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Writers and Society in Eastern Europe 1989–2000: The End of the Golden Age[1)]

Кључне речи:
Writers, authors, Eastern Europe, post-communism, society, dissidents.

Рад разматра положај писаца у источној Европи пре и после пада Берлинског зида, уз детаљну анализу узрока великог пада продаје литерарних дела након подизања „гвоздене завесе".

An enormous amount has been written about the political, economic, and social restructuring of Eastern Europe since the end of communism. There is no need to recapitulate that scholarship for readers of EEPS. Surprisingly, however, very little attention

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has been paid to the cultural effects of post-communist transition.[2] And, as far as I can ascertain, no one has attempted any kind of transnational survey of the consequences of this transition on writers, who, as is well known, formed one of the most important elite groups under communist rule.[3]

Of course, any survey that generalizes about post-communist literary culture over the entire territory of Eastern Europe runs the risk of sweeping under the rug the specificities of the process in individual countries. Nevertheless, after reviewing data collected by researchers under my supervision in 10 countries, it is my contention that some important general conclusions can be reached regarding the effects of post-communism on writers and on literary institutions in the region as a whole. Whenever possible, I will note exceptions to the overall pattern and try to explain them by a consideration of the local situation. But I believe that the general conclusions presented here are fully justified and hope that this work will encourage others to fill in the missing nuances.

The first, and most obvious similarity to be noted is that the creation of fledgling civil societies, democratic governments, and market economies in East European countries brought an end to the "objective conditions" that had placed writers on a pedestal for a century and a half. Writers were no longer needed to defend the nation's very right to exist (a role that had remained important especially in the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union and some of the Yugoslav republics even as it had faded in most of rest of Eastern Europe), nor were they needed as the voice of conscience in oppressive regimes. There were, of course, exceptions to this rule, at least for a time in countries under attack, or in countries where little or no substantive change occurred. In the immediate aftermath of the political changes, writers, like the vast majority of their compatriots, were euphoric. In the case of former dissident writers, the reasons were quite obvious, for the fall of oppressive communist regimes was what they had been advocating for years. But even most official writers had by the 1980s come to take a fairly cynical attitude toward the regimes that had supported them generously, so they, too, joined in the general euphoria. In addition to their satisfaction with political and promised economic changes (the latter were, as has been recognized in studies of post-communist societies in general, understood only in extremely vague terms), many writers looked forward to giving up what many had come to see as the heavy burden of being spokespeople for the nation, prophets, and gadflies. The psychological dif-

2) Thus, for example, no articles on the subject have appeared in such major US-based journals as *East European Politics and Societies* (EEPS) or *Problems of Post-Communism*. And books studying elite transformations in the region such as *Elites after State Socialism* (eds. John Higley and György Lengyel) or *Postcommunist Elites and Democracy in Eastern Europe* (eds. John Higley, Jan Pakulski and Wlodzimierz Wesolowski), pay little or no attention to cultural elites. Even the authors of the excellent collection *Intellectuals and Politics in Central Europe* (ed. András Bozóki) do not pay attention specifically to writers as a particular group of intellectuals

3) This article is excerpted from a larger book project entitled *Remaining Relevant after Communism? Writers and Society in Eastern Europe since 1989*. The book lays out the historical reasons for the exalted position of writers in Eastern Europe and examines some of the strategies they have used in an attempt to retain their traditional relevance in the post-communist period.

ficulty of this burden was expressed beautifully by the Russian poet Dmitry Alexandrovich Prigov "Here's me, an ordinary poet let's assume/But the thing is that by the whim of Russian fate/I have to be the conscience of the nation/But how to be that thing, if there is no conscience/Poems, maybe, there are, but a conscience – no/What is to be done?" Prigov is a supreme ironist, and the poem is meant more to poke fun at the self-importance of Russian, and by extension East European writers. Nevertheless, the irony only works here because of the more or less equal strength of the verbal reality expressed by the cliché (the demand to be the nation's conscience) and the reality of what poets can actually do in a real world that does not live by clichés.

Freed by the fall of communism of the demands to do the impossible, writers dared to dream of life in "normal societies" in which they could become "just writers," who could create whatever they wished. Very few, however, recognized the simple truth laid that communist regimes had in many ways created for them a writers' utopia, and that their traditional material well-being and/or exalted social prestige had been predicated on the general situation of their countries in the bad old days. In exchange for a degree of censorship that varied from country to country, an extraordinary number of writers had been supported by the state (either directly or indirectly), protected from outside competition (particularly from the competition of popular culture), and insulated from market forces that had no interest in or appreciation for their work. This realization would sink in only gradually, and it has still not been fully understood or accepted.

In order to grasp what happened to writers as a social group in East European societies, as well as to understand some of the motivations for what they have written since 1989, it is necessary to move from these general considerations to an examination of data relating to how the events of 1989 and beyond have affected the material and social position of writers. Prior to 1989 a generous subsidy system and an overall policy that limited salary differentials in socialist economies ensured that a fairly large group of writers could make a living from their profession throughout Eastern Europe. In the immediate aftermath of 1989 a number of factors conspired to seriously compromise this system. First, governments undergoing market reforms trimmed the generous subsidies that had been available to writers. Second, economic restructuring had a strong impact on the cash flow of citizens in Eastern European countries – whereas under communism money was generally available but there was nothing to purchase, post-communism saw goods of all kinds become available as cash became scarce. And, furthermore, even when cash was available, consumers now had many other products to buy in addition to books. Simultaneously, the centrally-controlled distribution networks that had guaranteed that what was published could be sent all over the country through a series of state-controlled stores and libraries, collapsed completely. Finally, although private publishing was permitted and this increased possible outlets for literary writers, in the vast majority of cases they saw their sales fall drastically on an open market in which their work was overwhelmed by previously forbidden forms of literature, particularly translated and then native pulp literature. All of these factors led to a catastrophic change in the material position of most writers of high literature.

Simultaneously, the prestige of serious literature (and its producers) suffered a major blow. New heroes appeared in society – businessmen in particular. Salary differentials

widened considerably, and writers, unable to make a good living in the new market-oriented world, began to seem at best quaint and at worst completely unnecessary both to ordinary citizens and to the political elites.[4] Simultaneously, Western publishers and readers began to lose interest in East European cultural developments. Whereas during the cold war, a certain amount of energy and money was devoted to understanding the enemy and supporting dissidents within communist societies (if only by paying attention to what they said, translating it and publishing it), in the post-cold-war world attention there is no political reason to read East European literature. What is more, as these societies have become more westernized, they are less exotic, less "other," and hence less interesting to western readers. In a word, just as the material base for their individual and corporate prosperity eroded at home, writers of serious literature began to seem less relevant abroad.

But writers, both as individuals and as a group, were unwilling to give up their privileged status (and in this they were no different from any other elite group whose position is threatened by new conditions). In order to defend it, they needed to find ways to adapt themselves and their work to the new situation of post-communist Eastern Europe, using their accumulated symbolic capital as a resource. In the book from which this article is excerpted, I trace a number of these strategies, but here I will focus on how the transformation of the political and economic structures of East European societies since 1989 has affected writers on a day-to-day basis. First, I focus on the changes in income that were experienced by "official writers" (that is, members of the state-sponsored Writers' Unions). Then I turn to the material conditions of unofficial writers, although these are much more difficult to quantify, and we will examine in depth the reasons for these changes. Finally, I consider the ways in which the prestige attached to the writing of high literature has suffered since 1989. While none of these factors alone can be used to track the relevance of serious literature or of individual writers to society as a whole, taken together they indicate that at the very least the position of serious literature in the cultural consciousness of Eastern Europe has eroded considerably since the fall of communism.

In the USSR in 1985, the average royalty paid to an author by a state publisher (the only kind that existed) for a novel was 8 000 rubles. Given that the average salary in the USSR was at this point no more than 180 rubles per month, this meant that a published novel paid the equivalent of almost four years salary. Articles in the leading "fat journals" paid on the order of 200–300 rubles per signature (24 pages) for an article of 4–8 signatures. Thus, a hundred-page critical article could pay almost a year's salary. Finally, translation, an activity in which even writers who were not members of the Union could engage, paid between 100–150 rubles for signature, meaning that a published translation of a single short story could pay the equivalent of a month's salary. What is more,

4) The drastically changed situation for writing and publishing in Eastern Europe (or at least in Central Europe) was already appreciated and described in broad outline in the book *Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom* (ed. Timothy Garton Ash, Budapest: CEU Press, 1995). However, despite the authors' optimistic conclusion that "the worst of the pains of transition are probably over" (191) our research shows that the situation for writers and publishers, even in the better developed Central European countries, has not improved significantly since the publication of that book.

because writers were given access to scarce consumer goods such as apartments and cars as the official state-subsidized prices (instead of paying black market prices as the majority of their fellow citizens did), the amount of money paid for a book was in effect even larger than it seems.

In comparison, let us take the situation in Russia in the year 2000 (this is the most recent year for which I have statistical information – however, the situation today can be considered more or less the same). In the new market economy, the payment of royalties is negotiated separately with each author – the value of an author to a publisher is in direct correlation to the success of his or her work, to his popularity – measured in sales. While a writer of detective fiction like Alexandra Marinina (her work is examined in chapter 8) can sell in the millions of copies in this market and make enormous amounts of money, the fees paid for serious novels are modest – perhaps $1 000 (28 000 rubles) for a solid novel with royalties for a major book by a famous author reaching at most $8 000–10 000.

It is difficult to compare what this means in terms of quality of life with the situation in 1985 because salary differentials today are much greater than they were. That is to say, while $8 000–10 000 may still be a fairly large sum in comparison to average Russian salaries, it is not large at all either in comparison to the salaries earned by those urban dwellers who have taken advantage of the possibilities that the market economy offers to make money or in comparison with the income required to sustain even a middle-class lifestyle. Thus, if the publication of a novel in 1985 provided enough money for a writer to buy a Russian-made car (the only kind that existed) at state subsidized prices, in today's market the royalty paid for this same novel would be barely sufficient to purchase a BMW bumper. The situation has become even worse when it comes to publishing articles or stories in the leading cultural and literary journals. If an article or novella of approximately 100 pages in 1985 could bring in a half year's salary, in 2000 it paid approximately 4 000 rubles ($150), not enough even to pay one month's rent in a reasonable apartment.

The trends discussed for Russia can be discerned, to a greater or less extent, in all the post-Communist states. In Romania, for example, the collapse of the centralized, state-supported cultural system, the economic recession of the 1990s, changes in the book market, and the economic problems of the Writers' Union all led to the diminution, and even cessation of traditional sources of support for writers. Without financial support from the state or the Romanian Writers' Union and forced to find private subsidies, periodicals stopped paying royalties at communist-era levels, or altogether. If, for instance, in 1985, a one-page article in *România literară* paid approximately one-third of an average monthly salary, in 2001 it could bring in only 100 000 lei (about $3.5); this represented about 1/30th of an average monthly salary. But at least *România literară* still paid royalties; other journals by this point had given up the practice and attracted collaborators only by symbolic means – the prestige of the magazine, and the promise of making their work and name public.

The same tendency can be seen in Romanian book publishing. In the Communist period a book of poetry, for example, commanded a royalty of 10 000–15 000 lei and a novel between 50 000–70 000 lei, rising to over 100 000 if it sold particularly well inside the protected Romanian market. Given that monthly salaries in Romania at this period were in the neighborhood of 4–5 000 lei, this meant that a novel paid at

least a year's salary, sometimes two. And, given the existence of artificially low prices and the fact that Writers' Union connections could ensure access to otherwise unavailable consumer goods, a successful novel brought in enough to buy a car or pay for an apartment. Royalties today have diminished and are now almost symbolic: 3 million lei (just over $100) at *Editura Fundației Culturale Române*, or at most 7–10% of the net income from a print run – that is about $200–300. Even membership in the Writers' Union no longer brings the advantages of old, with the Union's drastic diminution of resources after 1989. The system of supplementary retirement benefits no longer works, for example, because writers' retirement benefits have been integrated with the state retirement benefits system. Consequently, retired writers now receive small, insufficient pensions: 1 500 000–1 600 000 lei, that is, under $50 a month, facing with the rest of the aging population humiliating financial problems. For such reasons many writers claim that "economic censorship" has replaced "ideological censorship."

Turning to Bulgaria we see a very similar picture in the material conditions for the writing of literature. There, as we noted earlier, the government passed a law in 1948 that gave a member of the Union of Bulgarian Writers the right to work part-time (4 hours/day) but receive a full salary. As a rule, members of the Union of Bulgarian Writers were assigned to the staff of newspapers, magazines, and other such institutions and received salaries from them. In addition to the salary received from his or her job, however, a writer was paid an additional sum for each publication. Thus, a short story in the press paid between 100–160 leva (according to length), at a time when the average monthly salary was somewhere in the neighborhood of 250 leva. Royalties for novels were on a par with rates in the USSR. Thus, the first print run of 2 500–3 000 copies paid 2 000 leva, but even young writers published in 20 000 copies, for which they would receive approximately 8 000 leva. As a result, one book earned a writer enough to buy a car or a small apartment. A mere three published poems could provide enough money to for a sea-side vacation at a resort owned and operated by the Writers' Union.

By the late 1990s, however, few if any writers could make a living from publishing works of serious literature. Even if an author could sell 20 000 copies of a novel (a large sale for the Bulgarian market), he or she would only be able to earn some 1 500 leva (approx. 6 months' salary). Writing for newspapers and journals did not produce any better financial results. There an article of average length that had not been commissioned paid about 35–40 leva, but even a 40-page article by an older, established writer in the leading literary journal paid only 96 leva, less than two-week's salary. It is easy to see that remuneration from the writing of literature is unlikely to pay the bills for Bulgarian writers, let alone provide the high standard of living that writers had come to expect under communism.

The situation is perhaps even more extreme in Ukraine. A survey of approximately 30 professional writers (mostly in Lviv) revealed that for two thirds of them royalties from sales of literary work constituted their main source of income before 1989. In 2000 not a single writer listed royalties as a significant source of income. Most today get by on minimal state pensions or on salaries earned in universities or editorial offices.

As a final example, also from a former Soviet Republic, let us examine the income of a single writer, Nicolae Rusu (born 1948), who in 2000 was president of the Moldavian Literary fund.

Table 1. Nicolae Rusu's income 1986–2000

Year	Title of book	Royalty	Awards	Average salary	Annual total, (local currency)	Annual total ($)
1986	*Lia*	2 200 rubles	Ostrovsky Award, Soviet Writers' Union (1 000 rubles)	130 rubles	8 360 rubles	~1 400
	Grandfather's hat (translation)	3 600 rubles				
1987	*Wild apples*	1 700 rubles		190 rubles	3 980 rubles	~660
1988	*Everything is the same*	3 800 rubles		210 rubles	6 320 rubles	~1 050
1990	*Where the rain grows*	1 200 rubles		230 rubles	3 960 rubles	~657
1992	*Tomorrow is another day*	1 800 rubles	Moldavian Writers' Union Award (700 rubles)	550 rubles	9 100 rubles	~1 516
1996	*Without break*	Own money invested (3 500 lei)		250 lei	3 000 lei	745
1997	*The Golden rain*	Own money invested (10 500 lei)		360 lei	4 320 lei	770
1998	*Rats (Șobolaniada)*	Own money invested (27 000 lei)		550 lei	6 600 lei	775
2000	*Long live nightingales*	800 lei		695 lei	10 140 lei	810
	Let others pass the bridge	Own money invested (15 000 lei)	1 000 lei			

To fully appreciate this table, one needs to recall that in the late 1980s the sum of 4 000 rubles was approximately double the average salary in Moldova. In 2000, 10 000 lei was also approximately double the average salary in Moldova. However, the major differences are that, first of all, in 2000 the average is no longer as relevant a figure because salary differentials are now much greater, and second, that someone like Rusu has lost the privileged exclusive access to available goods that used to exist under conditions of socialist shortage. We can see the difference by keeping in mind that in the Moldovan SSR in the late 1980s, his yearly royalty income would have allowed him to purchase a Soviet-made Fiat (to which he would have had special access), whereas his $810 yearly income in 2000 would not allow him to buy an imported refrigerator. Thus, although it might appear at first glance that he has roughly retained his economic position, in reality he

is much worse off than he was as a young writer in the last years of communism.

Let us turn, for a moment, to the situation of non-official writers. The changes in their material position are much more difficult to determine. Under the anciens regimes, they were unable to take advantage of the vast majority of perquisites available to official writers. Nevertheless,, they did benefit from the system in a number of ways. In terms of their direct earnings from writing, many were able to earn at least an average salary from literary translations. Now, however, with the rates paid to literary translators having fallen as precipitously as all other royalties for literary work, this method of earning a living has all but dried up. Unofficial writers also benefited from the over-employment characteristic of communist economies. Given that all publishing houses, editorial offices and the like had at least three times as much staff as they needed (at least by Western standards), those unofficial writers who were employed in the publishing sector did not have to work very hard for their paychecks. As a result, they had quite a lot of free time for their writing, even if that writing was unpublishable. Now, if they have not been laid off, they actually have to work to earn their salaries, which leaves little time for writing. Of course, when they do write they now have the chance to see their work in print, but the royalties they are paid are so small as to be almost laughable.

Many reasons can be adduced for the catastrophic fall in the material rewards available to writers of literary works. These include enormous changes in the book publishing industry as a whole, increased competition for the leisure-time income of East European citizens, and the collapse of state subsidies for cultural production. Let us focus on the first of these for the moment. It was almost always claimed, both in communist countries and in the west, that royalties paid to official writers did not depend on the popularity of their books as measured in sales. This was not exactly true, however. To be sure, popularity with individual readers did not in most cases determine who was published and how many copies of a book would be released. The former was frequently decided on non-literary grounds, and the latter depended in great measure on the publishing house's centrally provided publishing plan. Still, it is a fact that large editions of novels and enormous quantities of journals were actually sold. Perhaps they were sold because of the lack of anything better on the market (with the state's ability to eliminate competition playing the leading role here), or they were sold to state institutions themselves (primarily libraries) that were obliged to buy them as part of their own plan. But the fact remains that most were sold, not pulped. And, at least to some extent, the fact that they did sell helped to justify the bloated staffs of publishing houses and the large royalties that went to writers.

Thus, for example, a large Russian publishing house like *Sovremennik* published 365 titles in 1985 with an average print run of 90 thousand. 80% of them were new titles with a large percentage in such high literary genres as poetry, fiction, and literary criticism. Books of poetry were usually published in editions of 10 or 20 000 and 50 to 100 000 copy runs for novels were normal. Similarly in 1985 the publisher *Molodaia gvardiia* released around 360 titles and some 37–40 million books. They published series primarily, and the majority of their run was purchased directly by the state and distributed to libraries (thus of an edition of 200 000, 170 000 went to libraries). The hunger for serious literature on the part of the populace was such that even a relatively obscure book, like an edition of the poetry of Alexander Pope in

Russian translation, was published in two editions (a total of almost 100 000 copies), and this at least in part justified the royalty equivalent to three years average Soviet salary paid to Ilya Kutik, one of a number of translators on the project.

By the late 1990s, the situation was totally different. In 1999 *Sovremennik* published only 28 titles with a total print run of 140 thousand copies. Whereas in 1985 there had been 170 people on staff, that had been reduced to 30 including the janitor in 1999 (still surprisingly large, at least by American standards). The situation in the leading cultural journals is similar. According to the literary critic and publicist Sergei Chuprinin, Editor-in-Chief of the leading cultural journal *Znamia*, (a post he assumed in 1993), circulation of the journal in the late 1980s reached 1 million copies per month. In 2000, the journal was being published in a monthly edition of 8 500 copies. Of these, 1 700 were bought by the Soros fund for libraries, 700 went to the Ministry of Culture and several to other federal libraries in multiple copies. So subscribers accounted for very few copies. And while a romance or detective novel, translated in a couple of weeks by a team of hacks, might still provide a reasonably large royalty, the hunger for serious literature has clearly been sated. Thus, in 2001, for the translation half of an edition of the poetry of Cyprian Norwid the royalty that my colleague Ilya Kutik received was 10 free copies and no money at all.

It would be incorrect to conclude from the above, however, that all sectors of the Russian publishing industry are in the same dire straights as the traditional fat journals and the old-line publishing companies. New publishers, better attuned to the vagaries of the market, have appeared, and they have expanded rapidly. The Eksmo publishing house, for example, was formed in 1991 and published 10 books that year. In 1999, they were releasing an average of 250 titles per month. In 1991 they employed four people, and had expanded to 500 employees by 1999. Another new house, Vagrius began operations in the early 90s. They now publish prose fiction, memoirs, biographies, collected works, science fiction, detective novels, romance fiction, and coffee-table books. In 1999 they were paying authors an advance of some 10–15 thousand rubles (approx. $500) and a percentage of sales. Their average royalty was 18 thousand rubles. Like many leading Western houses, they try to publish a combination of best sellers and non- or semicommercial (image) books. In the latter group they publish leading literary authors like Andrei Bitov, Vladimir Makanin, and Liudmila Petrushevskaia in editions of 5–7 thousand. Commercial series include "Russian Detectives" and "Made in Russia," which are published in editions of hundreds of thousands.

Thus, to some extent, the collapse of the old prestigious state firms (which have now been privatized) has been compensated for by the rise of new firms with more flexible publishing ideas and a better feeling for the market. But that market will not bear royalties for works of serious literature that are remotely sufficient to procure its producers even an average middle-class income. A major reason for this is that the book market has fragmented radically. In all the post-communist countries the years immediately after 1989 saw an enormous multiplication of the number of book publishers as well as of the number of journals. Many of these publishers and journals went out of business relatively quickly, but still, by the mid-1990s and up until today, the overall number of publication outlets in these countries has increased enormously. Thus, for example, in the Czech Republic there were no more than 30 publishers (all state-run) before 1989. In 2000 there

were some 450, down from an estimated 1500 or more in the first half of the 1990s, and practically all were private.

The following tables provide a bit more data about the Czech and Slovak publishing industry.

Table 2: Periodical and non-periodical press in the Czech Republic before and after 1989 (data from before 1989 refer to the Czech portion of Czechoslovakia)

Type of publication / Year	1984	1990	1999
Periodicals (titles)	759	1870	3894
Non-periodicals* (titles)	4115	4136	12551

*in addition to books, this includes sheet-music, lecture notes, folding picture books, maps and atlases.

Table 3: Book Publication and Circulation in Slovakia in the 1990s

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
No. of titles	2734	2842	3210	3808	3186	3561	3326
All books printed (in mil.)	31	19	18	12	8	6.5	4.5
Average No. of copies per book	11300	6700	5600	3150	2500	1800	1350

As can be seen clearly in the Slovak example, while the number of titles published has increased, the number of copies per title has decreased almost tenfold. And within this fragmented market, it is extremely difficult to sell works of serious literature. The comments of Ivan Beránek, the chief editor of the recently-established Czech press Havran, are typical of attitudes towards publishing original literature in today's market. When asked "Do you intend to publish original Czech works?" he replied: "Definitely not at present. I realize what a praiseworthy enterprise it would be but it is far too risky. Especially in the case of a newly-established publishing house which can't be expected to dispose of an unlimited capital. And even more so because, to be honest, I find it highly improbable that a new Petr Šabach or another successful author is soon to be discovered[5)]".

The situation of the literary publishing industry in post-communist Eastern Europe overall can be seen most comprehensively in the material we have been able to collect from Hungary. There, in the communist era (until 1986 when a liberalization in publishing began even before the official collapse of

5) Petr Šabach has published a number of best-selling novels that treat the communist period nostalgically.

the communist political system), 28 institutions were authorized to publish books; all but three were located in Budapest. After 1986 the number of presses proliferated. In 1988, there were about 60 publishing houses. Not all published literature, however, and even those that did might have only published one or two literary books a year. In 1999, there were over 1600 (!) publishers in Hungary, but most only published 1–2 books per year. In reality about 30 serious houses publish literature in Hungary today. *Magvető Kiadó*, probably the most prestigious in literary circles, releases 70–80 titles per year. *Európa* publishes mostly foreign and some Hungarian titles, altogether about 220 per year, and *Osiris* publishes some 250, but fewer literary pieces. While in the 1980s many classic pieces of literature were hard to come by, now the market is now saturated- according to our sources from a bookstore.

Our sources note that one of the reasons for the proliferation of presses is a rule introduced in the past few years that no press can apply for grants for more than 5 books (in some foundations only 3) from any foundation at a time. As foundation grants are one of the only ways to make publishing serious literature pay for itself, presses found subsidiaries under different names and with leadership that is only nominally different, in order to apply for grants separately. Small presses have a very hard time avoiding bankruptcy, especially if they want to keep publishing literature. They have to compete with vast multinationals that flood the Hungarian market (eg. Bertelsmann from Germany) with mostly translated popular literature, and who publish only a couple of original Hungarian works annually. These companies have sufficient resources to establish a vast organization that has a better chance of being profitable. For example, The Hungarian Book Club (Magyar Könyvklub) owned by Bertelsmann had a membership of half a million in the mid 1990s, and the fact that these consumers were buying books through the club took them away from smaller presses.

Table 4: presents the number of titles and copies of pieces published (literature also includes trashy novels, thrillers, crime stories, and so forth) [6]*:*

	1985	**1990**	**1998**
(Hungarian Population on January 1)	10 657 000	10 375 000	10 135 000
№ of titles published	8 015	7 464	10 626
№ of copies	87 956 000	113 112 000	47 046 000
№ of literary titles (book, booklet)	842	1 560	2 448
№ of copies of literary pieces (LP)	17 507 000	47 009 000	14 895 000
Of № of LP: Hungarian author	520	832	1 210
Of № of LP: foreign author	322	728	1 238
Of № of copies of LP: Hungarian author	8 490 000	17 741 000	2 917 000
Of № of copies of LP: foreign author	9 017 000	29 268 000	11 978 000
Of № of titles of LP: American author	34	275	643
Of № of copies of LP: American author	2 180 000	14 794 000	8 507 000

6) Data taken from: *Statisztikai évkönyv 1985 (Statistical yearbook 1985)*. Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Central Statistical Office), 1986., pages 1 (population), 305 (data on books and literary pieces), 307 (data on LP broken down by author's nationality).

This table reveals some trends in common with those we have seen above as well as a few surprises. First, as was the case almost universally in Eastern Europe, the number of literary titles published grew enormously between 1985 and 1998, but the number of copies decreased significantly. In other words, fewer copies are being sold but a wider variety of books is available. More authors can publish, but they cannot sell their work to very many readers. Even more disquieting, from the perspective of this analysis, is the trend related to work by Hungarian authors. Here again, the number of titles increased almost 2 and ½ times between 1985 and 1998, but the number of books sold dropped to ⅓ of what it had been. Foreign authors were also selling fewer copies per title in 1998 than they had in 1985, but the drop was far less drastic. Most important, foreign authors have seen their market share in Hungary rise from a bit over 50% in 1985 to over 80% in 1998. This statistic alone illustrates to what extent the socialist system functioned to limit competition and thereby increase the visibility (and hence both prestige and material standing) of local writers. What is more, and this is not entirely clear from the statistics, a good percentage of the foreign books published in 1985 were undoubtedly by official authors from "brotherly socialist countries" and thus not of great interest to Hungarian readers. Now, translated books come primarily from Western Europe and the United States, with American authors in particular having gained spectacularly (going from 12% to 57% of the total Hungarian literary market). And one can be quite sure that these titles are not Hemingway and Dom DeLillo but rather Danielle Steele and Steven King.

The statistics for 1990 are also quite telling, for in that year the number of copies printed was extremely high – indeed this is true in general for the period between 1989 and 1992, after which the number of copies published began to decline steeply. It is important to note, however, that the change between 1985 and 1990 is primarily in the publication record of foreign books (obviously due to the excitement caused by the liberalization of book imports), while Hungarian authors were already losing market share (though they were also selling literary works in fairly large quantities).

Another telling statistic relates to the number of copies sold: A typical literary book in 1999 Hungary was published in 1 000–2 000 copies. There is another, smaller peak in the percentage distribution at the 20 000 copies category: these are usually trashy novels, often by foreign authors, that are printed in a higher number of copies. The greatest literary best seller of recent, post-communist memory (printed 10 times) sold in 55 000 copies (Závada Pál's *Jadviga párnája*.) By comparison, in the mid 1980s, books were generally printed in runs of 30–60 000 copies to start with. Then reprints were made, if necessary. Of course this led to a vast amount of waste, but unquestionably more books were sold (or given as gifts to factories, libraries, etc) as well. In an article on

Magyar statisztikai évkönyv 1990 (Hungarian statistical yearbook 1990). Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Central Statistical Office), 1991., pages 1 (population), 282 (data on books and literary pieces), 284 (data on LP broken down by author's nationality).

Hungarian statisztikai évkönyv 1998 (Hungarian statistical yearbook 1998). Budapest: Központi Statisztikai Hivatal (Central Statistical Office), 1999., pages 1 (population), 240 (data on books and literary pieces), 242 (data on LP broken down by author's nationality).

The data for 1990 and 1998 are also available in Hungarian and English at http://www.ksh.hu/pls/ksh/docs/hun/xftp/gyor/pdf/kulttar.pdf

book publishing ("A szépirodalmi könyvkiadás esélytelenségei" in *Magyar Napló*, 1996) Györgyi Pécsi quotes Domokos Mátyás, who, in a book on publishing in the 1960s, wrote that if the comrades wanted to ignore someone and push him out of the limelight, they allowed him to publish a book of poems in 500–1 000 copies. This edition would be bought up almost immediately but promptly forgotten. By the late 1990s, such an edition would have counted as a pretty decent sized publication.

Table 5 breaks down the titles published in Hungary by literary genre.

	1980	1990	1995
Poems	172	219	375
Novels	427	972	1 163
Drama	64	45	23
Other prose	86	234	267
All	749	1 470	1 828

For the most part, this table shows no major shift in the relative importance of genres preferred by publishers (save for the almost complete disappearance of published drama). It is a commonplace, however, that only thrillers, sci-fi, or romance novels make the best seller list: only these can be sold in a large number of copies (around 60 000 copies for successful ones) and thus have a chance of becoming profitable. Indeed, there were only 3 pieces of high-brow literature on a list of 25 Hungarian bestsellers. Interestingly, many of these trashy novel writers are women, and they tend to publish under foreign pseudonyms (eg: Vavyan Fable, Evelyn Marsh, Sara Garden, Hillary King, Jolante Mallow, Rose Anders, Kate Wolf are all in fact Hungarian female authors).

Available statistical information from Romania presents a picture that complements what we see in Hungary.

Table 6: Indices of editorial production in Romania 1965–1998

Year	Titles published	Print runs (000 copies)	Average printing runs (000 copies)	Copies per inhabitant
1965	5 692	69 684	12.24	3.65
1970	7 681	70 631	9.20	3.49
1980	7 350	87 223	11.87	3.93
1985	5 276	69 266	13.13	3.05
1986	4 648	60 306	12.97	2.64
1987	4 181	55 479	13.27	2.42
1988	4 097	58 987	14.40	2.54
1989	3 867	63 378	16.39	2.74
1990	2 178	52 474	24.09	2.26
1991	2 914	57 272	19.65	2.47
1992	3 662	66 598	18.19	2.92
1993	6 130	75 907	12.38	3.34
1994	4 074	50 230	12.33	2.21
1995	5 517	34 914	6.33	1.54
1996	7 199	38 374	5.33	1.70
1997	6 471	23 712	3.66	1.05
1998	6 231	14 252	2.29	0.63

Because these data stretch farther back into the socialist period, however, we can see even more starkly the fall in demand for literary works. To be sure, because the number of copies published during the socialist period did not entirely depend on consumer demand, these statistics do not necessarily tell us very much about the actual habits of Romanian readers. Still, the enormous fall in both the average size of print runs and in the raw number of books produced, is an indication that the capitalist market clearly cannot absorb as many books as did its communist predecessor.

What is more, recent data from Romania that focus on the kinds of material published indicate (quite ominously for authors of serious literature) that publishers may be recognizing that literature simply does not sell and that rather than lowering their print runs they should stop publishing it altogether.

Table 7 presents an examination of editorial production structure in Romania since 1990, by genre. In percent:

Table 7	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
1. general works	2.48	2.51	1.94	1.78	2.09	1.78	2.96	11.25	22.44
2. philosophy	1.74	1.85	2.27	2.72	2.92	4.30	3.82	3.80	2.39
3. religion	2.02	4.02	3.63	4.16	3.63	4.19	4.18	5.97	3.74
4. social sciences	6.15	6.93	6.94	7.99	10.58	11.78	12.68	13.69	14.48
5. philology	4.27	5.11	5.49	5.71	4.49	5.85	5.99	5.92	5.65
6. sciences	14.60	11.98	10.43	11.32	10.43	11.65	13.74	13.40	12.18
7. technical	34.39	26.70	20.70	21.32	21.35	21.04	20.63	24.99	30.61
8. arts&leisure	5.14	3.36	3.22	3.12	2.09	2.18	1.46	1.48	2.01
9. literature	25.21	31.54	39.38	36.49	37.65	32.70	30.31	14.39	0.91
10. hist./geogr.	3.99	6.01	6.01	5.38	4.76	4.53	4.24	5.12	5.60
TOTAL (N=)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	2178	2914	3662	6130	4074	5517	7199	6471	6471

Note the catastrophic fall-off in literary works published in 1997 and 1998.

Russian statistics tell a similar story. Thus, in 1990 (a year in which the old state publishing plan was still effectively in place), some 41 000 titles were published in Russia in editions totaling more than one and one half billion copies. By 2000 the number of titles was, 40 000, almost the same as in 1990, but the total number of books published had fallen to four hundred million. Overall, the number of books published per capita has fallen from 10 to something like 2.8.

In Poland the situation appears to be analogous. There, the number of titles published overall in 1999 had doubled in comparison to 1985, but the overall number of copies published had dropped to approximately 30% of what it had been during the communist era. In the field of serious literature, the change was even more drastic. The number of titles more than tripled between 1985 and 1999, but the total number of copies published was only ⅔ as high, meaning average sales per title were approximately only ⅔ of what they had been in 1989.

Table 8: Books published in Poland by number of copies and titles[7)]

	1985	1990	1995	1998	1999
Titles	9 649	10 242	11 925	16 462	19 192
• titles (1st editions)		8 378	9 877	13 314	16 134
Circulation (thousand)	246 321	175 562	115 634	84 999	78 078
• circulation (1st editions)		87 403	72 791	50 797	55 371
• circulation per 1000 people		4 606	2 997	2 198	2 019
Titles — literature	1 076 [76/85]	1 573	2 556	3 839	3 560
Circulation (thousand)	34 179	65 164	40 680	25 079	21 432

If we examine the situation of literary journals, we can see similar trends. The most comprehensive set of data I have is for Poland. But the situation in other countries does not appear to be significantly different. The journal market reacted directly to changes in the economy. By the middle of the nineties in Poland there were more then 200 cultural magazines, and 40 of them had a strictly literary character; according to the data of the Central Statistical Office. In 1999, there were 71 strictly literary magazines in circulation.

Table 9: The number of emerging literary journals in 1989–1996 in Poland

1989 — 6	*Kresy; Lampa i Iskra Boza; Metafora; Pracownia; Strych Kultury; Chaltura*
1990 — 20	*Dekada Litracka; Ex Libris; Krzywe Kolo Literatury; Nowa Fantastyka; Teksty Drugie; Borussia; Na Glos*
1991 — 15	*Arkusz; Fraza; Tytul*
1992 — 16	*Topos; Notes Wydawniczy; Magazyn Literacki*
1993 — 15	*Sycyna; B1; Opcje; Pelnym Glosem; Lewa Noga; Krasnogruda*
1994 — 11	*Wiadomosci Kulturalne; Nowy Nurt; Fronda; Haiku; Kurier Czytelniczy*
1995 — 5	*Studium; Dykcja*
1996 — 9	*Tygiel Kultury; Incipit; Machina*

After a dynamic period of growth in 1989–1993, there was a period of stabilization. Overall, since 1989, about 150 new magazines have emerged, however only one of them, "Nowa Fantastyka" (a journal devoted to science fiction), has achieved a circulation larger than 50 thousand copies per issue and has become financially independent.

7) The source for these and the following tables on the Polish publishing scene is Przemyslaw Czaplinski, Piotr Sliwinski, *Literatura Polska 1976–1998. Przewodnik po prozie i poezji*. Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2000, 216–217, 218.

Table 10: The highest circulation of literary magazines in 1989–1997 (in thousand per issue)

Nowa Fantastyka	—	75
Wiadomości Kulturalne	—	30
Literatura na Świecie	—	15
Scyna	—	14.5
Zeszyty Literackie	—	10
Nowy Nurt	—	10
Odra	—	4.7
Nowe Książki	—	4
Czas Kultury	—	2

…by comparison to the highest circulation of woman's magazines (in thousand, per issue)

Twój Styl	—	430
Elle	—	185
Cosmopolitan	—	137

The audience for literary magazines in this period was 1–2% of the population of reading Poles; i.e., 250–500 thousand (out of 25 million people who are 14 years old and above).

It is worth recognizing that one cause of the financial problems of book publishers is the grave situation of libraries. In the 1980s, for example, Hungarian libraries owned 41 million books, but by 1995 their stock had practically not grown, though it had doubled between 1970 and 1980. Library stock has declined overall since 1990, which indicates that libraries have had practically no money for acquisitions since the end of communism. Visits to the theater and to museums by Hungarians also declined significantly in this period. In 1985, the statistical office registered 70 million visits to the movies, 6.1 million to the theater and 20 million to museums. In 1995, these figures were 14 million for movies, 4 million for the theater, and 9 million for museums – a vast decline in participation in every sphere of culture. Again, data from other East European countries suggest a similar trend. One suspects that this decline is directly linked to the overall impoverishment of the population that was caused by economic restructuring, coupled with a loss of state subsidies to cultural organizations (which resulted in higher prices to cultural consumers). As such, this trend may conceivably be reversible when economies improve. However, if a full generation does not develop the taste for cultural participation as young people, there is a good chance they will never do so. As a result, even if the declining interest in culture is to some extent accidental, there is every likelihood that this accident will eventually lead to a major and permanent loss of status for high culture in post-communist countries.

Another important, although theoretically more easily solvable, cause for the difficulties faced by East European publishers has to do with difficulties in the distribution system for books. Although, as we have seen, East European countries in the communist era had multiple publishers (though all were controlled by the state), the book distribution system was completely centralized. That is, one state-run organization saw to it that books were made available (or were not made available as the case may be) to bookstores and libraries across the entire country. In Poland, for example, "Składnica Księgarska," a wholesale distributor set up in 1953 had practically an exclusive monopoly for the distribution of books; it was subordinated to the Minister of Culture. In 1971, "Składnica Księgarska" ceased being directly subordinated to the Minister of Culture, and, together with "Dom Książki" (the major network of bookstores), was folded into "Zjednoczenie Księgarskie" (The Association of Book Marketers). "Składnica Księgarska" had its own printing house and published "Zapowiedzi Wydawnicze" (a publication an-

nouncing new books). Bookstores received questionnaires from them, on which they put orders for specific titles; that procedure helped publishing houses to determine the volume of circulation. Certainly, under the conditions of Polish socialism, most of these "marketing activities" had rather small economic significance – since the decisions of editors were at least as dependent on the censorship and on governmental allowances of paper as they were on market research. Still, many activities of "Składnica" helped to organize the publishing market in Poland.

In 1992, however, the State Court announced the bankruptcy of "Składnica Księgarska" and "Dom Książki." The reasons for this bankruptcy were manifold, but they included incompetent economic decisions (competing with small warehouses and inaccurately gauging market demand, buying titles that were not sold in the planned volume) the incompatibility of their infrastructure (logistics – accounting) with capitalist market conditions, and most of all, their inability and reluctance to cooperate with their biggest creditors – "Harlequin," the first private publishing house in Poland and "WsiP."

Today, in place of "Składnica Księgarska" there are some 550 book distributors in Poland according to the "Centrum Informacji o Książce." Although there are a few market leaders among them – "Katalog", "Holding Centrum", "Współczesny Światowid", – none of them reaches the entire country. In part, the poor condition of the wholesale market is directly related to the large number of active wholesale firms. The yearly sales of the average size wholesaler do not exceed PZL 7 million, which barely covers the costs of rent, transport, and workers' salaries (the average commission is 12–18% of sales price). The major type of transaction between wholesalers and publishers is based on consignatory contracts (paying after sales). This system functions mainly in transactions with small publishing houses, and these publishers have to wait for money from sales longer than their bigger competitors. The major publishing houses sell books according to a system of "closed contracts" – a distributor has no right to return unsold books; he pays at the negotiated due date – usually in 14 to 45 days. Those wholesalers who agree to "closed contracts" get better discounts and more attractive titles.

Based on the information we have been able to collect, however, Poland is probably better off than any other post-communist country in terms of creating a functioning book distribution system, even if Polish observers expect that in the next decade a major shakeout of the industry will eliminate the vast majority of small wholesalers. In most other countries, publishers find it exceptionally difficult to move books to bookstores, and many perforce act as their own distributors. This situation is particularly hard on smaller publishers. Thus, in the Czech Republic, one former owner of a small press established in 1994 told our researcher that, having found that the publishing market had stabilized to some extent, he decided to establish a poetry-oriented publishing house. It was essential to sell at least 500 copies of a title in order to cover his costs and he was convinced he could do so, but the problem was getting the books onto bookshelves. Regular distribution was expensive and hard to control. Instead, he ended up peddling collections of poetry from a backpack directly to bookshops. Indebted and disillusioned, he terminated his activity in 1997.

The situation is most catastrophic in the former multinational states (USSR and Yugoslavia). The central problem in Russia today

for the publishing industry is that there is no normal wholesale distribution of books in the country. As a result, the market is filled only in Moscow and a few other big cities, while there is a shortage of available books in other areas. This is in sharp contrast to the communist days when, because distribution was reasonably good over the whole country while demand was far less outside the major cities, one was more likely to find an interesting book in the provinces than in the capital. The few existing wholesale firms prefer to deal with popular literature like detective stories. The Ministry of Print Media in Russia is working to found a few wholesale distributors of books in the country. One project, called "Rosknigi" is being made operational now, but it will take a long time before it will have any real effect on the book trade in Russia. Nevertheless, one can say that by the year 2000 in Russia wholesale chains were in the process of being formed. One might name the projects "Master-knigi", the network called Top-knigi" in Novosibirsk, and the Petersburg firm "Snark." At that point, however, none of these fit the classical pattern of a book wholesaler, and none controlled more than 25 stores.

In the former Yugoslavia, the problems of the distribution system are compounded by barriers to trade among the former Yugoslav republics. As a result, in Croatia it is extremely difficult to find books published in Serbia and vice versa. Given that Serbian and Croatian are mutually comprehensible, the inability of publishers to sell in "foreign" markets means that they stand to lose an enormous percentage of their potential sales and readers. The absurdity of the system can perhaps best be appreciated with a story from my own experience. My book devoted to the cultural history of Yugoslavia was published in Serbian in 2001 by the Stubovi kulture publishing house. In 2002, I was contacted by a Bosnian publisher who asked for the rights to produce a Bosnian edition. When I asked why he did not just import copies from Serbia (which had been done in fact by one book store in Sarajevo), he told me that many Bosnian readers simply would not buy the book unless the translation was Bosnianized (this despite the fact that the Belgrade publisher had set the book in Latin rather than Cyrillic letters and that any educated reader in Bosnia would have no trouble understanding the Serbian). As a result, a Bosnian edition will appear in 2003. We will see whether the publisher can make money.

By the late 1990s and into the 2000s, however, the distribution system appeared to be improving almost everywhere in the former communist east (with the exception of former Yugoslavia). Although smaller towns are still badly served and electronic book buying is still in its infancy in the region, bookstore chains, book clubs, and larger wholesalers are increasingly able to get books to consumers who want them. However, many readers appear not to be as interested in acquiring these books as they used to be, and the proliferation of titles in most countries means that every year there are more books chasing fewer readers all over Eastern Europe.

It difficult to measure the changes in the prestige attached to writing than it is to track changes in the material base. But it is nevertheless clear from many of the comments made to our researchers that the prestige of serious literature has fallen considerably in the region, although perhaps not as precipitously as the financial rewards available (an indication of the latent power of the stored up symbolic capital of literature). One way of gauging the prestige attached to literature, at least in the public sphere, is to see how literary prizes are awarded and covered in the public media. In the Soviet Union the

awards ceremony of prizes to Soviet authors took place in the Kremlin in a solemn event. High party leaders handed out medals, prizes, diplomas and other awards. The ceremonies were broadcast on the national television channel of State television, were noted on the evening TV news programs and on radio shows on state radio. In newspapers like *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and *The Literary Newspaper* they were reported on the front page or at the top of special sections devoted to culture and art. The situation was basically the same in all the other communist countries. There were relatively few prizes and they were awarded in a very public way to the accompaniment of a great deal of publicity.

By the year 2000 prizes in Russia had multiplied. Where once there had been only three or four major prizes (including the Lenin Prize, State Prize of the USSR in the field of literature art and architecture, State Prize of the RSFSR for outstanding works of literature, and the Award of the Komsomol for a work of literature or art – most of them were offered to more than one person in a year, so that there may have been some 30 laureates per year), some 600 literary prizes were offered in 2000. The numbers alone are an indication that no individual prize can capture the attention of the entire public. And indeed, what appears to have happened is that each group or locality awards its own prize to its own favorites, and the general public simply does not pay much attention. As our Russian researcher noted: "In general the groups surrounding the various prizes are quite differentiated – thus the 'Triumph' or 'Booker' awards will never be given to writers or publishers of a left-patriotic slant. Such writers as Iu. Bondarev, V. Rasputin, Iu. Kuznetsov, would not go to the awards ceremony. Kuniaev and Lichutin would go to the "anti-Booker" ceremonies but you wouldn't find Akhmadulina or Evtushenko there."

Russia is probably at the more extreme end of the spectrum when it comes to changes in the prize system. In Hungary, for example, according to our researchers: "Many more prizes exist now than in 1985. In addition, many more agencies distribute these prizes, thus exclusion is less blatant. Nevertheless, the prestige of the major prizes has increased, although getting the Kossuth prize in 1985 did accrue prestige, even though obviously only those acceptable for the state socialist regime could receive it. The money associated with most prizes is negligible. In addition, except for the recently established Hungarian Literary Prize, most of the prizes (and certainly the major ones) are still distributed and financed by central state agencies. Therefore, political considerations are not absent in the award of these prizes because even though the writers' organizations nominate the recipients, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture have been known to change names and modify the lists they receive. Very few significant prizes and grants are awarded by non-state agents. For this reason what is really different is not the disappearance of politics in literary management, but rather an increased pluralism of (as well as struggle between) various political trends. Those outside these circles, or those who belong to an underrepresented group are still at a disadvantage."

But whatever the case in terms of prizes, the overall status of writing in society has undoubtedly declined. The changed situation was best summed up by the Serbian writer and essayist Mihailo Pantić. Comparing the role of literature under communism and in the late 1990s, he said: "from what had been an elite art form, which in a synthetic way recapitulated the general truths of people's experience and which deepened their understanding of reality … artistic literature in the post-socialist cultural model has become

socially unnecessary, an almost completely private affair which lacks any social importance and which is interesting only to narrow academic circles, to writers, and to rare dedicated readers who nurture their passion as other marginal groups nurture theirs. Some people belong to satanic cults, some to the Society for Lovers of Bulldogs, and others, amazingly, read Serbian poetry."

A similar conviction, put a bit less colorfully, can be found in the statements of Sergei Chuprinin, editor-in-chief of the Moscow-based journal *Znamia*: "[under Communism] the editor-in-chief and the writers were widely admired. The editor might even be a member of the Supreme Soviet, his position equal to that of a Minister or a Field Marshal. Now, the status of writers has fallen catastrophically. Thus, for example, Gorbachev would meet with the editor-in-chief twice a year, but Yeltsin did not do so. Putin hasn't either. Today the prestige of literature and culture has fallen in the eyes of the government and, therefore, in the eyes of the people." One finds the identical sentiment in Ukraine, where almost all of the writers we surveyed agreed that since 1989 "the social role and importance of literature has fallen considerably – 'by several times' (Romaniuk), 'immeasurably' (Shevchuk), and that its 'social resonance has weakened' (Ilnitsky) as has its 'moral influence on society' (Movchan), and thus, to put it most baldly, 'it plays no role at all' (Vlad) in today's Ukraine."

Simultaneously, writers from Eastern Europe have lost their cachet in the West. Whereas, at the height of the Cold War, the publication of Solzheitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, smuggled out of the Soviet Union and published simultaneously in multiple European languages, was a major news sensation, the appearance of new works from the region causes barely a ripple today. And it has become harder and harder for writers from the region even to reach a Western audience, particularly the ever more important Anglophone audience. Book series like Penguin's "Writers from the Other Europe", once edited by Philip Roth, have disappeared, the major New York houses publish fewer and fewer new authors from the region (part, of course, of a general trend by these houses to publish ever smaller amounts of serious literature). The reasons for this trend are quite clearly political. When one examines the way in which East European literature was presented before 1989, one can easily see that, whatever the author's style or theme, books were marketed as political statements. Thus, in her introduction to Milan Kundera's *The Farewell Party* Elizabeth Pochoda writes: "*The Farewell Party* attests to the longevity of political oppression in Czechoslovakia by never mentioning it." (x) That both the absence and presence of a theme were seen as a guarantee of its importance was beneficial to East European writers in the Cold War period, as it ensured that western audiences could be induced to find their work relevant. Now, however, they must pay a stiff price for previous marketing tactics, for in the clear absence of political relevance, neither readers nor publishers can find any reason to be concerned with their work.

So what do all of these facts imply for the future of literature, particularly highbrow fiction, drama, and poetry, in Eastern Europe? What is the balance sheet for culture after more than a decade of complex transition? Are writers as a group to be placed on the endangered species list, or will they find a way to weather the storms and to retain at least some of the prestige and power that they had accumulated over almost 150 years? Interestingly enough, all of the material problems, fragmentation and loss of status that we have described here does not appear to

have caused writers to abandon their profession. If we look at statistics relating to membership in writers' organizations, for example, we can see that the number of people who identify themselves as writers has not declined, and in most countries it has increased significantly. And this is despite the fact that writers' organizations are no longer able to provide much if any financial support for their members. As is the case with other aspects of literary life, the number of writers' organizations has expanded, one more sign of the overall fragmentation of literary life in the post-communist period.[8] Thus, in 1980 Union of the Bulgarian Writers (UBW) (Saiuz na bulgarskite pisateli [SBP]) had 348 members. By 1990 the membership had grown to 422 and in 2000 it stood at 516. Simultaneously, a second organization called the Association of Bulgarian Writers (Sdruzhenie na bulgarskite pisateli), which was founded as a liberal alternative to the Union in 1994 by some 29 members, had grown to 240 members by 2000. Similarly, the Romanian Writers' Union had approximately 1100–1200 members in 1985, while in 2000 it numbered 2147. Another organization ASPRO (The Association of Professional Writers) was founded in 1994 and had 174 members in 2000. A similar situation is apparent in Hungary, where the main writers' organization (*Magyar Irók Szövetsége)*, doubled in size (from a bit over 600 to 1200 members) between 1985 and 2000. The growth in these organizations has not been fueled entirely by new young writers, but rather results both from new writers and from the inclusion of those writers whose ideological or literary profiles had rendered them unacceptable in the communist days. Whatever the source of growth, however, these numbers indicate that identifying as a writer is still important to many people in Eastern Europe.

If we want to focus on positive developments for literature in the post-1989 period, we can certainly find them. Thus, our Polish researchers considered the role of the 150 new journal titles that appeared in the 1990s, usually published in editions of 2000 copies or fewer, and they concluded that, first of all, these publications illustrate the scale and the range of post-communist cultural revitalization. Although new magazines do not have

8) It is worth noting that in this, as in many of the other categories we have been examining, Slovenia stands out as an important exception. Here, continuity not radical change is the overall pattern. Thus, in 1985 there were approximately 300 members of the Slovenian branch of the Yugoslav Writers' Union, the same organization had 302 members in 2001. Nor had any other organization arisen to compete with it. While the number of companies publishing literature has grown here as in other countries, the book market is still dominated by the same firms that operated during the 1980s (Mladinska knjiga, Cankarjeva založba, and Državna založba Slovenije (DZS). From the data we have been able to collect, it appears that the Slovenian government increased spending on culture in general and literature in particular through the 1990s. Thus, while writers and publishing houses in Slovenia face some of the same market pressures as in other East European countries, their overall situation appears to be far healthier. This tendency to stability in Slovenia is in keeping with the fact in general their post-communist transition has been less fraught than in other countries in the region. The particular concern with culture and particularly linguistic culture on the part of the government may well have to do with the fact that for tiny Slovenia, culture is perceived to be one of the few factors that differentiates it from its larger neighbors and therefore justifies its very existence. This is a traditional Slovenian position that was elaborated best by Josip Vidmar in the interwar years.

a large circulation, they have decentralized literary life by creating many autonomous centers of culture (though all still supported by the centralized Ministry of Culture and Art), which animated the literary life of various regions. One of the healthy results of this decentralization/regionalization is the breakdown of the formerly unified and stultifying system of criteria and stable taste that united practically all audiences in the communist period. This has allowed for a growing diversity in literature but it also has a negative side effect: it generates a published *graphomania*. But, most important, it accelerates the circulation of information about books, increases the number of participants in the dialogue about them, and does not sentence the author of a book published by a small publishing house to the judgment of one of the central literary magazines. It helps small literary communities to find their own language in the discussion on their own identity; in other words, it creates local systems of communication, which support local communities. Furthermore, many of the newly created magazines gave birth to new foundations, publishing houses, and literary awards, multiplying, in this way, the infrastructure of the literary market.

What is more, East Europeans continue to read and to believe in the importance of serious literature, albeit not at the levels that obtained in the communist days. Thus, survey published in Prague (Pramen, *Adult Literacy Survey 1994–1998*) revealed that in the Czech republic some 74 percent of adults reported that they had read at least one book in the previous month. Only New Zealand reported a higher figure, and the US trailed well behind at approximately 65%. Furthermore, a book published in Prague in 2002 about the reading habits of Czechs indicates that the percentage of Czechs who read more than 6 books per year is above 50%, a significantly larger figure than similar surveys find in the US or most of Western Europe.[9]

On the negative side, however, is the obvious fact that more and more books and more and more journals are chasing after ever fewer consumers of local high culture. In this sense, perhaps, the writing and publishing industry of the post-communist countries is coming to resemble that of Western countries. Although publishers, even some commercially successful ones, are willing to publish challenging works of literature for prestige reasons, they recognize that there is a very limited audience for such works. As a result, even if they are willing to publish literature, they do not pay the kinds of royalties that would allow writers to make a living.

The situation in a sense recapitulates the experience of the East European intelligentsia toward the end of the nineteenth century, when, in the words of Konrad and Szelenyi, "it was easy for educated professionals to become intellectual proletarians: Their livelihood was uncertain, their market shifting and unstable. The intelligentsia could not support its own creative artists and scholars, and the stratum of the bourgeoisie that was willing to pay for culture was exceptionally small."[10] Precisely in order to escape this situation, intellectuals in general and writers in particular allied themselves with those governments that could provide the material conditions necessary for them to do their work, including of course the communist regimes. Now, however, as we have noted

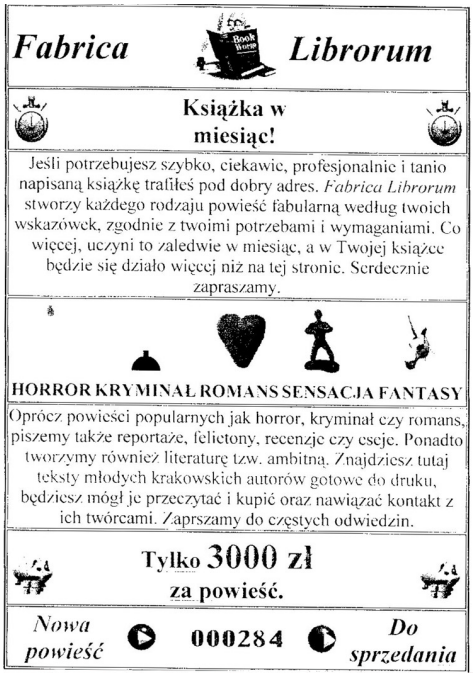
9) Otakar Chaloupka, *Takovi jsme my – česte čtenari* (Prague: Adonai, 2002), 120.
10) George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 119.

above, the new market-focused governments of most Eastern European countries are no longer willing or able to support writing as they have in the past and so intellectuals in general and writers in particular again find themselves in a precarious position.

As a result, writers in Eastern Europe today are searching for solutions, starting with the accumulation of jobs, and ending with various forms of conversion of already acquired symbolic prestige into new positions, which, in turn, can bring more income and social visibility. Depending on circumstance, education, and reputation, writers employ various strategies of to convert their symbolic cultural capital into positions in politics, journalism, or the private sphere – some become free-lance writers, some editors, others are attracted to the relative safety of academic positions. However, as opposed to the communist era, there is now an expectation that writers, editors and professors will actually work for their salary, so available time for creative writing has drastically decreased. What is more, the salaries paid by academic and literary institutions are generally not high, so writers who choose this route must have one or two other jobs, and all this besides writing literature. Thus, although writing still carries sufficient prestige in Eastern Europe to attract new participants, the financial situation makes it more and more likely that for many writing will become a hobby rather than a profession.

The strange combination of the continued prestige attached to writing with the increasing proletarianization of writers themselves can perhaps best be appreciated in the attached internet advertisement that appeared in Poland in 1999. It invites (one imagines) nouveau riche Poles who wish to see themselves as writers, to provide approximately $750 and a basic story line in any popular fiction genre. In exchange, this ghost-writing service, presumably staffed by hungry young writers, will produce a novel in the appropriate genre, publish it and deliver the copies to the proud "author." The ad even notes that the writing service is capable of producing works of "so-called serious literature," but the lack of prominence given to this aspect of the service indicates that its operators do not feel that their potential clients would be much interested in being associated with works of this type.

Perhaps the most difficult and intriguing question that arises after a consideration of the radical changes that have taken place in the material conditions of writing in Eastern Europe since 1989 is how they have affected literary production. While it is intuitively obvious that they must have had some effect, one wants to avoid the kind of vulgar sociology (itself so prevalent in East European literary criticism of the communist era) that would draw a straight line between material



conditions of writing and literary output. In my forthcoming book *Remaining Relevant after Communism? Writers and Society in Eastern Europe since 1989*, I lay out six broad strategies writers have pursued. Some involve leaving the world of literature (moving into politics, journalism, and so forth), others involve choosing certain approaches in order to attract readers (nationalism, internationalism), and still others have to do with genre (borrowing Western popular genres, for example). Overall, they present a broad picture of change in what had been the most literocentric societies in the world. How much farther that change will go will be seen only in the next generation, the first to grow up in an Eastern Europe in which literature and its producers were no longer on a pedestal.

Σ резюме

Писатели и общество в Восточной Европе 1989–2000 гг.: конец золотого века

Долгое время во всех восточно-европейских странах писатели, занимающиеся так называемой серьезной литературой, пользовались уважением и почетом, в особенности в период коммунизма. Однако с распадом коммунистического режима резко изменилось положение писателя в обществе. По данным, полученным из десяти восточно-европейских стран, автор настоящей статьи пытается показать, что именно изменилось. Выявлено, что крупные изменения произошли не только в отношении материальных условий писательской деятельности бывших официальных литераторов и писателей-диссидентов, но и в плане социального престижа высокой литературы.