

## National self-criticism as a processing of the past: Memory politics in East Central European literature and film

ZOLTÁN NÉMETH

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To my mother, who spoke her first words in a cattle car.

### NATIONAL IDEOLOGIES AND THEIR CRITICISM

This paper is about works of art which require the reinterpretation of phenomena hidden by ideology, in relation to actual social issues. These works of art, such as novels and films, become a temptation or provocation within a culture when they make collective national ideologies the terrain of changing horizons. This is especially true for the V4 countries, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, where the national development follows a model which may be surprising at first. It may be no accident, as state formations like the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Russia, Germany and the Soviet Union forced the nations living in the East Central European region into vassal-colonial conditions for decades or centuries. According to György Csepeli's definition, "a national ideology is the body of knowledge, developed historically and shared collectively, built on previous ethnocentric concepts to varying degrees as their social and psychological heritage, which makes it possible for the national group to conceive of, feel and express the belonging to the national group" (1992, 54). In this definition, there are two expressions that are especially important in the context of our topic: "history" and "collective". National identity offers collective concepts of identity and it consequently has an extraordinarily homogenising effect. It does not allow any room for individual experiences, nor for complicated, complex, multi-level and contradictory narratives. The collective story, history and identity, are usually purposeful, homogenous, mythical and obscuring. Therefore, it is no accident that national ideology, used for the interpretation of history, is inherently unsuitable for a complex view of history and is unable to provide space for every layer of groups with different interests, values, experiences and traumas, which constitute the nation. A simple, uncomplicated, often untrue picture of history built on generalisations can be operated with much less energy input.

## THE PARADIGMS OF GERMAN MEMORY CULTURE

If the historical self-views of the V4 nations referred to in the title have simplifying and generalising features (which they have, as will be discussed later), they can certainly be traced back to the fact that they did not develop in democratic circumstances. This statement can be concluded from the debate that happened in German historical science about the usability of the concept of “collective memory”, a debate which is iconically linked to the names of the two great figures of German historical research: Reinhart Koselleck and Aleida Assmann (Erős 2016, 14). While Koselleck, in the name of “historical truth”, rejects the irrational-manipulative content inherent in the concept of collective memory, Assmann argues that, while “[in] totalitarian societies, collective memory is generated and controlled by the state itself, in democratic societies, it is also done by citizens, artists, parties and first and foremost, the media” (37).

However, Assmann’s positive attitude does not really address the stories of the voiceless, the subordinates excluded from power and discourse, the marginalised and the minorities whose history is only expressed in stories of forgetting, trauma and fragments, not to mention the stories of those who were physically silenced and executed. The previous, perhaps too optimistic claim can be juxtaposed with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s classic question: “Can the subaltern speak?” (1988) Can the marginalised speak, or from the opposite view or narrational situation: even if they speak, will they have a recipient, an understanding audience?

It is no accident, then, that Assmann proceeds to devote a whole book to outlining the paradigms of German memory culture. The first phase of this lasted from 1945 to the 1960s, and was characterised by silence or, to be more accurate, concealment. Few words were spoken about Nazi crimes, as it was necessary that the members of the former national socialist party be integrated into the new democratic system and hold high positions, without which Adenauer’s republic could not have been built. However, the left-wing generation of 1968 was unable to make this compromise as they felt it to be unethical and, in the name of a new, ethical paradigm shift, they rejected both the Nazi world and the conditions of the new, opportunistic democracy. The Nazi past and its concealment equally became the objects of criticism.

This ethical shift became the basis of ruthless German self-criticism, which also entailed a clash of generations, the revolt against the generation of the fathers, and can be linked to important achievements of German literature and film such as *The Tin Drum (Die Blechtrommel)* by Nobel-prize winner Günter Grass (1959), *The German Lesson (Deutschstunde)* by Siegfried Lenz (1968), as well as plays of the documentary theatre: *The Deputy (Der Stellvertreter)* by Rolf Hochhuth and *The Investigation (Die Ermittlung)* by Peter Weiss. The radical showdown, represented by the generation of ’68, lasted until the 1980s when, according to Assmann, a new point of view appeared in German memory politics. This new, third paradigm (and generation) does not believe in its innocence any more. It knows that it is impossible to identify with the victims and all it can do is accept history “along with its crimes and their transformation into ethical responsibility” (2016, 77). It is in this paradigm that a “memory culture” developed which was not articulated along left or right-wing ideologies but was

determined by the acceptance of human rights (82). Assmann attributes an important role in the appearance of this third paradigm to the four-part American miniseries *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* (1978), which was broadcast in the German Federal Republic in January 1979 and was followed by a broad social debate. Similarly to the third paradigm, Assmann also links the fourth one to a film, entitled *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, shown in 2013, distributed in English and other languages with the title *Generation War*. Assmann gives this film as an example of the fact that, for the new generations, the memory culture does not mean the passing on of missing historical knowledge and information but the reliving of family history and personal perspective through the effects of Hollywood visuals in the age of hyper-visibility (55).

### MEMORY POLITICS IN THE V4 COUNTRIES

Assmann's book clearly shows us that memory and our concept of history do not presuppose and can never mean some kind of original and correct relationship to history, but are always dependent on the culture. This is about the realisation that cultural anthropologist Stephen Tyler expresses as follows, that ethnographic description looks at the stranger with eyes blindfolded with texts (1991, 96). In other words, memory and the past unveiled by it is never "already given" but is always an activity, viewpoint and approach "created" by cultural practices. If we interpret the achievements of Hungarian, Slovak, Czech and Polish memory culture and examine them in comparison with the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the result is certainly depressing. Looking back from 2019 at the representation of the historical events of the last century, we can claim that the collective memory culture of the V4 countries is articulated along two paradigms: variations on the concealment narrative and the victim-narrative. From time to time, this approach is generated even by the highest level of state politics and it has become part of official state ideologies. The historical reason for the Polish victim-narrative was the loss of Polish independence, the division of Poland among Prussia, Russia and the Habsburg Empire, followed in the 20th century by such traumatic events as the Nazi German and the communist Soviet occupation, to which millions fell victim, and which entailed the creation of ghettos and death camps. This narrative is not willing to acknowledge the mass murders committed by Poles (as in Jedwabne). A typical example is the case of Jan T. Gross, whose two most important books, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2000) and *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (2008) opened a new era in Polish historiography. Its consequence was that, following a petition submitted by the public, the President of the Polish Republic examined the possibility of depriving Gross of the knight's cross of the Order of Merit of the Polish Republic. Gross shocked Polish society with statements like the fact that the rescuers of Jews had been ostracized by Polish society and that during the German occupation, Poles killed more Jews than Germans. All this, it seems, despite Gross's analysis supported by historical data (he talks about 30,000 murdered Germans) is unbearable for current official Polish politics. The Museum of World War II in Gdańsk was similarly unbearable for the Polish government, and the authorities changed its exhibition, saying that it did not represent the Polish point of view.

On one hand, the Czech victim-narrative originates from the loss of sovereignty and the subordination to the Habsburg Empire and on the other hand, from the events of World War II, including the division of Czechoslovakia, the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and mass murders (Lidice). The resulting victim-rhetorics concealed the Czech responsibility in applying the principle of collective guilt, represented by President Edvard Beneš. As a consequence, they not only deported three million Germans from Czechoslovakia but also forced the German civilian population into circumstances like the Nazis did the Jews. The revenge against Nazi terror was manifested in a series of mass murders of the German civilian population, with tens of thousands dead. Nazi concentration camps were kept in operation: now run by the Czechs, holding German prisoners. Babies died of hunger, women were raped, murders were committed on a daily basis and suicide was common among the prisoners. All of this was repressed for decades by the Czech memory culture; under Communism, it constituted a taboo area of Czech history, and it remains more or less concealed from public opinion.

The Slovak victim-narrative is based on the “thousand years of Hungarian occupation”, generated by the missing sovereignty. The myth of the victim-narrative is much more alive than facing the heritage of the first, fascist Slovak state, which sent Jews to Nazi concentration camps for extermination. Similarly, the deportation of 40,000 Hungarian nationals to the territories of the Czech Sudetenland and 70,000 Hungarians to Hungary, the aggressive “re-Slovakisation” of 410,000 Hungarians and the banning of Hungarian books and periodicals has not become part of public opinion and the memory culture. Even though there are still approximately half a million Hungarians living in Slovakia and Hungarian ethnic parties have been present in the Slovak parliament since 1989, the Slovak population is not clear about how Hungarians have ended up in Slovakia. It is not part of public awareness, either, that in 1946, anti-Semite pogroms and Jew-beatings were organised in a staggering number against Jews returning from concentration camps in several cities in Slovakia (Mlynárik 2005). We also know of cases when the Jews who had returned from concentration camps were deported as Hungarian nationals a few years later. In Slovakia after 1989, statues were erected to Josef Tiso, President of the fascist Slovak State, sentenced to death for war crimes, to Ferdinand Ďurčanský and to neo-Stalinist Vasil Biľak, who played an important role in the repression of the 1968 Prague Spring.

Hungarian memory culture is also excessively characterised by the victim-narrative, which is historically supported by the Ottoman and later Habsburg rule, but it culminates in the Trianon peace treaty following World War I, when one third of the Hungarian nation suddenly found itself outside the borders of Hungary. This fact has an incomparably greater role in Hungarian public awareness than that during the German occupation, it was not German soldiers but Hungarian gendarmes who organised the Jews boarding trains for the death camps or that in Budapest, members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross party shot thousands of Jews into the Danube. Since 2010, the Hungarian government has been trying to present a new narrative according to which Hungary is a double victim: of Nazi Germany on one hand and of the communist Soviet Union on the other. This narrative and its lie is symbolised

by the monument to the German occupation, which was erected in Budapest in July 2014 but was never unveiled, due to protests. According to László Levente Balogh, the monument suggests “collective innocence” and that “Hungary’s responsibility in World War II is parried”. He adds that “today, victim-narratives are often means of propaganda and, while the real victims are forgotten, victim-narratives gradually become stories of the winners” (2015, 51).

### OPPOSING CONCEALMENT AND THE VICTIM-NARRATIVE

The parallel phenomena of concealment and the victim-narrative are kept alive by public opinion and often also by official politics. It is evidenced by textbooks which provide the young generations with a certain picture of history. In the V4 countries, the exploration of concealed or tabooed events can primarily be linked to a small group of intellectuals: historians, writers, film and stage directors. Novels, films and historical works belong to the strategy of national self-criticism, which in many cases explore the crimes of the national past with astonishing honesty and objectivity, while they are often accompanied by a conspiracy of silence, incomprehension and even indignant rejection.

Tomasz Żukowski’s monograph, provocative already in its title and subtitle: *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów* (The Great Retouch. How we forgot that Poles killed Jews, 2018), is the latest version of Polish past-processing. The author (perhaps surprisingly) begins his book by noting that the facts that Poles killed Jews and handed escaping Jews over to the Nazis, are not unknown but thoroughly processed by historians. Neither is it unknown to historians that among Poles, there were more murderers and informers than helpers, as Jews could not rely on any help outside the walls of the ghetto (9). In spite of this, it is the dominant view in Polish public awareness that the Polish crimes committed against Jews were marginal and that the figures shown by historians are the result of manipulation. Polish public opinion is lulling itself into the illusion that Poles were morally good during the Nazi occupation, that they helped the Jews, whereas historians proved decades ago that this is merely self-delusion.

Żukowski, however, goes further in his book. He interprets literary texts and films in order to show what rhetorical strategies are used by the works of art to create a positive image of Poles, whereas the death of Jewish victims is subconsciously explained, the murders are justified and thus, the murderers are acquitted. The author quotes a number of films and literary works of art as examples, from the first Holocaust film made in the 1940s, *Ulica Graniczna* (Border Street) by Aleksander Ford to *Pokłosie* (Aftermath, 2012) by Władysław Pasikowski. He even finds manipulative elements in Tadeusz Słobodzianek’s drama *Nasza klasa* (Our Class) from 2009.

Żukowski, like Assmann, distinguishes paradigms in Polish past-processing. After the years of shock following the war, by the 1960s, the view was created that Poles had been the victims of the war while actively fighting for their freedom. This narrative was first modified after 1985, as a result of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, a nine-and-a-half-hour documentary about the Holocaust. This film was broadcast on Polish television in the 1980s but official politics deemed it anti-Polish. However,

after Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Poles were forced to acknowledge that their motives had not been crystal clear. The second paradigm shift happened around 2000, following Jan T. Gross's book (Żukowski 2018, 21).

All of the above raises three important theoretical questions about the self-critical processing of the national past:

1. Must the events constituting the past-processing necessarily be historically proven and supported by documents? Can fiction become the area of self-critical past-processing?
2. Which works of art of each national literature belong to the category of self-critical past-processing? Do all the works written in the given language belong to it? Or do we need to start with the author's identity?
3. How do adaptation techniques relate to past-processing? What conclusions can be drawn from this type of adaptation process?

### REALITY VS. FICTION

Some writing techniques have a privileged role for the purpose of past-processing. These are related to the genres of documentary, archives, diary, (auto)biography, and through these, to events proven by historians. This natural relationship, however, does not seem at all natural, if we keep it in mind that both literature and film are media which represent with the use of a specific sign system. Neither the film nor literature can go back to the origin, to the original; presence is always a mere simulation. This distance of the past is also scandalous in an ethical sense: medial intermediary devices such as language and the moving picture help evoke events which we actually have no relationship with. The characters of the literary work of art are just names and events are just words, which are unable to turn the horrific events of the past to the bodily experience of the recipient. The characters of the film are only actors and the locations of the film are only the studio, the sets or another landscape.

In addition, in the last decades of the 20th century, historical research went through a paradigm shift that makes the rigid division of reality and fiction impossible. As Lionel Gossmann notes, history and fictional storytelling, situated at opposite poles of the practice of narration, traditionally confront and defy each other. However, at the current stage of their development, both are characterised by serious similarities and some significant tension (2003, 140). Surprising as it may be, the contrasting of history and fiction has only become the norm since the victory of 19th century historical realism. The theoretical problems of present-day historiography, however, are constructed along very different insights, in which the "reality of the historian" and "the fiction of the writer" are not very far removed from each other. As Jean Leduc claims: "Although literary and historical texts are differently related to what we call reality for want of a better word, they employ similar devices: those which are necessary for all manner of emplotment. A novel the furthest removed from linearity and a historical work of utmost thematic structure both tell a story [...]" (2006, 368).

In Czech literature, Josef Urban's novels *Habermannův mlýn* (Habermann's Mill, 2001) and *7 dní hříchů* (The 7 Days of Sin, 2012) and the films made from them exploded like bombs. Urban tore down the wall of collective amnesia, made pre-

vously tabooed history readable and writeable and at the same time questioned the discourse that had constituted the basis of Czech past-processing and identity: a generalising victim-narrative. Both novels and films, the scripts for which were written by Urban himself, deal with the days following World War II, with the fate of innocent Sudeten German civilians who were tortured or killed in the name of post-war revenge. They raise the question of Czech guilt which cannot be discussed dispassionately even after 70 years. It is well illustrated by the writer's preface written to the second edition of *Habermann's Mill*, which Urban meaningfully entitled "LŽIVÁ KNIHA?" (BOOK OF LIES?), in all capital letters. In this preface, the writer answers the campaign against his book and his person and comments on the "all-in game" created on the topic of "What really happened?". He also answers an article published in *Lidové noviny*, which claimed that "a film is being shot on the basis of the book of lies". Urban felt the need to emphasize the difference between non-fiction and the genre of the novel and to refer to the disclaimer at the beginning of the book: "This story was written on the basis of real events. However, it is a novel and not a documentary. Therefore, all similarities to actual historical figures or living persons are mere coincidence." Urban defends himself against attacks on his novel and film by saying that he later presented the actual events in a documentary film (Urban 2010, 13), collecting further facts and testimonies by contemporaries, and reality even exceeded fiction.

The film *The 7 Days of Sin* could become popular for several reasons, thus encouraging a wider audience of viewers to exercise more efficient self-criticism. Firstly, *Habermann's Mill* had already provided the first shock towards demolishing the universal victim-narrative; secondly, the love thread running through the story has a popularising effect and thirdly, the family in the centre of the story is not homogeneously German but mixed: Jan Olšan (played by the Czech actor Ondřej Vetchý) is Czech and Agnes (played by the Hungarian-Slovak actress Vica Kerekes) is German, which provides Czech viewers with more opportunity for identification. In the case of both works, the tension between fact and fiction also stems from the logic of adaptation and the different media, as the stories of the novels and the films made from them are different at several points. For example, the dramatic scene in the film version of *Habermann's Mill* when Habermann is trying to bribe the Nazi officer with jewellery is completely missing from the novel. Similarly, the climactic event of Habermann's death is different in the novel and the film.

The adaptational differences of Josef Urban's two novels and the films based on them make it clear that the effect of past-processing is not dependent on the position that the work of art occupies on the fiction-reality axis, as long as it is able to make an elemental effect on the viewers and induce compassionate catharsis in them, thus creating empathic readers with multiple perspectives.

## LANGUAGE VS. IDENTITY

Following a general consensus in literary history since the 19th century, national literatures are usually linked to the national language, but this question is far from straightforward. Firstly, medieval authors writing in Latin are part of every West and

Central European nation's own literary history and secondly, 20th century transnational literary criticism and the experience of transculturalism warn us that language and identity cannot be seamlessly identified in every case (Welsch 1999; Dagnino 2015).

From the point of view of our topic, it is evident that in Czech, Slovak, Polish and Hungarian literature, film and historical research, there are important works which do not operate national myths, concealment and victim-narratives or the tabooed and manipulated historical ideologies. Dozens of works have been written in Slovakia about the deportation and relocation of Hungarian-Slovaks – by Hungarian-Slovak authors. A significant part of works discussing the Holocaust was written by Jewish authors or those of Jewish descent. I wonder whether past-processing as national self-criticism really becomes operational if the identity of the author is the same as the identity of the victims. In my opinion, this task cannot be devolved to the victims and it cannot be skipped, either.

The best example for this is Imre Kertész's novel *Sorstalanság* (Fateless, 1992, published in English also as *Fatelessness*, 2004): even though first published almost thirty years earlier, it did not become part of Hungarian past-processing until Kertész won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002. It only forced wider national introspection as a result of external circumstances, so to speak. In the same way, Hungarian-Slovak author Lajos Grendel's novel *Bukott angyalok* (Fallen Angels, 2016), which mentions the massacre of Petržalka (soldiers of the Czechoslovak army killed hundreds of Hungarians including babies), did not force social attention in Slovakia. A novel by a Slovak writer, written in Slovak, would undoubtedly be more suitable for reaching Slovak readers.

The forerunner and one also of the most significant works of Hungarian national self-criticism is Tibor Cseres's novel *Hideg napok* (Cold Days, 1964), made into a successful film in 1966, which won first prize in the Karlovy Vary film festival. The novel describes the historical event that happened between 20–23 January 1942. As a revenge for previous Serbian partisan actions, Hungarian soldiers murdered over three thousand, mostly Serbian and Jewish, citizens (including 792 women and 147 children) in Novi Sad, which then belonged to Hungary. They stuffed the bodies into holes blown with grenades into the frozen surface of the Danube. Cseres's novel and András Kovács's film do not use ideological ballast or the clichés of communist art to expose fascism. They are much more interested in personal responsibility, psychological motivation and the causes and forces behind the cold brutality of the ordinary person.

The formal innovations of the novel can be interpreted from the direction of modernism in world literature. The events of the horrible days emerge from the sliding time sequences of the monologues of four Hungarian soldiers in a common cell imprisoned on remand. The drama is enhanced by the fact that the wife of one of them, Sergeant Büky, also disappeared in the chaos. It is only revealed by corporal Szabó's story at the dramatic climax of the novel and the film that Büky's wife had been raped and shot into the Danube along with her Jewish and Serbian girlfriends. Büky kills Szabó, who took part in the murder, with a single strike.

Whereas the effect of the novel is enhanced by the formal innovation (it shows similarity with the monologue form of William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the*



*Fury*) and the erotic thread; in the case of the film, such enhancing effects are the use of black and white film technique and the magnificent casting. By 1966, colour film was widely used but Kovács insisted on black and white footage, probably not only because of its more artistic nature but also because black and white film was able to recall the documentary nature of World War II footage. As for the cast, Sergeant Büky was played by young Zoltán Latinovits, the cult legend of Hungarian film, who is still considered to be the greatest Hungarian actor of all time by the film industry and public opinion alike.

It is imperative that such works of art be created by authors belonging to the same ethnic, religious or national group as the perpetrators, not the victims. Tibor Cseres was evidently of this opinion, and he expected a Serbian writer to write about the crimes committed by Serbs just like he had written about the atrocities committed by Hungarians against the Serbian population. However, he waited in vain for Serbian writers to commemorate the massacre of 40,000 Serbian Hungarians by Tito's Yugoslav partisans in 1944–1945, even though he mentioned this at a writers' conference in Belgrade in 1965 (Cseres 1991). That was when he decided to write a sequel to *Cold Days*, *Vérbosszú Bácskában* (Blood Revenge in Bácska, which appeared in English as *Titoist Atrocities in Vojvodina, 1944–1945: Serbian Vendetta in Bacska*, 1993).

#### ORIGINAL VS. ADAPTATION

Adaptation methods in these works raise questions of the relationship between the original and the copy as a moral, ethical category. Older literature on adaptation has often used terms that can be placed in the context of accuracy, by George Blueston (1957), the system of transposition, commentary, and analogy, by Geoffrey Wagner (1975), and borrowing – interstecion – transformation, by Dudley Andrew (1980). The problem with these theories from the point of view of our topic is that both the novels of Tibor Cseres and Josef Urban, even if “original”, are adaptations. As a matter of fact they were written on the basis of contemporary documents, testimonies, protocols, and oral narratives. The films made from novels would thus be adaptations of adaptations, and the question would be whether they should be faithful to the filmed novels, or even earlier documents, testimonies, and oral narratives. Not to mention that these “original” documents and oral narratives may contain contradictory data. The critical work on Tibor Cseres or Josef Urban's novels and films does not speak of any kind of ideological manipulation in the trio of film – novel – historical truth, which means that both novels and films correspond to the categories of transposition and borrowing. Nevertheless, it seems much more exciting to examine the relations pointed to by Jørgen Bruhn, according to which no novel or film is a work of art with strict boundaries, because all adaptations are reinterpretations of earlier works (as James Joyce's *Ulysses* is the reinterpretation of Homer) (2013, 69). It is similar to the phenomenon when a new edition of a novel refers to its film adaptation: for example, the covers of the new editions of *Cold Days* by Tibor Cseres and *The 7 Days of Sin* by Josef Urban feature images from the films, while the new edition of Josef Urban's *Habermann's Mill* was published with an introduction by the Slovak-Jewish director Juraj Herz. Even more exciting, however, is the narrative process in which the nar-

ration and modality of both Cseres's novel and Josef Urban's novels are built on film techniques. The short sentences and dialogues of Josef Urban's novels can be read as screenplays, just like the nature descriptions of the novel, which evoke cinematic techniques. It is no coincidence that Urban wrote the screenplays of his own novels. The modernist narrative processes and structure of Tibor Cseres's novel experiment with the chronology and the location changes of the film. Thus, the "original" novels can also be read as "novelizing" earlier film techniques, eliminating the hierarchy of "original" and "copy" inherent in the concept of adaptation.

As can be seen above, the question of text and film adaptations in the context of self-critical representation of the national past is not interpreted on the axis of the accuracy-inaccuracy principle, but on whether it can exert an influence on the recipient by which he or she can override his or her own national stereotypes. This is well illustrated by the novels and films of Urban, whose different narrative relations were not created as a dream of attaining some sort of original and factual truth, but in order to convey the deeper truth of the tone given to the muted and subaltern. The same principle can be found in *Cold Days* (both novel and film), as a matter of fact: "We are all witnesses" (Hopfinger 2018, 7), even if decades have passed since the terrible events.

In a 1996 lecture, Ágnes Heller stood up for hetero-representation with the harsh words: "The political demand that identifies faithful representation with self-representation will lead to the death of art and literature within it", and "The suspicious rejection of hetero-representation not only kills art but at the same time leads to the apartheid of groups of people inflicted upon themselves" (2010). The novels of Josef Urban and Tibor Cseres and the films made from them, as well as the Polish and German self-critical processing of the past make it clear that the criticism of one's own national past, although often generating attacks and outraged opinions, is able to break through the walls of silence and prejudices.

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## National self-criticism as a processing of the past: Memory politics in East Central European literature and film

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Collective memory. Historical past. Social criticism. Myths of national suffering. V4 countries. Literature and film.

In post-communist Central European countries the interpretation of the past is still often generated by myths, self-pity, martyrdom, and the denial of one's own fault. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a conscious, critical examination of the historical past, which is present in German language and literature, is almost absent in Hungarian, Slovak, Polish and Czech politics, culture, literature and films. The present study deals with cultural and political strategies, applied in films and literary texts of V4 countries, which critically process taboos, related to the national past. The study examines the issue of the historical self-criticism in Polish, Czech (Josef Urban's novels *Habermannův mlýn* – Habermann's Mill, 2001 and *7 dní hříchu* – The 7 Days of Sin, 2012 and their film adaptations directed by Juraj Herz and Jiří Chlumský) and Hungarian (Tibor Cseres's novel *Hideg napok* – Cold Days, 1964 and its 1966 film adaptation directed by András Kovács) literature and films.

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Dr. hab. Zoltán Németh, prof. UW  
The Department of Hungarian Studies  
Faculty of Modern Languages  
University of Warsaw  
Dobra 55  
00-312 Warsaw  
Poland  
nemetx@gmail.com