

# Places of Absence

## Cosmopolitan Agencies in the Fictional Budapest of Post-1989 British Novels

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*Abstract: British novels set in East-Central Europe during the Cold War and the 1990s represent cosmopolitan communities of people from different traditions, nations, and identities in a fairly closed world where cosmopolitanism remains either a wishful memory or a desire for a more open-minded future. The image of the intercultural community in these novels fails to live up to the official propaganda of proletarian internationalism as well as that of pre-war capitalist urban cosmopolitanism. In both respects, the literary images reveal a sad lack of real cosmopolitan spaces, either because the suggested community of people is based on demagogic lies, or because the bustling cosmopolitan metropolises had been dilapidated and homogenised by socialist regimes.*

*After the Fall of the Wall, Second Bloc metropolises quickly shifted from Communist internationality towards exotic tourist destinations for Westerners in the 1990s, which entailed new types of cosmopolitan experiences. British novels about Budapest are engaged with the parallel spatial and chronological realities of the ex-Second Bloc, which is still in the process of making sense of the past. Tibor Fischer's *Under the Frog* (1992) depicts socialist spaces in a metonymic relationship with their own past. Malcolm Bradbury's *Doctor Criminale* (1992) portrays the immediate aftermath of 1989, and displays a similar parallel consciousness constituted in a Budapest that is always aware of its own absences. Therefore, Hungarians in Bradbury's work often feel a deep Lacanian desire for the presence of an unknown West. In what Anthony Appiah designates as partial cosmopolitanism, local characters also give their specific answers to such global narratives. As both Fischer's and Bradbury's novels suggest, cosmopolitan agency often appears in the textual Budapest as an absence of the multicultural metropolis of the past or a fantasy.*

The discourse of cosmopolitanism, as the ideology linking people all over the world, appeared officially in Cold War East-Central Europe in the form of proletarian internationalism. Internationalism was the Eastern European version of the Western-centric concept of cosmopolitanism. According to Sándor Hites, the idea of internationalism, although tainted with Russian nationalism and Pravoslaviv theological hegemony, was originally meant as an emancipatory ideology for the Socialist Bloc. This ideology aimed at reshaping cultural relationships outside the (Western) Eurocentric thinking during the Cold War (67). However, this concept found its way into the everyday reality of socialist countries tainted by constant figurative lies. On the one hand, official discourse roared about the happy community of international people's republics; on the other hand, it was a highly limited internationality, with First World countries strictly excluded.

This totalitarian doublespeak resulted in a typical Second Bloc experience of split consciousness, which is aware of the presence of a certain community of the here and now, as well as the denied but very palpable absence of certain others: Western countries or friends and relatives who had emigrated. Moreover, this absence is linked to Central Europe's past as bleak socialist spaces occupy the space of bustling cosmopolitan Central European metropolises of the pre-war times. As a result, the space of East-Central Europe became one where the absence of the past could constantly be felt as a bleak reminder of lost glamour.

Martha Nussbaum, in her book *The Cosmopolitan Tradition* (2019), claims that cosmopolitanism can also be called an umbrella term as a result of the various traditions of equal human dignity (3–4). Although the cosmopolitan idea had undergone constant modifications during the centuries as it was adjusted to various sociocultural contexts, as Anita Barta claims (222), equality and the corresponding democratic values have traditionally been coupled with cosmopolitan consciousness ever since the first, ancient Greek, occurrence of this notion. In European Modernity, urban democratic, and hence, cosmopolitan thinking appeared in coexistence with capitalism. Paul Gilroy, in his work *Against Race* (2000), conceptualises cosmopolitanism as closely linked to democratic order (7). In the post-war era, the twofold division of Cold War Europe radically broke the then-existing international relationships and capitalist cosmopolitan traditions alike. The Eastern part of Europe fell prey to another interpretation of cosmopolitanism, that of the communist class terror exercised in the name of the working class. Consequently, the question arises

whether the post-war socialist internationalism in East-Central Europe could aspire to the rank of a member of this tradition.

Gilroy understands cosmopolitanism as a “comprehensive rethinking of ways we understand and analyse our vulnerable humanity” (20). As an ideology gaining ground in the immediate aftermath of World War II, proletarian internationalism also aimed at redefining humanity and recreating a transnational community. The proletarian community was believed and propagated to oppose chauvinist particularisms. One reason for such a propagation of communist internationalism was the trauma of WWII, which contemporaries experienced as a direct result of chauvinist ideologies. Historical possibilities of East-Central European cosmopolitanism during the Cold War, as they are depicted in two British novels about Hungary, are defined by these circumstances. This research aims to investigate fictional representations of how the excessively closed Socialist Bloc countries related to their universal humanity, torn between totalitarian doublespeak and their more cosmopolitan urban environment, giving rise to nostalgia for pre-war times.

As certain urban spaces evoked the more open-minded Habsburg monarchical past, others, typically the results of socialist housing estate programmes in the region, propagated a successfully realised proletariat community. These spatial manifestations of a cosmopolitan community, either past or fictional, appear in post-1989 British fiction about East-Central Europe, namely, Tibor Fischer’s *Under the Frog* (1992) and Malcolm Bradbury’s *Doctor Criminalale* (1992). Both novels were written closely after the 1989 Political Changes, and they distinctively define a discursive field dominated by the process of coming to terms with the state socialist heritage.

As a result of the discursive environment mentioned above, these fictive universes are centred on ideological anomalies in their depiction of the totalitarian regime. Fischer’s work is a bitterly humorous rendering of Hungary in the 1950s and Bradbury’s novel also depicts 1990s Hungary with irony, mostly with a touristic focaliser (Harasztsos 32–33). The touristic mindset is a contraindicated catchword against participatory cosmopolitanism, as Robbins claims (177). Still, both works display their own specific, perhaps a little tendentious, views on Hungary.

On the one hand, *Under the Frog* can be claimed as part of diaspora literature; indeed, Davis analyses the book in the framework of exile literature and claims that Fischer’s first book has a specific outlook on Hungarian history, that of the second-generation émigré who mourns the loss of a country (58). Ágnes Györke, also investigating Fisher in the paradigm of émigré literature, claims that one of the book’s aims

is to bring the historical trauma of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 close to its readership (324). This traceable intention can also be a result of the émigré context of Fischer's childhood. In this sense, I argued for the book's historical vista being a product of Hirschian postmemory in my study "Photographic Origins of Postmemory in Tibor Fischer's *Under the Frog*" (2016). This émigré outlook also defines the novel's take on cosmopolitanism, and investigating the exact manner in which it does so is one of this paper's objectives.

On the other hand, the specific bias *Doctor Criminale* displays is that of a campus novel concentrated around the world of university wits. This circumstance might be interpreted as one that narrows the vision of the book in terms of representing multiculturalism. However, such a view is something Bruce Robbins makes a case against when, arguing for the relevance of academic discourses in promoting cosmopolitanism, he asks the rhetorical question of how it is possible for academics to promote multiculturalism if they are "so self-enclosed as [they] were told" (170). *Doctor Criminale* fits into Robbins's vision, as it attempts to engage in a discursive promotion of a unified Europe, as I also argued in my study "Korszakok halálakor mindenki áruló" [When an epoch dies, betrayal is everywhere] (2016). Notwithstanding the specificities, the two novels analysed in this paper witness a journey that starts from pre-war cosmopolitanism, moves through wartime racism, and eventually arrives at the post-war lie of internationalism, framed through what Bruce Robbins claims to be a post-cultural standpoint of cosmopolitanism of the 1990s (181). These attitudes to others can be best disclosed through the analysis of the novels' spatial settings, which this study aims to explore.

The politically determined notion, internationalism, was a catchword in the demagogic banter of the forty years of Second Bloc state socialism. Consequently, Fisher's fundamentally dark, humorous book consecrates its sharpest ironic remarks to this discursive reality of the state socialist system. Internationalism appears as a centralised practice during Communist Hungary with its closed borders. Similarly to the Communist ideology of proletariat internationalism, postsocialist societies of the 1990s also held new international bonds in high esteem. Opening up closed societies, economies, cultures, and ways of thinking to the West became the new and very fashionable catchword in the immediate aftermath of the Fall of the Wall when Bradbury's story takes place. Consequently, cosmopolitan bonds appear in the novel as very colourful interpersonal relationships between Hungarian

and Western characters, ranging from exploitative to friendly or from investigative to superficial.

When the contexts of Fisher's and Bradbury's books are viewed in a strictly historical sense, it seems obvious that most post-1989 oppositional discourse rebelled against the official Communist propagation of proletariat internationalism alongside the bulk of communist ideological lies. These anti-communist discourses, however, also propagated the intensification of international relationships in the 1990s. This specific historical context of the given fictional universes calls for a differentiation of the concepts of internationalism and cosmopolitanism. In his book, *Cosmopolitanism*, Kwame Anthony Appiah links his concept of cosmopolitanism to Virginia Woolf's urging to be "free from unreal loyalties" such as "nation, sex, school, neighbourhood" (5). Given this definition, Appiah emphasises that both Nazism and the Socialism propagated by the Stalinist Soviet Union are great foes of cosmopolitanism (5). In this sense, the proletariat internationalism, propagated by the latter, can be considered to belong with the "unreal loyalties." Moreover, as Appiah argues, Soviet style internationalism still insisted on at least one unreal loyalty, that of class. Therefore, it opposed values of cosmopolitanism by "ruling out loyalty to all of humanity" (5).

From another perspective, cosmopolitanism can be viewed as a form of opening up in one's value system, habits, and general cultural traits to other people, other customs, and ways of living. Thus, Diogenes was the first cosmopolitan: his home was everywhere, his customs and ways of thinking he claimed not to distinctively belong to "unreal loyalties," such as his polis. In this sense, as opposed to Appiah's reasoning, which aims at disconnecting the two notions, Communist proletariat internationalism does bear a resemblance to cosmopolitanism, as both propagated a certain openness to others.

Martha Nussbaum's version of cosmopolitanism, grounded in equal human dignity, also backs a functional similarity between internationalism and cosmopolitanism. Nussbaum claims that both ideas entail a certain respect for equal human dignity and with that, a set of obligations towards our fellow humans, or fellow workers (3). In the two literary Hungaries of Fischer and Bradbury, internationalism appears as a restricted and institutionally coerced form of cosmopolitanism that is a noble but, in practice, flawed ideal, not devoid of forced unreal loyalties even. Consequently, in its ideal form, internationalism is a very similar concept to cosmopolitanism insofar as they both propose equal human dignity, openness

in identity, and an active nurturing of loyalty towards fellow humans. In its practised, and markedly Second World form, however, internationalism can be conceptualised as opposed to cosmopolitanism.

Around the time of the 1989 Political Changes, two opposing political communities propagated openness to the post-war or post-Wall East-Central European communities, each driven by antagonistic motives. Could this be a difference merely in the direction of the desired opening, namely, its Eastern or Western orientation? Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis, in their introduction to the volume *Sociology of Cosmopolitanism*, call attention to the tendency that the idea of cosmopolitanism appears in totalising, unfamiliar, and altogether too abstract discourses (4). Certainly, behind these centralised catchwords, there lies a constantly lived local and familiar reality which these novels could give an artistic image of. If, under the banner of either internationalism or cosmopolitanism, some form of cross-national and cross-cultural interaction could be promoted during two such ideologically opposed periods as Hungarian state socialism (1948–1989) and the 1990s, which emerged in opposition to that very regime, then there must be a contradiction at play. Such a repeated call for opening up makes one wonder: could there be some lingering wounds or empty spaces hidden under such an evident promotion of cosmopolitanism? The question arises whether Hungarians, both in their post-WWII collective mental state and in the aftermath of 40 years of Totalitarian Communism, were so local-minded and probably even provincial that learned minds and political leaders saw the need to promote cosmopolitanism. The answer might be affirmative, but as Appiah claims, cosmopolitanism does not aim to efface local differences, and in its tenable form, it builds upon partiality (5). This partial version of cosmopolitanism, more akin to postcolonial discourse than to the Kantian idea of cosmopolitanism, is generated in the face of the closed nature of Hungary during the historical periods these novels describe. It was often antagonistic to a more universalist version of global community building, which the Soviet type of Modernity was promoting in the name of internationalism. An investigation into possibilities, agencies, and spatial conditions of a diverse and more democratic cosmopolitanism and its representation in these novels can shed light on the memory work post-1989 ex-Second Bloc countries, especially Hungary, had to engage in when they attempted to come to terms with their state socialist past and its messages of cosmopolitanism.

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*Under the Frog* takes place mostly in Budapest, and the Hungarian settings of *Doctor Criminale* are also restricted to the capital city, which is described as the sole centre of, or rather, the only place worth mentioning in Hungary. This has obvious reasons in *Under the Frog*, since the events of 1956 concentrated the narrative space to the city, and such a portrayal is also logical in *Doctor Criminale*, a campus novel where the protagonist carries out his research about the renowned Hungarian scholar-philosopher in the university circles of Budapest. Certainly, Budapest appears in these novels as more or less the only cosmopolitan metropolis in Hungary.

Such a vision seems grounded, since Budapest, as depicted in these two novels, was undoubtedly a shallow version of its past self with regard to various aspects of cosmopolitanism. *Under the Frog* describes Budapest in its bleakest eras: WWII and the Rákosi era totalitarian terror. On the other hand, *Doctor Criminale* depicts the capital city at the moment of the change of the political system in 1990. These works describing the city either in the very closed period of state socialism, or in the immediate aftermath of it, also reflect upon the pre-war past when the city had indeed been a metropolitan centre and a bustling cosmopolitan city. In his book, *Identity and the Urban Experience: Fin-de-Siècle Budapest* (2004), Gábor Gyáni provides a detailed description of the Hungarian capital during the dual monarchy. Some aspects of Budapest cosmopolitanism he mentions include the multitude of languages spoken in its streets (189), the city's multicultural intellectual elite contributing to the artistic and scientific scene of European modernity (209), or specific urban mechanisms of inter-ethnic relationships flourishing in the city in the late 1800s (177).

Thus, when searching for cosmopolitanism in the city, the Budapest of these novels is a place of absence. The bleakly abandoned and closed urban areas, once much busier with foreigners and expats, appear as alternative, sometimes fictional, sometimes narrated, and sometimes fantastic alternative spaces. The different historical times that belong to these alternative spaces of the city feature as palimpsests of Budapest and, in turn, can be described in the creative coexistence of spaces of reality, of communicative and personal memory, as well as in the places of official discourses and utopian desires referring to a future, still-to-be-realised urban space.

A place of absence is constituted by the quality of a joint communal feeling that something is conspicuously missing. The lack can be constructed by societal fantasies of betterment, shared cultural memory of a place once having been very different,

or—and this version is very typical of totalitarian regimes—by the figurative lies of official discourses. In this final case, the place often shows its face to those who live there, shamelessly deviating from its official descriptions. These different conceptions of twentieth-century Budapest form layers of spaces piled upon one another, as described by Henri Lefebvre in his foundational work entitled *The Production of Space* (8). This essay aims to find literary figurations of such spaces in which cosmopolitanism often appears as a marked absence.

Lived spaces give rise to fields of subjectivity, which Lefebvre conceptualises to be the result of a productive interaction between subjects and the spaces around them (18). Communist and postcommunist ideological backgrounds and their nexus to the Other also affect spaces, which in turn defines the position of subjects moving around in them. This essay also aims at mapping the discursive formulation of the heteroimage of Hungarians in their relationships to the Other in British novels about East-Central Europe. This is especially intriguing given the postmodern nomadic identity of many English writers of East-Central Europe novels. Writers ranging from Bruce Chatwin and Tom McCarthy to Patrick McGuinness belong to the group of citizens of the world who typically spent expat years in various countries and formulated their fictional accounts of East-Central Europe from that position. Both novels can be categorised as postmodern *Bildungsromane*: the protagonists, Francis and Gyuri, embark upon their journeys from a fairly closed mindset, both desiring contact with foreign people, and at the end, they turn into opening up to the Other, albeit there are differences in the manner of that opening. Certainly, Bradbury's novel prognosticates a unified Europe where values and a general postmodern attitude to the relativised ideas of truth and morality will be shared by the English protagonists and their newly acquired Hungarian friends. This was still a dream in the Hungary of 1990 when the novel takes place, directing the cosmopolitanism of Bradbury's novel into fantasyland. In contrast, Gyuri from *Under the Frog* is forced to emigrate and be "open" to other cultures as a refugee in Europe, because real, oppositional cosmopolitanism was impossible in Soviet-oppressed Hungary after 1956. It only lived elsewhere or in the past, that is, in places of absence.

#### COSMOPOLITANISM DESIRED

*Under the Frog* begins with a brilliant *mise-en-abyme* about Rákosi-era Hungary: the basketball players travel around in Hungary fully naked (for fun) in a train

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carriage once owned by the Nazis, while wondering who the informant is among them. The *mise-en-abyme* at first reveals the atmosphere and feeling of the state socialist regime where people had to fear the informant all the time, even among close friends or family. Travelling naked in a train carriage encapsulates this experience of being exposed to friends. Secondly, travelling (or rather the lack thereof) is associated with substitutions, such as fantasising about travelling in one's head:

Gyuri settled down to think about being a streetsweeper while he gazed out of the window at the countryside that went past quite lazily despite the train's billing as an express. The streetsweeper was a sort of cerebral chewing gum that Gyuri popped in on long journeys. A streetsweeper. Where? A streetsweeper in London. Or New York. Or Cleveland; he wasn't that fussy. Some modest streetsweeping anywhere. Anywhere in the West. Anywhere outside. (3)

This figuration opens up a place of absence. On the very first pages of the fictional universe, where readerly expectations would forecast the first world-building description of the location where the story takes place, this text ironically highlights a characteristic lack in the nature of any places in Hungary under the Rákosi era, namely, that these places fail to be other places than what they actually are. Viewed through Gyuri's eyes, it is a very harsh judgement upon the countryside that it is characterised chiefly by the lack of certain qualities. This truth is revealed through Gyuri's mildly conveyed discontent at the train's "laziness" or the inferiority of his overall conditions, in which even street sweeping in Cleveland would seem better than travelling as celebrated basketball players of the nation.

The above-quoted passage also draws a parallel between the physical imprisonment, the one socialist citizens had to endure in the form of the closed borders of the Iron Curtain, and the psychological imprisonment in one's thoughts that one does not dare to reveal, given the fear of the possible informant even in friendly or work-related communities. The gesture of gazing out at a landscape, through the windows of a rushing train, involves a certain wishful longing that is linked to even farther places such as Cleveland or New York. This scene is an example of the psychological imprisonment Davis refers to in calling attention to how moving aimlessly from place to place also carries this meaning (58)—something Gyuri is constantly doing in the book. Consequently, in addition to the scene being

a *mise-en-abyme* for Rákosi-era Hungary in general, it can also be read as a metonymy for a prison cell instalment. Gyuri's above-quoted predicament is likened to a prison cell where the prisoner walks up and down aimlessly (similarly to the basketball team's journeys), suffers from solitude (just as Gyuri does in a community filled with informants), and hopelessly desires to be somewhere else (just as Gyuri wishes to be outside Hungary).

The metaphor of the "cerebral chewing gum" also suggests the aimlessness of musing over Gyuri's desire to emigrate: after all, chewing gum is a food not to be consumed, which supports the idea of uselessness as an image.<sup>1</sup> Davis also calls attention to the parallel between Gyuri's desire to be elsewhere and Fischer and his parents' immigrant plight which affirms the claim that "those who escape physically seem no better off than those who remain" (58). Thus, this passage also sheds light on how fruitless both striving for and succeeding in emigration might be, since neither grants the real community of a cosmopolitan kind.

Still, in his futile desire to emigrate, Gyuri serves as the mouthpiece for the people who desire to escape from the People's Republic. Socialist Hungary was the alleged paradise of workers, where workers typically did nothing more than trying to sabotage work at the same time as longing to depart to the imperialist West. This section exemplifies the ironical link between cosmopolitan desires and global capitalist exploitation, which Gyuri and his friends would not have any grievances against, had there been an opportunity to flee the closed, bleak, and poor Communist Hungary. However, what they desire is a more comfortable life provided by the recognition of human dignity. Nussbaum also calls attention to the fact that the theory of cosmopolitanism excludes exploitation from its earliest conceptualisations. She refers to Cicero, who argued that respect for the other human being indicates treating him as an end rather than a means (Nussbaum 27). Still, Gyuri's desire to escape from socialist Budapest to be exploited in the West is the enunciation of cosmopolitanism in *Under the Frog's* portrayal of the 1950s, fictionalising Hungary as a space that lacks certain features which would make it London, Cleveland, or New York. The absence of these places defines Hungary as a fictional space.

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1 On a marginal note to the chewing-gum metaphor, these types of sweets had not been widespread in socialist Hungary in the 1950s. Hungarians tasted their first chewing-gums only later, in the Kádár era, as Ferenc Hammer describes in his study, "Sartorial Manoeuvres in the Dusk: Blue Jeans in Socialist Hungary" (58). This anachronism could signify a literary image of the 1950s in *Under the Frog*, which was projected back from the Hungary of the 1980s as Fischer experienced it then.

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This cry for being elsewhere refers not so much to an openness and desire to learn about other cultures as to better conditions. However, cosmopolitanism can also be traced in this as it inherently entails a desire for general human dignity overarching nations and continents. As opposed to this, the official discourse and practice of proletariat internationalism provided people with a limited cosmopolitanism stretching only or mostly to the East. Such ties stretching over borders leave traditional international links of Central European cultures out of consideration. As a result, these international bonds often ended up as failure:

they were intrigued by the arrival of a Chinese basketball player at the camp ... , but after that, despite the undeniable warmth, cordiality and curiosity on both sides, things slowed down somewhat, because whoever had arranged for him to attend the camp had either overlooked or forgotten that Wu, as he seemed to be called, spoke no Hungarian, no English, no German, no Russian or any other language of which anyone in the camp had a smattering. No one, of course, spoke any Chinese. (Fischer 114–115)

The lack of any real contact with the Chinese comrade ironically illustrates the failure of such enforced encounters. In providing reasons for the failure, institutionalised and centralised enforcement can be mentioned, as well as an accompanying disregard for the local needs and facilities, such as the language skills of the participants. This negligence is manifested in the unnamed official who arranged this visit and “had either overlooked or forgotten” about the local conditions. The first clause of the above quote is in accordance with Gyuri’s fantasy about being a street sweeper in New York: it expresses a genuine desire to have encounters with the Other. And after all, cosmopolitanism is about an imaginary connection (Appiah 77) at first established in the mind. Still, however strong Gyuri’s imaginary connection to abroad might be, the basketball players’ initial interest in the Chinese comrade is swept aside by the totalising vision of internationalism organised in a bureaucratic system as a façade for real international ties.

But then, totalitarian socialism was not a regime to face reality. It lived in its own spatial utopia of cosmopolitan workers’ fantasy, which is discursively created by the totalitarian doublespeak. In his workplace, the GANZ-MÁVAG factory in Csepel, Gyuri Fischer lives among the spatial settings of the figurative lies

of proletariat internationalism and the friendly states of People's Republics. The factory yard is installed in such a way that it pushes the official international narrative on users of that space:

As Gyuri entered the main yard, he passed a board which was bedecked with amateurish red decorations and which had a heading "Socialist Brigades" ... Alongside these displays was an elegantly penned scroll, "Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Society," heading a series of ailing black and white photographs of Soviet lathe-operators watching Hungarian lathe-operators lathe-operate with avuncular, elder-brotherly encouragement, and photographs of Hungarian lathe-operators watching Soviet lathe-operators lathe-operate, with younger-brother wide-eyed admiration. (Fischer 81)

In this excerpt, the inequality between two cultures is expressed by the younger vs. elder brother metaphor. Somewhat opposed to this perceived superiority of the Soviet brothers, this cross-cultural bond is expressed in a joint, markedly industrial activity, suggesting a more egalitarian working-class solidarity. This proletarian togetherness can be seen as an intended true cosmopolitan experience. Especially, as it situates the Soviet and Hungarian bond in opposition to the global metropolis and the generally invisible labour that makes its glamour possible. In her book, *Cosmopolitanism and Space* (2014), Emily Johansen calls attention to the prototypically individual focus on *flânerie* in cosmopolitan studies, which tends to disregard the people and their backyard spaces which make the urban space possible in the first place (57).

Although the centralised intention may seem benevolent and true to the spirit of international socialism, the irony of the narration is evident. The direction of this irony is twofold: discursive and situational. The discursive irony appears in the repetition of the word "lathe-operate" and refers to the content of the cosmopolitan connection between the Soviet and Hungarian workers. This irony's edge directly questions the validity of such forced international relationships between lathe-operators, because what lathe-operators can teach each other is basically lathe-operating, which renders the point in such connections rather non-existent. Certainly, this is a middle-class view on lathe-operating, and holding such an opinion, Gyuri rather appears as an outsider when walking through the propaganda

façades of the working-class paradise, the GANZ-MÁVAG yard. This outsider identity of his is probably enhanced by his being picked as a deterrent against crime in the socialist system. He is also often referred to as “class x,” which denotes either an aristocratic or a middle-class background. As such, he is incapable of feeling true brotherhood with the Soviet workers; therefore, what Robbins calls “autonomous unforced appreciation of coherence ... among distinct cultural entities” (177), which would have been a precondition to real cosmopolitanism, remains unrealised in this scene as well.

Gyuri’s outsider focalisation provides the other, situational irony of the above quote. The passage describes Gyuri’s morning practice, which is not unlike that of all the other workers in the factory and throughout the country. They walk through cardboard façades of images of an experience; namely, a fruitful exchange of professional knowledge in the circle of foreign workers, which is practically impossible for them to experience. Travelling was a rare privilege in the period, as Gyuri’s streetsweeping fantasy also illustrated. This irony also questions the meaning behind these cosmopolitan ties, as they only exist as a façade, not as an everyday reality.

Similarly, disregarding the historical reality, such propagandistic representations of international relations seem absurd in the light of the fact that Hungary was a victim of the “elder brother’s” military occupation. This renders the “wide-eyed admiration” very unlikely. Appiah claims that any cosmopolitan community must rely upon a benevolence towards strangers (86), which is missing here on Gyuri’s part, given the military and political oppression. Hungarian feelings for the Soviets are more accurately described by the 1956 Revolution than as a “younger brotherly wide-eyed admiration.” Such farcical spatial settings as the yard described in the above quotation contribute to an abject subjectivity, victim to what Gideon Baker calls “imperialistic projections of identity” (107).

Apart from the blatant lie behind these international relationships, faking them also disregarded the traumatic Hungarian experiences of civilian encounters with the victorious and often very barbaric Soviet soldiers during WWII. Instead of shared acceptance of the Other and their outlook that Appiah claims to be the basis for mutual respect and universal human dignity (58), these enforced and imaginary ties with the “Soviet lathe-operators” were more similar to unhealthy attachments, such as Stockholm syndrome. The basis of such international ties always relied on the unity of the proletariat: an ideological link which was deemed more important than any previous altercation. Under such conditions, it is in no way surprising

that Gyuri and his fellow-workers lack what Appiah calls “cosmopolitan curiosity” (13), at least concerning the Soviets.

In addition, such spatial representations of mendacious official discourses of international fraternity overshadowed the reality of a post-Holocaust, post-German-relocation Hungary, closed in by Stalinist terror. The actual lived space is restricted by a prohibition of travelling, by a foreign power’s political oppression and the concomitant coercion of international relations, experienced by passers-by fleetingly glimpsing at placards on walls. The characters moving in these spaces are aware of the presence of the Second Bloc communities of the here and now, both actual and imagined or forced, but they are also haunted by the denied but very palpable absence of certain other cosmopolitan communities they belong to: Western countries, emigrated friends and relatives.

#### COSMOPOLITANISM IN THE PAST

The absence of once existing cosmopolitan urban life is most palpable in a spatial sense. Houses whose previous dwellers may never be seen again, whole districts whose inhabitants were forced out by wolfish ideologies, and even train carriages are spaces of memory. The absences they carry are linked to Central Europe’s past: they talk about a pre-war cosmopolitanism. One example of this lost world of transnational and culturally colourful community is alluded to when a transformed railway building is mentioned. The now morally faultless workers’ accommodation evokes memories of its previous function to welcome a cosmopolitan bourgeois public that frequented the prostitutes of Szeged:

Just next to the railway station in Szeged was a high, redbrick building which now advertised itself as a hotel. It had been, as everyone knew, one of the most renowned brothels in Hungary before such dens of capitalist iniquity were closed down. Town, gown, yokels in their Sunday best (only worn at church, in a coffin, or at the knocking shop), commercial salesmen and royalty (admittedly only the Balkan variety) had all made their way through its portals. (Fischer 4)

This excerpt describes people finding home at the “knocking shop” and highlights social variety, by alluding to travelling people, salesmen, and the infamously rootless

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type of social class, the royalty. By ironically describing the royalty as “of the Balkan variety,” the text proposes two fundamental characteristics of the visitors. Firstly, the word “variety” suggests the diversity of the customers. Secondly, the Balkans evoke a certain sense of chaos or a mixture of identities, given the tumultuous history and the many ethnic groups traditionally sharing this region. There is a third, and most ironic, meaning to this remark; namely, that it questions the authenticity of the royal lineage of those claiming to be royalty and Balkan at the same time. This is due to the relatively short history of Balkan monarchies, given that their disentanglement from the Ottoman Empire only occurred late in the nineteenth century. However, in all cases, this passage very vividly evokes the cosmopolitan array of these people meeting in the same place.

The passage very graphically evokes multinational people of all walks of life. This scenery appears vividly in the minds of those onlookers of the now silent or boring workers’ hostel who are aware of its past. The contrast between the pre-war bustling of bourgeois people and the boredom of the disciplined workers of the 1950s suggests another type of antagonism between these two worlds. The pre-war urban scenery evokes a brothel which is necessarily a place of either revelry or the shameful hiding of this for a great number of people who all meet here for the same reason, namely, to fulfil their suppressed desires. Whereas, the workers’ hostel represents the tedious sincerity of a socialist space of surveillance, hiding no secrets at least on an official level. The redbrick building used to be a kind of Foucauldian heterotopia for capitalist society: all kinds of people gathered here doing what is forbidden in their sappy-stern (after Philip Larkin) *fin-de-siècle* reality. This place was once indeed cosmopolitan, which is proved by the colourful list of the different social groups. The phrase “town and gown” evokes the youth of a university town, “yokels” represent the rural people, whereas “salesmen and royalty” represent the middle- and upper-classes of bygone Hungary. The evoked image of the “den of capitalist iniquity” in which hidden fulfilments of forbidden desires could be exercised is in stark contrast with the monotonous unanimity that state socialism had to offer: lathe-operators boringly lathe-operate. The cosmopolitan freedom encapsulated by this place exists only in the mind, and, in actuality, the building carries the absence of its past self.

The past multiculturalism is even more deplorable given the unanimity today’s inhabitants of the same place display when the former prostitutes are taken on as workers, all “wearing factory overalls” (4). The socialist image of community entails a totalitarian monotony which opposes the condition that, according

to Robbins, would make cosmopolitanism possible. He states that “the perspective of the cosmopolitan must entail relationships to a plurality” (177), which is impossible if everybody wears the same overall, is allocated the same job and the same workers’ home to live in. This is rather the world of the Soviet-type internationalist vision.

The Austro-Hungarian monarchy appears as a truly cosmopolitan surrounding in a similar passage in Bradbury’s *Doctor Criminalis* as well. This novel also refers to the urban space of pre-war Hungary when it was visited by a diverse international public:

Back in the days of the Dual Monarchy and the belle époque, the tired and sated aristocrats of middle Europe had, I gathered, come here to its great Grand Hotel for the famous hot sulphur baths, hoping to purge away their old amorous and gastronomic excesses and at the same time start on new ones. Rumour has it that Franz Schubert was made better here, though we can take it that Franz Kafka was made a good deal worse. (Bradbury 92)

As opposed to the previous passage, these lines call attention to the era of Hungary’s history which linked it to the West, strictly forbidden fruit for socialist citizens in the novel’s present. The quote evokes the diction of touristic flyers, thus excessively calling attention to the lack of any contact with the previously so frequent visitors from the West. Even categorising a German and a Czech Jew as coming from the West would have been meaningless in the times of the *belle époque* conjured up in this quote. Schubert and Kafka had been characters belonging to the same cultural zone of *Mitteleuropa* as Budapest. The ironic reference to their illnesses, supposedly cured or made worse by Hungarian baths, suggests a close relationship between these cultural zones in which the Pest gossip could gain access to such intimate details of the great men.

This description, such as the previous one, montages the bustling cosmopolitan cities of the past onto their own slightly dilapidated and rundown present of either the 1950s or the 1980s. These are places which fulfil the characters’ fantasies nostalgically: there is a metonymic relationship between these places and their own past. Madina Tlostanova’s notion of *tempolocality* aptly describes such intersections of space and time. In her analysis of postsocialist modern subjectivities, Tlostanova aims at calling attention to the complex relationships characters moving in postsocialist

cultural spheres maintain with space and time. Following but also decolonising both Bakhtin's chronotope and Foucault's heterotopia, she calls the palimpsest of overlapping postsocialist spaces tempolocalities (Tlostanova 94–96). This quotation from *Doctor Criminale* demonstrates a typical postsocialist tempolocality in which the past of a city is deemed more worthy, since it contained cosmopolitan encounters with such great artists as Schubert and Kafka, whereas the present exhales nothing but dilapidation.

The tempolocality that this passage creates does not exist in isolation, or merely in the fictional world. Tlostanova claims that it is “important to take into account not only the hermetic tempolocality of the fictional text but also the wider chronotope of its context” (120). Therefore, the sarcastic tone of the above quotation cannot be missed. It is apt that the tempolocality of the sulphur baths frequented by aristocrats of Europe was referred to as *belle époque*, and the French term exhales *fin-de-siècle* elegance. However, the suggestion that Schubert and Kafka came to Budapest only to deal with their physical needs, such as “purging away” their pains or taking part in “amorous and gastronomic excesses,” leads to the conclusion that Hungary was a space for a menial type of cosmopolitan encounters, which suggest a colonial relationship between the visitors and Budapest. John Lukács, in his description of Budapest in the 1900s also highlights the overabundance of nightlife the city was Europe-famous for, and which enriched the place with an air of a “late aristocratic kind” and with “the desire to please [which] had a definite priority over the wish to be loved” (259).

Such a denigratory perception of Hungary heavily relies on a self-perception not devoid of the self-colonising attitude Alexander Kiossev describes in his study, “The Self-Colonizing Metaphor” (2008). Francis's intra-diegetic narration is speckled with references to information from the locals. One such instance can also be found in the above insertion “I gathered.” The positive values associated with the Austro-Hungarian Monarchical era of Budapest, such as the aristocratic tourists, the present company of great artists, even the French term *belle époque*, form an integral part of a self-colonising cosmopolitanism Kiossev describes as a “resilient image of ‘our own,’ which was both self-ironic and hostile toward others.” This presentation of Budapest in *Doctor Criminale* suggests that it is a place where cosmopolitanism is now already sadly absent. As Kiossev claims, such a self-irony is also concomitant with hostility towards others, and this might be linked to a specific

East-Central European inferiority complex,<sup>2</sup> since mourning the richer past self of a city also entails being blind to its present values.

Edward Soja denotes a parallel existence in chronologically different points of a single space a palimpsest (qtd. in Didier 7). Nostalgically looking back upon a desired but already past cosmopolitan urban space in the two investigated novels calls for a revisiting of the differentiation between the notions of cosmopolitanism, part of the Western tradition, and internationalism, belonging more to socialist modernity. Internationalism was the technical term in the Cold War-era Second Bloc, where the novels take place, and this term often denoted the cross-cultural experiences sought after in the texts in the name of cosmopolitanism. However, internationalism is the more politically loaded term, as Robbins argues (183); whereas, cosmopolitanism, per Appiah, is arguably an ancient notion of global citizenship, that is, “universality plus difference” (85). Nonetheless, my usage of the term “internationalism” was aimed at evoking the atmosphere of state socialist times since this is the endemic term for the historical temporality of Hungary between the 1950s and the 1990s.

At this point, it is also worthwhile to differentiate between these two notions for the sake of the following. How is cosmopolitanism different from internationalism as it was used in socialist Second Bloc countries during the Cold War era? As Emily Johansen claims, cosmopolitanism is often perceived as if in an everlasting present, contrasting with the historicity of the local (21). The traditional perception of cosmopolitanism posits this desired universal human community historically following a local and particular past. However, this chronological order was reversed in socialist Budapest as depicted in the analysed novels. The fictional bleak socialist spaces occupy the space of bustling cosmopolitan Central European metropolises of the pre-war times. Here, it is the past that is cosmopolitan and teeming with rich variety, and it is the socialist present that is international only in name. This socialist internationality could not enhance cultural understanding, because “no one spoke any Chinese” (Fischer 115). Therein lies one answer to the question of differentiating between the terms cosmopolitanism and internationalism: the former embraces differences, whereas the latter only aims at contact, but mostly on the grounds of a forced joint Proletarian sameness. The intercultural hybridisation

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2 I wrote about various literary versions of a specific East-Central European inferiority complex in my dissertation entitled *The Postmodern Baroque: Bruce Chatwin's Utz and British Fiction on East-Central Europe at the Time of the 1989 Political Changes* (2021), 14, 45–46.

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embedded in cosmopolitanism was pointed out by Marie Ostby, who argued that “cosmopolitanism rests on the hope that different societies will embody different values” (265). This acceptance of difference is absent in the socialist spaces described by the two novels. The fictional East-Central Europe is described as a space where people are constantly reminded of the absence of the past as a desire or a fantasy of cosmopolitanism.

### COSMOPOLITANISM IN FANTASYLAND

After the Fall of the Wall, Second Bloc metropolises quickly shifted from this schizophrenic internationalism towards becoming exotic tourist destinations for Westerners in the 1990s. This new role entailed a new type of cosmopolitan experiences. Malcolm Bradbury’s *Doctor Criminale* depicts the immediate aftermath of 1989. This textual space displays a split consciousness constituted in a Budapest that is always aware of its own absences, similarly to Fischer’s novel. Bradbury’s early 1990s Buda and Pest are also engaged in a deep desire for the presence of an unknown West. This desire is akin to one described in Lacan’s model of subjectivity. Lacan claims that, at the centre of subjects, there is always an absence of the loss of the symbolic mother; and the constant drive of the subject is directed to fulfil this void. In its primordial drive to fulfil an empty inside space, the Lacanian subject intends to pursue external objects which will substitute for its yearning for a lost centre. British novels tend to portray East-Central Europe as deeply desiring the West precisely in this manner, as if Western Europe were a long-lost central meaning of a very own East-Central European identity, as I also argue in my dissertation (Haraszts, *The Postmodern Baroque* 87). Francis, the English journalist who comes to Budapest in 1990 to continue his research on the great Hungarian philosopher, Bazlo Criminale, meets one of the renowned scholar’s disciples, Sandor Hollo. It is in their conversation during the sightseeing walk in which the ex-university lecturer shows Francis around Budapest that Hollo highlights the simulacrum nature of the city:

“Here we have built a great European city, two in fact, one old and one new. Our only problem is our European cities are not in Europe at all. Budapest is Buenos Aires on the Danube, all a pretend.” “How is it a pretend?” I asked. “First, nearly all

these buildings were not designed for here at all,” said Hollo, “See there our lovely Parliament, down by the river, which hardly meets, by the way. The architect loved your House of Commons, so he made us one. The Chain Bridge, built by a Scotsman in a kilt. Eiffel from France made the railway station. Our boulevards are from Paris, our coffee houses from Vienna, our banks are English, the Hilton American. You see why they make films here, we are everything. And this old castle, Fisherman’s Bastion, from which nobody has ever fished, by the way, was built as a fantasy at the turn of the century. So you see it is Disneyland, and we are Mickey Mouse.”

“I think it’s a magnificent city,” I said. “I too,” said Hollo, “A great unreal city.” (98–99)

This excerpt illustrates how the past cosmopolitan nature of Budapest, manifested in the contact the historical buildings maintain with Britain, the Eiffel Tower, or Vienna, and in an old desire for Budapest to belong to the West, created a space that is unreal and fantastic in its cosmopolitanism. However, this fantasyland, just like the Hungarian university teacher’s name, is entirely Hollo(w); it lacks its own culture. Instead of nurturing his own values, Hollo, and, in his opinion, his own city as well want to imitate others, especially Western Europe. This gesture embodies the opposite of what Ostby calls “rooted cosmopolitanism” (263); in fact, it could be labelled as rootless cosmopolitanism.

Such a rendering is a considerably essentialising reproach on Hollo’s part, and it is also a fundamentally structuralist criticism of the postmodern ethos where inherent meaning and quality are replaced by the interplay of surfaces. As Vinod Gopi states, Bradbury’s use of architecture highlights the postmodern qualities of Budapest, metonymically equating the capital city thus to random eclectic architectural quotations (159–161). The negative aspect of lacking any essential culture of its own makes Budapest a great “unreal city” in this novel.

Nonetheless, it is striking how the conceptualisation of this self-colonising rootlessness or Hollo(w)ness is put in a conversation with an Englishman who, in the main plotline of the novel, searches for the final meaning of a Hungarian philosopher and, finally, Hungary itself. An answer this passage seemingly gives to Francis for his epistemological quest is that the touristically essentialising meaning of Hungary can be found in its desire to collect everything from the West and copy all this.

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However, Hollo may very well have formulated the meaning of his land a little differently for someone else. His cynical and self-deprecatory answer may be a reaction to the very touristic curiosity Francis displayed instead of the cosmopolitan curiosity Appiah argues for (14). After thorough reconsideration of his journalistic mission, the absurdity of understanding a whole country by visiting it for two weeks, talking to a handful of Hungarians and viewing the most famous sights stands clearly in front of the reader. Consequently, Hollo's self-definition might be akin to what Homi Bhabha calls "sly civility." Bhabha claims that as a resistance to the Benjaminian "homogenous empty time of Western nationalist discourse" (qtd. in Bhabha 95), which describes the history of others as fixed civil progress, colonised discourses often fall back upon sly civility using a syntax of deferral by which colonised subjects create a "sign under erasure" (Bhabha 95). Consequently, reflecting on the capitalistic interest the West takes in Budapest, namely, the fact that they make films here pretending Budapest can be any other city, the meaning that Hollo might, in fact, hide behind his sly civility is expressed in this passage. He might not identify with everything being a copy in Budapest but feels that this is how Westerners see it. By the above quote, he might suggest that if they want to see Hungary as a simulacrum West, then he can very well serve this need. Hollo might only curtail this narrative about "Buenos Aires on the Danube" (98) precisely to serve the amount of interest these Westerners take in his country. Hollo, after all, is a yuppie, a very active young businessman, who immediately intends to take part in capitalism after 1989. Certainly, it could be stated that such a capitalistic background is just as detrimental to the effectiveness of post-1989 cosmopolitan encounters as the imperialistic one was during the Soviet oppression of Hungary.

### ENUNCIATIVE FOCALISATION OF CENTRAL EUROPEAN SPACES

The rooted, rootless, desired, or forced cosmopolitan encounters of the novels are determined by the spaces where they are set. Besides, spaces also give rise to specific subject positions for the focalisation of what Michel de Certeau calls the "indication of the body within the discourse" (116). These focalisations can be pinned down in characters, actions, and emotions that make certain appropriations of spaces possible, and which express as well as subvert the confined socialist Budapest as narrative thirdspaces. Thirdspace is Edward Soja's coinage that denotes a complex understanding of spaces in their representations. The term refers to the space

of the inhabitants and users who directly live the space across the symbols that accompany it (67). I use “thirdspace” accordingly as a space experienced in engagement with utopian, political, or artistic appropriations, in many cases subverting these ideological co-optations.

Fischer’s narrative of socialist Budapest returns to an accentuated working-class place, the GANZ-MÁVAG factory. This ideologically saturated place gives rise to alternative spatial experiences resulting in a complex thirdspace. The factory yard is typically appropriated by socialist discourse, since, on propagandistic pictures, Soviet lathe-operators are displayed while lathe-operating. Gyuri’s enunciative focalisation of the wall in the description provides an interesting perspective:

Not far from these displays, but diametrically opposed to them, on the other side of the yard, was an enormous caricature of US President Harry Truman made out of cardboard. At the foot of this caricature was a board with the inscription “FRIENDS OF TRUMAN” in wobbly calligraphy, and in less bold lettering, “I’m out to destroy the gains of the people of democratic Hungary, please help me by taking it easy. My thanks.” On the board, which looked like an old situations vacant notice that used to be hung outside the factory, various names had been inserted. There wasn’t much seasonal variation in this either. Top of the list was Pataki, Tibor, followed by Fischer, Gyorgy. (82)

This ironic fictionalised description features the GANZ factory as a thirdspace where Gyuri is at once an ostracised member of the socialist community and a boy whose only possibility of getting associated with America (a country of his desires) is this ludicrously didactic billboard in the heart of a lathe-factory in totalitarian Budapest. This type of cosmopolitanism, which John McBratney labels “detested cosmopolitanism” (530), accommodates a field of subjectivity where those who have desires to learn more about and have more contact with other cultures than the strictly propagated communist ones are immediately punished by the ruling social order. Gyuri focalises his workplace with the eye of the outcast, the instrument of whose banishing from the community is the much-desired fellow-feeling of cosmopolitan relations he dreams about.

This passage is also one instance of the many in Fischer's work where the burlesque style is in stark contrast with the tragic content of the end. The ludicrously overachiever socialist brigade's notice about Gyuri's "destroying the gains of the people" by simply being late eventually turns out to be true at the end when he takes part in the 1956 revolution. His being a "friend of Truman" also gains a tragic weight when he is forced to live abroad after the Soviet repression of the revolution. As Gerd Bayer claims, the earlier cheerful tone of the novel, promising light entertainment, later leaves the readers baffled with the tragic ending. This betrayal of the characters' belief in a better future teaches the readers metatextually not to trust narratives of positive progress, akin to what its protagonist, the 1956 freedom fighter, Gyuri learns (452). The style of the above quote seems to highlight the inner controversy of the content. It not only deals ironically with mendacious socialist propaganda of a suggested anti-communist alliance with the US but also emphasises the fantasy nature of such ties. After all, Gyuri, who kept dreaming about being a streetsweeper in Cleveland, could only secure an association with a cardboard Truman.

The desire for a closer knowledge of the Other is directed towards the Hungarians in *Doctor Criminale*. The English focaliser of Bradbury's novel gradually becomes immersed in his search for the great philosopher, Bazlo Criminale. He meets university teachers and publishers to gather information on him, but the great man is as elusive as fixed meaning in deconstruction. During his search, Francis meets Hungarians in touristic spaces, such as restaurants or the Matthias Church. Such spaces define how the Hungarians treat him: firstly, as a rich Westerner to be exploited, whom they ask to pay for their meals in the restaurant, and, secondly, as a higher authority, to whom they report even on each other.

She was blonde, blue-eyed, a Hungarian beauty ... ; Hollo waved at her; she waved back. "Oh, I just forgot to mention," he said, "I told a friend of mine you would buy her lunch. You don't mind, I hope?" (103)

...

We went outside, into the square. Here Ildiko stopped on the pavement, and stuck her arm through mine. ... "This fine philosopher, you know how he lives now?" asked Ildiko. "Fixing things," I said. "He talks to German and American businessmen in the bars and cafes, and promises he will find them some investment," said Ildiko, "Next he goes to some more bars and cafes, and talks to the government

officials, telling them he can find them hard currency and takeovers. So a little bit here, a little bit there, and everyone has something. Be a little cautious.” (106)

Thus, Francis, the English focaliser, saw the Hungarians as desperate people who expect Westerners to be like capitalist messiahs and authoritarian superiors to them. This role, allocated to the Brits in the novel, is manifested in scenes such as the restaurant dining and the sightseeing, in which the Hungarians compete with each other for Francis’s favours.

These Hungarians deliberately seek cosmopolitan encounters, but they do not approach the Other on equal terms. They behave self-colonisingly towards themselves vis-à-vis Francis, just as someone coming from what Alexander Kiossev calls “culture of absences” would. Ildiko has not known him for more than a couple of hours and is ready to report on her possibly much older friend, Sandor, to Francis. Reasons behind this are unclear: they might lie in old habits from the not-so-distant socialist system of informants, or in much more actual self-interest. Later, it also turns out that Sandor was not entirely selfless in introducing Ildiko to Francis either, as she in a later phase of the story, cheats some easy money out of the Englishman, probably in a prearranged way.

Self-colonisation in this case happens not only on the level of cultural identification, but also on a very concrete economic level. Hollo and Ildiko do not consider, or more likely do not have the means, to form a fruitful engagement, cultural or economic, with the visiting Englishman but take him as an instant source to be exploited with the quickest means possible. Thus, they make Francis invite them for a dinner with what Homi Bhabha calls “sly civility”—further showcased by the fact that Hollo pretends to have forgotten to mention that he had invited another Hungarian to the restaurant on Francis’s expense. The other, Ildiko, is already there, so the situation is irreversible without severe uncivility, which Francis would not risk, given that he meets the troublesome ex-university teacher in order to gain information from him on Bazlo Criminale. Hollo keeps the pretence of civility towards the Englishman, but, with Bhabha’s sly civility, his behaviour includes “the native refusal to satisfy the coloniser’s narrative demand” (Bhabha 99). This narrative demand would be to uphold the European norms in which nobody is forced into situations in which they have to pay without offering. However, honouring this European norm would uphold the coloniser’s narrative, namely, that the participants of this situation are equally

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gentlemen, equally well-off, and endowed with equal opportunities. As opposed to this narrative, Hollo's sly civility reveals the self-colonising aspect of the situation. The Hungarian ex-academic reads it in such a way that, if this rich Westerner wants information from him, it seems only fitting to manipulate him into a position where he cannot avoid paying for his time, perhaps even footing the bill for dinner with his friends.

In the above episode, Sandor and Ildiko, the Hungarian characters, are focalised in a way that their inferior economic and imaginatively self-colonised position in relation to Francis is enunciated clearly. The space is a rich restaurant in the Buda castle where they steal a ride in return for some information, but Francis fails to receive anything from them in the end. Although they are freeloading, their position, enunciatively focalised in the restaurant, is still that of a respected and welcome guest eating a dinner they cannot afford. They enter into the Lacanian realm of the Imaginary, embodying façade-like identities in that situation. The third-spaces of British fictional Budapest reflect an intersection of self-colonising desires. The enunciative focalisations display people either ironically missing and desiring real cosmopolitan experiences or exploiting the presence of somebody from another culture in order to appear higher prestige in their own. The scene between these three characters, indeed, pictures an "unreal city."

## PARTIAL COSMOPOLITANISM

By the various agencies enunciated in Budapest, the local engages in dialogue with larger narratives of the global, such as Communist internationalism and postmodernist multiculturalism. They all enrich the local possibilities of spatial cosmopolitanism or the lack thereof. In what Appiah names "partial cosmopolitanism," local characters give their specific answers to global narratives too: "loyalties and local allegiances determine ... who we are" (Appiah 5). In the last chapter of this study, I will investigate how, in Appiah's sense, these literary works display some of the answers that locals from Budapest provided for the global cosmopolitan issues Communism and immediate post-Communism raise.

The first half of *Under the Frog* describes the thirdspaces and the focalisations of the lived social order as giving rise to impossible, detested, nostalgic, and desired cosmopolitanisms of state socialism. Then, as the historical novel turns towards events of the 1956 Revolution, possibilities of real togetherness linking people with

different cultural or national backgrounds improve suddenly. The 1956 Revolution filled the empty and mendacious international community of Second Bloc nations with real (anti-totalitarian) meaning. Gyuri experiences his first love affair with Jadwiga, a Polish guest student, who, together with other Poles and Soviets, joins the Hungarian freedom fighting.<sup>3</sup> This community of shared values even creates a glorious few days of realised communism, since the fighters share their goods as people in the communist utopia would:

Jadwiga was wearing her quilted Soviet jacket, the pelt of a dead Soviet soldier, Gyuri thought bleakly. He had taken weapons from the dead internationalists, but weapons were somehow faithless, they didn't belong to anyone, they were just carried. (Fischer 233–234)

Calling the enemy “internationalists” is, of course, ironic, as the freedom fighters are the ones who really are international and cosmopolitan in their Hungarian–Polish–Russian loyalty against the nationalist and aggressive Soviet oppression. In the fictional 1956 freedom fight, a Polish and a Soviet soldier, named Witold and Victor, respectively, discuss the possibility of toppling Stalinism together in their respective countries with a Hungarian on the barricades: “‘Budapest today, Warsaw next week. Right Witold?’ Witold nodded in agreement. Then she added in Russian: ‘Moscow, let’s be realistic, one month.’ Victor grinned in approval” (234). This scene demonstrates how real cosmopolitan loyalties are formed over shared values of the 1956 Revolution, not because, but rather in opposition to the propagated proletarian internationalism. Thus, the Hungarian answer to the proposed cosmopolitan community of socialist world order, as it is rendered intelligible in Fisher’s book, is a split consciousness which takes internationalism seriously and realises it but discards forced forms of it.

The fact that the Polish student is a woman also surpasses previous proletarian international ties, which unanimously propagated inter-male contacts of cross-cultural fraternity, both in the case of the lathe-operators and in that of the basketball

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3 The historical reality of Soviet soldiers who deserted and sided with the Hungarian freedom fighters often appears in individual recollections. However, their existence and numbers are still debated among historians. A recent book by László Domonkos, *Átállt szovjet katonák 1956-ban* [Soviet Soldiers Deserting in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956] (2024), still fails to bring the historical authenticity of this topic to a standstill. What is certain, however, is the presence of this element in the legendary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

players. According to Gilroy, the more traditional dreams of libertarian equality propagated “wilfully ungendered humanisms” (16), which Fischer’s fictional 1956 manages to override. However, the fact that Jadwiga also takes the Soviets’ military clothing conveys a unanimity previously attributed to the politically loaded notion of internationalism. Still, by abusing the Soviet uniform, Jadwiga wears it to embody a meaning opposing its intended Russian terror. Thus, she embodies the spirit of 1956 in this controversial manner, creating a spatial universe where nothing is as it seems: a Polish woman in Soviet uniform fights for Hungarian freedom. We could claim this to be a truly cosmopolitan corporeality, to use Gilroy’s term (22).

*Doctor Criminale* paints a much bleaker picture about a simulacrum Budapest whose cosmopolitan days are past, and its desire to realise cross-cultural contacts ends up in a split consciousness. The split mindset of the novel’s image of Hungary is torn between the local answer to globalisation and its own self-colonising culture. Sandor Hollo is convinced that Hungary is split along the lines of locality and cosmopolitanism: a very closed and local-minded rural Hungary stands against the middle-class Budapest, whose desires for cosmopolitanism and nostalgic memories of a past *glorie* cannot unite and reach a commonly achieved partial cosmopolitan relationship with the Europe, which has just been made available by the 1989 Revolutions:

“I think it’s a magnificent city,” I said. “I too,” said Hollo, “A great unreal city. You know two million people live in Budapest, and every one is a European, when they are not being Magyar nationalists. All are artists, intellectuals, actors, dancers, filmmakers, great athletes, fine musicians. Unfortunately just for the moment, they drive a taxi, but one day ... Then go out into the Puszta, and you will see Europe has stopped. The peasants have carts with horses, there are men in sheepskins herding flocks of ducks. Or look down the Danube a little, you will find great marshes and old women squatting by the river, washing clothes in the mud. That is Hungary. Two million intellectuals, eight million peasants, and only one thing in common. Barak [sic] palinka, peach brandy.” (99)

The first sentence asserts a postmodern deferral of fixed meaning inasmuch as two opposed qualities determine Budapest dwellers at the same time. The second sentence comments on the simulacrum and fantasy existence of these people: they

only pretend to be artists and intellectuals when, in reality, they have to drive a taxi to make ends meet. The Anglo-American non-settlement imperialist outlook defines the next sentence, which suggests that the Hungarian countryside is indeed too backwards to be considered part of Europe at all. Rural parts of Hungary are depicted in the discourse of pre-modernity. The final statement, suggesting that the symbol of unity between rural and urban Hungary is only peach brandy, has various connotations. It can refer to touristic country promotion, a significant element of which is palinka. Ágnes Györke also argues for this understanding of the untranslated Hungarian word “palinka” left in the English text of *Under the Frog* (“Affective Encounters” 181). In addition, it can also refer to a widely-known stereotype about Hungarians and their tendency to make merry by crying as a result of alcoholic inebriation. Finally, it can also refer to a sad statistical fact about the country, namely, the excessive number of alcoholics in the population. After all, the vision in either case is shallow, or even denigratory. However, concerning cosmopolitanism, the above quote suggests that Hungarian space is divided between urban, that is, European and cosmopolitan and rural, that is, provincial territories.

The novels of Fischer and Bradbury show an absence of the multicultural metropolis that Budapest once was. They also show a desire for real and partial cosmopolitanism, which rarely becomes realised, such as in the exceptional revolutionary moments of 1956. However, lived cosmopolitanism predominantly appears as a desire (or an impeded community) suppressed by either socialist totalitarianism or by the quick arrival of capitalism overwhelming Hungary, either from the East or from the West. Cosmopolitan temporalities, such as the bustling pre-war Budapest, the working-class Csepel, or the touristy Buda sights, tinted with a colonialist gaze, appear in these novels as a desire impossible to be realised or a rare occasion to be exploited.

Local Budapest versions of Appiah’s partial cosmopolitanism created mostly split mindsets both during state socialist terror and the post-1989 period, in which reality, desire, nostalgia, and fantasy intersect with mendacious official discourses. Both novels describe Budapest’s relationship to foreigners as difficult. It is so because Hungarians have to escape not only the official totalitarian or capitalistic discourses of cosmopolitan contact, but also because these narratives exist in the (self-)colonising gestures of the Hungarian characters in the text. These narratives of (self-)colonisation, which the fictive Hungarians of the two novels evade by sly civility, certainly

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fail to nurture mutual respect in their contacts with the foreigners. Consequently, Bradbury's and Fischer's fictional depictions engage with cosmopolitan encounters as contained by places of absence, either because they are in the past, or because they exist only in dreams, or because they are not honest. Except for the glorious 1956 Revolution, real cosmopolitanism can hardly be realised in the tempocalities of Budapest shown in the analysed novels.

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