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Archiving the Literature and Theater of Dissent: Beyond the Canon

The most famous cultural figures of the dissident movements during the socialist era were, arguably, writers. This is not much of a surprise if one considers the traditional role literature has played in the history of Eastern European nation states and the significance Communist regimes attributed to literature. At the core of the mythologies of anti-communist dissent most often lay a triumvirate: the Polish journalist Adam Michnik, the Czech playwright Václav Havel, and the Hungarian writer György Konrád. They represented a larger group of Eastern European intellectuals who were active in various fields, contributed to several genres, and in the late 1970s, in parallel to their acceptance of the role of the “dissident,”¹ created a discourse of human rights in an alternative public sphere. To the pantheon of these authors, emigré writers like Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera, Josef Škvorecký, and Josef Škvorecký are often added, along with Herta Müller and Danilo Kiš, authors not from one of the countries of the Visegrad Four.

Recent scholarship in the field, however, shows that there is a need to revisit this somewhat schematic story and exclusivist canon, but in a way that does not make us lose sight of these prominent figures.² In accordance with the ambitions of the Handbook, this chapter highlights the history of collections representing literary dissent in a broad sense that includes nonconformist theater. The primary focus of the chapter is on practices of the memorialization and (self)documentation of literary dissent and on the process through which these kinds of collections gained recognition by state-financed institutions as part of a cultural heritage to be preserved. In several cases, these processes started well before the regime change, creating a significant gray zone. The introductory overview, which concentrates on poets and writers, will be followed by a case study written by Kathleen Cioffi on a significant collection of materials related to Polish underground theater.

Collections of dissident or non-conformist literature can be clustered roughly into three general categories as far as their founding dates are concerned. In the regular intervals of political thaw under communism, archiving policies also became somewhat more liberal, and it was easier to acquire papers

1 On the invention of “the dissident” see Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*.

2 See e.g. Kind-Kovács and Labov, “Samizdat and Tamizdat: Entangled Phenomena?”

by authors who had a difficult relationship with the regime. This is not, however, an absolute rule that applies to each of the countries in question to the same degree: from personal ties across the political scenery to guild solidarities or a simple insistence on value-free professionalism, there was a series of factors which motivated archivists to overrule political directives. The social web in many cases created a resistant milieu with no easily identifiable center, and thus it remained difficult to discern and deal with for the state apparatus. A second cluster consists of collections that were made public in the 2000s and 2010s. These collections were founded at a time when most East European states were becoming relatively stable democracies, though their memory politics varied in their emphasis: the states that joined the European Union reclaimed greater recognition as part of a common European history, while post-Soviet states (i.e. states which had become Soviet republics after the end of World War II) put particular emphasis on their cultural independence from Russia. Formerly oppressed patriotic and nationalist sentiments have been driving forces throughout the region up to the present day, but the effects of the recent radicalization of politics cannot be accurately measured yet. Archive holdings established in exile should also be mentioned here. Since these collections are dealt with in a separate chapter in this Handbook, I will limit myself to mentioning the fact that these collections were often transferred to the home country, typically beginning around 2005, when collectors passed away or were too old to continue to tend to the collections, or because of a lack of funding, it was no longer possible to maintain the collections in the country where they had been created. Finally, the archives and collections that usually come to mind in the first place in this context are the ones that were founded shortly after the regime change, during the so-called transitional period. At this time, more resources were devoted to the creation of new archival institutions and to the reorganization of existing archival settings to address the post-socialist heritage.³

Certain types of literatures clearly enjoyed being in the spotlight in Eastern Europe after the regime changes. Among the “archetypes of dissent,” to use a term coined by one commentator, prison and camp literature stands out.⁴ The works themselves are telling, and the kinds of stories they tell are often well-documented in museums and archives throughout the region, from the Baltics to the Balkans. It is not hard to see why. These works involve cases in which politics most dramatically interfered with poetry. The tragedy of the individual is always compelling and easy to relate to: this makes single tragic stories effective vehicles of memory politics and likely to meet with the interest of a wide audience. Authors of literature directly or indirectly reflecting on camp or prison

3 For brief overviews see e.g. Apor, “Museum Policies in Hungary”; Kuutma and Kroon, “Museum Policy in Transition from Post-Soviet Conditions to Reconfigurations in the European Union.”

4 Gruenwald, “Response: Camp Literature: Archetype for Dissent.” See the entire debate: Gruenwald, “Yugoslav Camp Literature: Rediscovering the Ghost of a Nation’s Past-Present-Future”; Oja, “Toward a Definition of Camp Literature”; Hayden, “Using a Microscope to Scan the Horizon.”

experiences could be presented as unambiguous cases in which, at least at first glance, readers do not need to deal with the kinds of complicated questions that arise in cases of authors who integrated into socialist society. Particular attention was given, it seems, to poets who did not survive persecution, including authors who made what have come to be regarded as major contributions to literature and authors who did not. The celebrated Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus, who gained the title of Hero of Ukraine in 2005, was known up until the late-1980s only among a limited circle of dissenters who read works by him which had been smuggled out of prison camps in samizdat and tamizdat publications. When he died in 1985, he was widely mourned as a martyr of the communist dictatorship in underground and émigré circles.⁵ His reburial in November 1989 in Kyiv marked a significant step towards the political transition, and a rapid canonization process elevated him to the Ukrainian literary pantheon. The Stus family played an active role in furthering this quick and well-deserved acknowledgement: they donated Stus' papers to the T. H. Shevchenko Institute of Literature to give the public better access to a part of his legacy that had been saved, the trials of his life notwithstanding.⁶ The acquisition was initiated at the same time by the philologist Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska, who had belonged to dissident circles during Soviet times and had mentored the poet, and Vasyl Stus' son Dmytro, who also authored a biography on his father.⁷ However, the acquisition only took place after Ukraine had become independent in 1991. Since then, Stus' legacy has been a battleground between the various political groups in a country deeply divided by ethnic, religious, and cultural tensions, a country which now is in the throes of war.

Vasyl Stus provided an example of a poet whose celebration as a martyr opened the gates for his canonization, which could be seen as a retrospective "compensation" for his not being recognized in his time. In contrast to Stus' high status after the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of an independent Ukraine, the significance of the poets of the Füveskert ("Grassy garden") in Hungarian literature is less established.⁸ This group of literati was named after a little park in front of the prison chapel. Attila Gérecz, the best known member in the group, was imprisoned in 1950 and released by revolutionaries during the 1956 uprising, only to die a couple of days later in the fighting.⁹ As he had begun to write poetry only two years before he died (while in prison), he did not have time to prove his innovative potential, and even though Gérecz's talent is acknowledged, the poems that survived have not persuaded so far the majority of literary critics of their unique qualities as far as poetic features are concerned. Tibor Tollas, another member of this group, became a leading figure in

5 Pavlyshyn, "Martyrology and Literary Scholarship."

6 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Vasyl Stus Collection", by Orysia Kulick, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

7 Stus, *Vasyl Stus*.

8 Ray and Tollas, *From the Hungarian Revolution*.

9 Hajnal, *A Gérecz-hagyaték*.

Hungarian émigré circles, while others either remained silent for the rest of their lives or started to publish both in exile and, after their rehabilitation, in journals in Hungary. Géza Béri was the only member of the group who was not allowed to publish his book of poetry.¹⁰ Some of his poems contain references to his experiences in prison and so, one could argue, allegorically to the wider world of state socialism. In the absence of direct evidence, however, one can only hypothesize that this might have played a role in the decisions by publishing houses, before the change of regimes, not to publish his works. This group is interesting, however, not so much because of the careers of its members under communism, but rather because of its fate after 1989. The poet-entrepreneur Kamil Kárpáti and his publishing house devoted great energy to making this circle of imprisoned poets famous (and with considerable success), starting with Gérecz, whom he dubbed the “poet of the revolution” and the “martyr poet.”¹¹ The profile of his publishing house was shaped by the Füveskert poets, and in 1992 Kárpáti even established a Gérecz Prize awarded to the best young poet by a committee chaired by Kárpáti each year. This private initiative was taken up in 2002 by the Ministry of Culture, and the Gérecz Prize was turned into a state award. Gérecz achieved cult status, as demonstrated, for instance, by a number of homepages devoted to his poetry, including an online collection of materials related to his life and work, including scanned images of letters and manuscripts, secret police files, and documents of his trial.¹²

Most of the Füveskert poets became noted authors whose works were published eventually, either in Hungary or in émigré periodicals. There is, however, a more hidden part of the European literary heritage: works that, for whatever reason, were never published. A fascinating research project initiated by Ines Geipel and Joachim Walther in 2000 and funded by the Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship in Germany created an archive of “suppressed literature in the GDR.”¹³ The archive collects and makes available all kinds of manuscripts that remained unpublished, including dramas, prose, and poetry. Followed by a series of public appeals, citizens (mostly writers themselves or their descendants) started to donate relevant materials to the growing archive. Thus, Geipel and Walther, taking advantage of the snowball effect, reached more and more silenced writers and acquired over 70,000 pages of manuscripts.¹⁴ One of the authors was the young Edeltraud Eckert, who was sen-

10 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Géza Béri Papers”, by Tamás Scheibner and Tünde T. Tóth, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

11 Kárpáti, ed., *Gérecz Attila, a költő; Kárpáti, Fehér könyv*. See also Komoróczy, *A szellemi nevelés fórumai*.

12 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “The Gérecz Heritage Digital Archive”, by Tamás Scheibner and Tünde T. Tóth, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

13 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Archives of Suppressed Literature in the GDR”, by Uwe Sonnenberg, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

14 Buchholz, “Von der Ohnmacht unterdrückter Autorinnen und Autoren und der retrospektiven Macht der Archive,” 170–71, 182.

tenced to 25 years in prison in 1950 and was allowed to keep a notebook as a reward in 1953 for her high productivity in forced labor. She wrote 101 poems in the manner of Rainer Maria Rilke until she perished two years later.¹⁵ The objective of the archive is to contribute to the “moral rehabilitation” of authors like her and to provide a better understanding of the entire literary field, which is often identified with socialist realism, but which was much more diverse if one takes underground literature into account.

The initiatives discussed above were successful in large part because of a public mindset which sought a kind of retroactive justice. The actual poetic quality of the texts in these kinds of processes can sometimes play a significant role, but in the final account, in most of the cases in post-1989 Eastern Europe, it has been of secondary importance. Canonization has been driven, rather, by a call for a sort of moral settling of accounts. Whatever the motivations (whether scholarly or private, colored by personal ambitions, business strategies, or a political drive to revisit a troubled past), memorialization is founded on an acknowledgement of an author’s efforts to maintain his or her integrity, moral courage, and personal autonomy in a radically hostile human and material environment.

The most significant archives on cultural opposition and non-conformism in the literary scene are arguably the ones that were started as private initiatives by dissenters themselves, grew into recognized institutions after the regime change, and became state-supported repositories while usually maintaining their NGO status. In this context, Libri Prohibiti, founded by samizdat publisher and signatory to Charter ‘77 Jiří Gruntorád in Prague in 1990, should be mentioned perhaps first and foremost.¹⁶ The archive houses a vast array of collections consisting of tens of thousands of samizdat and tamizdat materials, manuscripts, books, and sound and audiovisual recordings of underground events. Given the prominence of literary figures in Czech and Slovak internal dissidence and exile (of whom Eva Kantůrková, Ivan Klíma, Hana Ponická, Zdeněk Urbánek, Ludvík Vaculík, Jan Vladislav, and then president Václav Havel were founding members of the Society for Libri Prohibiti), the materials relevant to literature and theater are extensive. This calls attention to one of the main distinctive features of Czech samizdat production in comparison with other countries where significant samizdat cultures developed: the large proportion of works of belle lettres among the samizdat publications.¹⁷ The core of the collection was gathered by Gruntorád and his fellow dissidents beginning in the late 1970s. Thanks to their coordinated efforts, they were able to preserve the bulk of the materials despite regular po-

15 Geipel, *Zensiert, verschwiegen, vergessen*, 48–66.

16 See the various collections related to COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Society of Libri Prohibiti”, by Michaela Kůželová, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

17 See Skilling, *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*; Skilling and Wilson, *Civic Freedom in Central Europe*; Goetz-Stankiewicz, *Good-Bye, Samizdat*; Kind-Kovács, *Written Here, Published There*; Machovec, *Views from the Inside*.

lice raids and the imprisonment of some members of the group. The archive is therefore seen by many as a grass-roots collective achievement the value of which is demonstrated by the impressive number of small-scale donations by private citizens even three decades after its establishment. This is a significant difference between this archive and the state archives in the region that are often seen as less secure places for donations of private papers: given the many times that materials in archives were either destroyed in the twentieth century or limitations were put on their accessibility to the public, people became understandably less suspicious of repositories with greater independence from the state. Indeed, the founding principles of Libri Prohibiti include a commitment to institutional independence, which is seen as fundamental if “the citizen’s right of access to information without any hindrance” is truly to be protected as “one of the pillars of democracy.”¹⁸ This is a value shared by other private archives, such as the KARTA Center in Warsaw and the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives in Budapest, which also have similarly important collections of samizdat, though they are somewhat less relevant to the field of literary history, since the profile of Polish and Hungarian literary samizdat culture is somewhat different.

Institutional independence, however, is not easy to maintain, and most NGOs are still dependent on state subsidiaries. The Artpool Art Research Center, which was made accessible in a downtown Budapest apartment in 1992 and which holds a unique collection in interart genres like visual poetry and sound poetry, lost its municipal and state support in 2014. It was made a separate unit of a large national institution, the Museum of Fine Arts, because this was the only way to ensure its survival.¹⁹ Up to the present day, artist and former samizdat publisher György Galántai’s founding principle of the “active archive,”²⁰ which interconnects archivism and artistic creation with social activism, has not been challenged. This should not, however, tempt us to ignore the fact that the emergence of populist politics all over Europe and “illiberal democracies”²¹ in Eastern Europe poses a considerable threat to both private and public collections that support critical thinking.²²

The majority of archives mentioned so far were established or institutionalized right after the regime change or in the early 1990s. The frequent men-

18 Libri Prohibiti’s *Annual Report 2017*. Accessed October 11, 2018. http://www.libpro.cz/docs/3019-lp-vyrocní-zpráva-2017-en-v01-web_1526402236.pdf

19 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Artpool Art Research Center”, by Balázs Beöthy, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

20 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*.

21 The classic interpretations of the term remain: Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”; Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom*. For a critical view on the term, consult Müller, *What Is Populism?*

22 Cultural policies in such states tend to concentrate financial sources to a few selected institutions or personages based on political loyalty, and aspire to take control of primary sources by limiting access to them—instead of launching wide-scale digitization programs. For analyses of Eastern European cases, see Kubik, “Illiberal Challenge to Liberal Democracy”; Kristóf, “Cultural Policy in an Illiberal State”; Wilkin, “The Rise of ‘Illiberal’ Democracy.”

tion of symbolic dates like 1989 or 1992, however, should not obscure the fact that the practice of archiving non-conformist literature has a longer history, and not simply in the sense that private collections had been formed decades earlier. While Libri Prohibiti and Artpool in their origins were indeed closely connected to active opposition to the regime, other collections were preserved within state archives centrally funded and closely supervised by the communist authorities. Arguably, in countries like Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, several state repositories existed in which the regime changes did not usher in any profound difference in archiving practices. Rather, the political changes brought about changes in public access to the existing collections. One compelling case is that of the eminent Slovak writer Dominik Tatarka, who underwent a transformation from a devoted communist to an outstanding figure of the opposition and a visual symbol of the Prague 1968 revolution thanks to the now famous dramatic photo in which he faces a tank while opening his shirt.²³ Tatarka was banned from publishing in Czechoslovakia from 1969 until 1989, but this did not prevent Marie Krulichová at the Museum of Czech Literature (PNP) from acquiring his correspondence and manuscripts in 1979 and 1981.²⁴ Tatarka could not sell his papers to the Museum directly, but Krulichová and the dissident historian Ján Mlynárik, who was mediating in the deal, managed to find a solution: they used an antiquarian bookseller on Karlova Street, who first purchased the materials from Tatarka, and then the Museum bought them from the bookshop. Krulichová was not only courageous as a state employee who dared collect samizdat authors, she was shrewd as someone who was able to formulate things in a way that appeared acceptable to higher fora.²⁵ On this occasion, she and Mlynárik took advantage of a law in effect at the time: booksellers had to offer literary archival materials for purchase to the Museum. This is how Tatarka, stricken by bad financial conditions, was able to make some money.

One might regard Tatarka's story as atypical, given his former high stance as a communist writer *and* the fact that he was a Slovak favored by Prague intellectual circles. In the very different case of the Czech Catholic poet Jan Zahradníček, however, similar patterns prevailed.²⁶ Zahradníček was imprisoned in 1951 and granted amnesty in 1960, but only so that he would be able to die at his home. A fellow Catholic prison guard and printer Václav Sisel, who was working in the Pankrác Prison print shop at the time, hid and saved his secret manuscripts, which found their way to the Museum during the Prague Spring in 1968. An edition of *Čtyři léta* (Four years) was published the following year, but apart from that, until 1989 Zahradníček's poems were

23 Mlynárik, "Tatarka: Silenced in Slovakia"; Pichler, "Dominik Tatarka."

24 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Dominik Tatarka Collection at the Museum of Czech Literature", by Michaela Kůželová, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

25 Sládek, "Svědectví o několika letech života Marie Krulichové."

26 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Jan Zahradníček Collection at the Museum of Czech Literature", by Michaela Kůželová, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

published only in exile or in samizdat. Nonetheless, the PNP continued to buy his manuscripts, as they had even in the 1950s, when he was in prison. In 1991, Krulichová remembered the many titles that were not included in the yearly reports on acquisitions in order to avoid confrontation with representatives of cultural politics.

With these practices, employees of the PNP effectively supported underground authors or their families. In such cases, however, the people involved were not necessarily or exclusively driven by any kind of oppositional attitude. The Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest (the Hungarian equivalent of PNP), for instance, started to collect samizdat with the tacit consent of director Ferenc Botka, who was a committed member of the party.²⁷ At the same time, he was committed as an archivist, and he believed that (almost) everything that was published in Hungarian should be preserved—a view that was shared by many employees without regard their political stance. Botka and his colleagues probably believed what Krulichová later put as follows: “This ‘treasure of paper,’ which we have inherited from previous generations, obliges us: we had and have the urge to continue their work and to contribute to the mapping of Czech literature in its entirety.”²⁸ At the same time, this did not mean that Botka was initiating clandestine practices like regular purchase of materials from György Gadó, a member of the democratic opposition and a distributor of samizdat. The arrival of Csaba Nagy to the Department of Manuscripts in 1983 made a real difference in this regard. Nagy himself was a fervent reader of samizdat, and he became a leading expert in Hungarian literature in exile. The personal input of museum professionals and archivists was decisive in such cases.

Alongside archivists and private individuals, two other groups played crucial roles in documenting non-conformist literature: representatives of state apparatuses, such as censorship offices, and social contacts, agents, and officers of the political police. The secret services were very active throughout the region, but in the GDR, Romania, and the member states of the Soviet Union they played even larger roles, not only by exerting control over the societies under their guard via surveillance and state coercion, but also by preserving documents and artifacts of the non-conformist cultural heritage. This was a necessary consequence of the sheer amount of materials they collected and stored. Lithuanian existentialist poet and writer Bronius Krivickas,²⁹ who was killed at a young age by the Soviet security services in 1952,³⁰ is a case in point.³¹ Krivickas was active in the literary scene in the late 1930s and

27 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Samizdat Collection at the Petőfi Literary Museum”, by Tamás Scheibner, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

28 Krulichová, “Přírůstky, o nichž se mlčelo,” 119.

29 Mykolaitytė, “Būtiðkøjø apmàstymø metmenys broniaus krivicko prozoje.”

30 Gaškaitė-Žemaitienė, “The Partisan War in Lithuania from 1944 to 1953,” 35.

31 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Bronius Krivickas Collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

1940s, but he did not have the time to fully blossom as a poet, and by the time the regime fell, he had been long forgotten. He was discovered by the fellow poet and literary critic Virginijus Gasiliūnas in the late 1980s. Part of Krivickas' oeuvre was kept by a woman living in Biržai, where Krivickas had been teaching in a local high school before joining the anti-Soviet partisans in 1945. The other part of his work, however, ended up in the MGB/KGB archives and would have been lost forever had the Party not launched a campaign to discredit the Lithuanian partisan movement. To fabricate evidence of the alleged brutality of the partisans, all related materials were collected from the KGB, including the manuscripts of Krivickas' works, although they were of no use from the perspective of the aims of the project. The materials had been kept in the Communist Party Archives, and they were transferred to the Archives of the Lithuanian Institute of History when the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Today, Krivickas is a canonical poet in Lithuania, who has made his way into the school curriculum. Again, Krivickas's case is not unique. Manuscripts of other persecuted authors had a similar trajectory. It is also suspected that KGB officers took many files home when they retired, as in the case of the photo album documenting the student Romas Kalanta's self-immolation protest in 1972.³²

Certainly, former employees of the secret services were hardly the only people to have played crucial roles in preserving documents of cultural opposition. The primary sources, naturally, were or are the authors themselves and their families. Some did not invest considerable efforts in preserving manuscripts or correspondence, but in many instances an author systematically preserved not only his own papers, but also those of some of his or her acquaintances. Romania, for instance, offers a series of particularly telling examples in this respect, precisely because of the extremely harsh conditions created by the local Communist regime. Under Ceaușescu, any kind of dissident activity was strictly and often brutally punished, so cultural opposition was hardly an option.³³ Even the notion of cultural dissent is difficult to define in this context, and this affects memorialization and the types of collections that were created in the country. Among the relevant collections that survived and were made public, many were assembled by individuals, and collections created by minority figures tend to prevail, partly due to the fact that several archives created by the German and Hungarian minorities enjoy financial support from two states. Church archives also became very significant once they were given forms of compensation for their losses under communism and regained possession of some of the buildings they had owned. The writer and Lutheran priest Eginald Schlattner, for instance, donated his papers to the

32 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Romas Kalanta Collection", by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

33 See Petrescu, "Eastern Europe, Central Europe or Europe?," 238; Petrescu, "The Resistance That Wasn't."

Friedrich Teutsch Centre for Dialogue and Culture of the Evangelical Church A.C. in Romania, which became the primary repository of Saxon private papers after the Church regained the Teutsch House in 2000.³⁴ Here and elsewhere, collections like this one started to pour into regional archives, usually after 2000. A modest increase in people's trust in state repositories and the fact the people who owned the collections were aging contributed to this trend, although it greatly varied from country to country. However, many collectors remain suspicious of state institutions in Eastern Europe, even though practice suggests that donating one's private archive to a public one could greatly contribute to one's (re)canonization, as Schlattner's example demonstrates.

The period beginning in the early-1990s is frequently seen as a permanent archival revolution in Eastern Europe which only began to slow in recent years, as restrictions have been put on access to collections and archives in several states, complicated by the situation in the Ukraine, where the undermining of the Russo-Soviet legacy led to greater access to the KGB archives.³⁵ No research environment is more hostile than the one in Moldova, where access to archives documenting the period is very restricted. Under these circumstances, private individuals driven by a sense of solidarity with fellow professionals are trying to deal with the situation by sharing their documents with one another. Literary scholar Petru Negură and historian Igor Cașu were both members of a commission set up in 2010 for the study and evaluation of the local communist regime. Thus, for a short time, they had access to a plethora of archival materials, including KGB files on literary figures from the Archive of the Intelligence and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova (ASISRM), which otherwise is not open to the public. By making these papers accessible to colleagues in their private archives, they perform a great service to the academic community. They also offer an example today of how individuals can resist regimes that aim radically to restrict access to information.³⁶

Despite the difficulties and prevalent distrust, the past fifteen years has born witness to an influx of materials of dissident literature to public archives, materials donated by private individuals, groups of various kinds (visual artists, students, musicians, etc.), and institutions. The creation of the collection of the Belgrade International Theatre Festival is an exemplary case. BITEF, which is still organized every year, was founded in 1967 in accordance with Tito's "non-alignment policy": it was an eminent propaganda event of the regime to show how open-minded Yugoslav culture policy was. It was indeed a very significant event for avant-garde performing arts in Europe, where

34 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Eginald Schlattner Collection at Teutsch Haus Sibiu", by Cristina Petrescu and Corneliu Pintilescu, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

35 E.g. Jones, "Unearthing Soviet Secrets in Ukraine's Archives."

36 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Petru Negură Private Collection", by Andrei Cusco and Cristina Petrescu, 2018; COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Igor Cașu Private Collection", by Andrei Cusco and Cristina Petrescu, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

theater companies from East and West could meet.³⁷ A conservative turn in the early-1970s resulted in increased surveillance by the secret services, but BITEF still managed to preserve its relatively liberal character and successfully resisted excessive Soviet attempts to influence its programs. The bulk of the materials was transferred to the Historical Archives of Belgrade in 2004 by Jovan Ćirilov, the director at the time, who was motivated by the desire to find a safe place for the collection, where it would not be destroyed and would remain accessible to anyone interested.³⁸

The BITEF collection reminds us that it is wise to maintain a certain flexibility when cultural opposition or the literature of dissent is discussed, as neither of these two things can be given a precise definition applicable to all times and geographical locations. It is always the given context and research questions that are decisive regarding such issues, and one needs to assume that there will be a large “gray zone,” given the complicated matrix of political, institutional, and personal relationships. Even within one oeuvre, certain works could harmonize with the given state’s cultural policy, while others were changed, sometimes slightly, sometimes drastically, by the censors, and some were never published. The Lithuanian poet Antanas Miškinis made his peace with the regime³⁹ when he returned from Siberia in the late 1950s. He was allowed to publish some of his writings, but not the works he had written during his time in Siberia, which were only published after 1989.⁴⁰ In the GDR, Brigitte Reimann, who favored some kind of socialist humanism, criticized the regime for not meeting its own standards: she was published, but in censored versions.⁴¹ It is important to note that the official cultivation of her memory was started by the Neubrandenburg Literary Center, which was established in the 1970s as the first institution of its kind in East Germany. It was charged with the task of promoting regional literary legacies.⁴² Literary centers like the one in Neubrandenburg, with an interest in cultivating regional authors, often had a role in preserving the heritage of a writer, even if s/he was not a flagship author, but rather belonged to the gray zone.

Processes of archiving, memorialization, and canonization do not always overlap, but it is still worth mentioning some changes on the *moyenne durée* which further explains the recent interest in dissident literature and, in par-

37 See Dasgupta, “BITEF.”

38 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “BITEF Collection”, by Jacqueline Nießer, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

39 See Rubavičius, “A Soviet Experience of Our Own,” 92–93.

40 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Antanas Miškinis Collection”, by Saulius Grybkauskas, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

41 On Reimann’s complicated “double life,” see especially Bircken and Hampel, *Als habe ich zwei Leben*; Braun, “Bücher Waren Ihr Alltag, Schreiben War Ihr Leben”; Hampel, *Wer Schrieb Franziska Linkerhand?*

42 COURAGE Registry, s.v. “Brigitte Reimann Archive”, by Uwe Sonnenberg, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

ticular, political poetry.⁴³ In the 1990s, when optimism about the future of liberalism was at its height, political poetry abounding in references to the specific contexts of State Socialism began to seem largely inadequate.⁴⁴ After a relatively short period, during which a market for previously banned and samizdat works emerged, literary cultures in the new democracies did not place great emphasis on the political, at least not in the sense as they had in the 1980s underground. No doubt, literary groups competing for dominance clashed over resources and institutions, and they publicly contrasted their political visions and the diverse traditions on which they intended to rely. Aesopian language, however, no longer had a thrilling effect on the reader, and over-sophisticated systems of political references did not engage a slowly shrinking audience. While in some countries an attempt was made to reclaim the romantic status of the poet as a spokesperson for the people pointing at social issues, literary criticism tended to give preference to highly elaborated self-referential poetic languages inspired by the neo-avant-garde and playful representations of transitional identities. In an epoch defined by the umbrella-term “postmodern,”⁴⁵ not all formerly celebrated nonconformist “political poets” were forgotten or displaced, but works were favored that demonstrated an obvious potential for addressing issues of universal or transhistorical experiences. This trend is tangible in the reception of eminent poets such as Zbigniew Herbert and György Petri. As Coetzee argued right after the regime change, the canonical position of Herbert was best ensured by the “political” poems that could be read as a reflection on the eternal conflict between the individual and the tyrant or on the mechanisms of power,⁴⁶ while pieces with less detached references to the political reality of Polish Communism were expected to lose their privileged canonical position. The devaluation of Petri’s congenial book of political poems, published originally in samizdat as *Örökkétfő* (Eternal Monday), was perhaps even more spectacular in the 1990s. In today’s Eastern Europe, however, such more direct political poems seem to regain their vitality as parables and allegories of contemporary situations.

In recent years, another factor has given extra fuel to the aforementioned boom of establishing and opening up collections of dissident culture: techni-

43 Gömöri, “Édes hazám”; Bárány, “My Sweat Homeland.”

44 In Poland, the status of the writers was shaken by a series of other factors too, largely because of their tense relationship with worker leaders of Solidarność. See Tighe, “Polish Writers and the Transition from Socialist ‘unreality’ to Capitalist ‘Reality.’” Tighe saw a complicated battlefield including conflicts between generations, while Bolecki presented a more gradual flow of an “unfolding democracy.” See Bolecki, “The Totalitarian Urge vs. Literature.”

45 See Calinescu, “Romanian Literature”; Iovine, “Bulgarian Literature after the Revolution”; Stoicheva, “Post-1989 Bulgarian Literary Theory and Criticism”; Kirss, “Circumnavigation and Transplantation”; Sileniaks, “Decolonization and Renewal of Latvian Letters”; Kvietauskas, *Transitions of Lithuanian Postmodernism*. For a particularly interesting case study that connects dissident antipolitics and the post-socialist literary canonization, see Horváth, “The Cultural (Un)Turn in Hungarian Literary Scholarship in the 1990s.”

46 Coetzee, “Zbigniew Herbert and the Figure of the Censor.”

cal advances that allow the digitization of manuscripts without much effort. This has allowed open access to the papers of Danilo Kiš for the public at the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, where visitors can consult the digitized versions,⁴⁷ and it has enabled the creation of online archives such as the one documenting the International Festival of New Theater Eurokaz created by Croatian theater professional Gordana Vuk⁴⁸ and Zofia Łuczko's digital repository of the heterogenous Polish artist group of the 1980s Pitch-in Culture.⁴⁹ The future of the cultural heritage of dissent in Eastern Europe perhaps lies in the hands of those individuals who find ways to get their collections digitized and shared. The ethos of amateurism (not to be confused with dilettantism), which was very important for individuals fighting a regime of cynical technocrats under late socialism, might gain new relevance today. If private initiatives find an established institutional partner which provides technology and assistance in the process, the result will be as significant and spectacular as the online archive introduced by the following case study on the Alternative Theater Archive.

Case Study: Archiwum Teatru Alternatywnego

The alternative theater movement in Poland was, throughout its thirty-five-year history (1954–89), intimately connected with politics. From the movement's inception in the mid-1950s Thaw, participants judged their efforts not only by the standards of art but also by whether they were succeeding in becoming the "life breath of the epoch," in the words of a member of the Studencki Teatr Satyryków (Student Satirists' Theater).⁵⁰ The movement's ability to fulfill this role waxed and waned with political trends in the country. As the Thaw gave way to what was called in Poland the *mała stabilizacja* (small stabilization) of the 1960s, censorship got stricter, and the theaters' ability to undertake politically engaged performance was curbed. However, the events of 1968—including government repression of student-led protests, an anti-Semitic propaganda campaign, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia—eventually resulted in a theater movement which was even more closely connected to the political climate in the country. Starting in around 1970, the movement began to define itself as a site of resistance to the regime and a space of freedom and truth.

47 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Danilo Kiš Collection", by Sanja Radović, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

48 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Gordana Vnuk Collection", by Lidija Bencetić, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

49 COURAGE Registry, s.v. "Pitch-in Culture Archive", by Patrycja Kruczkowska and Xavery Stanczyk, 2018. Accessed: October 11, 2018.

50 Jarecki, "Warszawski STS," 422.

The Archiwum Teatru Alternatywnego (Alternative Theater Archive) collects material that relates to the 1970s and 1980s stage of the alternative theater movement. During this period, these theaters, most of which were originally funded by student organizations and called “student theaters,” lost their university sponsorship and were placed under the auspices of various professional state entities. They began call themselves “alternative theaters,” and they reached their heyday, both artistically and as a form of protest. The theaters also started to attract scholarly attention, particularly from sociologists such as Jeffrey Goldfarb, whose book about Polish student theaters in the 1970s was called *The Persistence of Freedom*, and Aldona Jawłowska, who argued in her book *Więcej niż teatr* (More than theater) that the movement amounted to a countercultural and oppositional lifestyle.⁵¹ The theaters themselves varied in their levels of political engagement. Members of some of the theaters identified their primary purpose as fighting against the regime rather than devising performances. Some of them were individually involved in oppositional work with the Komitet Obrony Robotników (Workers’ Defense Committee, KOR) and, later, with Solidarity. But others were more interested in making art and saw theater as a way to escape politics rather than engage in it.

The ATA was started in early 2009 through the initiative of Zbigniew Gluza—a journalist, editor, publisher, and the president of the KARTA Center Foundation—together with Dorota Buchwald, currently the director of the Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego (Zbigniew Raszewski Theater Institute) but at that time the manager of the Theater Documentation Department of the Theater Institute, a department which had originally been maintained by the Actors’ Union. Gluza was an opposition activist in the 1980s and had been a participant in the alternative theater movement when he was a student in the 1970s. During the Martial Law period (December 1981–July 1983), among other works he wrote and edited for underground publications (including the underground newspaper *Karta*), he published a book about one of the alternative theaters, Teatr Ósmego Dnia (Theater of the eighth day). This book, entitled *Ósmy Dzień* (Eighth day), was published in the so-called second circulation (i.e., the Polish underground press) in 1982.

In 2009, Gluza wrote a letter to his former alternative theater compatriots asking for them to contribute to the archive. The letter, which remains posted on ATA’s website, reads in part, “It has been twenty years since the transformation, after which many of you left the stage. But this, perhaps paradoxically, does not weaken, but rather reinforces the meaning of the proposed venture. It is not only about the theater, but about the energy of alternative life, which in the PRL [Polish Peoples’ Republic] was unique on the stage. Your, sometimes brilliant, works of art were not only an artistic creation, but also a construction of reality in which an independent social life could manifest it-

51 Goldfarb, *The Persistence of Freedom*; Jawłowska, *Więcej niż teatr*.

self." Gluza may have initially intended for the Alternative Theater Archive to be another of several archival collections that the KARTA Center Foundation curates or co-curates. However, in the end the ATA instead became a separate part of the Raszewski Theater Institute's Archives. Nevertheless, Gluza contributed items from his own personal archive to the ATA, including a copy of his book *Ósmy Dzień*.

From its beginning to the present, the curator of the collection has been Agnieszka Kubaś, in 2009 still a graduate student studying with Lech Śliwonik, a professor and scholar at the Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Arts in Warsaw who specializes in alternative theater.⁵² Kubaś has undertaken the structuring of the archives and the selection of the twelve theaters featured in the collection. The archive contains materials related to those theaters as well as articles and books that concern the theater movement in general. She has also overseen the partial digitization of the materials and has made them available to the public. There are plans to digitize more fully the material contained in the archives in the future, but currently, full access to the ATA is only possible in person at the Documentation Department and Reading Room of the Theater Institute. Moreover, not all items are catalogued on the website, especially a great many of the press clippings the archive owns. To look at certain items in the collection, a researcher must get permission from the Directorate and/or the person who deposited the item due to privacy issues.

The core of the collection consists of materials that had already been acquired by the Documentation Department of the Raszewski Theater Institute or, before that, by the Documentation Department of the Actors' Union. These materials have been supplemented by gifts from the editorial department of the monthly theater publication *Dialog*; the Polish branch of the International Theater Institute (ITI); private individuals who are former and current members of alternative theaters; theater historians and scholars; and people who were active in student clubs, galleries, and the student press during the period in question. Donations have consisted of items such as the statutes of the theaters; letters to and from official government agencies; scripts or portions of scripts submitted to censors; programs, booklets, flyers, postcards, tickets, illustrated cards, and catalogues of student theater festivals printed by the theaters themselves; press clippings and interviews from newspapers and magazines; some original typescripts of reviews; photographs; posters; and audiovisual recordings. In 2011, the ATA began to conduct an oral history project as part of which key members of the alternative theater movement were interviewed; the tapes from this project are also available.

Some of the theaters have a lot of material on deposit at the archive and others have a much smaller number of items. In some cases, the theaters themselves only existed for a few years, and therefore there is not as much to col-

⁵² I am grateful to Agnieszka Kubaś for answering emailed questions and providing me with additional information about the ATA that is not on the website.

lect as in the cases of others. For example, Teatr Pleonazmus, an extremely influential student theater company in the early 1970s, only existed for four years. Nevertheless, either because their performances were less overtly political or because they had their own unique performance style (different from other student theaters at the time), there was a great deal written about them during their short existence and immediately after. The page of the ATA website devoted to Pleonazmus's bibliography contains twenty-one items, including one full book devoted to them. The collection—much of which was donated by Maria Baster-Grząślewicz, one of the Pleonazmus actresses—also contains photographs of three of their six productions (including photographs of a rare outdoor performance of their play *Szłość samojedna* [Comings and goings, 1972]), programs, informational booklets, a recording of an interview with actor Wojciech Szulczyński, and other varia.

However, in other cases when the theaters existed for a much longer period of time, there appear to be lacunae in the collection. For example, in the part of the archive devoted to Teatr Kalambur (Pun Theater)—a group which was influential both as a student theater itself and as an organizer of theater festivals—there are only five entries on the bibliography page (four books and one article). There also do not appear to be any pictures or posters relating to their most famous and acclaimed production, *W rytmie słońca* (In the Rhythm of the Sun, 1970), although at least one of the books does include a couple of photographs of this production as well as a fragment of the script. On the other hand, there are interesting documents in the collection relating to Kalambur's hosting of international theater festivals in the 1970s and 1980s and the group's change in status from "student theater" to "professional theater."

The archive contains many more items relating to Teatr Ósmego Dnia, probably the theater in this movement that is the most well-known outside of Poland. The Ósemki (Eighths), as they are affectionately known in Poland, decided in 1968 "to make a theatre relevant to people living here and now, a theatre that would deal with everyday problems, with the simple facts of political and social reality."⁵³ Because of this decision, in the 1970s and 1980s they were subjected to continual surveillance and harassment by the security services, and for a time, their performances were banned from official venues. Four members of the theater company who joined in the early 1970s are still actively involved in the theater today, and the company has donated many items to the archive. The archive contains official correspondence between members of Teatr Ósmego Dnia and the Ministry of Culture, along with other official documents, as well as programs, photographs, posters, films, and informational booklets. In addition, there is a bibliography of publications which contains five complete books and ten articles. Among the items in the collection is the aforementioned book by

53 Cioffi and Ceynowa, "An Interview with Director Lech Raczak," 82.

Zbigniew Gluza published in the underground, as well as another one he wrote about the theater, *Ósmego Dnia*, published by the KARTA Center Foundation in 1994.

One of the most complete collections is the one donated by the late Wojciech Krukowski (1944–2014), artistic director of Akademia Ruchu (Academy of Movement) theater, and his widow, Jolanta Krukowska, an actress with the theater. Akademia Ruchu was founded by Krukowski in 1972, and the company's activity ranged from outdoor street actions and workshops and improvisational "interventions in reality" conducted with audience members to indoor productions of movement-based yet decidedly un-dance-like performance art pieces. Because Akademia Ruchu often collaborated with common people, introducing them to the arts as a way of expressing their frustrations with the regime, they were regarded as rather dangerous, particularly when they worked with workers and workers' children. Many of their activities, for example, were banned during the Martial Law period. Their indoor performance art productions, however, were somewhat more difficult to censor, as they were based on movement and imagery, not text. The materials they donated to the ATA consist of photographs and audiovisual recordings of both Akademia Ruchu's street actions and their indoor performances; the company's own texts and notes (transcriptions of the rehearsal process) of Wojciech Krukowski; materials collected by the Security Service on Akademia Ruchu and Wojciech Krukowski; short publications issued under the AR Publishers imprint (e.g. Piotr Rypson, *Mail Art, czyli sztuka poczty* [Mail Art, or the art of the post], 1985; Józef Robakowski, *PST! czyli Sygnia nowej sztuki* [PST! or sygnia of new art], 1989); and materials on the activities of several community organizations associated with Akademia Ruchu—the Akademia Ruchu Theater Center, the Association of Friends of Akademia Ruchu, Cinema/Theater/Rainbow, and the Cora Cultural Center. In addition, the Akademia Ruchu collection also contains some books and articles by and about the theater.

In conclusion, the ATA is an excellent resource for researchers working on alternative theater in Poland, and it will become increasingly useful as further items are donated, more oral history recordings are made, and the cataloguing becomes more complete and digitized. Currently, the collection is valuable both for those interested in avantgarde theater as an aesthetic phenomenon and for those interested in the intersection of theater and politics. If the archive succeeds in getting all or most of the collection digitized and online, it will be invaluable both for Polish scholars and scholars around the world.

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