

Memories of Lost Fathers: The Unfinished Transmission of Generational Values in Hungarian Cinema by Peter Falanga

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Abstract : During the process of de-Stalinization that began in 1956 with the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, many filmmakers in Hungary chose to explore their country's political discomforts by using Socialist Realism as a negative model against which they could react to the dominating ideology. A renewed national film industry and a more permissive political regime would allow filmmakers to take to task the plight of the preceding generation who had experienced the fatal political turmoil of both World Wars and the purges of Stalin. What follows is no longer the multigenerational unity found in Socialist Realism wherein both the old and the young embrace Stalin's revolutionary optimism; instead, the protagonists are parentless, and thus their connection to the previous generation is partially severed. In these films, violent historical forces leave one generation to search for both a connection with their family's past, and for moral guidance to direct their future. István Szabó's *Father* (1966), Márta Mészáros *Diary for My Children* (1984), and Pál Gábor's *Angi Vera* (1978) each consider the fraught relationship between successive generations through the lens of postwar youth. A characteristic each of their protagonist's share is that they are all missing one or both parents, and cope with familial loss either through recalling memories of their parents in dream-like sequences, or, in the case of *Angi Vera*, through embracing the surrogate paternalism that the Communist Party promises to provide. This paper considers the argument these films present about the progress of Hungarian history, and how this topic is explored in more recent films that similarly focus on the transmission of generational values. Scholars such as László Strausz and John Cunningham have written on the continuous concern with the transmission of generational values in more recent films such as István Szabó's *Sunshine* (1999), Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), György Pálfi's *Taxidermia* (2006), Ágnes Kocsis' *Pál Adrienn* (2010), and Kornél Mundruczó's *Evolution* (2021). These films, they argue, make intimate portrayals of the various sweeping political changes in Hungary's history and question how these epochs or events have impacted Hungarian identities. If these films attempt to personalize historical shifts of Hungary, then what is the significance of featuring characters who have lost one or both parents? An attempt to understand this coherent trend in Hungarian cinema will profit from examining the earlier, celebrated films of Szabó, Mészáros, and Gábor, who inaugurated this preoccupation with generational values. The pervasive interplay of dreams and memory in their films invites an additional element to their argument concerning historical progression. This paper incorporates Richard Teniman's notion of the "dialectics of memory" in which memory is in a constant process of negation and reinvention to explain why these Directors prefer to explore Hungarian identity through the disarranged form of psychological realism over the linear causality structure of historical realism.

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