

## LITERARY PUBLIC SPHERE AND LITERARY POLITICS IN THE EARLY PERIOD OF *UTUNK* MAGAZINE

The main theme of the book is the forced relationship between the ideology of state socialism and literature, captured in the context of the Hungarian press in Romania, in Transylvania. The book focuses on a single magazine, entitled *Utunk*, namely on the issues that appeared in the early period of its editing, its first three years of existence. The analyzed period of the magazine *Utunk* covers the years 1946-1948. The context and historical events of the period are of great significance, being characterized by the slow but very systematic process through which the Romanian Communist Party takes power and organizes its institutions according to the Soviet model. This process (both institutional and ideological) can be traced also in the restructuring of the publicity forums.

This book is based on an analysis of texts published during *Utunk's* first three years, describing the nature and mechanisms of literary publicity influenced by the changes in literary politics of the times. The social transformations and metamorphoses after the Second World War also brought about visible changes in the arts. After the Communist Party came to power, the forms of advertising supported by the Hungarian minority in Romania – which had become part of Soviet interests – inevitably became limited socialist advertising in line with the ideology and interests of the party state. The interests of the working class were replaced by the interests of the party in representing the working but also in asserting and imposing its interests. Founded in the summer of 1946, the magazine *Utunk's* early years fell in the midst of the processes of transformation and reconstruction that had already. The direction of literary policy that led to the notion of publicity of the period (in which the Stalinist-style was the established practice of power) were not yet clearly defined.

*Utunk*, being a literary magazine of the Hungarian minority in Romania and being supported (financially, but also ideologically) partly by the

state, is suitable for tracing and presenting as a case study those – successful, by the way – attempts to transform the literary publicity of the Hungarian minority. Those literary policy directions that have influenced the emerging publicity can be primarily identified in feature articles, texts of critical theory and literary criticism, and, indirectly, in literary works.

As a background for the analysis and interpretation of the chosen types of texts, it is necessary to sketch the history of the magazine. Chapter 2. which is dedicated to this issue (Accessus ad: *Utunk* Magazine. The Beginnings, a brief history) was an aid to contextualize the material from the first three years. On the basis of the subchapters of this part, it is possible to outline the profile of a magazine with a nationwide network and initially appeared bimonthly. The magazine covers the entire era of state socialism, and in its columns one can trace both the events of the literary and cultural life of the Hungarian minority and the moments in the history of Hungarian literature in Romania over more than four decades.

However, the literature of the state socialism period is not in itself an unproblematic phenomenon, so I have tried to present the magazine in the context of those institutions and ideologies that influenced literary publicity during the period. Chapter 3. describes the Hungarian minority in Romania and state socialism in the light of the historical basis of its formation and development. It also provides an introduction to the history of the Hungarian press in Romania during the period of state socialism. Subchapters 3.3 and 3.4 contain a sketch of the institutional and ideological background behind the specific, controlled and commanded state socialist publishing: censorship, as a mechanism of control and prohibition, provided effective support for the establishment of the ideology spread by agitators and propagandists. In the period under review, the magazine was subject to an early type of censorship that supported the construction of state socialism, namely concrete censorship, which removed ideologically questionable texts practically from a material already edited and written. Between 1946 and 1948, there was a gradual accentuation and imposition of censorship and an increase in the number of propagandistic texts.

Chapter 4 deals with clarifying possible questions related to periodization, i.e. it defines the temporal limits of the period under analysis. The three limits of the periods are marked by political-economic events (László Luka's article published in *Igazság* on the abolition of the institution of monarchy and the beginning of the planning-based economy) that influenced the literary policy of the magazine, as well as the themes publicized and the approach to them. The literary policy, the extent and degree of

politicization of the publicity it sought, increased proportionally with the growing power of the Communist Party.

Chapter 5. concentrates on the first stage of the period under review, i.e. the first year, from June 22, 1946. to June 7, 1947. This stage can be described in terms of heterogeneity and pluralism. The subchapters analyze the texts from the debut issue, which is a kind of projection of the future (in terms of the magazine's content, structure and appearance), because during the four decades of its publication *Utunk* kept the promises it made in the first issue: it is a literary magazine that does not primarily address itself to specialists in the field, but precisely, with the help of intellectuals, it tries to sustain a magazine that popularizes literature and cultivates the receptive sensibility of readers. However, it is clear from the very beginning that this popularization of literature, the cultivation of receptive sensibility, has multiple interpretations and voices, from specific to very specific ones. The opinion – at that time very heterogeneous – about literature of the magazine of the Association of Hungarian Writers in Romania was shaped within the magazine by the presence of these diversity of voices.

The revolutionization (i.e. the social transposition, the subjection to the interests of public and political life) of literature and literary criticism (i.e. literature and criticism seen as a means for the radical-revolutionary metamorphosis of society) became a two-front struggle for the modification of the literary field. It envisages literature as an instrument and a transmitter of the ideology on all dimensions, that wants to penetrate not only the public life, but also the private life of citizens. In order for the literary space (together with its institutions, publicity, recipients and creators) to become an instrument of the ideology aspiring to power, literature must be first convinced (to this end, feature articles appear), then colonized. All those who propose a different way of thinking (aggressive criticism, censorship) must be excluded from its circles and the "production" of texts that serve the interests of the ruling power must be supported (e.g. countless prose works by István Nagy, István Asztalos, Lili Marton, or the poetry of László Salamon). Marking the direction in which criticism must move in order to fulfill its "mission" is in itself already a sign of the crisis caused by the change. The establishment of criticism of a new type could not be achieved overnight. To this aim, together with the elimination of differences in opinion, of counterarguments, a political tone was needed in order to mark the limit of the era, which signaled not only the end of literary pluralism, but also the end of political pluralism.

The texts that prove the success of the literary policy affirming the transposition of literature on a social level anticipate the inclination towards the new direction as an imminent change. Until June 1947 this direc-

tion does not become aggressive, does not exclude anyone and even accepts deviations from the dominant discourse. What is more, in the same public space (the magazine's columns), texts and critical appraisals proclaiming the artists' freedom as opposed to commitment do still appear.

The next stage (the second half of 1947) basically focuses on the systematic destruction of those institutional frameworks, opinions, free thinkers who hindered the development of plebeian publicity and the intention of the power in its background. Politics, directing public life, respectively literary politics in the magazine fights shoulder-to-shoulder against the violation of principles: the wave of arrests of intellectuals consort with the opposition begins, *Utunk* publishes articles about the hidden reaction in Hungarian scientific institutions. It is significant to highlight that rhetoric which is based on the notion of "unity without principles" borrowed from László Luka and which achieves a real colonization from a position of power, covering up those essential facts which may mean any doubt for the stability of this position. Accusing the entire Hungarian public of unprincipled unity invokes in itself the unacceptable idea of collective crime, whereby the Romanian press and Romanian politics, in the context of the not at all tension-free post-war period, stigmatized the Hungarian community as reactionaries in the employ of Horthy. "Unity without principles" became a political slogan, the use of which most likely played a role in the desired homogenization.

The debate is also closely related to the nature of Plebeian 'democratic' publishing, as it, too was defined in principle by the element of power, exclusion on the basis of provenance, rejection on ideological grounds.

The Toldi debate seems to define and even stigmatize the direction of the magazine's literary politics and publicity: the validation and control of the reality outside literature, of political ideology in an apolitical environment, entails the complete destruction of the delicate balance earlier present in the value structure, which in the case of this magazine (as other periodicals of the time prove) results in the political propaganda gaining space.

Chapter 7. analyzes the stage when ideology of political origin becomes predominant. The spaces eventually vacated by the aggressive removal of contradictory opinions, enemies of socialist and progressive principles, "reactionary" and "retrograde" will be immediately occupied by texts pointing in the right direction of interpreting current events in politics and public life, or texts that can be considered part of integrative propaganda, but which remain on the side of militant rhetoric. In spite of the ideological unification deployed the movement and struggle character of the texts serves to maintain the appearance of "revolutionarism".

Texts celebrating the birth of popular democracy celebrate not only the removal of the king, but also the change in the power structure. Through the merger of the parties, the representatives of the working class can come to power. The cult of the party secretary – who practically takes over the position of the king – Gheorghiu-Dej, begins to build. The practice of power and the organization of society with renewed élan, after the Soviet model, inspire many literary works and there is a need for even more explanatory texts to accompany them, because the decisions are not based on democracy, but on the dictatorial application of the Soviet model. The state ideology that came to power in the magazine, the literary politics that served it, turned *Utunk* into a propaganda magazine, whose sole purpose would become to emphasize that the state and any forum that conveys state ideology fights for the workers, for those who were exploited earlier.

In 1948, in the period under analysis, it can be observed that all types of texts are subject to a single purpose. Their function is homogenized, as is the ideological orientation of the magazine. Its aim: the praise of the state ideology, as the discursive construction of the conscious worker takes a secondary place to the party. The liberation and struggle for the workers' independence, the identification of broad masses of people as working masses (agricultural or factory workers) had already begun earlier. This is why plebeian advertising can fulfill its function: to convey the working class' gratitude to the Party, i.e. to present the Party's directives, provisions and decisions as an activity beneficial to the workers.

The populating of the discursive advertising space in the magazine with figures, data and conceptions that support the creation of a historical past is an aggressive process that necessarily wants to convince, alongside the similar strategy of the rhetoric of power; thus the advertising created is not only the stage on which the elements become ideological reality, but also the medium of this process, taking on a symbolic character in itself: the manifestation space of party power, a space of socialist identity confirmation, of the taking-part in power.

*Utunk's* early literary politics and the (literary) publicity it influenced shifted from heterogeneity, pluralism to homogenization during the three years under analysis. This process unfolded as a consequence of the external power influence and documents the increasing degree of politicization. The publicity is reaching a new level and functions, first and foremost, as a forum of persuasion, with the plebeian character maintained to the extent that the target group, the working-class, is also the origin of party leadership (i.e. those who are responsible for the functioning of the organs

of control of the public forums). From 1948 onwards, the magazine's advertising is to be reinterpreted: the early advertising, promising to be democratic, was intended to achieve a dialogue between intellectual and worker, as Sándor Kacsó formulated it in his description of the intellectual-spiritual life of the time. Since June 1947, the main condition of democracy, namely respect for different opinions and the opportunity to put forward multiple views, has been violated. This is being done under the pretext that those who think differently are not only on the wrong path, but, because of a "lack of principles", will negatively affect popular democracy and the great transformation of society. The exclusion took place against the intelligentsia that did not agree with the methods of metamorphosis that did not take into account the interests and needs of the subsystems of society, but only the party ideology.

The notion of publicity developed in the first three years of *Utunk* magazine's work – on this narrow temporal interval – has undergone radical changes. The crisis-ridden period of changing the function of advertising, institutionalizing the methods of exclusion on ideological grounds, can be considered a single six-month stage between the appearance and the "processing" in the magazine of László Luka's article of May 1947, i.e. the elimination of the institution of monarchy.