Reconnected into the World: The Early Years of the Hungarian Comparative Association in the AILC/ICLA

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Abstract:This paper presents two chapters from the institutional history of comparative literature in East/Central Europe during the Cold War period. From 1970 to 1973, István Sőtér, the director of the Institute of Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, served as president of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA). He was the first scholar from a communist country to be elected to the highest rank of a Western scholarly institution during the Cold War era. First, we examine and interpret documentats related to his election as ICLA president in 1970 at the association's VIth Congress in Bordeaux, followed by the foundation of the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association in 1971. While his election was certainly a success for the Soviet-bloc cultural and academic diplomacy, the context and the consequences of the reintegration attempt of the Hungarian literary studies community into a Western-run international organization were rather complex. Our analysis of the context through Sőtér's ICLA presidency documentats illustrates the internal and external power relationships within the academic world of a communist country in the seventies. Second, the paper examines documentats related to the publication of the Bordeaux congress proceedings, which highlight foreign affairs within the same academic milieu. These documentats tell a nearly stereotypical Cold War story within the context of international scholarly relations between the West and the Communist East. Three papers submitted to the Bordeaux proceedings overtly criticized totalitarian communist regimes, and Sőtér, as the ICLA president intervened to prevent their publication or, at least, their most outspoken passages. His intervention met resistance from certain members of the ICLA Board who defended freedom of speech. The "Bordeaux censorship affair" was eventually resolved through a mutual compromise, but not without a sense of embarrassment was experienced by all parties involved. The paper analyzes the discursive, rhetorical and diplomatic strategies employed by the opposing Eastern and Western sides. The research is based on documentats from the Institute of Literary Studies archive in Budapest.

Keywords: ICLA, institutional history of comparative literature, Cold War academic diplomacy, censorship, István Sőtér.

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Introduction

The early 1970s marked a new beginning in the history of comparative literature in Hungary, after the postwar years of hard communist dictatorship and dogmatic Marxist ideology which overshadowed the contribution of Hungarian comparatists in establishing and consolidating the discipline. By that time, the rich comparative literature heritage of the fin de siècle and interwar period started to be remembered, notably, the legacy of two multilingual comparatist journals, *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877–87), the very first comparative literature journal with pioneering decentralizing ideas from Kolozsvár/Cluj and *Helicon*, a semi-institutional forum of the pacifist, pan-European network of literary scholars (1938–1943).[1] The opening up of the world, both in time and in space, signified the discrete yet public rediscovery of the bourgeois (non-Marxist) past of Hungarian scholarship, on the one hand and the reestablishment of relationships with Western cultural and academic institutions and the ideas they introduced to Hungary, on the other. The tolerance in cultural and academic politics was evidently the consequence of the political pacification that the Kádár regime sought to achieve in order to forget the violent times of the communist takeover, and then the repression of the 1956 revolution. The historical moment of the thaw within

1. One might think to the international conference "La littérature comparée en Europe orientale" held in 1962 in Budapest and the subsequent proceedings with papers devoted to the two international comparative literary journals. István Sőtér et al., eds., *La Littérature Comparée en Europe Orientale. Conférence de Budapest 26–29 Octobre 1962* (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1963). See also Péter Hajdu, "Neohelicon's Local Traditions and Present Strategies," *Primerjalna knjizevnost* 31, no. 1 (2008): 43–54.

Hungarian internal affairs coincided with the willingness of the Western world to pacificate its relationship with the Eastern Bloc. What is called the "Thaw" in the history of the Cold War started to be felt as the withdrawal of an isolationist policy both in the communist Eastern bloc and in the Western world, whatever divers were the strategies on both sides behind the initiatives for collaborating within international institutions, ranging from attempts of spying and infiltrating to eroding the respective ideologies and to real cooperations in scholarly projects.

Our paper showcases and studies an episode of this well-known grand narrative based on the documents in the archive of the Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Irodalomtudományi Intézet (Institute of Literary Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences).[2] The primary sources for this study include correspondences, minutes of meetings and other official documents from the three-year presidency of István Sőtér, the first scholar elected from a communist country to serve on the International Comparative Literature Association from 1970 to 1973. The sources focus on two major events related to Sőtér's presidency. On the one hand, we examine and interpret documents in relation to the election of Sőtér as the president of the ICLA in 1970 at the association's VIth Congress in Bordeaux followed by the foundation of the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association in 1971. These texts illustrate the internal power relationships within the academic world of a communist country in the seventies. On the other hand, the documents related to the publication of the proceedings of the Bordeaux congress, which highlight the foreign affairs of the same academic milieu and tell a nearly stereotypical Cold War story in the context of international scholarly relations between the West and the Communist East. Under normal circumstances, the Bordeaux proceedings should have been published by the time of the Montréal/Ottawa congress, but its publication was hindered by a censorship affair. Three paper proposals in the manuscript of the volume overtly criticized totalitarian communist regimes, and Sőtér, as the ICLA president intervened to prevent their publication or, at least, their most outspoken passages. Nevertheless, his intervention met the resistance of certain members of the ICLA Board defending the freedom of speech.

The micro-historical analysis of the documents has at least three stakes. Firstly, from a historical point of view, it helps us reconstruct the story of the introduction of an international scholarly institution in Hungary during the Cold war whose field of operation was not confined to the Second world. The establishment of the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association "representing Hungary" in the ICLA—as Hungarian scholars liked to refer to their participation as a collective act, although ICLA has never considered its members as representatives of national organizations—was an important step in facilitating the exchange of ideas in literary scholarship across diverse political, social, and ideological perspectives on both international and domestic stages. This development enabled literary scholars in Hungary to engage with intellectual domains that transcended the conventional Marxist paradigms, thus fostering intellectual diversity within their own academic community. Participation in the construction and operation of an international institution, adherence to the institution's more transparent policies, engagement in a community characterized by pluralistic political and ideological perspectives, and the necessity of negotiation have contributed to the acquisition of a more democratic operational modality. This modality may also be regarded as a modest advancement in the democratization of the Hungarian political system and, more broadly, in the countries of the Soviet bloc.

Secondly, the study of these documents enables the observation of political games, maneuvers, and behaviors within the academic world where political interventions employing direct force had been largely discredited by the end of the sixties. The debate surrounding the potential censorship of the publications of three American scholars (all Central or Eastern European émigrés) in 1973, (one of our case studies here), in a visible international scene entailed a civil yet resolute symbolic confrontation within the academic institutional milieu, governed by its own laws. Despite the delicate ideological balance maintained within the ICLA through protocol-based communication, a relentless struggle for determining the organization's alignment with a particular institutional (and political) logic persisted. In this regard, as will be demonstrated subsequently, Eastern scholars exhibited certain advantages, stemming from their frequent involvement in diplomatic positions or missions. In contrast, their Western counterparts possessed comparatively limited professional experience in political matters, but they often had more civilian courage to confront more directly with their ideological opponents beyond the usual courteous mode of communication. In the correspondence we examined, the operative tasks of conference organization or delegation formation were found to be undermined by political and, at times, personal interests, manifested through various means of influencing and manipulating partners in debate, such us the use of gossip, blackmail, flattery, and other forms of soft power exercises, aimed at ensuring the outcome of one's own preferences.

Thirdly, analyzing the documents helps us understand how games and strategies of academic diplomacy, at both national

2. Since its foundation in 1956, the Institute of Literary Studies enjoyed a certain legal and financial autonomy within the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which was ended in 2012 when Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont (Research Center for Humanites) were established regrouping seven research institutes in humanities. Since 2019, the network of research centers and institutes were detached from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, belonging first to Eötvös Lóránd Kutatóhálózat (Eötvös Lóránd Research Network), then Hungarian Research Network (HUN-REN). In the moment of writing this paper, HUN-REN's four research centers in humanities and social sciences are transferred to Eötvös Loránd Unversity (ELTE), Budapest.

and international levels, influenced the framework of collective literary research, and consequently, the exchange of ideas and literary canons during the two-poled world order. The ICLA was one of the first international literary associations to allow moderated discussions between Western and Communist literary scholars. The academic diplomatic quarrels in question sometimes involved real professional stakes. In this context, the question of how to represent and interpret the contemporary social reality to which literary works refer is particularly interesting. Despite their ideological differences, at certain moments of the debate, both sides pretended to defend the autonomy of literature: Westerners argued for the freedom of speech and for the right to represent the social, historical and political realities without constraints. In contrast, their Communist counterparts advocated for purely aesthetical or general political approach to literature. Followers of the doctrine of socialist realism heavily criticized the representation of recognizable historical facts by advocating for an immanent interpretation of literary texts, free from their immediate social context, what they called "daily politics."

The Foundation of the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association

The Hungarian comparatists' association was established in 1971, and the institutional context was rather complex. The invitation letter for the inaugural meeting formulated the name of the new organization as "the comparative literature branch of the Hungarian Literary History Association as the Hungarian National Committee of the Association Internationale de la Littérature Comparée,"[3] and the meeting was held in one of the most beautiful rooms in the headquarters of the Magyar Tudományos Akadémia (MTA) (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, HAS). The three institutions, AILC/ICLA—an officially bilingual organization, which in Hungary was mostly referred to by its French name until around 2010—Hungarian Literary History Association, i.e., *Magyar Irodalomtörténeti Társaság* (MIT), and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences created a context in which the relationships were not always very clear, and probably intentionally so. MIT was and still is basically financed by MTA. It has several branches and it does not interfere with their activities. The statutes of MIT do not actually regulate the branches' working procedures, only states that the branches are free to elect their own officials without even defining what kind of officials should be elected or how frequently or with what kind of method. The affiliation with MIT gave the comparatists much freedom without any serious administrative obligation. The comparative literature branch elected a surprising number of officials: a president, two vice-presidents, a secretary general, a treasurer, a managing secretary, and eight assessors. The location of the inaugural meeting already implies a direct link to HAS, and rightly so: one of the vice-presidents and five of the assessors were members of the Academy. The 1949 communist reorganization of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences left hardly anything of this old institution but the name and made it a Soviet-style central institution to control most of the scientific and academic life in the country. Being a member of the academy meant not only prestige and privileges but also significant power. Half of the assessors worked for the Institute for Literary Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, moreover, István Sőtér (1913-1988) was the director,[4] Tibor Klaniczay (1923-1992) deputy director,[5] and Miklós Szabolcsi (1921-2000) was executive director.[6] The assessors were all major comparatists, while the president, the vice-presidents and the secretary general not so much. In the communist context, when a powerful person nominally acted as the leader of an organization, it could mean either supervision or protection. They could protect the organization against the central power, providing shelter by their own prestige and influence, or they could represent the central power and prevent anything politically suspicious or unacceptable from happening. It seems, the assessors were the ones who wanted to do some serious work in the field of comparative literature with strong international embedding, and it was the job of the vice-presidents to control them. István Király (1921-1989)[7] was a literary historian, highly influential ideologically, which means a quite orthodox Marxist influence. In 1970 he started editing a periodical called *Soviet Literature,* which can be regarded as a contribution to comparative literature but not the kind the assessors creating links to ICLA wanted to establish in Hungary. The other vice-president (not

3. László Kéry's invitation letter, January 8, 1971. Archive of the Institute of Literary Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Science [MTA ITI Archive subsequently], Folder containing the correspondences and other documents of the HCLA's secretaries.

4. Director 1957-83, corresponding member of the Academy 1955, ordinary member 1965.

5. Deputy Director 1956-84, director 1984-92, corresponding member of the Academy 1965, ordinary member 1979.

6. Managing Director 1967-80, corresponding member of the Academy 1965, ordinary member 1976.

7. Corresponding member of the Academy 1970, ordinary member 1979.

a member of the Academy until 1973), Péter Nagy (1920-2010),[8] was not a comparatist either. Király and Nagy must have been appointed to make sure that the new association acts in tune with the official ideology. Some further clarification is still needed to understand the political-ideological context in the humanities in Hungary at that time, and also the roots of comparative literature which was channeled relatively soon to the international scholarly life beyond the wall. All of the aforementioned scholars, whether reformist or hardline communist, were members of the esteemed Eötvös Collegium prior to the war. This institution was established in 1895 by Baron József Eötvös, who sought to create a Hungarian equivalent of the École Normale Supérieure for the training of an elite in the humanities and letters. The recruitment process for the college was based on a meritocratic principle, while talented young people from socially disadvantaged or rural backgrounds were given preference. The college fostered a strong sense of community among its members, who lived in the same building and engaged in frequent social activities. This resulted in the formation of enduring professional networks. This almost secret affiliation between scholars with disparate ideological orientations (which cannot be reduced to the opposition of Communist or less-Communist, given that during the prewar period far-right sympathizers of the popular movements were also represented in the collegium) likely facilitated the establishment of an official association of Hungarian comparatists as members of a non-Soviet international institution. The idea of meeting western scholars regularly and discuss topical ideas with them, not to mention the opportunities of travelling abroad must have been rather attractive. For this purpose, they successfully presented the new association as being part of an international organization. In a letter addressed to the secretary of MIT on March 24, 1971, secretary Ede Bene reported that he attended the ICLA Executive Council meeting in Paris on February 20, informed the council of the launch of the Hungarian organization and asked for membership "for us." He summarized the result as follows: "The Executive Council approved our statutes and unanimously granted us membership; this way, our position has been 'legalized' internationally too." The fact that a foreign body approves the statutes of a branch of Hungarian academic association and that the latter is legalized in Paris implies some duplicity. The emphasis put on the foreign loyalty can be interpreted as a claim for autonomy.

The link to MIT became ever weaker during the following years until people completely forgot it. In the correspondence the ICLA affiliation became dominant, although the vocabulary describing it was variable and fluid. The ICLA's postitionwas also ambiguous in this matter in the seventies. In a letter addressed to István Sőtér dated fr January 31st of 1971, Jacques Voisine, the former president of ICLA congratulates to the "Secrétaire générale de la nouvelle Société hongroise le la littérature comparée" and informs him that the affiliation to the ICLA will be proposed to the Board of its meeting of February 28 (1971).[9] On the contrary, in the minutes of the Bureau's meeting on March 16-17, 1974 in Innsbruck, Horst Frenz, the president of the ICLA from 1973, informed the newly founded comparative literature association in Taiwan that "at present departments and associations cannot become members of the ICLA, only persons."[10]

Currently, the ICLA follows this latter standpoint, and its institutional organization is not based on national committees. It is possible that the policy was more flexible in the past, but it is also possible that the executive council played along and let the Hungarian complit community invent some special rules so that scholars of a communist country can be involved in the international academic work. And it is also possible that they never realized that they have a Hungarian National Committee. In any ways, the documents attest that the Statutes of the Hungarian Society for Comparative Literature adopted by its first general meeting on January 15, 1971 used the French Comparative Literature's Association's Statutes from 1962 as a guideline to define its activities and operating procedures.

The finance of the Hungarian association also shows some strange features. There are documents that prove that the HAS directly sent money to the ICLA on behalf of the Hungarian complit association all through the 1970s,

8. Corresponding member of the Academy 1973, ordinary member 1982. Recent publications have confirmed what was already known through oral tradition, that secret political activity has played a significant role in Péter Nagy's life. While studying in Switzerland during WW2, he became involved with leftist political organizations. After the war, he returned to Hungary and as a committed communist he received diplomatic missions under the code name "Borisz" from the State Security Office run by the communist party. One of his missions, the so called "Csornoky-case" was published in detail by historian, Ferenc Katona, based on an interview conducted with Péter Nagy and also on the reading of his unpublished memoirs. In his memoirs and in the interview too, Nagy recounted how he denounced Viktor Csornoky, ambassador of Hungary in Egypt for organizing the escape of Zoltán Tildy, the president of the Hungarian Republic in 1947 and Csornoky's father-in-law, in order to provoke a scandal and draw international attention to Hungary's undemocratic political transition. Viktor Csornoky was arrested and sentenced to death in 1948, and President Tildy was forced to resign due to his family ties. Even decades after the 1989 Revolutions, Nagy were proud of the part he played in the affair. Katona Ferenc, "'Tevőleges részese voltam…' (Nagy Péter akadémikus két emlékezése 1948-ra)," *2000: irodalmi és társadalmi havi lap* 26, no. 12 (2014): 52–74.

9. Jacques Voisine's letter to István Sőtér, January 31, 1971, Paris. Archive of the Institute of Literary Studies at the Hungarian Academy of Science [MTA ITI Archive subsequently], 14-1, folder 2, Correspondence AILC of István Sőtér, 1971–1973

10. Minutes of the Meeting of the ICLA Board in Innsbruck, March 16–17, 1974. MTA ITI Archive, 14-1, AILC Correspondence, folder 1974.01–04, ÖH 12/1974, 2.

and it happened only in 1980 that ICLA treasurer Erwin Koppen suggested to Péter Nagy, who that time served as president of what Koppen called "Hungarian Comparative Literature Association," that they should open their own bank account to which Hungarian members can send their membership fee. Local ICLA costs of "meetings or publications" could also be covered from that sum. This actually happened in 1982, and the "National Committee" had an account for many years with the help and guarantee of HAS. This way the complit community was directly supported by HAS without the MIT acting as intermediary. After around 2010, capitalism and strict rules against money laundering made such a bank account, informally connected to HAS but not actually belonging to any legally existing entity, both weird and very expensive. It must have been a business account: the banking costs of collecting membership fees and transferring them to the ICLA became so high that the small group of comparatists could not afford them. In 2016, this was the main reason that the Hungarian comparative literature association has returned to MIT and (re)established the comparative literature branch.

István Sőtér as President of the International Comparative Literature Association between 1970–1973

István Sőtér's election as the president of the ICLA undoubtedly accelerated the process of foundation of the Hungarian association, as a president without a national comparatist association behind him would have been anomalous. Indeed, the link to ICLA was probably the main reason to establish the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association. Hungarian scholars have already participated sporadically in ICLA events in the sixties, but their reception divided the Western academic public, probably due to the proximity of the failed 1956 revolution and following repressions. An incident that occurred during the IIIrd Congress of the ICLA in Utrecht in 1961 showed that including communist scholars in a Western-run scholarly institution was everything but obvious at that time. Tibor Klaniczay, one of the most influential scholars at the Institute of Literary Studies and a member in the Hungarian "delegation," wrote in his conference report that most of the American colleagues have left the conference hall during Sőtér's talk, so the desire to cooperate "with scholars in the bourgeois world despite [...] ideological and political differences," often involved "high-level polemics with bourgeois scholarship."[11] This hostile, or at least suspicious climate changed by the end of the decade. Hungarian comparatists, especially Sőtér made considerable efforts to diminish the ideological and political tensions between scholars from the East-European and Western countries. In 1962, he organized an international conference dedicated to "La littérature comparée en Europe orientale" in Budapest, as a gentle reminder of the role that Eastern European literary theory but also Hungarian comparative literature played in the interwar period and earlier in the foundation and the institutionalization of the discipline.[12]

Like many of the new intelligentsia in Hungary after WW2, István Sőtér had a politically and ideologically controversial background. Sőtér was among the most prominent Hungarian literary scholars in the second half of the 20th century, having studied at the Eötvös Collegium. He studied literature, French and German, and spent some time studying in Paris too. He began his career as both a fiction writer and a scholar, becoming lecturer of French at the Eötvös Collegium at the age of 23, but he was unable to land a job as an academic until 1948. He worked as a librarian and as administrator for various economic organizations in the late 30s and during WWII. He was, however, a productive writer who published several novels, academic books and translations of significant English novels during and after World War II.

Already in 1946 Sőtér started working for the new, democratic Ministry of Education, and the communist takeover, which brought about some changes in the academic elite too, offered him great opportunities. His family connections might have helped a bit: his father-in-law Dezső Jász was a hero of the Spanish Civil War, who fought there to the last minute as a high rank officer together with his friend Marshall Malinovsky (one of the leaders of the Soviet army in the battle at Stalingrad). Jász was living in East-Germany as a journalist and military historian, outside the risky realm of Hungarian politics, still having immense authority in the Soviet bloc due to his past and his strong ties to the highest circles of the Soviet military elite. In 1948 Sőtér was appointed professor at the University of Szeged, in 1952 a professor at Eötvös Loránd University, and he became the president of the university (*rektor*) next year. With this position he became one of the most influential figures in the Hugarian literary studies. He was awarded Kossuth prize, the highest official tribute in Hungary in 1954 as literary historian and writer. When the

11. Klaniczay Tibor, "Egy irodalomtörténeti kongresszus és tanulságai. Utrecht, 1961. augusztus," *Kortárs* 6, no. 1 (1962): 124. Klaniczay presumed that the American scholars' spectacular departure from Sőtér's presentation was a counter reaction to István Király's earlier intervention, who—following the Canadian-Ukrainian M.I. Mandrynka's anti-communist communication—hindered the delivery of another presentation whose title suggested a polemic approach to communist politics (p. 126). One should admit that cooperation with "bourgeois scholars" was easier for Klaniczay than Sőtér or Király, since the former did research in European Renaissance while the latter focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, respectively, where ideological issues could more easily create tensions.

12. The conference featured renowned scholar both from the West and the East, such as the prominent figure of the Geneva school, Rousset, the then ICLA president W. A. P. Smit, or the Russian formalist, Victor Zirmunsky. The proceedings of the conference featuring chapters on ACLU and Helikon, were published next year: István Sőtér et al., eds., *La Littérature Comparée en Europe Orientale*, 1963.

Hungarian Academy of Sciences established the Institute for Literary Studies in 1957, he became its director and he stayed in that position until his retirement in 1983. In 1960 he was elected the president of the Hungarian PEN Club, and that position might have helped him build and rebuild his connection with French intellectual circles. These connections, together with his several publications in French might have also contributed to his nomination for presidency in the ICLA. He was awarded honoris causae doctorate of Sorbonne Nouvelle and membership in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettre in 1974, which might also have expressed appreciation for his ICLA presidency.

According to the minutes of the ICLA Board meeting held at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bordeaux, September 5, 1970, Sőtér was elected president of the ICLA during of the VIth Congress of the association in Bordeaux.[13] Sőtér received 141 votes out of 187 voters, almost 100 votes more than the other candidate, Horst Frenz, from the USA. However, knowing that Frenz was elected president too three years later, after the termination of Sőtér's mandate, it would not be so fictitious to consider their succession as a sort of tacit deal between Western and Eastern scholars. Sőtér's three-year presidency must have been a big success for communist cultural politics, especially in Hungary but also for the whole Soviet Bloc, which was looking for acceptance and recognition outside of the Second World.[14] Yet, the circumstances of Sőtér's nomination remain unclear from the available documents. How and why did the ICLA, a literary association founded and dominated by Western intellectuals and scholars, open its highest officer ranks for a literary scholar from a totalitarian state who was not at all considered as dissident or ideologically opposed to the regime? Did they hope to influence the intellectual life and discussion behind the Iron Curtain with this decision as a form of soft diplomacy? Did they want to share ideas from the "free world" in a culture that was controlled and censored, to support and encourage intellectuals who were not committed to that ideology? And on the other side, what did leaders of communist academic institutions expect from the same moves in the worldwide legitimization of their self-declared democratic and liberal political system? What kind of intellectual and diplomatic strategies did they employ in the internal and external institutional games to control and benefit from those relationships? What do the documents of Sőtér's election, of his 3 years long presidency, of his and the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association (HCLA) contribution to prepare the VIIth Congress of ICLA/AILC in Canada in 1973 and the publication of the proceedings of the Bordeaux Congress tell us about those stories?

The Bordeaux Proceedings Affair: from ideals to pragmatism or how to proceed communist censorship in the Western academia in the seventies?

The proceedings of the VIth ICLA congress held in Bordeaux in 1970 were published only in 1975 by the editorial house Kunst und Wissen in Stuttgart. The length of this delay seemed unusually long, especially knowing the ICLA policy in this matter, as the Board tried to present the last congress' papers during the following congress. The careful reader can find an explanation about the reasons of this delay, even though somehow coded and fragmented in the first pages of the volume. First, the volume does not have a proper editor. The copyright pages features Robert Escarpit as the "General organizer of the 6th Congress of ICLA, Bordeaux, August 31st to September 5th, 1970", then a "Comité de redaction" including Milan V. Dimić (Edmonton) as chairman, Michel Cadot (Paris), David Malone (Los Angeles) and Miklós Szabolcsi (Budapest). It is immediately followed by a short "Avant-propos" and a "Guideline for ICLA Proceedings adopted on March 17, 1974," before the general introduction of the volume. The *Avant-propos* is a rhetorical bravura in that extent that it wants to nullify a rumor by exposing it overtly. Talking about the reasons of the delayed publication, they declare that this delay means "by no means a crisis, as malicious people might have believed, but obviously a crisis of growth!"[15] Contrary to what has been said, however, there was a deep crisis within the AILC Board. This crisis was prompted by Robert Escarpit, the chief organizer of the Bordeaux congress and vice-president of the ICLA, the supposed to be editor-in-chief of the Bordeaux proceedings, who threatened to resign from his positions within the ICLA, and, as a result, caused a deep division between Eastern-European and Western scholars.

The debate, as indicated in the preface turned around the publication of three papers by three American literary scholars, all of them East-Central European émigrés who criticized in their papers both directly and indirectly the

13. Association Internationale de la Littérature Comparée. Procès-verbal de L'Assemblée Générale tenu à Bordeaux le 5 septembre 1970.

14. Even though, the 5th Congress held three years earlier (1967) in Belgrade, in the capital of Yugoslavia, which was experiencing its own form of communist development, showing a more liberal approach to Western ideas and lifestyle within the Soviet bloc.

15. "il ne s'agit pas nullement d'une crise, comme des gens malveillants auraient pu le croire, mais une crise de croissance évidemment!" Michel Cadot et al., eds., *Actes du VIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée, [Bordeaux, 31 août au 5 septembre 1970] = Proceedings of the 6th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association* (Kunst und Wissen E. Bieber, 1975), 1.

totalitarian political regimes in Communist Eastern Europe.[16] The papers by George Wellwarth, Mardi Valgemäe and Andrzej Wirth presented at the Bordeaux congress addressed the relationship between theatre and politics, and while they mostly analyzed the general consequences of a direct political intervention in literary life, they referred also sporadically to actual political and historical events like the invasion of Prague in 1968 by Warsaw Pact armies, the repressed revolutions in Hungary and Poland in 1956, and the existence of concentration camps in Soviet Union during the Stalinist era, which was quite embarrassing for the Communist scholars, especially in high ranks of the ICLA. Eventually all three papers appear in the volume: while Wirth and Valgemäe gave their consent to a slight modification of their wording (for instance, every occurrence of the term "Soviet Union" in negative contexts, that is to say all of them, was deleted), Wellwarth did not, but he allowed his paper to be published in the proceedings with a footnote warning the readers about censorship.[17]

The story of this censorship-attempt what the paratextual sections of the volume expose timidly was in fact a thrilling drama as we learn from the files of the archive of the Institute of Literary Studies in Budapest. According to the presidential correspondence of Sőtér,[18] we can reconstruct the story and the stakes of what can be called the "Bordeaux censorship affair" as follows. After his election, the new Hungarian president of the ICLA offered the services of the Budapest based Akadémiai Kiadó, the central scholarly publishing house belonging to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, to publish the proceedings of Bordeaux, "because financial reasons impeded their publication in France."[19] His offer was advantageous not only for making an immediate good impression in his new function, but also to extend his control over the publication of this volume which, normally, should have been the responsibility of the former president. Jacques Voisine.

The MTA ITI Archive does not contain a copy of contract with the editor, but according to the minutes of the ICLA Bureau held during the VIth congress in Canada on August 12, 1973, which summarized retrospectively the whole affair, the contract was signed between Akadémiai Kiadó (Publishing house of the HAS) and ICLA in November 1971[20]. However, a letter dated February 23, 1972, addressed to Weisgerber, a secretary of the ICLA and a confident of Sőtér, provides insight into the matter. This letter marks the first occasion on which Sőtér concerns about the political allusions of certain American scholars in the material of the Bordeaux congress, and it also forecasts the possibility of withholding the proceedings "under the banner of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences's publishing house," because he cannot imagine that it could contain "texts criticizing socialist countries." Instead, he proposes "that the Academy's publishing house could do the printing work on behalf of a foreign publisher, but the volume would then have to be published under the latter's name." Additionally, he asks Weisgerber for help finding a new publisher, if necessary.[21] We don't know if this scenario was ultimately realized through Weisgerber's intervention or not, but a year later when the censorship scandal broke out within the ICLA's inner circle in March of 1973, the Stuttgart based Kunst und Wissen publisher, West-Germany, was already to publish the proceedings.

16. George E. Wellwarth was born in Vienna but promptly relocated to England following the Nazi annexation of Austria. After WW2, he settled in the United States. Mardi Valgemäe was an Estonian whose family was forced to flee their home after the Soviets returned in 1944. They eventually settled in the USA. Andrzej Wirth was raised in Poland. His father was a member of the Polish government in exile in London, and Wirth himself participated in the Warsaw Uprising. From the 1960s onwards, he resided primarily in the United States, England, and Germany.

17. "A few incisions in the text of this communication have been made without the author's permissions. – The Editors." Cadot et al., *Actes du VIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée, [Bordeaux, 31 août au 5 septembre 1970] = Proceedings of the 6th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, 335.

18. Sőtér wrote his letters to his correspondents in Hungarian, then he made them translated into English or French. The copies of his letters (both the original typescript and their translations) and the responses he got are kept in the Institute's archive. However, there are some missing pieces of the puzzle, so sometimes we were to bridge the gaps of information by deducing our conclusions from other documents.

19. Eva Kushner and Paul Chavy's letter to István Sőtér, April 9, 1973, MTA ITI Archive, 14-1, folder 2, Correspondence AILC of István Sőtér, 1971–1973. In their letter, the two Canadian comparatists reminded Sőtér that controlling the edition of the Bordeaux proceedings was the responsibility of the former president, Jacque Voisine, not him. "An ICLA president is by virtue of chronology responsible chiefly for the Proceedings of the congress which takes place at the end of his period of chairmanship." However, they acknowledged that Sőtér was involved, because he had "been kind enough to take the major responsibility in the publication of the previous set of *Proceedings*, those of Bordeaux, because financial reasons impeded their publication in France."

20. AILC/ICLA, Procès-verbal de la réunion du Bureau tenu á Montréal le 12 août 1973.

21. Istvàn Sőtér's letter to Weisgerber. February 23, 1972 MTA ITI Archive, 14-1, folder 2, Correspondance AILC of Istvàn Sőtér, 1971–1973. "Malheureusement il y a eu des déclarations de caractère politique de la part de nos collègues américaines, au congrès de Bordeaux, gratuitement, selon moi, et sans exigence du thème scientifique. Ces textes sans importance particulière du point de vue de leur niveau scientifique, nous mettent tout de même devant un dilemme désagréable. Je ne vois pas les textes, critiquant les pays socialistes paraitre sous l'enseigne de la Maison de l'Édition de l'Académie Hongroise des Sciences. Omettre ou raccourcir ces textes est également impossible car cela compromettrait l'authenticité de la publication. Il est possible que l'imprimerie de la Maison d'édition de l'Académie fasse le travail d'imprimerie sur la commande d'un éditeur étranger, mais le volume devrait alors paraitre sou le nom de ce dernier. Nous continuons encore á parler de cette affaire mais si cela devenait nécessaire, je demanderai votre entremise, surtout dans la recherche d'un éditeur qui donne son nom."

Furthermore, in a letter addressed to the ICLA Board members, Sőtér reveals the censorship affair to a wider public and attributes the discovery that "some of the papers contain statements of an inadmissible political character" to the West-German editors.[22] Among the documents, there is no trace of any warning from the West-German editor, and Sőtér did not mention it in any Hungarian documents meant to explain the situation to cultural-political leaders, so the alleged role of Kunst & Wissen in discovering the anti-communist and anti-Soviet allusions in the manuscript aimed rather at camouflaging the Hungarian editorial house's attempt at censorship.

Although we do not dispose of direct documents about the exact nature of the Akadémai Kiadó's contribution to the Bordeaux proceeding, we do suppose that it was their "reviewers" who detected the politically uncomfortable contents and warned Sőtér already in an early phase of the editorial work, during 1971. An anonymous official note to "comrade Sőtér" dated May 16, 1973—whose author was very probably György Mihály Vajda, a close colleague of Sőtér at the Institute for Literary Studies and an influential member of the ICLA—refers to an attached review on Wellwarth's paper by "comrade József Kovács, who was originally the 'reviewer' of the conference papers for Akadémiai Kiadó." Putting the word 'reviewer' in quotation marks is an indirect admission that the publishing house of the Academy submitted the foreign material for a political and ideological examination before publication.[23]

The Akadémai Kiadó is believed to have played a key role to harden the position of Sőtér in the aftermath of the ICLA Board meeting in Brussels on November 25, 1972. The minutes from this meeting are missing from the archive, however, the following correspondence reveals that, in Brussels, Sőtér expressed his concerns about discussing "day-to-day political life" at ICLA events, although he did not explicitly object to the publication of any particular papers.[24] However, his position changed following his return from Brussels. In a letter dated December 1, 1972, addressed to Pierre Orecchioni, a colleague of Robert Escarpit in Bordeaux and member of the French team charged to edit the proceedings, Sőtér claimed that the texts of Wellwarth, Wirth and Valgemäe "should not be included in the volume, as they deal with current political issues, often in an incorrect manner."[25] He mentions vaguely that certain paper presentations at the Bordeaux congress have already become subject of criticism in the press of socialist countries due to their politically incorrect allusions, but he attributes their detection in the manuscript of the volume to the West-German editor. While admitting that as a president elected only after the congress he has no formal authority to intervene directly in the edition and the question of the three papers was not discussed during the Board meeting in Brussels, he asked Orecchioni, to whom he referred as the "editor of the proceedings," to explain the delicate situation to the three concerned authors, and make them "voluntarily refrain from publishing their texts."[26]

The reason why Sőtér addressed Orecchioni rather than Escarpit, the general organizer of the congress and supposed editor-in-chief of the volume, remains a subject of speculation. Unfortunately, the MTA ITI archive does not contain the December letter from Orecchioni, nor those letters from Escarpit and Weisgerber in the beginning of January, in which the latter two proposed a "discrete solutions," according to Sőtér who thanked them in his responses. We do not know exactly what discretion would have meant, as the matter turned soon into a vigorous public debate concerning censorship within the ICLA Board. In January 1973, Escarpit wrote to Wellwarth, Wirth and Valgemae asking them to modify certain passages of their texts. Only Wellwarth responded, refusing his request. Escarpit, who must have felt trapped between the two sides' intransigence, also reacted strongly. In a letter dated the February 16, 1973, addressed to Sőtér, he took responsibility for excluding the three papers in question and resigned from his ICLA membership (and logically from his position as vice-president). He also wrote a foreword to the volume explaining why he decided to not include the three papers.

Escarpit's move left little room for Sőtér to act. He knew that the respected French scholar's dramatic departure from the ICLA could be seen as further evidence of restrictions on freedom of speech in Eastern European communist countries. Sőtér was aware that publishing Escarpit's foreword would have made things even worse, despite his French colleague's denial of any political pressure inflicting his decision to omit the three articles and his admission that certain formulations in those texts could hurt his national feelings, if directed at his country.

22. István Sőtér's letter to the ICLA Board. March 6, 1973.

23. In fact, this policy was widely implemented at the Akadémiai Kiadó to determine the translatability of a foreign book from a political standpoint at the seventies. In an interview conducted on August 31, 2024, Judit Karafiáth who had previously worked as an assistant at the Office of Foreign Affairs at the Institute of Literary Studies at the seventies, and later became secretary of the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association revealed that reading foreign works to identify potential political content presented a lucrative opportunity for young scholars not only to earn money but also to explore literature that might otherwise be inaccessible.

24. „Le Bureau de ICLA est d'accord avec ce principe [that the ICLA publications cannot deal with political questions], mais je n'ai fait aucune proposition au sujet des travaux critiqués et aucune discussion ne s'est formée autour de ce problème." István Sőtér's letter to Pierre Orecchioni, December 1, 1972. MTA ITI Archive, 14-1, file 2, István Sőtér's ICLA Correspondence 1971–1973.

25. Ibid. „Ayant étudié ces textes, je suis d'avis qu'ils ne pourraient figurer dans le volume, car ils traitent de questions politiques actuelles et souvent d'une manière peu correct."

26. Ibid. „Je vous serais infiniment reconnaissant si vous pouviez faire comprendre aux auteurs en question ces inconvénients. Il faudrait qu'ils renoncent de leur propre volonté á la publication de leur texte."

To avoid a diplomatic scandal, he made the case public by forwarding Escarpit's resignation letter and his planned foreword to the Board members, while trying to convince Escarpit to retract his resignation. Sőtér's reaction was prescient, since he could have guessed that Wellwarth, corresponding with Escarpit, would inform his American colleagues, which he indeed did.[27] In his letter addressed to the ICLA Board dated the March 6th 1973, Sőtér exposed briefly the case by expressing his will to keep the unity of the ICLA, but at the same time he insisted that ICLA must remain a forum for discussing "scientific, philosophical or aesthetical questions" from pluralistic perspectives, and "day-to-day political life" as well as "discussions related to international political life should not take place at our congresses."[28] In the same letter, he asked the members if they agreed with the following: (1.) His request addressed to Escarpit to contact the authors and ask them to change the political character of their papers that he found objectionable; (2.) Escarpit's resignation due to his decision to leave out the papers because of the lack of responses or refusal of the three authors; (3.) The insertion of Escarpit's foreword into the volume.[29]

Responses arrived soon, and mainly North American members were particularly active in the discussion. Despite Sőtér's cautious efforts to push Western European colleagues in the frontline, they understood that the idea of censoring anti-Communist allusions should certainly come from a communist country. Chandler B. Beall, a board member and vice president of the ICLA, who was referred to as the chief of the "isolationist faction" of the American comparatists in a report about the Montréal/Ottawa congress,[30] after receiving a letter from Escarpit, wrote on to Sőtér on March 9. Although that letter is not preserved in the MTA ITI archive, from Sőtér's response on March 23 and Heskell M. Block's April 13 letter to Judith Karafiáth, assistant secretary of the Hungarian Comparative Literature Association, one can reconstruct the main themes of the protest. First, despite Sőtér's attempts to mask censorship with euphemistic circumlocutions, the Americans saw the plan to omit the three papers due to their critical political remarks as censorship. Second, they both objected to Sőtér's claim that he legitimizes his actions based on an alleged agreement of the Board at its 1972 November meeting in Brussels, when no decision was actually made, just a general declaration was formulated to circumvent political polemics within ICLA. Eventually, copies of the three incriminated papers were sent to the members of the Board on March 28, 1973 by Karafiáth, but the short message accompanying the manuscripts upset even more the Americans and forced the Hungarians to clarify that the publication of the three papers "is subject to the decision to be taken by the Board."[31]

Arguments and Counterarguments or the Ideological Fundaments of the Debate

The dispute arising from the correspondence between the Hungarian president of the ICLA and influential North American members (many of whom were East Central European émigrés!),[32] as well as Western European members of the association has a logical and a chronological dimension. While the positions in the debate revealed firmly held ideological convictions or principles that remained unchanged throughout, the succession of the letters reveals that both sides were forced to adjust their strategies and goals, and eventually reach a compromise. Sőtér had paradoxical objectives. He sought to exclude the three texts (or at least their most critical parts) that addressed embarrassing traces of past and present political repression in socialist countries from the proceedings without being accused of censorship. Therefore, he endeavored to portray the decision as a collective action of an unbiased international committee, suggesting that the essence of the matter was not political-ideological, but objective-professional in nature. To understand the mixture of his objectives and strategies, one should be aware that Sőtér was indebted to the Hungarian political system, and while he wielded power within the system what he used also for creating a relative institutional-intellectual freedom exempt from direct ideological control, he was expected to show loyalty to the regime in his role as Hungary's international representative. Although, we have no reason to doubt the sincerity of his much-voiced intention to maintain the unity of ICLA above the political divide of the bipolar world order, a part of his mission as a renowned scholar in the Western academia was to legitimize Hungary's international image, and consequently, the entire political regime. This role also explains why he preferred to refer

27. George E. Wellwarth's letter to the ICLA Committee, March 9, 1973. In his letter, Wellwarth protested against „such a policy, which sets the forms of courtesy above scholarly integrity" that he considered „self-defeating, frivolous, and irresponsible." In his letter to Escarpit on March 2, 1973, he expressed his surprise that "Communist standards of repression of expression in a country [in France], which [...] is not a totalitarian one" could be imposed. Both letters of Wellwarth are in the MTA ITI Archive, 14-1, file 2, ICLA Correspondence 1971-1973.

28. István Sőtér's letter to the ICLA Board. March 6, 1973.

29. Ibid.

30. István Sőtér: Jelentés az AILC Montreal-Ottawai Kongresszusáról, 1973. VIII. 13–19 [Report on the Congress of ICLA, August 13-19]. MTA ITI Archive, I: 433/1973. 1. 3/A. This report was likely intended for the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences following the congress. The term "isolationist" refers in this context to a Western politics characterized by the diminution of interactions with communist regimes, thereby challenging their legitimacy.

31. Judith Karafiáth's letter to the members of the ICLA Board on April 27, 1973.

32. Horst Frenz and Henry H. H. Remak were both refugees from Nazi Germany in the late 30s. René Wellek arrived about the same time, Eva Kushner a bit later from Prague to the American continent.

to the encounter of different ideological opinions as a clash between representatives of collective entities. Sőtér and his fellow Eastern European scholars in the ICLA considered themselves as "delegates" of a state-representing association, so their opinion at any public event had to align with the state's official politics. They viewed their Western colleagues in the ICLA similarly, but Western comparative literature associations were rather loosely connected individuals' professional alliance in academic milieux. During the debate, North-American scholars such as Henry H. H. Remak[33] and Eva Kushner tried to explain this fundamental difference to Sőtér with more or less success,[34] while French-speaking comparatists like Voisine, Weisgerber or even Escarpit demonstrated a better understanding of his approach.

Without reproducing minutely the whole debate, which became quickly bigger then the simple question of publishing or omitting (entirely ofrpartially) the three papers, we focus on the main arguments and counter-arguments of the adversaries. As we have already seen, the main argument for excluding the three papers was of political nature. Sőtér suggested that political criticism addressed to communist countries should be rejected not necessarily because of their ideological content, but also because it leads to a communicative impasse. He argued that scholars from socialist countries could also criticize concrete political acts in the Western world, and in this way the ICLA could enter "into polemics and counter-polemics that would eventually hinder scientific work."[35] In that respect, his strategy consists of demonstrating that he is not actually opposed to the particular idea of criticism directed towards communist regimes, rather he is against the formal concepts of "political polemics" in general within the ICLA. In his letters, he explained repeatedly that his position in the debate is a matter of principles, and it does not stem from his personal involvement and "he would have taken the same action if delegates of some socialist countries had made political allusions and dealt with, let us say, the internal affairs of the United States."[36] Transgressing the accidental particularism, aiming the general principles, voilà, how the Hungarian president sought to impose his position in the debate over his American colleagues.

In turn, his North American colleagues emphasized that the freedom to criticize and accept criticism is a democratic practice of open societies. In a letter to Sőtér dated May 31 1973, Henry H. H. Remak recounted examples from the recent past, when Western scholars faced criticism from a political-ideological standpoint at international academic events, and they withstood the challenges, even when those seemed to them "displeasing," "provocative," "political" and sometimes even "irrelevant." He also reminded Sőtér that in the recent past, Communist scholars had tolerated political criticism better, as it happened for example in the case of Henry Levin's controversial paper pronounced at the Belgrade ICLA congress in 1967, which paper appeared unchanged in the proceeding, moreover it was later translated into Hungarian and published in the Hungarian language academic journal, Helikon,[37] what Sőtér, in response, did not miss to showcase as an example of the tolerance for pluralistic political and ideological views in Hungary and more broadly in socialist countries.[38]

Sőtér also played the card which opposed professionalism and political discourse in scholarly papers. He argued that the ICLA, as an international *scholarly* institution, should focus on professional debates excluding issues of political nature. Advocating for theoretical, formalist and apolitical approach to the literature seems surprising from a Marxist scholar whose political convictions should incline him rather for the doctrine of social realism, underscoring the social and historical, but also political context the works stem from. This detail was not mistaken by their adversaries who insisted that social and political contexts are intrinsic parts of literary works: "Literature is a vast domain that cannot be entirely separated from political, sociological, economic, anthropological, philosophical and other questions" insisted Henry H. H. Remak to his letter to Sőtér on March 25 1973.[39] Sőtér, obviously, did not object to the necessity of contextualization, but he did insisted on the difference between two types of context, which he called relevant and

33. Henry Heymann Herman Remak (1916–2009) was German-born American comparatist who fled Nazi Germany with a scholarship for German-Jewish refugee students from Indiana University in Bloomington, MA. A professor of German studies, he played an important role alongside his fellow Central-European émigré scholars at Indiana University, such as Horst Frenz and René Wellek in the ACLA in mediating between American and European comparatists after WW2 in the bipolar world order.

34. „ICLA consists of individual scholars and of some scholarly societies in various countries of greatly different ideologies. However, these scholars and scholarly societies, at least in the Western hemisphere, in no way represent their governments, and therefore it would be better to eliminate reference to 'member states' in the ICLA." Remak to Sőtér, May 31, 1973.

35. Sőtér's letter to H.H.H. Remak on the May 21, 1973.

36. Sőtér letter to Chandler B. Beall on March 23, 1973.

37. In his article, presented at the VIth congress of ICLA in Belgrade, Levin, after a historical survey on the relationship between reality and literature, and possible meaning of "realism" in literature from a historical perspective, dwells on the tautological nature of the term "social realism". He also reminded his fellow literary scholars from socialist countries that open societies should tolerate criticism. Cf. Harry Levin, "On Dissemination of Realism," in *Proceedings of the VIth Congress of International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. Nikola Banaševic (Université de Belgrade, Swet & Zeitlinger, 1969).

38. Sőtér to Remak, June 27, 1973.

39. This phrase is quoted from the response of Sőtér to Remak on the April 20. The original is not conserved in MTA ITI's archive.

"irrelevant" in debates within ICLA meetings, relying on the terminology of Eva Kushner and Paul Chavy, the Canadian organizers of the forthcoming Montreal-Ottawa congress in August who sought to mediate between the opposing comparatists. Following the two Canadians, he welcomed their intention not to favor "irrelevant political comment, i.e. specific comment for or against persons or institutions which is not structurally a part of the analysis of literary."[40] Obviously, Sőtér considered as irrelevant any evocation of violent episodes in Soviet ruled countries' history, and most probably he would have pleased to avoid any reference to concrete events related to East European countries' recent history. Instead, he preferred a more abstract aesthetical and philosophical debate, even with ideological impacts. He would have liked to present the opposition of Western capitalist and Eastern communist countries as a clash of world views and philosophical standpoints, as two separated and autonomous worlds which are not united by some differently understood political ideals such as fundamental human rights.

Sőtér also tried to frame the disagreement as a question of linguistic formulation. He insisted in various letters to his Western colleagues on "harsh wordings" and "needlessly offensive language," suggesting that "tactful or cautious wording of the texts" can prevent deeper ideological confrontation and that the whole affair from this point of view can be seen as a "question of wording and the way of wording does not necessarily affect the message itself."[41] His strategy is particularly visible in how he interpreted the right for the free speech which his American colleagues defended in their letters, and what Sőtér identified as "the liberty of harsh wordings."[42] He sought particularly to avoid using the word "censorship" and refute "the rumour [...] about the Actes de Bordeaux having been censored."[43] Indeed, his correspondence witnesses that he did so successfully, because the only person who tackled the question of censorship directly is one of the authors being subjected to it. It is not clear how copies of George Wellwarth's letters to Robert Escarpit and to the ICLA Board came into the possession of the Institute of Literary Studies Archive, but their readers' curiosity is visible through underlined sentences and notes on the margins. Wellwarth rejected Escarpit's "contention that the remark made" in his paper "constituted a lack of respect or courtesy," because "it was a statement of fact,"[44] and criticized his opinion "that one should not make remarks that likely to offend the official representatives of nations that currently practice censorship," and he also condemned that "policy, which sets the form of courtesy above scholarly integrity."[45] Even scholars like Kushner and Chavy who warned Sőtér that references in the three papers to "concentration camps in various places and to Soviet tanks in Czechoslovakia [...] are historical facts," and considered that the papers in question "are not aggressively political," and who found perfectly legitimate "encoding" of the repressing social practices of the totalitarian state in its generality through the artistic language of the theatre, preferred to avoid "decoding" of references to historical facts in their pure and unanalyzed existence as an act of protest.[46]

Compared to the high ideological and political impact of the aforementioned arguments, the technical question of whether the congress proceeding should publish the papers as they were literally presented on the spot seems to have less significance. In fact, the Americans insisted on keeping the original spoken papers exactly as they were presented in Bourdeaux to formally exclude any cuts from the texts. Sőtér's counterargument, namely that the right to change the often underdeveloped or improvised conference presentations should be reserved, meant to legitimizing censorship through a common-sense logic of editing.

However, arguments and persuasive strategies from the realm of logos were not the only factors that eventually led to exit the impasse created by opposing ideological convictions and institutional interests. Escarpit's resignation certainly put emotional pressure on Sőtér to make him aware of the gravity of his censorship attempt. On the other hand, Sőtér responded in a similar way when he blackmailed his French, Canadian and American colleagues in the ICLA Board with his resignation and with the subsequent withdrawal of the Hungarian delegation from the ICLA.

But What Was Wrong with These Papers?

The Canadian organizes of the forthcoming VIIth ICLA Congress in Montreal/Ottawa, Eva Kushner and Paul Chavy suggested that Sőtér should ask for the intervention of the president of ACLA. Sőtér followed their advice, and he contacted Horst Frenz via György Mihály Vajda, who called him on April 18, 1973. Frenz agreed to reach out to his colleagues and supported the Canadian organizers' idea that publication of the proceeding should be postponed after the upcoming congress. He also argued that no final decisions should be made about the three papers in question until the beginning of

40. Sőtér's letter to Paul Chavy and Eva Kushner on the April 27, 1973. The original letter of Chavy and Kushner is dated the April 9, 1973.
41. Sőtér's letter to Horst Frenz at May 21, 1973.
42. Sőtér's 's letter to Henry H. H. Remak on May 21, 1973.
43. Sőtér's letter to Chandler B. Beall on March 23, 1973.
44. Wellwarth letter to Robert Escarpit on March 2, 1973.
45. Wellwarth's letter to the Members of the ICLA Committee on March 9. 1973.
46. Eva Kushner and Paul Chavy's letter to Sőtér on the April 9, 1973.

the congress.[47] On May 21, 1973 Sőtér wrote to Frenz providing a detailed list of the required changes to the three papers.

Indeed, we have three versions of the Wellwarth, Wirth and Valgemäe texts: 1. the censored and published version from the Bordeaux congress proceedings;[48] 2. the (almost) uncensored proofs which were sent out to the ICLA Board members on March 28, 1973;[49] 3. the uncensored typescript version.[50] The typescript versions support our hypothesis that the proceedings were initially edited in Hungary, because they contain instructions and comments for the copyeditor in Hungarian (although the abbreviation before the page identification number also makes sense in German—"Bordeaux Kongr."). They also include corrections of typos and autograph insertions and replacements (at least in the texts of Wellwarth and Wirth). Many lines in the three typescripts were underlined, and an annotation in Wellwarth's text indicates a clause to be deleted from the original. These corrections and suggestions were then adopted in the proofs which were sent to ICLA Board members.

All three of the studies' variants are typical conference papers, especially Wellwarth's. These short texts are rarely more than sixteen thousand characters long—the average length for a 20-minute conference paper—and they introduce research ideas or inform their readers about (literary) historical states of affairs without delving deeply into their topics. This is particularly true of Wellwarth's paper, "Metternich and Franco: Drama under Totalitarianism," which is probably the least developed of the three papers in question and also the only typescript that was already censored in the copyedited proof and circulated among the ICLA Board without its references to Communist Russia and Nazi Germany as models of modern totalitarian states. The paper is divided into three thematically uneven parts. The first part is an essayistic reflection on why theatre is the most sensible artistic genre for reacting to and mirroring contemporary social life and why totalitarian regimes seek to control it. The second section, the longest, discusses how censorship imposed in the Habsburg Empire in the 19th century deeply shaped contemporary drama production, including the choice of dramatic genres used to address social issues when freedom of expression was limited. The third and final part, the least developed, focuses contemporary Spanish theatre, but the brief overview is confined to characterizing (and insulting) the works of the authors who collaborate with the regime and to alluding to the existence of an alternative, namely underground theatre. We believe that the paper is a faithful record of the presentation at the Bordeaux congress whose aims were rather performative than scholarly. While Wellwarth chose two totalitarian political systems other than those existed in contemporary Eastern Europe, his reference to "Nazi Germany and Communist Russia" to illustrate "the modern, highly developed, and glossy efficient totalitarian state" might be seen by many as the main target of his ideological attack. His introduction of the censorship practices of the Metternich and Franco regimes is perhaps deliberately superficial, and therefore it could easily be read as an obvious criticism of actual Eastern European regimes camouflaging their true faces. In fact, the Hungarian author of the document "Comments on G. E. Wellwarth's paper entitled 'Metternich and Franco: Drama under Totalitarianism'" interpreted it this way and noted that "the term 'totalitarianism' […] is used exclusively in Western discourse to refer to socialist social systems."[51] The censor understood the dangers of this indirect criticism, which was highlighted by Wellwarth's mannered, deliberative discourse. In his Bordeaux conference paper, he did not target the actual repressive practices of Eastern European totalitarian political systems or their consequences on contemporary drama. Instead, his sarcastic remarks about the ethical deficiencies of collaborators and censors, as well as his allegorization of a past and a present political

47. Mihály György Vajda's letter to István Sőtér on April 25, 1973.

48. George Wellwarth, "Metternich and Franco: Drama under Totalitarianism," in *Actes du VIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée, [Bordeaux, 31 août au 5 septembre 1970] = Proceedings of the 6th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. Michel Cadot et al. (Kunst und Wissen E. Bieber, 1975), 335–37. Mardi Valgemäe, "The Structure of the Socialist Theatre of the Absurd," in *Actes du VIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée, [Bordeaux, 31 août au 5 septembre 1970] = Proceedings of the 6th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. Michel Cadot et al. (Kunst und Wissen E. Bieber, 1975), 379–382. Andrzej Wirth, "Mrożek: The Theatre of Absurd as Theatre of Commitment," in *Actes du VIe Congrès de l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée, [Bordeaux, 31 août au 5 septembre 1970] = Proceedings of the 6th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association*, ed. Michel Cadot et al. (Kunst und Wissen E. Bieber, 1975), 383–86.

49. With one notable exception, because seven words had already been deleted from the proof of Wellwarth's paper. „In the modern, highly developed, and glossy efficient totalitarian state [, such as Nazi Germany and Communist Russia], drama is recognized as a powerful didactic weapon and is used by the state for direct propaganda purposes." (The deleted words are between square brackets.) All three papers had different pagination in the proof than in the published volume: Wellwarth's 331–333; Valgemäe's: 375–378; Wirth's: 379–382.

50. The typescript versions have double paginations. On the one hand, the numbering of each text begins on the second page, with page numbers increasing sequentially until the end of the papers. On the other hand, each typescripts page contains a stamped identifying number, starting with the abbreviation "Bordeaux Kongr." These numbers are the following for each typescript: Wellwarth's: 0763–0770; Valgemäe's: 0893–0905; Wirth's: 906–916.

51. Our translation. The document is not signed, but according to György Mihály Vajda's May 16, 1973 letter to Sőtér, we know that its author was József Kovács. Kovács was an executive in the international office of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, charged with organizing international cooperation.

regime that were not associated with communist regimes aimed to highlight the immorality of those who had served or were currently serving totalitarian regimes in general.[52] However, his protest gesture with "offensive hyperbolids" took an unexpected twist when Henry H. H. Remak—who had initially loudly contested any censorship—proposed removing two additional passages from the text in which Wellwarth mocked successful propaganda writers in general and two contemporary Spanish authors in particular.[53]

Unlike Wellwarth's study, the other two papers directly address the political drama under communist rule. Andrzej Wirth's paper, "Mrożek: The Theatre of Absurd as Theatre of Commitment" focuses on two of the most famous works by Slawomir Mrożek, a prominent figure of the Eastern European absurd theatre, while Valgemäe's "The Structure of the Socialist Theatre of the Absurd" examines a selection of the best-known absurd theatre plays from Eastern Europe, including works by Mrożek, Vaclav Havel, the Serbian playwright, Aleksandar Popović, and the Estonian poet, Paul-Eerik Rummo. Both papers have real comparative stakes. Valgemäe seeks to identify the specificities of the Socialist Absurd by comparing it to its Western European counterpart.

Wirth examined how and why Mrożek's plays could offer valid interpretations beyond the historical (the history of Polish playwriting) or the social (the actual totalitarian regime in Poland) context of his works. In particular, he focused on the difference between interpretations of those familiar with the Polish context and those who were not. Wirth's paper became an easy object of negotiation, and Remak was surely right when he wrote in his letter of May 31, 1973 to Sőtér, that he could not see anything in this essay "that merits editorial interference" as "he treated a delicate subject with considerable restraint." Wirth had only one direct reference to the dark years of Stalinist regime in Poland (from which eventually only the qualificative "Stalinist" was deleted, letting alone the still quite transparent "police state"),[54] but otherwise his analysis of the two Mrożek plays deals with problems that transcend "the regional experience of contemporary authoritarianism."[55] Wirth's paper here is oriented towards the exploration of the anatomy of power and obedience in general. While the contemporary political context of *The Policeman* and *Tango* remains transparent, given his reference to the immediate reception of the two plays in contemporary Poland, his focus lies in the sophisticated dissection of the temptation of power during social and political transformation in grotesque parables, as depicted in Mrożek's works, as well as in a witty criticism of "leftist" political theories of literature as he recontextualizes the meaning of the committed literature, a recontextualization that probably might not please Western sympathizers of East European political experimentation.

Of the three papers, Mardi Valgemäe's "The Structure of the Socialist Theatre of the Absurd" offered the sharpest and most explicit criticism of Soviet-style political regimes in Eastern Europe. In the aforementioned letter to Horst Frenz, Sőtér proposed nine shorter or longer deletions from the original submission.[56] Valgemäe's debate strategy exhibits a hybrid approach, aligning partially both with the tactics employed by Wellwarth and Wirth. In his short but heavily referenced paper, he analyzes how the dramaturgy of Western Europeane absurd theatre and grotesque imagery are used for political criticism, and he essentially reads contemporary Eastern European plays as political parables. However, in doing so, he does not hesitate to employ allusions to political events, underscoring that this new allegorical language of the theatrical expression emerged in response to the control and repression in totalitarian

52. Wellwarth was the only of the three censored authors according to the documents at our disposal who engaged in a direct debate with Escarpit and with the members of the ICLA Board about the ethical and political consequences of accepting censorship in the name of political correctness.

53. In his aforementioned letter to Sőtér. From a strictly logical standpoint, he was right to claim that in a totalitarian regime, theatre play can be produced by ideological conviction, and not just by "servile hacks who are more interested in worming their way into favor with the authorities." He also warned Sőtér that referring to the works of living authors as "spineless par dribbled out by such writers" might also incur legal repercussions. Both passages were eventually removed from the printed version.

54. The other incriminated wording ("... in Mrożek's *reductio in absurdum* of the reality of a totalitarian state.") from the concluding sentence of Wirth in which he characterizes Polish playwrights' political theatre remained eventually intact in the published version. Wirth, "Mrożek: The Theatre of Absurd as Theatre of Commitment," 386.

55. Wirth, "Mrożek: The Theatre of Absurd as Theatre of Commitment," 384.

56. i. "Complicated enough under ordinary circumstances, artistic communication becomes even more complex when subjected to ideological censorship." ii. "... absurd images enable Eastern European playwrights to communicate their views on man and the totalitarian state without arousing the wrath of the censor." iii. "To anyone familiar with Nazi and Soviet concentration camps...'—'... The intrusion of the naked power into the idyllic garden of Eden not only alludes to the recent (as well as not so recent) history of Eastern Europe..." iv. "Though Tango had a production in Warsaw in 1965, Mrożek's plays were banned, and his passport was cancelled when the playwright condemned Poland's role in the 1968's Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The intervention of the Warsaw Pact nations restored rigid ideological censorship in that country, though Czech writers had enjoyed only relative freedom before the invasion." v. "... which suggests the continuation of the present social and political system in Eastern Europe." vi. "... indicates that under such a system society no longer protects the individual." vii. "... that socialist bureaucrats fatten themselves at the expense of the people..." viii. "Yet he cannot keep the present reality from invading his work, for here and there in the story of the children of (the Socialist?) Paradise the playwright alludes to the contemporary political scene." ix. "Whether or not the playwright is here making an oblique reference to the recent history of Poland, or Hungary, or Czechoslovakia, where a newly found spirit of liberalism was quelled by Soviet tanks, he is nevertheless using mythic materials to construct a modern allegory in which the archetypal war against the titans is transformed into the revolt of today's socialist youth against Communist establishment."

regimes. In his three-and-a-half-page article, he uses the word "totalitarian" or a variant of it no less than five times, in close competition with the term "censorship" which appears four times. Still, these two terms which cut right to the primary subject of the paper, have endured censorship, unlike the terms "socialist" or "Eastern" which—occurring in pejorative contexts—were mostly deleted from the text to avoid identifying Eastern European countries directly. The two significant "cuts" from referring to Czechoslovakia's recent Soviet invasion, as well as the comparison of the Soviet and Nazi concentration camps were obviously classified as "needlessly offensive," moreover provocative, and were not allowed to stay in the published article. Nevertheless, the critique pointed to the politics and the ensuing censorship practices of Eastern European totalitarian states remains recognizable within the context.

The End Game

In the absence of documentation on the negotiations concerning the modification of the three papers, it is unclear how the opposing parties have eventually reached a compromise on the three texts. Nevertheless, a solution has settled in, easing the general tension within the association before the Montreal-Ottawa congress. In their letter dated April 27, Kushner and Chavy promised to apply a pre-reading to the papers at the Ottawa-Montreal congress to avoid ideological confrontations. The idea of forming an editorial committee to decide about the fate of the three questionable papers first came from Remak in his May 31 letter in response to Sőtér's request for deletions. Then, in his June 7 letter, Frenz probably named possible candidates for this mission as we know from Sőtér's June 13 letter. This letter of Sőtér already contains the names of the four members of the ad hoc committee which he must have made up according to Frenz's recommendations. On June 15, 1973, Sőtér invited Milan Dimić (Edmonton), Michel Cadot (Paris) and David Malone (Los Angeles) to participate in the committee's work and asked them to form an opinion on Valgemäe's and Wirth's papers enclosed with the letter, prior to the Ottawa-Montreal congress. Additionally, Sőtér personally solicited his colleague, Miklós Szabolcsi from the Institute for Literary Studies to do the same. However, to avoid the risk of an even bigger scandal and all direct confrontation with the three authors, Sőtér proposed postponing the final decision on the three politically questionable papers after the congress.[57]

The meeting of the ICLA board took place in Montreal on August 12, 1973 at the eve of the congress. The minutes from the meeting summarized the entire affair from its beginning to the nomination of the above mentioned four scholars as members of the council of wise men, who served also as the editorial board of the proceedings. According to the minutes, the discussion turned around the adoption of general principles regarding ICLA publication policy to avoid such ideological clashes in the future. The immediate issue of the three papers was not addressed. As publication of the Bordeaux proceedings was unrealistic in the near future, the Bureau decided to review all the submitted material. Guidelines for ICLA Proceedings which were finalized by the editorial council and submitted by Dimić, were adopted at the ICLA Bureau meeting on Innsbruck March 17, 1974. It can be read on the opening pages of the proceedings finally published in 1975. The adopted principles represented a compromise: they served to safeguard the spontaneity of live conference presentations and regarded the ICLA proceedings as the historical records of the congress, while they also underscored the importance of the professionalism and the appropriate language in future ICLA publications.

This publication policy was undoubtedly useful for the subsequent ICLA events, particularly the next congress which, perhaps not surprisingly, was held in Budapest in 1976. However, the increasing demand for the professionalization of humanities publications and the progressive diminution of political tension within the association in the eighties rendered the guidelines and their policy to reduce the scope of revisions and extensions of oral communications outdated. After the congress, as Sőtér's presidency ended and his personal involvement in the affair diminished, his correspondence became less frequent. Hungarian comparatists who remained in high-ranking positions within the organization, such as Miklós Szabolcsi, György Mihály Vajda and Béla Köpeczi, followed the conclusion of the affair with a sense of satisfaction and presented the outcomes to cultural apparatchiks as a sort of triumph. Their colleagues from the West may have had similar feelings. However, it is also possible that a sense of embarrassment was experienced by all parties involved, as if Hungarian scholars were as half-hearted in defending the rightness of communist rule as their Western counterparts were in defending freedom of speech. After all, it is an occupational hazard in literary studies to believe that censorship is a stylistic question.

The Hungarian involvement in ICLA remained active in the rest decades of the cold war period. Hungarian delegations frequented the congresses, and Hungarian comparatists were enthusiastic to serve as ICLA officials. The organization offered a framework for creating opportunities to engage in cooperation with colleagues from the other side of the iron curtain: not only to travel to the West and learn about the recent trends of the literary studies in a time of fervent renewal (i.e., the age of theory), but also to organize workshops and conferences, and

57. "la réunion de Bureau au Canada ne prendrait aucune décision concernant les communications de trois auteurs américains : elle prendrait connaissance de la formation du comité et l'approuverait (j'espère). Il en résulte qu'il ne serait pas nécessaire d'inviter à cette réunion du Bureau les auteurs intéressés." Sőtér's letter to Weisgerber dated July 4, 1973.

even an ICLA congress in Hungary. The various forms of cooperation had mutual benefits rather than performing a unidirectional knowledge transfer. György Mihály Vajda's plan of a comparative history of world literature resulted in the prestigious ICLA project of Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages. The conference series on Enlightenment initiated by Béla Köpeczi and hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Mátrafüred (1970–1988) became a very important forum of eighteenth-century studies.[58] The political tension and the censorship issue seem to have prevented the publishing house of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from participating in ICLA publications more actively: even the proceedings of the Budapest congress were published in Stuttgart. But this situation might have had a liberating effect on the Hungarian comparatists as well.

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58. Daniel-Henry Pageaux, "L'Europe des Lumières et les colloques de Mátrafüred," *Neohelicon* 50, no. 2 (2023): 423–36.