínos feladat ez, lelkesítő kín, mert az is van. – Lassan beszélt. Közben hosszú, görbe orrán megbillent a szarukeretű pápaszem, és ügyetlenül próbálta helyreigazítani, ferdére hajtva a fejét, mint egy bölcs bagoly." (Lesznai 2019. Vol. 2. 499.) Translated by B.Sz.

<sup>25</sup> "Nem lehet felejteni. Azt se, mikor egy pókhálós, poros padláson búcsút vett Lászlótól, aki ott rejtőzött a fehérek előtt [...] Szégyellek elmenekülni Pestről, panaszolta Lászlónak, sose járom végig az utat, a századik lépést sose teszem meg! – Ne vádolja magát, Lizó. Kilencvenkilenc lépés nagyon sok, elér az élet határáig; a századik rendesen már a halálba visz. – De maga nem áll meg a kilencvenkilencediknél, felelte Lászlónak,

#### IV. The Forgotten Master

##### 1. István Eörsi: *Az interjú (The Interview, 1983)*

The most personally toned literary writing about Lukács was written by his former disciple, István Eörsi. Lukács's biographical sketch – the so called *Gelebtes Denken: Notes Towards An Autobiography* – and the interview called *Records of a Life* are strongly connected to István Eörsi, as well as to Erzsébet Vezér, because it was their great effort to make it possible to capture the last works of the highly indisposed Lukács. Both the editing of Lukács's biographical sketch and the interview are truly remarkable, because the anguished Lukács himself was writing his own biography during the last months of his life, in which he made a wide overview of the narrative of his thinking, his main focus and tendencies from the aspect of an 86-year long period. The old Lukács was not able to give up creation even at his deathbed, but he was physically unable to write, that is why Eörsi and Vezér were recording his biography based on his previously written sketch. This is how *Records of a Life* (Eörsi 1983. 6–8) was made. In his writing, *The Right to the Last Word*, Eörsi revokes Lukács's anecdote where Lukács noted the following on the apropos of his request to be a member of the party again in 1957: “[...] »I have stuck in their throats«, was Lukács's description of such situations: »They can't swallow me and they can't spit me out.« [...]” (Eörsi 1983. 10). After a decade following Lukács's death, Eörsi was still not able to leave behind his old master's ethical dilemmas and decisions, Lukács also stuck in his throat, therefore he is interviewed his old Master again in his drama *Az interjú (The Interview)*. Eörsi's drama, or rather an absurd documentary play, evokes Lukács to get final answers, asking him harshly even impeaching him, but the play still portrays the disciple's respect towards his former master and teacher. Eörsi struggles as he tries to question his master and maybe even get some answers but he fails constantly. Not just because of Lukács's illness or the lack of his ability to speak, but also because of the inconsistent elements of his biography, which cannot be formulated and interpreted as one single unit.

Eörsi's drama only deepens the inconsistency between the master and the student more using literary elements such as absurdity and dark humour, and at the end of the drama, it seems like the depth of this abyss is insuperable. An almost religious respect towards the old master can be recognized in Eörsi's play, however there is also a parallel denial and refusal, which constantly tries to ask the eternal question from the old master, but it remains unanswered. It is the unquestionable worthiness of Eörsi that he makes Lukács's oeuvre vivid. He reflects on this and brings in a specific literary and linguistic play as Lukács's

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maga nem bujdosik külföldre, mint mi, a vasárnapi barátai.” (Lesznai 2019. Vol. 2. 568.)  
Translated by B.Sz.

biographical elements are combined with Lukács's attitude, character and the main questions and dilemmas of his philosophy. Therefore, the sometimes incomprehensible and uninterpretable character of Lukács becomes more reachable and more human. Next to the philosophical dilemmas, the other important aspect of the drama is the physical decay of the old Lukács, which is parallel with a mental disorder.

[...] I cannot stand much further, I have to imagine him here — I visualize him as he is still standing there in front of the window (he looks towards Lukács, who is standing in the light now), he stares motionless. [...] One time in the April of 1971, he stood precisely like this in front of the window when I stepped in [the room]. I was shocked because I had never seen him standing just passively. This time he did nothing, moreover he did not even do the nothing. It seemed that he only stared out the window, actually he did not look out, and however he stood there, I could not dare to claim that he “stood”, because this word, as a verb, expresses activity [...]. (Eörsi 1989. 10.)<sup>26</sup>

Eörsi's personal drama expresses how the body fails the mind and how the philosopher fades away, only to leave behind the inconsistency and discrepancy of his oeuvre, which is still interpreted in many different ways and which leaves Lukács's figure as a(n anti-)hero not just in the literary works, but also in the history of philosophy and the discourse of cultural policy.

## V. Conclusion

It is well-known that Lukács tried to write literary works at an early age. Lukács also mentioned these literary beginnings in his biographical sketch:

Two important concretizations of my entrance into the world of literature. a) with Benedek, even before the Thalia, Banóczy (characterization; later development), in the background (L. Popper). Discovery that I had no authentic gift as a writer. Not long after leaving school-destroyed *all* my manuscripts. (Lukács 1983. 148.)

<sup>26</sup> “[...] Nem bírom ki sokáig, ide kell képzelnem őt — elképzelem, hogy ott áll ma is az ablaknál (Lukács felé néz, akire most fény vetődik), kibámul mozdulatlanul. [...] Egyszer 1971 áprilisában pontosan így állt az ablaknál, amikor beléptem. Megdöbentem, mert még sosem láttam tétlenül ácsorogni. Ezúttal semmit sem csinált, sőt még a semmit sem csinálta. Látszólag kinézett az ablakon, valójában nem nézett ki, és noha álló testhelyzetben tartózkodott ott, nem merném állítani, hogy »állt«, mert ez a szó is, ige lévén, cselekvést fejez ki. [...]” (Eörsi 1989. 10.) Translated by B.Sz.



The strong self-criticism of Lukács led him to a different self-realization, however it is worth mentioning that he had intentions for literature. In the summer of 1900, the young Lukács worked on a the sketch of a novel for almost a year and a half and a year later in 1901, he finished his opus *Úri morál* (*Gentlemen's Morality*) and another one under the title *Éjjéli nap* (*Midnight Sun*) (see Bendl 1994. 37). However, these unsuccessful attempts “led spontaneously to a criterion: where does real literature start?” (see Lukács 1983. 148).

The aim of this paper was not to answer Lukács's question, but to focus on specific literary works which represent the idea expressed in Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, namely, that the novels “carry the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms” (Lukács 1971. 15–16), therefore according the hypothesis of this paper, they could be viewed as contemporary documents (*Zeitdokument* or *Zeitroman*). The four selected literary works represented an era from Lukács's life and philosophy, although their significance is not limited to their reflections on Lukács. This paper focused only one aspect of the selected works; however, I must mention that they were not fully interpreted here, and other important aspects could have been brought to the discourse. One of these aspects may be the interpretation of the historical events of the Aster Revolution and the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which were discussed only from their ideological and philosophical perspectives. Another point of view is the position of the female writers in Hungary at the turn of the century, and how the female protagonists are portrayed in the novels.<sup>27</sup> This also includes how female roles changed in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and after its collapse, and what kind of possibilities women, especially female writers had at the time. The interpretation expressed in Eörsi's drama of the old Lukács could have also been discussed further, as it reflects on how the leading cultural policy tried to reconsider Lukács's oeuvre after his death. Moreover, this research can be extended by other literary works in which Lukács's character is represented – how the authors of these works, who either were not *comrades-in-arms* of Lukács's or not even contemporaries of him, portrayed Lukács's attitude and ideas. The motif of the Revolution and the Hungarian Soviet Republic are also recurrent in these literary works and the rediscovering of these works could bring new aspects not just to literary studies, but both the history of philosophy and the history of ideas.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> A significant book of Agata Schwartz focuses on this problem (see Schwartz 2007).

<sup>28</sup> The book of Amália Kerekes already outlines the focal points and reflects on the remembrance of the Revolution of 1918–1919 in literature and in films (see Kerekes 2018. 88–94).

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THE PHILOSOPHER AS A(N ANTI-)HERO  
THE LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF GEORG LUKÁCS

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Literary works generally portray historical and social changes of their times besides of their aesthetical values. These writings also interpret the ideas which influenced the most. This makes them a form of contemporary documentation (*Zeitdokument* or *Zeitroman*), which helps to understand a specific era. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Georg Lukács, the Marxist theorist and philosopher, was a significant thinker, whose attitude, character, and ideas influenced many other philosophers and artists. The aim of this paper is to outline Lukács's development of thinking from the point of view of his contemporaries. To this end, I discuss four literary writings in this paper: these four works represent an era from Lukács's life and thinking. The almost unknown feuilleton of Béla Balázs published in 1911 idealizes the young Lukács and portrays him as a quixotic thinker, who belongs to another sphere, another "caste". In the turn of 1921–1922, the novel of Emma Ritoók entitled *Spiritual Adventurers* was published, which represented the generation of pathfinders negatively and disillusioned, as they tried to calculate the redemption of the individuals with some mystical philosophical ideas. Anna Lesznai's novel, *In the Beginning was the Garden*, is a significant opus with two volumes which outlines the troubled times of Hungarian history and recreates the historical events from the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 to the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the first years of emigration. The two novels portray Lukács as a pathfinder who stands at a crossroads between theory and political praxis. Ritoók's novel judges this struggle and interprets it in a caricatured way, while Anna Lesznai represents Lukács's dilemma and decision as a sacrifice. The fourth work is *The Interview* by István Eörsi, which was published first in 1983 and is a very personal writing. Eörsi's writing is a drama or rather an "absurd documentary play", where Eörsi evokes his old Master, who is not the great thinker and philosopher, who he once was. The mind struggles as it still tries to create and work, but the body fails and Lukács got lost in the maze of his own thinking. The student wants to face his old Master, trying to get answers to his own dilemmas about Lukács, but his physical inability makes it almost impossible to communicate with him. All these four works represent Lukács in different phases and they take a very specific glance at a significant oeuvre. However, these works deserve the consideration not just from the point of view of Lukács's significance, but because of their literary value. The literary works mentioned here are on the periphery of the literary canon and the rediscovering of these writings could bring new aspects not just for literary studies, but for the history of philosophy and ideas as well.