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Enikő Kovács-Szépvölgyi

Administrative child protection in Hungary at the crossroads of legal history and law and literature during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the interwar period

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Abstract: Following the legal modernization after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, administrative child protection gradually separated from the broader field of poverty relief and became part of social policy within the narrower framework of child welfare. In this domain, abandoned children—those declared abandoned for material reasons, and from 1925 onward, also for moral reasons—were placed under the care of state-run children's shelters, thereby acquiring the right to state support. These children were often placed with foster families, which could serve their best interests but also created opportunities for abuse. This study explores such abuses through the literary works of Zsigmond Móricz using the perspective of law and literature within legal-historical context. After reviewing the role of civil-led child protection, the novel Árvácska is analyzed from a legal-historical context to examine the practice of administrative child protection during interwar period. The paper highlights the growing tension between legal norms and their societal enforcement, as reflected in contemporary legal consciousness.

Keywords: abandoned children, administrative child protection, law and literature, state-led child protection

Introduction

One possible approach to the relationship between law and literature is the examination of the presence of law in literary works.[1] According to István H. Szilágyi, "The depiction of law in literary works can also be used as a source for legal history and the history of ideas."[2] Literary works can also serve as historical sketches, as they convey the atmosphere of a given era through the subjective impressions of their authors.[3] They can reveal the legal norms that prevailed at the time, whether these were state-enacted laws or unwritten rules emerging from and sustained within the community.

This study explores the practice of administrative child protection in early 20th-century Hungary from a legal-historical context, with a focus on the literary works of Zsigmond Móricz. In several of his writings, Móricz addresses the plight of impoverished children and the shortcomings of child protection policies. His unique perspective was shaped by his legal education, experience in public administration, and firsthand encounters with rural life during

1 István H. Szilágyi, "Jog és irodalom," *Iustum Aequum Salutare* 6, No. 1 (2010): 5.
2 Szilágyi, "Jog és irodalom," 10.
3 Balázs Fekete, "A századforduló szellemi körképe a Varázshegyről. Esszé a 'jog és irodalom' köréből," *Iustum Aequum Salutare* 3, No. 2 (2007): 20.

his folk poetry collection journeys. "The young man, who set out to collect songs and tales, was led by the experiences of his last journeys to social realizations: the singing people are also suffering people, life produces the bloody ballads."[4] These insights not only informed his literary output but also provide valuable commentary on the socio-legal conditions of the time.

Zsigmond Móricz's short stories and his influential novel *Árvácska [Orphalina]*[5] provide a sensitive and critical portrayal of administrative child protection in civil-era Hungary. The novel was based on conversations Móricz held with his foster daughter, Erzsébet Litkei, whose life experiences provided the foundation of the narrative. At the same time, the plot construction and the fictional death of the protagonist Árvácska reveal the presence of invention alongside documentary elements. With this short novel, Móricz's aim was not only to sensitize society to the plight of orphans but also to draw political and social attention to the broader issue of child welfare.[6] Through individual fates, Móricz exposes the systemic deficiencies of state intervention and the harsh consequences of a dysfunctional protective apparatus, with the abandoned child emerging as its most vulnerable victim.

The first chapter of the study conceptualizes the definitions of state-led and administrative child protection from legal historical and theoretical perspectives. The second chapter examines the issue of child poverty through Móricz's short stories, exploring the tensions between community-led and state-led child protection and the consequences of inadequate oversight of abandoned children. The third chapter examines the conflicting interests and practical shortcomings in the field of administrative child protection. The fourth chapter turns to *Árvácska* to illustrate how a child's experience within the state care system reflects the broader incapacity of institutions to fulfill their intended protective roles.

Conceptualizing Administrative Child Protection

Following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867), child protection emerged as part of the poor relief administration, primarily in connection with measures aimed at alleviating

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4 Mihály Czine, *Móricz Zsigmond (1879–1942)*, in *A Magyar Irodalom Története V.*, ed. Miklós Szabolcsi (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1965).

5 The title Árvácska refers not only to the orphan status of the child protagonist but also evokes the Hungarian name of a flower (Viola tricolor, pansy in English). In the novel, the girl's official name is "Állami Árvácska," literally "State Orphan." In the English translation by Virginia L. Lewis, published by Library Cat Publishing in 2020, the title appears as Orphalia. In the following discussion, the child will be referred to by her original Hungarian name, Árvácska.

6 Norbert Baranyai, *"...Valóságból táplálkozik s mégis költészet." Az önéletrajzi (újra)olvasás lehetőségei Móricz Zsigmond regényeiben* (PhD diss., Debreceni Egyetem, 2007), 157–159.

poverty. The system of Hungarian administrative child protection, following the Compromise, was built primarily on Hungarian traditions and a French model. Covert emulation of the Austrian model can be observed in the case of Hungarian state-run children's shelters. While the Austrian solution is presented here for reference, it should be noted that the territorial applicability of the relevant legislation did not cover Hungary.

As part of this, Emperor Joseph II founded the first state-run foundling hospital in Vienna in 1784. A distinctive feature of the Austrian solution was that it established a link between the foundling hospitals and maternity homes, requiring women admitted to maternity homes to serve as nurses in the institution for four months.[7] Hungarian citizens also gave birth to their children in these foundling hospitals, and the Josephinist foundling homes continued to operate even during the years of the Dual Monarchy.[8]

The Austrian Civil Code (ABGB) of 1811 placed children (up to the age of seven), minors (between the ages of seven and fourteen), and young persons (up to the age of twenty-four) under special protection and also defined parental obligations.[9] During the period under study, the upbringing and care of poor children were generally regulated by provincial poor relief laws, as well as by the Reichsheimatgesetz of 1863.[10] According to the latter, foundlings were to be sent to the locality where they had been born or where they had been found. In the case of children already in the care of state foundling homes, whose place of birth or discovery was unknown, they were transported to the municipality where the foundling hospital was located.[11] Municipalities were obliged not only to provide maintenance but also education for needy children, if a legally responsible third party was unable to do so. From 1901, provincial orphan funds had to be used for the care and upbringing of orphans, neglected and abandoned children until the age of eighteen. The legislation specified who was to be regarded as an orphan or an abandoned child.[12]

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7 Leopold Hueber und Leopold Moll, "Österreich," in *Säuglingsfürsorge und Kinderschutz in den europäischen Staaten*, ed. Arthur Keller und Chr. J. Klumker (Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg GmbH, 1912), 587–613.

8 Sándor Karsai, "A gyermekvédelem multjából," *A Gyermekvédelem Lapja* 2, no. 2 (1926): 4–5.

9 Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch für die gesammten deutschen Erbländer der Oesterreichischen Monarchie. StF: JGS Nr. 946/1811. 137–186. §.

10 Gesetz vom December 1863, betreffend die Regelung der Heimatverhältnisse. Elérhető: https://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=rgb&datum=1863&page=396&size=45.

11 Leopold Hueber und Leopold Moll, "Österreich," in *Säuglingsfürsorge und Kinderschutz in den europäischen Staaten*, ed. Arthur Keller und Chr. J. Klumker (Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg GmbH, 1912), 587–613.

12 Gesetz vom 29. Januar 1902. wirksam für das Erzherzogthum Ößterreich ob der Enns, womit nähere Bestimmungen über die Bewerbung der dem Lande Oberößtrreich in Gemäßigkeit des Gesetzes vom 3. Juni 1901 überwiesenen Theile der Gebarungsüberschüffe der gemeinschaftlichen Waifencaffen erlassen werden. Elérhető: ÖNB-ALEX – Landesgesetzblatt OÖ 1819–1995 (onb.ac.at).

Based on a decree issued on 11 May 1901, criminal courts were obliged to inform guardianship authorities (guardianship courts) and child protection associations about cases of child abuse.[13] Under the decree, in instances of certain crimes committed against minors—such as the torture, neglect, or exploitation of children for begging or immoral purposes—criminal courts were required, after the conclusion of proceedings, to refer the case to the guardianship courts. This applied even if the defendant was acquitted, whenever doubts arose about the proper care of the child.[14]

In the spirit of transforming the Vienna foundling hospital into a child protection office, a proposal was prepared for the 1907 Child Protection Congress. This proposal, based on Josephinist foundations, aimed to further develop the child protection system so that legitimate—i.e., not illegitimate—children could also receive state protection if their mother was unable to care for them.[15]

In Hungary, a significant change occurred in 1898 when the state assumed the financial burden of caring for and educating children under the age of seven who had been declared abandoned because of material reasons. This action reinforced its role in ensuring the welfare of this vulnerable group of children.[16]

The child protection laws of 1901, along with the 1903 ministerial circular, established the normative foundation for the operation of Hungarian state-led children's shelters. These regulations not only extended the age limits for the care of abandoned children but also significantly broadened the scope of state involvement in child welfare.[17] During this period, state interventions aimed at protecting abandoned children were commonly referred to as "state-led child protection," a term that likely gained widespread usage following the enactment of the 1901 child protection laws and the issuance of the 1903 ministerial circular. However, this terminological usage can be seen as somewhat misleading. The concept of state-led child protection extended beyond the care of children in state-run shelters, encompassing a broader range of interventions and responsibilities aimed at safeguarding vulnerable children.[18] Following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the term *state-led child protection* referred to an evolving, multi-branch legal and administrative framework aimed at safeguarding children.

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13 Arthur Károly Szilágyi, "Kiskorúak gyermekvédelme Ausztriában," *Ügyvédek Lapja* 42, no. 42 (1905): 2.

14 "Nemzetközi Szemle," *Jogtudományi Közlöny* 24, no. 24 (1901): 196.

15 "Gyermekvédelmi hivatal," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap* 7, no. 7 (1906): 88–89.

16 Act XXI of 1898 on the Coverage of the Costs of Public Health Care § 3 d).

17 Act VIII of 1901 on State-led Children's Shelters; Act XXI of 1901 on the Care of Children over the Age of Seven in Need of Public Assistance; Circular No. 1 of the Minister of the Interior from the year 1903, addressed to all municipal authorities—with the exception of Fiume—concerning the issuance of regulations on the protection of abandoned children.

18 Sándor Szana, *Az állami gyermekvédelem fejlesztéséről* (Temesvár: Uhrmann Henrik Könyvnyomdája, 1903).

This framework sought to coordinate the activities of authorities (including national, municipal, and local administrative bodies), in implementing child protection measures.

In a broader sense, child protection during this period encompassed all state and societal actions directed toward children, including nursery care, public education, maternal and infant health programs, pediatric healthcare, and protections against child labor. More specifically, child protection in its narrower sense focused on children deemed endangered—either due to material deprivation or because of criminal behavior, moral decline, or neglect. Within this limited scope, administrative child protection were central components, particularly the care of abandoned children.

Administrative child protection gradually emerged from the broader framework of poor relief administration and became an integral part of early social policy. It encompassed all tasks, activities, and legal regulations under administrative authority, carried out by state and municipal institutions to safeguard children deemed legally abandoned. While the term itself appeared in professional debates and in the contemporary press during the years of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, it was never formally defined as a scientific or legal concept.[19] In the interwar period, the term continued to describe the system of state care for abandoned children, reflecting its ongoing relevance in state welfare discourse.[20] Some scholars identified child protection as a subfield of poor relief—alongside general assistance to the poor and medical care—[21] while others classified the care of abandoned children within poor relief, but considered child protection in a broader sense to fall under the general domain of social policy.[22] This study aligns more closely with the views expressed by representatives of criminal law scholars of the period, and later by Andor Csizmadia, who regarded administrative child protection as an integral part of social policy.[23] The system of administrative child protection

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19 "Gyermekvédelem Magyarországon," *Népszava*, 1906, No. 201, 9–10.; Zoltán Rónai, "Jegyzetek a magyar büntetőjog reformjához," *Huszadik Század*, 1908, No. 1, 59.; "A fiatalkorúak bíráiról és a fiatalkorúak bűnügyeiben követendő eljárásról szóló törvény-javaslat. Vita a Magyar Jogászegylet Büntetőjogi Bizottságának 1912. évi december hó 21-én és február hó 1-én tartott ülésein," *Magyar Jogászegyleti Értekezések*, új folyam, 7. köt., 1913, No. 50, 123.; Zsigmond Engel, "Felperesség Apasági Perben," *Ügyvédek Lapja*, 1909, No. 18, 5–6.; Miklós Berend, "A csecsemőhalandóság elleni küzdelem Magyarországon," *Magyar Figyelő*, 1914, No. 2, 361.

20 Kálmán Csorna, *Gyámsági jog és jogszolgáltatás* (Budapest: Budapest Székesfőváros Házinyomdája, 1935), 193.

21 Tivadar Forbáth, *Adatok a magyar szegényügy rendezéséhez* (Budapest: Márkus Samu könyvnyomdája, 1908), 44.; Rezső Hilscher, *Bevezetés a szociálpolitikába* (Budapest: MEKDSz Szövétnek-Kiadás, 1928), 15.

22 Zsigmond Engel, *A gyermekvédelem alapkérdései*, (Budapest: Magyar Jogászegylet, 1905), 5–6.

23 Andor Csizmadia, *A szociális gondoskodás változásai Magyarországon* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Állam- és Jogtudományi Intézet, 1977), 12.

during the era of Dual Monarchy remained fundamentally unchanged in the interwar period, with the exception of the brief period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic.[24]

In administrative child protection, the official decision declaring a child abandoned played a central role. With the entry into force of the 1903 ministerial circular, two significant changes occurred in the procedures concerning the declaration of abandonment: firstly, the legislator modified the conditions required for such a declaration, secondly, jurisdiction over the proceedings was assigned to the court of wards (árvaszék).[25]

Community-led Child Protection in Móricz's Novels on Child Poverty

Zsigmond Móricz achieved his long-sought literary breakthrough with the novella *Hét krajcár* (*Seven Farthings*), a work that signaled his decisive departure from a conservative worldview and opened the path toward a more socially engaged perspective.

In *Riport a pesti gyermekről* (*Report on the Child of Pest*), Móricz offers a sobering account of the conditions faced by impoverished children in the capital. The piece is framed as a dialogue with a secretary, through which the bleak realities of urban child welfare are gradually revealed. Institutional child protection in the first half of the 20th century was grounded in the coordinated efforts of state institutions and social organizations. This system had several drawbacks: care for sick children was not fully addressed, children's homes imposed impossible requirements for admitting such children. The writer's conclusion was that child poverty could not be eradicated through social associations alone.

In his work *Ami megérthetetlen* (*What Is Incomprehensible*), Móricz portrays the social tension between poor and wealthy families. The piece also highlights the contradictions that can be raised against private charity, which are also discussed in the standpoint of lawyer and social politician Hilscher Rezső in the monthly publication *Szegényügy* (Poverty Affairs).[26] A key question regarding charity is whether it truly stems from selfless action. Móricz's novel aligns with Hilscher's perspective, depicting a poor little girl whose meal is provided in exchange for the nobleman expecting the girl's day laborer father to settle the debt through

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[24] Andor Csizmadia, "Szociálpolitikai törekvések a Magyar Tanácsköztársaságban," in *A tanácshatalom jogpolitikája 1919-ben*, ed. Kálmán Kovács (Budapest: Magyar Jogász Szövetség, 1979), 103–104, 106–107.; Gyula Gayer, "Kármán Elemér (Egy elfelejtett magyar bíró portréja)," *Valóság* 4 (1973): 72–73; Katalin Petrák, "A szocialista gyermekvédelem kialakítása a Magyar Tanácsköztársaság idején," *Párttörténeti Közlemények* 4 (1961): 109–158.

[25] Mihály Kiss, "A szegényügy és a gyámhatóságok," *Magyar Közigazgatás*, 1899, No. 29, 2–3.

[26] Rezső Hilscher, "Szociálpolitika, szegényügy és jótékonyság," *Szegényügy*, 1917, No. 1, 1–3.

woodcutting. In this story charity is not entirely voluntary, as it is at the request of the teacher that the impoverished girl is invited to dine with her classmate.

Private charity in its organized form was present within the framework of community-led child protection during the examined period, which remained significant alongside state-led child protection. Community-led child protection refers to the activities carried out by civil organizations—typically associations—and religious denominations aimed at protecting children. These efforts supported and supplemented state child protection or fulfilled tasks entrusted by the government in this area. In Western European countries, similarly to Hungary, until the second half of the 19th century, the protection of children was primarily handled by churches and various forms of civil society organizations. The role of society remained important during the legal modernization that followed the Compromise of 1867, and the state also considered various organizations as partners, as seen in the case of the National Child Protection League and the Stefánia Association. From the perspective of legal regulation, the achievements of community-led child protection are worth evaluating due to their exemplary nature. The establishment of kindergartens or the care of abandoned children by social organizations were good practices upon which the state relied.[27] Therefore, domestic national-level regulation was built not only on foreign models but also on effective practices realized and demonstrated on a micro-level by domestic social organizations.[28]

The National Child Protection League, which is mentioned in the short novel *Árvácska*, a prominent body of social child protection, was founded on February 25, 1906. Count Edelsheim-Gyulai Lipót and Sándor Karsai played significant roles in its establishment.[29] The organization maintained a close relationship with the state while fulfilling its duties, effectively serving as a bridge between state and social child protection. It assumed responsibility for child welfare tasks that fell outside the scope of direct state intervention—tasks that were nevertheless essential for safeguarding children.[30]

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27 Zoltán Pálóczi Horváth, "Társadalmi feladatok és intézmények a gyermekvédelem területén," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1907, No. 11, 153.

28 "Országos Gyermekvédő Liga," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1906, No. 3, 42.

29 Albrecht kir. herceg, "Gyermekvédő Liga (Országos)," in *Pedagógiai Lexikon*, ed. Ernő Finászy, Gyula Kornis, and Ferenc Kemény (Budapest: Révai Irodalmi Intézet Nyomdája, 1936), 776–777.; Fülöp Rottenbiller, *Az Országos Gyermekvédő Liga harminc évi működése, 1906–1936* (Budapest: Fővárosi Nyomda Részvénytársaság, 1936), 9–12.

30 Fülöp Rottenbiller, *Az országos Gyermekvédő Liga harminc évi működése 1906–1936* (Budapest: Fővárosi Nyomda Részvénytársaság, 1936), 9–11. o.

Balancing Interests: State, Local Authorities, and the Care of Abandoned Children

In domestic scholarly thought, the right to upbringing was derived from the supervisory rights over minor children held by the parents or, in their absence, by the guardian in the discussed period. Therefore, it was not considered part of paternal authority. The right to upbringing was also an obligation. As a right, it was not seen as unlimited, parents or guardians who failed to fulfill this obligation could have it revoked. [31] According to guardianship law, supervision over the minor was exercised by the parents, or in their absence, by the guardian, who had the right to enforce domestic discipline.[32]

In addition to those set out in the guardianship law, wider social norms and informal laws governing children's lives have also played a crucial role in shaping the image of child-rearing. This is where Móricz's literary works become significant. Through Móricz's literary works, the peasant life of the past century can be studied, revealing the "laws of the village"—laws not created by parliament, but ones that originated within the village and governed the lives of its inhabitants for many years. These village laws dictated the order of everyday life, as demonstrated in his work *Életem regénye* (*The Novel of My Life*). "The law of the village is a strict law. There is no escaping the law of the village." This statement can also be considered true in terms of the implementation of regulations aimed at child protection.

The strength of the customs is important to emphasize, especially since the question of financing administrative child protection was raised numerous times in the legislative body. In administrative child protection, three interests had to be reconciled by the directors overseeing the state-run children's shelters: the interest of the children in need of protection, the financial interests of the state, and the financial interests of the local municipality.[33] Children declared abandoned upon reaching their seventh year—if their relatives were not financially responsible for their care—remained within the frame of state-run children's shelters at the expense of the local municipality (the placement of abandoned children in state-run shelters primarily involved transferring them to families, while institutional placement was more common in cases of illness or misbehavior). The practice showed that some local authorities sought to avoid these costs. They did so by either not requesting the declaration of abandonment for children eligible for care or by requesting the release of the child from the orphanage, to

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31 Arthur Károly Szilágyi, "Oly szülőtől, ki a gyermek kellő ápolásáról és neveléséről nem gondoskodik, vagy a kinél a gyermek erkölcsileg veszélyeztetve van, fenálló törvényeink és kormányhatósági rendeleteink alapján elvehető-e a gyermek és elhelyezhető-e egy állami gyermekmenhelybe?" *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1907, No. 4, 57–58.

32 Act XX of 1877 on the settlement of guardianship and custody matters §§ 10, 57.

33 Dezső Barsi, "Reformkérdések az állami gyermekmenhelyek belszervezetében," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1906, No. 9, 126.

provide care for the child more cheaply.[34] This also exemplifies the conflict between state and local governmental interests in administrative child protection.

The state-run children's shelters fulfilled multiple functions, including overseeing child protection authorities and ensuring the presence of official agents, participating in public health tasks, and serving as "child depots"—places for the surrender of children.[35] The normative definition of the state-led children's shelter was defined by the ministerial circular as "an institution in which the state cares for all abandoned children until they reach their 15th birthday."[36]

The 1901 Act No. VIII aimed to place healthy children outside of the orphanages. The directors of children's shelters were required to ensure that the provisions of the law on kindergarten attendance for children[37] and the law on public elementary education for children aged six and older[38] were applied.[39] Therefore, healthy children were primarily to be placed outside the institutions, with foster parents. The placement followed the family system. Becoming a foster parent was possible based on an official certificate issued by the local community. In the practice of the children's shelter in Temesvár, this was supplemented by the support of the settlement committee. In Temesvár's practice, the regularized ceremonial placement was intended to strengthen the moral commitment of the foster parents and emphasize the importance of their task. The foster parents were compensated in exchange for caring for and raising the child.[40]

The adoption of the family system entailed the establishment of strict conditions for supervision. This task was carried out by a doctor who supervised the children placed to foster families (or children's settlements) and, where established, by the settlement committees.[41] The settlement committees primarily aimed to coordinate the activities of the settlements, municipalities, and cities with the work of social organizations within the scope of administrative child protection, while also performing important supervisory and inspection duties concerning

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34 Miklós Kormos, "A gyermekvédelem és a hatóságok," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1905, No. 3, 49–51.; Pál Ruffy, "Gyermekvédelmi rendszerünk reformja," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1905, No. 4, 61–65.; "Az elhagyott gyermekek illetősége," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1905, No. 4, 67.

35 Zsigmond Engel, *A gyermekvédelem alapkérdései*, (Budapest: Magyar Jogászegylet, 1905), 18–21.

36 Circular No. 1 of the Minister of the Interior from the year 1903, addressed to all municipal authorities—with the exception of Fiume—concerning the issuance of regulations on the protection of abandoned children §12.

37 Act XV of 1891 on Early Childhood Care.

38 Act XXXVIII of 1868 on Public Education.

39 Act VIII of 1901 on State-led Children's Shelters §§ 1–3.

40 Sándor Szana, "A nevelőszülők kiválasztása s a gyermekeknek telepre való kihelyezése körüli eljárás a temesvári állami gyermekmenhelyben," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1906, No. 2, 27–29.

41 88.868 Vc./1903. B. M. Circular of the Ministry of the Interior on the Establishment of a Child Protection Committee.

the upbringing, care, and supervision of children placed in external care.[42] Since by 1909 the national system of officials ensuring supervision had not been established, professional circles advocated for the widespread employment of female child welfare supervisors.[43] The children's shelter of Temesvár was the first to employ such supervisors, and from 1909, training of settlement supervisors began at Budapest.[44]

Administrative Child Protection Between the Two World Wars—*Árvácska*: A Short Novel Derived from a Harrowing and Brutal Reality[45]

Móricz's writings examine the social inequalities that persist despite the existence of formal legal equality, drawing the reader's attention to these discrepancies.[46] Following the end of World War, the administrative child protection system was fundamentally based on the laws enacted during the era of the Dual Monarchy.

Árvácska is set in post-World War Hungary, in the rural settlements of the Great Plain, and serves as a sad reflection of the pitfalls of the history of the state-led child protection system. The novel's protagonist, Árvácska, is an orphaned young girl placed with foster families as part of the administrative child protection system. The foster families keep the abandoned child alongside the animals for her own benefit, as the state pays her eight pengős[47] each month and provides clothing for the child every six months. The novel immediately reveals in its first chapter the rural drivers behind the placement of abandoned children (often referred to as "foundlings" in the common parlance of the time) outside of institutional care: the money received for child maintenance and the clothing provided for the child.

The issue of state child protection is a complex area, which encompasses social, health, and legal aspects that must be understood in both theory and practice. These points are also reflected in *Árvácska*, although with some variation depending on the social environment in which the child placed with foster parents is raised within the administrative child protection system. The degree of social care for the child varies among the rural peasant, the wealthy

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42 Circular No. 1 of the Minister of the Interior from the year 1903, addressed to all municipal authorities—except for Fiume—concerning the issuance of regulations on the protection of abandoned children § 65.

43 Sándor Szana, "A telepfelügyelői tanfolyam a budapesti állami gyermekmenhelyben," *Gyermekvédelmi Lap*, 1909, No. 4, 49–51.

44 Szemle. *Gyermekvédelmi Lap* 3 (1909): 42.

45 Móricz himself made this statement about the novel. Imre Bori, "Tényregény az 1930-as évek magyar epikájában," in *Szintézis nélküli évek*, ed. Lóránt Kabdebó and Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó (Pécs: Janus Pannonius Egyetemi Kiadó, 1993), 389.

46 "Társadalom, nevelés, mozgalom, 1919–1945," *História*, 1997, No. 5–6, 44.

47 Official currency of Hungary from 1927.

landowner, and the artisan middle class, but in no case is the child treated in a humane manner. Perhaps the most deprived is the child in the peasant family of the Dudás, considering both the amount of food and the fact that the child is made to walk around naked. None of the fostering families take responsibility for the child's education; no one sends the school-age child to school. The fulfillment of school attendance is monitored by the state,[48] but the caregivers in Árvácska evade this obligation. Ultimately, the child is transferred to another family from the home of Dudás, due to the violation of the school attendance obligation, yet no official procedure is initiated as a result.

From a legal sociological perspective, it is interesting to examine, based on the novel, how rural and village people related to the laws and what correlations can be drawn between legal consciousness and actual human behavior. The dialogue in Árvácska exposes the stark realities of state oversight and social neglect, particularly in the realm of child protection within rural communities. One scene depicts an authority figure reprimanding the foster mother, Dudásné, for failing to send her foster child to school. This moment underscores the gap between legal mandates and the grim realities of life for such children. Dudásné's defensive replies—admitting to the neglect yet offering no genuine justification—reflect the deeper social and economic hardships she endures. The official's tone reflects not only the regulatory focus of the state but also the punitive nature of the system, emphasizing personal responsibility. The foster mother, Dudásné, tries to excuse herself, claiming—in line with the official's assumptions—that the child was always sick and underdeveloped.

The passage underscores the tension between societal expectations, legal obligations, and the dire realities of poverty that Móricz often sought to portray.[49] In the novel, we can see how the state-appointed foster families break the legal obligations set forth in the law, and how the workers of the state child protection system or the school teacher assist in this.[50] Even in the second foster family, with the rural landowning Szennyes family, the situation regarding school attendance remains unchanged.

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48 Act XXXVIII of 1868 on Public Education regulated the legal consequences of withholding compulsory education from school-age children.

49 Zsigmond Móricz, *Árvácska* (Budapest: Athenaeum Kiadó, 1941), 28.

50 According to Section 1 of Act XXX of 1921 on the Enforcement of School Attendance, every child's guardian is obligated to provide public school education to the child for nine academic years following the child's sixth birthday. Exceptions to this obligation were outlined in Sections 6 and 7. The 1926 Act VII, on the establishment and maintenance of elementary schools serving the interests of the rural population, aimed to facilitate the education of children living in rural areas.

> "And soon after that she sent the girl to school. She had to go there with a basket, the basket held curd cheese, and she carried a couple of nice chickens under her arms. The teacher took chickens and the curd cheese, said to send her regards to auntie Szennyes, and allowed the child to come into the school for a bit. She saw all the children, but looked in vain for the Dudás kids.
> She didn't set foot in the school again that year.
> But when the second year passed and it was again September, Mári Zsaba once again sent her to the teacher with a basket, and this time too she brought a couple of nice chickens, but it wasn't curd cheese that was in the basket, but rather eggs, lots of eggs, fifty of them."[51]

The child does not socialize, and no one is concerned with teaching her, she knows and understands as much as her childlike intellect can independently grasp. School becomes a cardinal issue, and Árvácska knows that she should be attending school, and that the caregivers should be sending her there.

The children's health condition was also subject to official supervision. According to the law, those caring for or looking after children under the age of seven were required to ensure that the children received medical care.[52] Árvácska suffers several injuries that raise the need for medical attention. One of these injuries was caused by Kadarcs (István Kadarcs, neighbour of the Dudás family), and later, its criminal legal implications will be discussed in more detail. At Dudás' home, domestic discipline is exercised in a way that harms the minor's health.[53] One only needs to think of the punishment for "stealing" the melon, after that burning hot embers were placed on the little girl's hand.

The question of the state's role and the necessity of state intervention also appears in the lines of the work.

> "Dear old uncle, I'm a lot like Jesus, because the State gives me wounds on my hands and my behind, because the State gave me over to Mári Zsaba, so she could beat me."
> "My child," the old man replied, "whoever has the State as his nursemaid should think twice whether he wants to be born. Why were you even brought into the world to be a burden to the State, you little fool."[54]

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51 Zsigmond Móricz, *Orphalina* (Library Cat, 2020), translated by Virginia L. Lewis, 144.
52 Act XIV of 1876 on Public Health, §§ 19, 20.
53 Act XX of 1877 on on the settlement of guardianship and custody matters § 10, states: "Domestic discipline may only be exercised in a manner that is harmless to the health of the minor."
54 Zsigmond Móricz, *Orphalina* (Library Cat, 2020), translated by Virginia L. Lewis, 153–154.

The Uncle's, a man named Csomor, fate is somewhat similar to Árvácska's, he was also an abandoned child, but in his case, there was an opportunity to learn the trade of weaving, so until the World War, he was able to live relatively decently from his work. With this, Móricz does not illustrate that boys raised by the state had it easier.

> "That's why I say, little girl, that whoever has the State for a nursemaid should think twice whether he wants to be born into this world, for the State seeks the good, but it has no voice, it needs an advocate, the State is powerful, but its hand does not caress; woe is he who lands in the hands of the bureaucrats, no good comes from them, only bother, vexation, and harm." [55]

In Uncle Csomor's opinion, Móricz gives voice to his criticism of administrative child protection and state care. Csomor treats the little girl kindly, like a child—he is the only one who attempts to educate her and is also the one who reports that Dudás (the head of the Dudás family) likely committed the crime of seduction against her.[56] The novel does not describe in detail what happened between Dudás and the little girl. Nevertheless, Szennyesné's reaction allows the reader to infer that Dudás sexually abused the child. Móricz illustrates the contempt and disgust shown by Szennyesné toward the girl after Dudás's actions come to light. The shocking reaction to the crime committed against the child, and the fact that Árvácska is a fact-based novel, makes the account more harrowing—especially considering the reality that such acts often went unpunished in the first half of the 20th century.

In Hungary, during the interwar period, Act V of 1878 on the Criminal Code—commonly known as the *Csemegi Code*—was in force, and thus any crimes depicted in the novel must be interpreted considering this Code. In the novel, Kadarcs "impaled the child on a stake, and she started bleeding immediately," although Árvácska was unaware of what had happened to her. Although the text never names the act directly, the atmosphere of the scene and the subsequent consequences make it tragically clear: the little girl was the victim of sexual abuse. This act corresponds to the crime of *defilement*, which under the Code was punishable when committed against a respectable girl under the age of 14. Although the Dudás parents disapprove of Kadarcs's actions, they take no concrete steps to hold him criminally responsible and nobody confronts him with his crime. Paradoxically, this event brings a sense of joy into Árvácska's life:

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55 Zsigmond Móricz, *Orphalina* (Library Cat, 2020), translated by Virginia L. Lewis, 159.
56 Act V of 1878 on criminal acts and offences § 247.

> "And she was truly proud, and she pampered her wound, which admittedly smarted. Mama dear had bandaged it with salt water, and the salt and the pain coursed through it, but she buried her small, grimy face in her little black hands, and cried inwardly, and rejoiced that she was so very fortunate to have the sort of injury that made even mama dear feel for her."[57]

At that time, the Dudás family was legally responsible for the child's care and likely knew that the event constituted a criminal offense, yet their personal moral code compelled them to keep it secret, believing that "decent people don't speak about such things".[58] This situation raises the broader question of how extensive the hidden or unreported nature (latency) of crimes committed against abandoned children might have been.[59]

The characters who harmed Árvácska were never found legally responsible for their actions, apart from Zsabamári, but they are always held accountable in some form as a result of events. The child rapist Kadarcs appears later in the novel, dressed as a ghost to frighten the children, and Dudás takes the life of the 'ghost' with a revolver. In this case, however, Dudás did not increase the latency rate, they report the incident, but he is not prosecuted. "If it weren't for these children, they would have locked me up," says Dudás, who himself probably invoked the self-defense.[60]

Conclusion

In *Árvácska*, Móricz does not focus on urban poverty but rather tells the harrowing story of an orphan girl living in the rural plains of Hungary. The novel reveals the dark sides of child protection in the first half of the 20th century. State-provided subsidies for raising foster children—and the fact that families could avoid hiring servants by taking in orphans—often led to the exploitation of these children.

Everyone attempted to shift responsibility away from themselves, particularly in matters relating to abandoned children. During the period in question, state-led protection for children was far from adequate. Foster parents often regarded children more as labor tools than as young humans in need of nurturing. This is well illustrated in the line: "Because dear mother said, you won't get any food today—you didn't work for us anymore," spoken by the Dudás family when they decided to return Árvácska.

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57 Zsigmond Móricz, *Orphalina* (Library Cat, 2020), translated by Virginia L. Lewis, 58.
58 Zsigmond Móricz, *Orphalina* (Library Cat, 2020), translated by Virginia L. Lewis, 77–78.
59 Zsigmond Móricz, *Árvácska* (Budapest: Athenaeum Kiadó, 1941), 23.
60 Zsigmond Móricz, *Orphalina* (Library Cat, 2020), translated by Virginia L. Lewis, 86.

The state delegated some the responsibility of child welfare to society and its goodwill. Its extended arms failed to carry out supervisory and monitoring duties effectively, resulting in situations like the abandoned child not attending school. Foster parents and "supervisors" became, in essence, accomplices to these legal violations.

Ultimately, the novel highlights the inhumane treatment of orphaned children and the failures of child protection systems. In Hungary, serious discussions regarding the state's and society's duties in child protection began in the latter half of the 19th century. Simultaneously, the social perception of childhood began to shift. After World War I, international legal recognition emerged that children required special, enhanced protection. At that time, children's rights were considered obligations of the state and society, rather than individual entitlements, at the same time, in the context of child protection discourse even during the era of Dual Monarchy, the child often appears as a subject of rights.

Although some progress had been made in child protection by the time the novel was published, Móricz makes it clear that it was far from sufficient. His discussed writings serve to raise social awareness and expose the glaring deficiencies in early 20th-century child welfare. These shortcomings were most apparent in inadequate legal frameworks, lack of financial support, and the extreme vulnerability of abandoned children. *Árvácska* narrates the story of state-led child protection and exposes the ineffectiveness of contemporary social policies, offering practical insights alongside historical legal elements, and thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the issue for those interested in the topic.

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In the Shadow of Fortune I.
Gambling, Crime, and Modernity in Interwar Budapest

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Abstract: This paper examines the interconnections between gambling and crime in interwar Budapest, focusing on the social and institutional contexts of illegal gaming. By situating gambling within the broader framework of urban modernity, it explores how the practice reflected and reinforced social inequalities, shaped urban spaces, and challenged the capacities of law enforcement. Drawing on contemporary police writings, crime journalism, and official statistics, the analysis reveals how illicit gambling was represented and regulated, as well as how these representations contributed to the construction of "deviant" urban identities. The paper argues that illegal gambling was both a symptom and a catalyst of the social tensions generated by modernization and economic crisis, offering a distinctive lens through which to interpret the moral and cultural context of interwar Budapest.

Keywords: gambling, urban crime, card games, law enforcement, interwar Budapest

"*Only a man who plays his cards should take them in hand. He must be the master of both his cards and his money. Whoever lets the cards master him becomes their slave.*"[1]

Introduction

The nightlife of interwar Budapest reflected both the glamour of a modern metropolis and the shadowy zones where entertainment and crime were closely intertwined. In this world, gambling—especially its unlicensed and illegal forms—became a defining social practice. It not only mirrored existing social inequalities but also helped to reinforce them, influencing the use of urban space and the everyday operations of law enforcement. Emerging in cafés, dive bars, elegant nightclubs, and private flats, gambling venues combined excitement, risk, and the pursuit of quick profit, while also functioning as spaces of social interaction.

This paper explores the connections between gambling and crime in interwar Budapest. Beyond its criminological relevance, the topic offers broader perspectives on social history by revealing tensions between social norms, deviance and everyday life. The analysis's objective is to elucidate how illegal gambling embodied the dynamics of risk, hope, and alternative routes to prosperity during a period of social transformation.

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[1] Izidor Kálnoki, *A bacc-asztal mellől* (Budapest: Schenk, 1908), 60.

However, an examination of these issues cannot be separated from the institutional and urban context in which gambling, as an illegal practice, became visible and interpretable in the first place. The urbanization that took place during the 19th century resulted in social and spatial transformation, thereby rendering crime perceptible in a novel manner. This shift in perspective rendered crime not solely a legal problem, but also a cultural and narrative phenomenon. An early reflection of this phenomenon can be found in Hungarian crime and urban literature, which emerged in the middle of the century. The works of Ignác Nagy, Lajos Kúthy, and later Soma Gúthi addressed the dark side of metropolitan life, the uncertainties of social mobility, and prevalent forms of deviance. These texts not only reflected on the consequences of urbanization, but also prepared the conceptual and imaginative framework in which the "underworld" could become a distinct, recognizable phenomenon.[2]

The modern police force in Hungary evolved into an institutional entity in the latter half of the 19th century, a development that occurred in close temporal conjunction with the Compromise of 1867. This event was in turn closely associated with the accelerated urbanization and transformation of Budapest into a major metropolis. In the capital, which was unified in 1873, the challenge of maintaining public safety emerged as a significant issue, surpassing the capacities of the existing, partly military or local law enforcement agencies. Consequently, a unified, state-controlled police force was established in 1881, which already bore the hallmarks of modern bureaucratic policing. Concurrently, the "underworld" evolved into a distinct category within the historical context of crime, transcending its status as an isolated phenomenon to become a networked, partially professionalized form of criminal activity. Although gambling had been an integral part of urban life long before the turn of the century, it was not until the establishment of the police force that it began to receive the attention of law enforcement and criminal investigation agencies. The fact that the police were now in existence did not in itself mean that all areas of crime could be immediately mapped or effectively controlled.[3] For a considerable duration, illegal gambling was regarded as an "invisible" or tolerated crime, operating on the periphery of the private sphere and the semi-legal entertainment industry. It was only in the first half of the 20th century, particularly

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2 The following section will provide further information regarding the writers previously referenced: Sándor Kálai, "Médium, műfaj, mediáció. (Kuthy Lajos: Hazai rejtelmek)," in *"Szirt a habok közt" Tanulmányok Imre László 70. születésnapjára*, eds. Péter Bényei, Mónika Gönczy, and Pál S. Varga (Debrecen: Debrecen University Press, 2014), 179–185; Sándor Kálai, "Fekete könyvek—Gúthi Soma bűnügyi elbeszélése," *Korunk* 28, no. 3 (2017): 16–24; Mónika Mátay, "Egy reformkori író-celeb: Nagy Ignác," *Magyar Könyvszemle* 139, no. 3–4 (2023): 337–357.

3 The following section will provide a more detailed overview of the process of professionalization of the police force: Roland Perényi, *A bűn nyomában. A budapesti bűnözés társadalomtörténete 1896–1914* (Budapest: Uránia Ismeretterjesztő Alapítvány—L'Harmattan, 2012), 159–198.

during the interwar period, that a professional, administrative and discursive framework emerged within the police force that consciously interpreted gambling as a social danger and a structural element of the underworld. The advent of war and economic crises, the emergence of "modern" statistical and expert approaches to crime, and the recognition that gambling was not an isolated moral problem but a key area of survival strategies, corruption, and organized crime played a decisive role in this.

Three main questions guide the inquiry. First, how did gambling become integrated into Budapest's social life, and through what mechanisms and actors did it intersect with crime? Second, how did law enforcement respond—what measures were taken to curb illegal gambling, and how effective were they? Third, how did contemporary press coverage depict and shape public discourses on the boundaries between crime and order, or between "normal" and "deviant" urban life?

The source base of the analysis is intentionally diverse. Crime journalists (e.g. Marcell Palásthy, Kornél Tábori, Gyula Turcsányi, Vilmos Tarján) and police officers (notably Ede Gellért and Dániel Schreiber) portrayed Budapest's nightlife in ways that were both documentary and dramatized. Official statistics and legislation complement these accounts, offering insights into the regulation and perception of gambling, even if they seldom capture its full extent. Thus, the sources reflect not the "reality" of gambling but contemporary constructions of it—constructions that nonetheless reveal key aspects of urban society.

The paper is structured into three main sections. The opening section situates gambling within a broader international context and examines its social functions, focusing on the participation and motivations of different social groups as well as the predominant forms of gambling in the period. The second section explores the relationship between illegal gambling and crime in interwar Budapest, paying particular attention to the legal framework, preventive measures, and the institutional practices employed by the capital's law enforcement authorities to curb the spread of gambling, especially its illicit forms.[4] Finally, the third section turns to contemporary press representations, analysing how gambling was discussed, framed, and narrated in public discourse. Overall I argue that illegal gambling was a striking manifestation of the economic crisis of the era, but at the same time it was a reflection of the social changes and tensions associated with modernization, and may even have been a catalyst for them.

[4] Due to considerations of scope, the paper deliberately excludes the economic and legal history of state-controlled gambling—such as lotteries, betting, and horse racing—as well as medical or psychological interpretations of addiction.

The social role of gambling

Gambling can be defined as a social phenomenon, in which individual risk-taking is intertwined with community experiences, hope, and, in some cases, the illusion of social advancement. Consequently, its function is threefold: cultural, economic and symbolic. The characteristics of this phenomenon are determined by a multitude of factors within every social and political environment, including traditions, power relations, and—perhaps most obviously—norms and moral frameworks. Consequently, the essence of gambling for research purposes frequently extends beyond the game itself, as it can also serve as a social mirror that unveils specific characteristics of a given community's mentality.[5]

The social role of gambling has been characterized by duality in almost every era. While on the one hand there was the danger of fraud, addiction, moral decay, and crime, on the other hand there were economic benefits, tax revenue, entertainment, and the possibility of institutional regulation. This duality was already evident in ancient Rome, where Roman law prohibited games played for money, allowing them only in one case, during the Saturnalia festival.[6] In 14th-century France, legislation proscribed gambling with a view to preserving social order, whilst simultaneously permitting it in certain forms, especially when it generated revenue for cities or royal courts. In Italy, from the 16th century onwards, casinos operating under princely license served the entertainment of the aristocracy and were also taxed. The authorities' primary motivations for addressing gambling were to maintain public order and prevent fraud. However, in times of war or financial hardship, a pragmatic approach to these activities was adopted, with gambling often serving as a source of tax revenue or funding for support purposes.[7]

Illegal forms of gambling, such as those taking place in public spaces or at fairgrounds, and covert card games, have been frequently associated with criminal organizations of varying

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5 Kálmán Korchmáros, *A hazárdjátékok elmélete és gyakorlata* (Budapest: Forum, 1930), 5–7.

6 Dániel Schreiber, *A játékkaszinók szélhámosai* (Budapest: Centrum Kiadóvállalat, 1934), 11.

7 Toine Spapens, "Illegal Gambling," in *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*, ed. Letizia Paoli (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 404–407.—A similar principle was applied in Budapest during this period. Entertainment tax was levied on the general public, with the revenue being used primarily for poverty relief purposes. The pertinent regulations encompassed a diverse array of entertainment establishments, encompassing theatres, cinemas, cafés, and casinos. According to some sources, in 1925, 11% of the capital's entertainment tax revenue was derived from gambling in casinos. It should be noted, however, that this figure only included legal gambling. Rezső Homolyai, *Városi önkormányzat. A városigazgatási politika vázlata* (Budapest: Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatala, 1943), 180; Mihály Pásztor, *Budapest zsebe* (Budapest: Athenaeum, 1926), 241–242; Tivadar Surányi-Unger, *Budapest szerepe Magyarország gazdasági életében 1925–1934* (Budapest: Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatala, 1936), 160–163; Ervin Pálosi, *Budapest kriminalitása és moralitása az 1909–1925. években* (Budapest: Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Hivatala, 1927), 101–107.

dimensions. These entities have been known to generate revenue through the facilitation of such illicit activities. During the 18th and 19th centuries, with the advent of urbanization and social mobility, gambling became widespread, especially among the working and lower middle classes. It is evident that by this juncture, the initial organized criminal entities had come into existence, with a deliberate focus on illicit activities such as illegal betting (notably on horse racing), slot machines, and card rooms. Consequently, these forms of gambling presented a significant law enforcement challenge on a global scale during the 20th century. The discourse in favor of criminalization persisted, with gambling being perpetuated as a symbol of social deviance, corruption, and the efficacy of state power. This historical process clearly demonstrates that gambling was not only a legal or economic issue, but also a social challenge that operated at the intersection of state regulation, public morality, and crime.[8]

The proliferation of gambling has also given rise to novel institutional frameworks, as clandestine gambling dens and semi-legal casinos have emerged, thus giving rise to new forms of employment. In the Hungarian capital, for instance, there existed various types of gambling establishment workers, including "*pinkabérlők*" (card sharps)[9], "*krupiék*" (croupiers)[10], "*játékmesterek*" (game masters)[11], and "*zsetonosok*" (chip dealers).[12] These individuals were accompanied by new types of criminals, such as casino swindlers, who professionally exploited the lack of regulation and social control in the world of gambling. Thus, in addition to its role as a form of entertainment or risk-taking, gambling has also led to the creation of a new social and economic environment characterized by specific actors, values, and norms.[13]

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8 Heather Shore, "A Brief History of the Underworld and Organized Crime, c. 1750–1950," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice*, eds. Paul Knepper and Anja Johansen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 170–191; Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth-Century England* (London–New York: Routledge, 2011), 87–108; Peter Ferentzy and Nigel E. Turner, "Gambling and Organized Crime—A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Gambling Issues* 23. (2009): 119–123.

9 The so-called "*pinkabérlők*" were the club's game organisers, who were essentially entrepreneurs responsible for running the gaming operations. The so-called "*pinka*" was a diminutive drawer or cassette with a slot in the card table, into which the share of the winnings was inserted in the form of cash or chips. This income was the property of the entrepreneur who maintained the club; the staff were only permitted to retain the gratuities they received from the players, which were distributed amongst themselves at the conclusion of the game. Gyula Turcsányi ed., *A modern bűnözés*, Vol. 2 (Budapest: Rozsnyai, 1929), 148–150.

10 The croupiers were the supervisors of the gaming table, serving the banker and the players. The task of the bookmakers was to oversee the management of these wagers. In the event that the bank was victorious, the bookmakers were responsible for collecting the wagers; conversely, if the bank was unsuccessful, the bookmakers were accountable for disbursing the winnings to the winning parties. Ibid. 149.

11 The game masters led the game in prominent clubs. Ibid. 149.

12 The responsibility for financial management of the game was typically assumed by the dealers, who frequently originated from the waiter staff. Nevertheless, it was not infrequent for former high rollers to undertake this role, seeking to secure their livelihood or regain the financial losses they had suffered at cards. Ibid. 148–149.

13 Schreiber, *A játékkaszinók*, 10.

A salient social characteristic of the period following World War I was the intensification of economic inequalities, which, according to contemporaries, was closely linked to the further spread of intellectual forms of crime.[14] The war and the political and economic crises that ensued engendered social conditions that facilitated the rapid and substantial accumulation of wealth by certain groups, often through opaque, ethically questionable, or outright illegal means. This change resulted in a transformation of society's perception of wealth. Historically, the accumulation of wealth was regarded as a consequence of diligent effort and moral rectitude. However, the emergence of the post-war "nouveau riche" elicited feelings of resentment and even disdain among many individuals. The possibility of attaining wealth engendered a social environment in which an increasing number of individuals perceived the aspiration to accumulate wealth as legitimate, irrespective of the methods employed to accomplish this objective. The ability to capitalize expeditiously on economic opportunities, engage in speculation, and circumvent established regulations became hallmarks of the pursuit of social mobility. In this context, criminal activities were employed as a means to achieve desired outcomes.[15]

Besides, the existential and mental upheavals of the war and the revolutionary period that followed contributed to a heightened demand on a collective level for entertainment and relaxation. Contemporary interpretations posit that this phenomenon was not only a general characteristic of wartime societies, but was also influenced by specific internal factors in Hungary. For instance, journalist Imre Nyigri posited that the proliferation of gambling could be attributed to the abrupt and remarkable surge in the demand for entertainment and escapism among the male demographic returning from active service. This phenomenon was conceptualized as a social effect of these men's "nervous tension". However, he also emphasized that the desire to escape from livelihood problems and robot-like work, that is, the need for a kind of complete relaxation, was often disproportionate to people's actual financial possibilities.[16]

However, other sources emphasized that, in addition to the post-war influx of refugees, a significant number of performers also arrived in Budapest, where they initiated new business ventures to ensure their survival. These performers established cabarets, variety shows, and sideshow performances, through which they could attain rapid success. These ventures were frequently the result of the efforts of "newly rich" financiers who had accumulated significant wealth during the post-war economic circumstance. The expansion of the entertainment

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14 For further insight into the issue of the dissemination of intellectual crime, please refer to the following sources: Turcsányi, *A modern bűnözés*, 63–146; Roland Perényi, "Az intellektuális bűnözés feltalálása. Fehérgalléros kriminalitás Budapesten a 20. század elején," *Aetas* 38, no. 2 (2023): 80–97.

15 *Jelentés a Budapesti Magyar Királyi Állami Rendőrség 1918–1920. évi működéséről* (Budapest: Radó Izor Nyomdai Műintézete, 1921), 157.

16 Zoltán Borbély and Rezső Kapy eds., *A 60 éves magyar rendőrség 1881–1941* (Budapest: Halász Könyvkiadó, 1942), 579.

industry was driven not only by demand but also by new social groups wishing to display their status and prestige through entertainment. Within this milieu, gambling proved to be particularly compatible with the allure of swift gratification and the prospect of immediate financial enrichment.[17]

The social and criminological significance of gambling is confirmed not only by the situation in Hungary, but also by international examples. The criminal organizations known as *Ringvereine*, which operated in Berlin during the Weimar and Nazi eras, are a pertinent example of the legal and social duality that surrounded illegal gambling. These groups formally operated as clubs or social associations, and their members were often former convicts or marginalized individuals. The construction of a facade of social acceptance was achieved through the establishment of precise internal regulations, etiquette, insignia, and collective mourning rituals. The ceremonial operation conducted within the official framework rendered it challenging for the authorities to initiate action, as the clubs could not be unequivocally regarded as criminal organizations from a legal perspective. In addition to the facilitation of illegal gambling, the Ringvereine was engaged in the organization of prostitution, extortion, protection rackets, and the institutional coordination of burglaries and thefts. This dual structure served two functions: firstly, it enabled the concealment of their activities; secondly, it facilitated the institutional operation of crime. The Ringvereine are a pertinent example of how organized crime can simultaneously integrate into the periphery of society and into legitimate organizational forms.[18]

It is evident that the practice of gambling has evolved into a significant social concern, manifesting not only in major German cities but also in England. A prime example of this phenomenon is provided by Salford in the 1930s, a period which clearly demonstrates how gambling became intertwined with economic vulnerability and social disintegration. While the majority of workers did not engage in regular gambling, a proportion of men did risk their weekly earnings, with consequences including financial ruin, family crises and community tensions. The authorities encountered significant challenges in taking action against this practice, as illegal street betting frequently occurred in locations that were challenging to regulate. Moreover, local communities often offered protection to the organizers of these activities. The limitations of legal measures were reinforced by cultural factors. Despite the fact that it was widely condemned, gambling persisted in its role as an exciting form of leisure within working-class communities. The example of Salford highlights that gambling was not

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17 *Jelentés a Budapesti Magyar Királyi Állami Rendőrség 1921. évi működéséről* (Budapest: Radó Izor Nyomdai Műintézete, 1922), 117.

18 Christian Goeschel, "The Criminal Underworld in Weimar and Nazi Berlin," *History Workshop Journal* 75. (2013): 64–74.

exclusively linked to criminal groups, but became a means of alleviating social crises and a hope for quick riches. As demonstrated by the Ringvereine, during the period in which the city of Berlin was under the control of the National Socialists, gambling was employed as a means of legitimizing criminal organizations. In contrast, in Salford, gambling could be considered more indicative of social hopelessness. However, in both cases, it can be interpreted as a symptom of the disruption of social order, a phenomenon that is well illustrated by the impotence of law enforcement.[19]

In this broader European context, Budapest between the two world wars also exhibited a distinctive pattern: namely, that illegal gambling flourished here too. However, in the Hungarian capital, this phenomenon was accompanied by an extremely diverse repertoire, about which Police Chief Dániel Schreiber provided detailed information in his book *A játékkaszinók szélhámosai (The Swindlers of the Casinos)*, published in 1934. In a separate chapter, he expounds on the nature of games, i.e. the extent to which they rely on luck and the extent to which they permit skill or knowledge, which in turn determines their social perception and their classification as legal or illegal.[20]

As indicated by the extant criminological literature of the period, the defining characteristic of games of chance was that how the player could influence on the outcome of the game. Such games are characterized by their rapid pace, which often results in the determination of profit or loss within a brief interval. The role of the player is frequently confined to the placement of a bet. This category included classic casino games such as "baccarat" and "chemin de fer"[21], as well as the so-called "nasi-vasi"[22], "trente et quarante"[23], and roulette. It is a commonly held view that such games were typically categorized as table games, insofar as they were played on a table of considerable size with multiple players competing against a banker. Casino games (baccarat, chemin, trente et quarante) were played either with cards or spinning devices

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19 Andrew Davies, "The Police and the People: Gambling in Salford, 1900–1939," *The Historical Journal* 34, no. 1 (1991): 114.

20 Schreiber, *A játékkaszinók*, 23–26.

21 Pásztor, *Budapest zsebe*, 264. The card games referenced in the source text were among the most popular of the era. In "baccarat", a designated banker plays against the other players, who place their bets against the bank. The objective of the game is to obtain a combination of two or three cards that add up to as close to nine as possible. It is important to note that tens and face cards are worth zero points, aces are worth one point, and all other cards are worth their face value. "Chemin de fer" is a variant of "baccarat", with the key distinction that the right to deal is shared among the players, and the participants also enjoy greater freedom in the rules for drawing the third card. Kálnoki, *A bacc-asztal*, 8–25; Ödön Récsei, "A kártyás, sőt hamiskártyás Budapest," in *Az Esti Kurir naptára 1929* (Budapest: Esti Kurir, 1929), 135–137; Korchmáros, *A hazárdjátékok*, 36–60.

22 This is a game of Russian origin that is played with Hungarian cards. *Tolnai Új Világlexikona*, vol. 12 (Budapest: Tolnai Nyomdai Műintézet, 1928), 290.

23 This is a card game that is played with a standard pack of 52 cards, with each player receiving an identical number of cards at the start of the game. Korchmáros, *A hazárdjátékok*, 33–36.

(roulette). These events were typically characterized by their clandestine nature, taking place in venues that were either closed or operating in a semi-legal or illegal context. These included "underground" private residences, and clandestinely operated club rooms.[24]

The majority of the popular legal games of the time were predicated on knowledge and skill; however, when financial reward was involved, they could readily be classified as illicit. The fundamental distinction pertained to the extent of the "luck factor": that is, the proportion to which the outcome of a game was determined by the cards dealt rather than the skill of the player. In card games, for instance, the greater the influence of chance, the more it was regarded as a game of chance. Consequently, the authorities prosecuted not only classic casino games, but also other games if they were played for money.[25]

It is also pertinent to briefly mention the tactics, techniques, and systematic cheating methods employed by the players to influence the outcome of the game, in other words, how "luck was corrected" at the green tables in Budapest. The domain of casinos, for instance, functions in accordance with its own internal logic, wherein not only do players compete against the house, but they also engage in direct competition with one another. It is evident that, on the basis of the available evidence, casino swindlers were divided into three primary categories during this specific historical period. The initial group comprised individuals who were integrated into the institution itself and assumed managerial or administrative roles. It was demonstrated that the subjects had the capability to manipulate the game through the utilization of confidential information, thereby deceiving not only the players but also other employees. The second group consisted of employees, including croupiers and chip dealers, who played a pivotal role in the facilitation of the game. It has been documented that these individuals frequently misused their position to either steal or exert undue influence over the outcome of the game. It is evident that a pattern of collaboration with other players emerged, resulting in acts of deception directed towards the casino. The third group consists of players who either attempted to deceive themselves or colluded with other players and employees to "blow up" the casino, in the gambling industry's vernacular, i.e. cause substantial losses to the house. Consequently, within the context of gambling, which is inherently illegal, participants frequently transgressed the established regulations of the game.[26]

Card cheating was one of the most prevalent and sophisticated forms of gambling fraud of the era. This particular type of fraud necessitated a confident and cultured demeanor,

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24 Schreiber, *A játékkaszinók*, 26–27.

25 "A m. kir. belügyminister 1901. évi 64.573. számú körrendelete valamennyi törvényhatósághoz, a hangversenyek, mutatványok stb. engedélyezése tárgyában," in *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára 1901* (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyministerium, 1901), 491–492.

26 Schreiber, *A játékkaszinók*, 28–29; Turcsányi, *A modern bűnözés*, 158–159.

accompanied by a charming and trustworthy facade, on the part of the player.[27] However, it should be noted that in many cases, this calm demeanor was accompanied by superstitious beliefs.[28] The objective of the card cheat was to avoid arousing suspicion among his playing partners, and thus each move had to appear natural. Dexterity was also a significant factor, given that cheating frequently entailed the surreptitious removal, replacement, or manipulation of cards. These techniques demanded a certain degree of cold-bloodedness, as well as routine and well-groomed hands, since in many cases the cards had to be identified by touch. It is evident that many of these individuals did not operate in isolation; rather, they were typically members of a well-structured and coordinated team, where each player had a specific role to play. The individual referred to as the "barker" was tasked with identifying and persuading potential victims, who were then introduced to a game that was presented as a form of entertainment. However, the true nature of the game was to deceive the participants and steal their possessions. The individual referred to as the "playing partner," who was also a member of the team, assisted the card cheat in winning during the game by subtly influencing the course of play. The role of the "signal man" was of particular significance, as he was positioned in a manner that enabled him to observe the opponents' cards. Subsequently, he communicated this information to the card cheat through a series of pre-established non-verbal signals, including adjustments in the position of his cigarette in his mouth. These methods of communication facilitated expeditious decision-making that remained imperceptible to external observers.[29]

The practice of card cheating did not cease with the employment of marked cards or the deliberate deception of players; rather, an entire secret communication system was developed to manipulate luck. Players frequently employed signals that were imperceptible or unintelligible to external observers. One such technique, among the more traditional methods, was known as "foot Morse code". In this particular instance, the act of cheating was predicated on the movements of the players beneath the table. The accomplice employed subtle kicks as a means of signaling which card their partner required. The exterior appearance was deceptive; from a distance, the scene appeared to be an intimate and playful environment. However, in reality, it functioned as a sophisticated means of communication to influence the game.[30]

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27 Ede Gellért, *Budapest bűnözői. Egy pesti detektív naplójából* (Budapest: M. Kir. Államrendőrség Detektívtestülete Nyugdíjpótló és Segélyező Egyesülete, 1925), 183.

28 "Vigyázat: hamiskártyás!" *Tolnai Világlapja*, January 8, 1930, 35.—The individuals engaging in fraudulent activities believed that carrying a bat's wing or heart would offer protection from being apprehended. "Babonás gonosztevők," *Tolnai Világlapja*, January 22, 1936, 41.

29 Gellért, *Budapest bűnözői*, 183; Vilmos Tarján, *Riporteri titkaimat nem viszem a sírba* (Budapest: Magánkiadás, 1943), 98; Turcsányi, *A modern bűnözés*, 155–156; Récsei, "A kártyás," 134–135; Vilmos Zolnay, "A hamiskártyások nyelve," *Magyar Nyelvőr* 62, no. 1–2 (1933): 17–22, 50–53, 82–85.

30 "Vigyázat: hamiskártyás!" *Tolnai Világlapja*, January 8, 1930, 36.

One of the sophisticated tool employed by those who cheated was the conscious use of facial expressions. The fundamental premise of the method entailed the attribution of pre-coded meanings to facial movements. To illustrate, a smile was indicative of a need for a king, while biting the lips was suggestive of face cards and puffing out the cheeks indicated number cards. These movements were discernible to an experienced partner, but to the untrained eye, they appeared to be casual facial expressions or accidental reactions. The efficacy of the method derived from the fact that the signals appeared to be manifestations of natural human behaviour. It has been demonstrated that expressions of facial emotion, such as smiling, grimacing or nodding, did not arouse suspicion, but instead conveyed crucial tactical information to individuals who were already familiar with the relevant protocols.[31]

The ingenuity of card cheats extended to the use of technical devices. A contemporary newspaper reported in early 1930 that an impoverished man of aristocratic descent had been exposed at a prestigious card club in Budapest after enjoying a long streak of luck as the banker, i.e. the dealer. The players initially attributed his continuous winnings to blind luck, but eventually an observant companion noticed the technical basis of the cheating. The banker's strategy entailed the placement of a gold cigarette case, characterized by its notably glossy surface, in close proximity to the box containing the cards. The subject was able to observe the cards he had previously distributed on the surface of the case, a skill that enabled him to make optimal decisions when it was his turn to draw. This straightforward yet efficacious technique guaranteed success.[32] This case exemplifies the manner in which deception can be concealed by means of a sophisticated facade and ingenious technical manipulation. The social status, outward elegance, and the etiquette of the game often served to conceal the underlying fraud; indeed, the surprise stemmed precisely from the fact that such a "gentleman" had resorted to such a device.

Individuals engaging in fraudulent activities involving playing cards frequently utilize decks that have been pre-manipulated, colloquially referred to as "marked decks". The distinguishing characteristics of these decks were achieved through the implementation of various techniques. In some instances, the cards were marked with minute punctures, which were perceptible only to individuals with highly sensitive fingertips. There were multiple methods of marking the cards. In instances where the staff were complicit, the marking was occasionally carried out in situ. However, on other occasions, the cardsharp would bring their own pre-prepared deck and smuggle it into the game at an opportune moment. The subtlety and concealment of the manipulation were found to be instrumental in the perpetration of the fraud. It is evident that

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31 Ibid.

32 "A hamiskártyás arany cigarettatárcája," *Pesti Hirlap*, January 10, 1930, 25.

the implementation of well-prepared tricks, coupled with the presentation of theatrical yet natural behaviour, frequently impeded the victims' ability to perceive the unfolding events in a timely manner.

Furthermore, casino employees, most notably croupiers, were also afforded the opportunity to interfere with the course of the game. One of the most prevalent forms of interference was the theft of chips. Croupiers, who were responsible for handling the chips and overseeing the game, developed particularly sophisticated methods to achieve this. In many ways, the act of stealing chips proved to be a more advantageous practice for them than cheating with cards, as it appeared to carry less risk. Furthermore, the winnings did not have to be shared with other players or the banker. For instance, during the process of stacking the chips, the subjects utilized the muscles in their palms to elevate the uppermost chips, which they subsequently placed in their pockets or concealed within a slit in the cloth covering the table. This cloth was then inserted into the shoe. The sophistication of the methods employed often meant that neither the players nor the casino management were able to identify the shortage immediately.[33]

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[33] Schreiber, *A játékkaszinók*, 83–95.

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Product Placement as a Useful Film Catalyst—*You've Got Mail* as a Useful Film

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Abstract: The thesis is guided by the idea of Charles R. Acland and Haidee's introduction to the study volume Useful Cinema, which states that useful cinema has been around since the dawn of cinema and is the preferred tool for serving different social, political, and financial etc. spheres of interest and conveying their messages. In the thesis, I argue that product placement essentially acts as a catalyst that transforms the given film in which it is placed into a useful film. At the same time, product placement is genre-sensitive, so the group of genres that are suitable for brand integration is limited. In my case study, I aim to demonstrate how Nora Ephron's romantic comedy You've Got Mail can act as a useful film through product placement.

Keywords: useful film, product placement, genre-sensitivity, romantic comedy

Introduction

In *Utility and Cinema*, in the introduction of the volume entitled *Useful Cinema,* Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, the editors, analyze useful cinema as a category that has existed since the dawn of cinema, coexisting with the aesthetically examined (feature) film, and argue that it is "a body of films and technologies that perform tasks and serve as instruments in an ongoing struggle for aesthetic, social, and political capital."[1] This definition essentially assumes a purposiveness, an intention behind the moving image, which dismisses Kantian disinterestedness and argues that film is an important and preferred tool for serving different spheres of interest and conveying their messages. One only has to think of the most radical examples—Mussolini's now iconic phrase "cinema is the strongest weapon", or Lenin's statement that cinema is the most important of all the arts—which have seen cinema as the flagship of ideological communication and the most effective means of advancing the cause of new political arrangements, rather than as an aesthetic value.

'Aesthetic, social and political capital', as it can be read in the above quoted sentence from Acland and Wasson's introduction. But what about the role of financial capital, economic advantage and material gain? 'Moving images serve an expanding range of corporate [...] functions'[2], they state in their study's first paragraph. Indeed, the promotional film spot has a role to play as a tool for a company to make a profit, and has been around since the dawn of the moving image. With the advent of the Gutenberg galaxy and the printing press, advertising

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1 Charles R. Acland and Haidee Wasson, *Useful Cinema*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, 3.
2 Ibid. 1.

and publicity already appeared in the 15th and 16th century[3], but in the modern sense of the term, institutionalized advertising dates back to around the end of the 19th century, when there were already agencies and trademarks were widespread.[4] This is probably the reason why, immediately after the emergence of the moving image, examples of product placement can be found, which is either embedded in a work of art as a "useful" element or, depending on the success of the process, is even integrated into it.

Product placement in cinema

In a 2006 study, Newell, Salmon, and Chang[5] traced this marketing strategy back to 1896, when a short film commissioned by the Lever brothers, *Laveuses,* was shown in which the Lumière brothers promote washing with Sunlight soap. From the 1920s onwards, it was common to see snippets in films promoting tobacco, alcohol, soft drinks or motor vehicles,[6] but product placement became a common practice in the film industry from the 1940s onwards.[7] The turning point in the regulation of product placement came with Spielberg's 1982 film *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, in which the main character, a young boy, sweet-talks the alien with Reese's Pieces sugar jelly. Following the film's release, the candy company Hershey's increased its sales by 65%. In response, somewhat belatedly, the Entertainment Resources and Marketing Association (ERMA) was formed in 1991 to establish a binding code of ethics for product placement and to review product placement practices.[8]

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3 David H. Tucker and Philip Soundy Unwin, *History of Publishing.* https://www.britannica.com/topic/publishing

4 Janet Staiger, "Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking about the History and Theory of Film Advertising," *Cinema Journal* 29, no. 3., 3–5.

5 Jay Newell, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang, "The Hidden History of Product Placement," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 50, no. 4. (2006), 575–594.

6 Susan D. Geringer, Michelle Rovella, and Rudy Sanchez, *Viewer Perception of Product Placement in Comedic Movies*. 37. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301957423_Viewer_Perceptions_of_Product_Placement_in_Comedic_Movies

7 Michael A. Wiles and Anna Danielova, "The Worth of Product Placement in Successful Films: An Event Study Analysis," *Journal of Marketing* 73, no. 4. (2009), 44.

8 Susan D. Geringer, Michelle Rovella, and Rudy Sanchez, *Viewer Perception of Product Placement in Comedic Movies*. 37. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301957423_Viewer_Perceptions_of_Product_Placement_in_Comedic_Movies

Product placement or brand integration is a marketing strategy whereby a product or service is embedded in a particular media narrative (newspaper article, book, film, etc.).[9] In this paper, I will focus exclusively on film, and look at the criteria that a film product placement must meet and how product placement can convert even a popular feature film into a useful film.

While the Hershey's story mentioned above is clearly a success story, product placement is still a shaky ground for both companies and filmmakers today. For the former, product placement is a dubious proposition because at the moment of the agreement with the film they do not know whether the film in which they want to insert their product will be successful, and unlike commercials, the sales generated and the resulting revenue are not as accurately measured for the various film brand placements.

The role of the genre

Product placement in film is genre-sensitive as Wiles and Danielova pointed out in their study. In films depicting violence, for example, it is important to avoid associating the product or service with a negative emotion in the mind of the viewer, nor is it appropriate for a company to use brand placement to suggest that it is legitimizing the aggressive content presented in the film. Surprisingly, it can also lead to rejection if a company seeks to place a product in a critically acclaimed piece of cinema, thereby subverting audience expectations, breaking a purely aesthetic experience, alienating the audience with a consumer message. Audiences in search of artistic value believe in the ethos of art, and consider film to be outside the horizon of commercial goals.[10] It is therefore easy to conclude that popular film culture is the most suitable medium for product placement.

But as has been pointed out, this practice does not fit into all genre frameworks. A 2008 study led by Sung and de Gregorio revealed that comedies are best suited to convey a brand message due to their wholesome conclusion and a narrative that evokes positive emotions and laughter, but dramas, adventure films and even action movies with their immersive plot have a similar potential. Animated films, science fiction, political and historical films are the least successful in this area. Although no specific study has been carried out into why the following genres are inappropriate for these purposes, empirical evidence suggests that, while in animated films the violent consumer socialization of children is to be rejected, and in science fiction films, which look to the future, the promotion of a company that wants to generate

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9 Namita Bhatnagar and Fang Wan, "Is Self-Character Similarity Always Beneficial? The Moderating Role of Immersion in Product Placement Effects," *Journal of Advertising* 40, no. 2. (2011), 39.

10 Wiles, "The Worth of Product Placement in Successful Films," 48.

profits in the present is unacceptable, political or historical films based on actual events are not expected to serve any economic interests, otherwise the credibility of the world they are intended to portray is damaged.[11]

The suitability of comedy for product placement seems obvious in the light of the above. The brands in question intend to evoke positive feelings and associations in the viewer, and comedy logically provides the right context for product placement, while its narrative is also highly persistent, engaging and involving.[12] Humor is an important element of the genre, and although there has been much research on it in advertising and marketing, it has not been extended to product placement. Duncan has found that the use of humor in advertising can train memory and attention, increase the effectiveness of the message being communicated[13] and increase liking and acceptance of a brand. It is no wonder that consumer messages are most often smuggled into comedies.

Alongside the genre, a hero who is appealing, with whom the viewer can strongly connect, and this deep sense of identification can also trigger and enhance receptivity to the products used by the hero, is just as important. In their study, Bhatnagar and Wan distinguish two types of information processing: systematic/central and heroic/peripheral. While the former refers to an approach where the viewer has a more developed motivation and information processing ability, carefully examining the arguments of a message and making a conscious decision when making a judgement, the latter is the opposite, where viewers rely more on simplistic information—for instance on a character—to make a decision, are intuitive, emotionally attached to something or someone, e.g. they find a good-looking hero more sympathetic. Product placements and brand messages are also more appealing or widely accepted by this type of viewer.[14] And if the viewer can resonate with the hero, discovering similarities in his or her own character, they will be more easily immersed in the story and find a brand message more relatable.

However, the message can be repeated not only once, but several times, in a repetitive manner, in order to emphasize the message. In this case, however, there is a chance that the recipient of the message will become accustomed to the stimulus, and the boredom, annoyance or frustration that results may have the opposite effect, repelling or alienating the viewer. Social scientists have found that, depending on the type of product presentation—

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11 Y. Sung, and F. De Gregorio, "New Brand Worlds: College Student Consumer Attitudes toward Brand Placement in Films, Television Shows, Songs, and Video Games," *Journal of Promotion Management* 14., no. 1–2. (2008), 85.

12 Bhatnagar, "Is Self-Character Similarity Always Beneficial?", 46.

13 C. P. Duncan, "Humor in Advertising: A Behavioral Perspective," *Academy of Marketing Science Journal* 7, no. 4. (1986), 285.

14 Bhatnagar, "Is Self-Character Similarity Always Beneficial?", 40.

nuanced or pronounced—it can reduce or increase feelings of boredom or discomfort.[15] The fact that the message conveyed by a particular product placement has a different impact on each recipient also makes it difficult to assess the overall effect. The only element that can be specifically captured and studied is the financial background behind the practice, which provides quantitative data for analysis, but is negligible for our analysis. And even if there is no factual data available, it can be stated by empirical means that product placement is not only a useful practice for companies to make a profit, but also a practical one for constructing and transmitting consumer awareness, for example sustainable, ethical, environmentally and socially conscious consumption, etc., and can therefore, in my opinion, be considered a useful film element for both sides (producer and receiver).

Product placement in practice: a case study

In the above, I wanted to outline my belief that product placement in feature films, with the marketing objectives it serves, reinforces the category of useful film and can be seen as a specific strategic element that enhances the effectiveness of its messaging. The aim of this paper is not only to summarize all these film language tools, but also to show how they work in a film that can be considered almost prototypical in terms of the features listed. Not only does Nora Ephron's romantic comedy *You've Got Mail* incorporate the aspects discussed above—popular film, comedy, humor—but, in addition to developing its plot along the lines of a highly spectacular product placement, promoting the services of a specific company, in this case America Online, it also creates an archetype of the modern woman, and, beyond the product, propagates a new social practice, a new way of life. The aim of this article is not only to show the traits of product placement in this film, but also to demonstrate through this example that a romantic comedy can also contain useful cinematic elements.

Nora Ephron's film, which transposes Ernst Lubitsch's successful and beloved 1940 classic romantic comedy *The Shop Around the Corner* (based on the original play entitled *Parfumerie* of Miklós László) into a modern setting, not only highlights a product placement, but also makes America Online's online mailing system the main channel of communication between the two protagonists, effectively organizing the entire narrative around product placement. The time of the action can be estimated to be around the time the film was made, around 1998, when AOL had already celebrated its fifteenth anniversary, the World Wide Web had been around

[15] Pamela Miles Homer, "Product Placements: The Impact of Placement Type and Repetition on Attitude," *Journal of Advertising* 38, no. 3. (2009), 22.

for almost a decade—and had been available to the masses since 1991—the first laptops had been in operation for ten years, and more and more people were using computers not only for work but also for their private lives, and taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the Internet. The typical dial-up Internet signature is repeatedly echoed in the film, signaling the transition between the two worlds—the cyber one and the real one—, just as the mail system calls out to its user and informs him or her that "You've got mail!" The internet interacts with reality, an extension of it, an alternative reality that can be built from nothing, where you can be yourself, hidden behind a username, and reveal your deepest thoughts.

The opening of the film is itself an homage, a visual confession to online space. With a single click on the desktop of our widescreen computer, a window opens up to reveal the entire cyber universe, and out of the schematic space emerges the city, which the film assumes to be the center of the world: New York. (Especially Manhattan and the Upper West Side. Ephron's ode to New York is in some ways akin to Allen's *Manhattan*.) Only one more click separates the viewer from a bird's-eye view of the digitally reconstructed and thus duplicated sphere, which will serve as a living space for the two protagonists in both analogue and virtual versions. The male protagonist, Joe, even identifies himself in his username—*NY152*—by his location in space, using his real-world coordinates to create his online persona.

One of the film's most poignant claims is that the American Online mail system is not only capable of receiving and forwarding emails, but also of creating an alternate reality where people can escape from the problems of everyday life or a dysfunctional relationship. The viewer is not offered a service or a brand name, but the opportunity to change their life, the means to find a soulmate on a silver platter. This is an important rule of product placement, which Ephron understands and uses brilliantly in this film: the product being sold goes beyond itself.

Another perfect example of this is the Starbucks franchise, which is featured several times in the film. Joe philosophizes about the coffee chain as follows: "The whole purpose of places like Starbucks is for people with no decision-making ability whatsoever to make six decisions just to buy one cup of coffee. Short, tall, light, dark, caf, decaf, low-fat, non-fat, etc. So people who don't know what the hell they're doing or who on earth they are can, for only $2.95, get not just a cup of coffee but an absolutely defining sense of self: Tall. Decaf. Cappuccino."[16] Although Joe is teasing the customers loitering in front of the counter, the message behind his words is clearly the message of Starbucks. He argues that coffee goes beyond itself, that it is not a drink, but the result of a forthright decision, that its characteristics are the consumer's characteristics, that it is a testament to the complexity and diversity of his or her personality. For just three dollars, we can prove to the world how special we are with a single cup of coffee.

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[16] *You've Got Mail,* directed by Nora Ephron, Lauren Shuler Donner Productions, 1998, 0:16:58.

In his article on romantic comedies turning towards consumerism, Thomas Doherty says of Ephron that she is "one of the few rom-com writer-directors actually more interested in romance than shopping."[17] While in the romantic comedies of the classic Hollywood era, the main aim was to evoke the American dream and promote the marital bond—"the propaganda arm of the American Dream machine, Hollywood promoted a romantic fantasy of marital roles and conjugal euphoria"[18]—, over time marriage as the highest form of self-fulfillment was removed from the equation, and the desire for men was joined by the desire to possess material goods, especially fashion items. These films and/or series, made at or after the turn of the millennium—e.g. *Confessions of a Shopaholic, Legally Blonde, 27 Dresses, The Devil Wears Prada, Sex and the City* etc.[19]—tried to offer women social leverage through shopping, to make them look more successful, more attractive and more youthful, which is linked to the third wave of feminism, which celebrated the market and saw the increasing purchasing power as the social empowerment of women.[20] Ephron, on the other hand, has consistently kept away from the fashion industry, and has also dressed his protagonists in clothes that do not emphasize feminine attributes, such as turtlenecks or dungarees, without giving in to the shopping gene or material desires. This does not mean, however, that it has shied away from product placement, nor that it has not, however, criticized consumerism and the violent expansion of American corporations.

In the case of *You've Got Mail,* for example, it is striking that the female protagonist, Kathleen Kelly, is an opponent of so-called 'corporate America' and also the depositary of a purely immaterial idea of love rooted in chivalric poetry. Kathleen is a self-employed, self-reliant woman who carries on the spirit of the children's bookshop she inherited from her mother, The Shop Around the Corner, and prefers quality to cheap, quantity bookselling. She opposes large chain stores that squeeze small businesses and employ workers without the right skills or knowledge. Kathleen is thus consistently opposed to quantity consumption and the all-consuming big business right up to the very end of the film, even if Ephron does not give her a professionally happy release and victory over the big bookstore that moves round the corner.

It is also important to mention that Kathleen, both in physical appearance and personality, provides a framework into which everyone can easily fit, and hence her suitability for product placement. In contrast to romantic comedies, often directed by men, in which the femininity of the female protagonist is very strongly articulated in her outward features, Meg Ryan's

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17 Thomas Doherty, "The Rom-Com Genre and the Shopping Gene," *OAH Magazine of History* 24, no. 2. (2010), 26.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 P. Maclaran, "Marketing and feminism in historic perspective," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 4, no. 3., 462–469.

Kathleen wears mostly pastels and earth tones, her cleavage never peeks out from under her blouse, and she wears very conservative, sometimes girlish clothes. The same can be said of her movement, which also somewhat infantilizes her, or her short hairstyle, which gives her a rather boyish look. There is nothing extravagant about Kathleen's appearance, nor about her personality. Her character has universal values that most people would follow, such as respect for tradition, a steadfast belief in unconditional love, hope for happiness, and confidence in the rewards of hard work. These are attributes considered universally good that everyone can easily identify with. Both in her modest appearance and in her traditional values-based internal qualities, she may be sympathetic to the heroistic/peripheral information processing type defined by Bhatnagar and Wan.[21] As soon as the viewer sees that this sympathetic lady's life has been positively changed by AOL's mail system, he or she is more convinced of the service.

The educational intent behind the product placement in Ephron's film, which is primarily aimed at a female audience, is therefore clear: Kathleen opens up her laptop, dials up the internet, clicks, types and writes emails with ease. As one employee of the AOL's film collaboration explained: "That made us proud that AOL is becoming a feature in people's lives, and the Internet and the online world is not simply a 'thing;' it's a natural part of people's lives."[22] But is it really part of every person's life? Hiroshi Ono and Madeline Zavodny's article *Gender and the Internet* summarizes at the beginning that the initial users of new technologies are usually young, educated, mostly affluent, urban men who are not members of any minority. In addition, several studies have shown that far fewer women than men used the internet in the mid-1990s, when it became available to all.[23] Kathleen's main role is to present she can handle technology with a naturalness that anyone, any woman, can imitate.

You've Got Mail had not even arrived in cinemas before it became a national press issue that the film was actually raising awareness of the usefulness of the internet, as well as entertainment. "This deal gives AOL the opportunity to present their service to an audience of [female—ed.] moviegoers that may or may not be familiar with AOL and to showcase how their service works and the benefits of it"—said Dean Ayers, then President of ERMA, on the collaboration.[24] The film will therefore bring intellectual benefits to the audience through a new perspective and, not least, financial benefits to the company in question.

After all, Ephron's film does not even try to hide this. In the month before the premiere on 18 December 1998, there had been speculation in the pages of *Wired* in the wittily entitled

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21 Bhatnagar, "Is Self-Character Similarity Always Beneficial?", 40.

22 *You've Got Product Placement.* https://www.wired.com/1998/11/youve-got-product-placement/

23 Hiroshi Ono and Madeline Zavodny., "Gender and the Internet," *Social Science Quarterly* 84, no. 1. (2003), 111.

24 *You've Got Product Placement.* https://www.wired.com/1998/11/youve-got-product-placement/

article, You've Got Product Placement about the size of the deal that the film's studio, Warner Brothers, and AOL had struck.[25] Jupiter Communications' head of online marketing strategy, Evan Neufeld, estimated the deal at between three and six million dollars. The publicity and hidden marketing opportunity has naturally caught the eye of several companies, with Apple and IBM each offering a computer to appear in the film: Meg Ryan's character uses a Macintosh PowerBook, and Hanks' character uses an IBM desktop computer to write beautiful love letters to each other.[26]

For in this film, computing and the internet are presented in a new function, as a new media space for modern love, anticipating the online dating and dating apps that later burst onto the scene. If no romance is to take root in the real world, it's time to give the internet a chance, where anyone can turn out to be your soulmate. "Someone you pass on the street may already be the love of your life," the film's poster proclaims, and the first scene of the comedy reveals Kathleen and Joe walking past each other, unaware that they are each other's most trusted confidants in the virtual world. Perhaps the most important message of the film is best captured in the word "anyone." Anyone can find love in the online space, anyone can take advantage of the internet, anyone can easily operate such a seemingly complicated machine.

Kathleen's partner, Greg, a journalist of *The Observer*, a caricature of the urban liberal intellectual obsessed with old typewriters and rejecting all modern devices, repeatedly voices his technophobia and reports with disbelief that in Virginia all workers had to delete the solitaire program from their computers because no one had worked for six weeks. In this gesture, he sees the end of Western civilization, and despite all the arguments, he flatly denies that humanity owes anything to technology. He says to Kathleen at the beginning of the film, with a mocking and slightly dismissive edge, "You think this machine is your friend, but it's not."[27] Only to find out by the end of the film that technology, and AOL's mail system in particular, can open the door to unexpected human connections. The two men symbolically represent two worldviews: Greg is the rigid, stagnant, unadventurous figure, while Joe embodies the exciting future, open to technological innovation. The qualities of the two men also serve as value judgements, the film clearly takes the side of Joe, and his transformation from anti-hero to hero is also a triumph of technology: the former object of the viewer's aversion—computing and the internet, or Joe himself—now represents a brighter future.

At the same time, it is interesting that one of Ephron's most pointed claims in the film is that through the most modern technological achievements we can find our way back to the traditional, virginal, pure love, rooted in spiritual and intellectual communion, monogamy,

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 *You've Got Mail,* directed by Nora Ephron, Lauren Shuler Donner Productions, 1998, 0:03:26.

purified of carnal desires. "This is possibly the most adorable creature I've ever been in contact with, and if she turns out to be as good looking as a mailbox... I would be crazy enough to turn my life upside down and marry her,"[28] Joe tells his friend, strolling outside the café he is been given as a meeting point for a blind date. (And, of course, it is striking that the happy ending must culminate in marriage, the most traditional male-female relationship.) Joe then asks his friend to peer in the window and give him an idea of whether the lady waiting for him—Kathleen—is attractive or not, and when he gets a favorable answer, he happily dances. This does, however, somewhat nuance the image of a man who is totally unconcerned with appearances and only concerned with inner values.

AOL's service thus does not simply offer the possibility of companionship, but conveys the romanticized message that on the Internet, anyone can be themselves in the purest sense, can reveal their most private thoughts, feelings and fears under the protection of anonymity, and find help for their problems. Even if appearances do matter to Joe, the dramaturgical element that contributes to the purity of love is that the two parties interact merely through words sent to cyberspace, revealing nothing concrete about themselves, thus preserving anonymity, and forming their essence and personality through syntactical structures along different themes, thus offering the most essential part of themselves to the other.

Of course, it is an interesting addition, and somewhat counterintuitive, that the film promotes a large corporation with the product placement that is the backbone of the plot, when the main conflict in the film is the Fox bookstore, owned by Joe's family, slowly taking over and occupying the small privately owned bookstores in New York. In the process, Kathleen's bookstore is falling victim. Ephron applies a special hypnosis with the love thread: while for two-thirds of the film the viewer is intently involved in the Fox bookstore's hostile takeover and tends to dislike Joe, in the final third the love story takes precedence over all other events, so much so that the calamity Kathleen has been forced to endure because of Joe's business is forgotten. The 'small business versus corporate America' storyline is rather awkwardly interwoven, but Ephron resolves this emotional tension in the viewer's mind so that Kathleen at least has time to write children's books and, as she is an expert in children's literature, is offered a job as an editor.

As AOL aims to prove in the film, the internet is open to all and serves as a public space where people can express their opinions and thoughts, under their name or anonymously. Ephron also assumes other areas of the media, the press or, say, television, to be such a space, which ideally, in a democratic state, would give everyone the opportunity to speak. It is also a powerful message of the film, and one that encourages us to cling to the possibilities of the

[28] Ibid, 0:59:10.

modern world that Kathleen, when she feels threatened, turns to the media and seeks to forge a community around herself. A good cause, people who stand up for it, a free forum: the American ethos is not lost on Ephron's film. To then confess at the end, with barely perceptible, nuanced cynicism: the big fish always eats the small fish, the stronger always crushes the weaker. Although *You've Got Mail* is ostensibly a light romantic comedy, based on the topos of love awakened from hostility, it makes a surprising statement, for it is also a critique of monopoly and big business. This was certainly not commissioned by AOL.

In conclusion, as we have seen through the examples of Ephron's film, cinematic product placement can convert any feature film work with product placement features into a useful film. The 'utility' in this case is not only that the mutual parties (the brand and the film company) can benefit financially from the use of product placement, but also that it can convey content that satisfies an intention or fulfils a purpose (in the case of *You've Got Mail,* the widespread exposure of AOL's mailing system and thus the expansion of its user base.) As a means of induction, it can be argued that, under certain conditions, even a romantic comedy can act as a useful film, since, in the words of Acland and Wasson, *You've Got Mail* also performs a function and serves as a tool in the ongoing struggle for social capital. The film's aim goes beyond the horizon of entertainment or aesthetic pleasure, since its message is intended to teach a lesson to society as a whole, and its message is based on a specific intention. It is an education in Internet use and consumer awareness; an encouragement to be open to modern technology, and a lesson in American capitalism.

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Tamás Szűcs

Geopolitics, Heritage Diplomacy and Nation Building—Russia and Ukraine in the World Heritage Committee before the Full-fledged War

Pro&Contra 8

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Abstract: Wars are no longer fought only on the battlefield. The information and media space and the various arenas of symbolic politics are often just as important as the sites of physical combat. In addition to their armed forces, the states involved in the conflict also measure their strength in soft power, mobilizing money and diplomatic lobbying power to gain the upper hand over the other in symbolic politics and in winning over the global audience. In the Russian-Ukrainian war, both sides are trying to make the most of the opportunities offered by symbolic politics to appeal to global public opinion. One of the arenas for this is the World Heritage Committee. The aim of this article is to examine the strategies pursued by Russia and Ukraine in the World Heritage Committee since the beginning of full-scale Russian aggression—2014—examining the strategies pursued by Russia and Ukraine in the World Heritage Committee to achieve their symbolic goals, the extent to which they have been successful, and the extent to which these successes are related to the general balance of power within UNESCO. Overall, it appears that both sides have achieved successes, but—thanks to the support of the Global South—Russia is better able to use the system to achieve its own goals than Ukraine. At the same time, Ukraine has also achieved important successes in addressing global public opinion, and its World Heritage nominations contribute greatly to the construction of a new Ukrainian national identity.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, World Heritage, diplomacy, memory politics, heritage in conflict zones, nation building

Introduction

The World Heritage program has become the most successful undertaking of the entire UN ecosystem in the last 50 years. Its popularity far exceeds all other programs of all other specialized UN agencies, and UNESCO is practically identified with it in public discourse. It is omnipresent and globally recognized.[1] Although at the time of its creation it was estimated 100 sites would qualify for it, at the time of writing, the World Heritage Convention already has 196 State Parties—more than the United Nations—170 of these have a total of 1,248 sites, which receive billions of visitors annually and generate tens of billions of dollars in revenue. The committee sessions attract considerable media attention, and the inscription of

[1] Christoph Brumann, *The Best We Share: Nation, Culture and World-Making in the UNESCO World Heritage Arena* (Berghahn Books, 2021).

a given site means a significant increase in prestige. Thus, international soft power conflicts are increasingly infiltrating the World Heritage arena. States in conflict use the inscriptions to gain media attention, occupy symbolic spaces, and shape their national identity. On the other hand, as a World Heritage title inevitably generates significant media attention and lends greater recognition to the site, states in conflict often feel that WH status provides increased protection for their precious monuments, and since cultural genocide is generally condemned by the global public, WH status can also be a serious deterrent to their opponents. Thus, it is worth analyzing the activities within and around the Committee and the nomination process when mapping a given conflict. In this article, we seek to answer the question of how far the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has reached the World Heritage Committee, what strategies the parties involved have pursued in their World Heritage policies in committee debates and nominations, and how they have changed their goals at different stages of the conflict. Our sources include extensive documentation from World Heritage Committee meetings, materials from the Russian and Ukrainian national UNESCO and ICOMOS committees, and local and global press coverage. The analysis focuses on the texts—nomination documents and resolutions of national and international heritage institutions—that define the narratives surrounding the sites; These documentations are subjected to discourse analysis, to uncover the underlying metanarratives, political intentions. The roles and activities of the various actors—national and international institutions are also analyzed. From all this, we can draw conclusions assessing the changing national strategies.

This article does not aim to provide a detailed analysis of Ukrainian or Russian memory discourse, but it is worth emphasizing that since 2014—and especially since February 2022—the conflict has been raging intensely in the symbolic sphere as well. On the Ukrainian side, symbolic spaces are being created in line with the new national metanarrative, shaping a new Ukrainian national identity—liberating the space considered Ukrainian from all memories of the imperial and Soviet past and reinterpreting the stories of these places in the context of a unified "European Ukraine," which naturally also has an impact on the construction of narratives around new WH and tentative list sites. On the Russian side, the elimination of Ukrainian identity and the recreation of the imperial-Soviet space is taking place in the occupied Ukrainian territories together with the transformation of collective memory in line with the narrative of an anti-Western political course, which also affects the interpretation of heritage sites. The aim of this policy is to emphasize the unity of the two peoples and the Russian character of the occupied Ukrainian territories. These symbolic struggles also infiltrate the diplomatic efforts in and around the World Heritage Committee—which is the subject of this article.

The background—before 2014

The Soviet Union joined the World Heritage Convention relatively late, in 1988. Geering[2] sees the reason for this primarily in Soviet reservations about the World Heritage system as a "Western imperialist" phenomenon. Thus, it was only in 1989 that the nomination of Soviet sites and the compilation of the tentative list began. The aim of this—and the underlying late Soviet heritage policy—was to express the unity of the Union. The list shows that the Soviet Union's historically diverse and unconnected historical traditions, from the Baltic to Central Asia, were presented as unified, while also expressing the primacy of resurgent Russian nationalism.[3] This is how the sites were selected that were added to the World Heritage List in 1990 during the Soviet Union's first—and last—round of nominations: three Russian sites (Leningrad and the surrounding former tsarist residences, Moscow's Red Square, Kizhi), one Ukrainian (St. Sophia Cathedral, Kyiv) and one Central Asian (Khiva). Thus, Ukraine, which was soon to become independent, inherited not only World Heritage membership from the Soviet era—the Ukrainian SSR was an "independent" UN member state—but also a "ready-made" World Heritage site.

In the case of Ukraine—as in the case of other former socialist countries—a detailed analysis of world heritage policy is still pending. However, it is evident that in the 1990s, amid economic decline and political difficulties, independent heritage policy was not a priority, and funding was poor in the freshly formed states. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1998, Lviv became the first site in Ukraine to be nominated by the independent country. The nomination was already initiated in the late 80s by the Ministry of Culture of the Ukrainian SSR, but for independent Ukraine, the inclusion of the city on the World Heritage List, considered the center of Ukrainian national awakening, had a symbolic meaning. Two important elements of the documentation are worth mentioning that foreshadow the direction of later developments: on the one hand, the direct connection with Kievan Rus as the prototype of Ukrainian statehood, and on the other hand, the emphasis on various Western influences and connections.[4] In 2001, Ukraine made an attempt to inscribe four natural sites at once, which ended in complete failure. All four were rejected, and the IUCN's assessment[5] suggests

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2 Corinne Geering, *Building a Common Past: World Heritage in Russia under Transformation, 1965–2000,* Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019.

3 Nelly Bekus and Kate Cowcher, "Socialism, Heritage and Internationalism after 1945: The Second World and Beyond," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26, no. 12 (2020): 1123–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2020.1852299.

4 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, L'viv—The Ensemble of the Historic Centre: World Heritage List Nomination (1997), https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/865.pdf (accessed January 30, 2026).

5 *International Union for Conservation of Nature* (IUCN), Evaluation of Nominations of Natural and Mixed Properties to the World Heritage List (2001), 56, https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2001/whc-01-conf208-inf12e.pdf (accessed January 30, 2026).

that international advisory bodies were not involved in the nomination process at all, not even in the selection of potential World Heritage sites. The IUCN's negative assessment was apparently so clear that the re-nomination of the four sites was not even considered, and all four were removed from the tentative list that same year. After that, Ukraine was included in two larger multinational nominations—the Struve Geodetic Arc (2005) and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians (2007)—but did not have any independent nominations. In this respect, Ukraine did not differ from most of the newly independent former Soviet republics. Although all of them had joined the World Heritage Convention and most had successful nominations, their activity was not high during this period. In most cases, either the capital or the cultural center of the country was nominated as the first candidate.

Several authors (Myshlovkska[6] Malysh[7]) analyzed how the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 transformed the memory discourse in Ukraine, how the demand for "decommunisation" and "derussification" of Ukrainian heritage grew. Budgetary analysis clearly shows that the financing of heritage protection grew significantly during the Yushchenko administration. Then, in 2015–16, after the annexation of Crimea, there was another considerable increase in spending on "decommunization" and "derussification." During the same period, several EU cooperation programs were launched, reinforcing the increasingly prominent "European Ukraine" metanarrative. And that had an impact on WH policies too. In the 2010s with the resumption of national-symbolic nominations in the Ukrainian heartland of western Ukraine (Palaces of the Metropolitans of Dalmatia and Bukovina in 2011, Wooden Tserkvas in the Carpathian Region in 2013), and with the emergence of tourism-driven World Heritage nominations (Tauric Chersonese in 2013), attempts were made to redefine Ukrainian World Heritage policy. The compilation of an updated tentative list also reflected this endeavor, as it included sites in western Ukraine associated with the Ukrainian national revival (Tomb of Taras Shecchenko, Kamenets-Podilsk), meanwhile the outlines of a future Crimean World Heritage hub emerged, complementing the existing Crimean nomination with the cave cities of Crimean Gothia and the Khans' Palace in Bakhchisaray, and—possibly—with Askaniya Nova a little further away. The framing of Chersonese and the other Crimean nominations clearly fits into the narrative of "European Ukraine", emphasizing the presence of Western (Greek, Gothic, Italian) elements in Eastern Europe, as stated in the definition of the outstanding universal value of Tauric Chersonese, which "provides outstanding physical evidence of cultural

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6 Oksana Myshlovska, "Delegitimising the Communist Past and Building a New Sense of Community: The Politics of Transitional Justice and Memory in Ukraine," *International Journal for History,* Culture and Modernity 7, no. 1 (2019): 372–405, https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.561.

7 Nataliia Malysh, Viktoriya Shevchenko, and Olena Tkachuk-Miroshnychenko, "State Policy in the Sphere of Protection of Cultural Heritage in Ukraine," *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development* (2020), https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-03-2020-0047.

exchange between the Greek, Roman and Byzantine empires and the peoples living on the northern coast of the Black Sea."[8] These nominations depict the region as if it were throughout its entire history some sort of "western bulwark" of Eastern Europe—like a precursor of the current Ukrainian state. However, in the first decades of the new millennium compared to its population and territory, Ukraine still ranked among the lowest in Europe in terms of World Heritage activity, indicating that the sector was not only underfunded and poorly paid, but also the lack of priority for the government.[9]

Although Russia's World Heritage activities experienced a certain setback by the economic downturn and political turmoil of the 1990s, nominations there never completely stopped. New sites were regularly added A significant proportion of these nominations involved elevating outstanding elements of the local cultural register to the global level, as was the case in other countries of the disintegrated union. This is how the monuments of Novgorod, Vladimir and Suzdal, as well as the Solovetsky Islands (1992), Sergiev Posad (1993), and the Church of the Ascension in Kolomenskoye (1994) were nominated. In the second half of the decade, natural sites in the non-European part of the country occurred on the list,[10] which on the one hand indicates that the central government sought to serve the demands for self-representation of the regional elites, and on the other hand, according to Plets's interpretation,[11] by emphasizing nature over cultural elements in the indigenous (non-Russian) territories of the country, they also served Russian ethno-nationalism. This is how the *Virgin Komi Forests* (1995), the *Volcanoes of Kamchatka and Lake Baikal* (1996), the *Golden Mountains of Altai* (1998), and the *Western Caucasus* (1999) ended up on the list. The nomination of the Kazan Kremlin in 2000 brought about a change: influential local elites were now able to successfully get their own cultural heritage sites included in the federal and then global registers. The leadership

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8 UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Ancient City of Tauric Chersonese and Its Chora," https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1411/ (accessed January 30, 2026).

9 Тамара Марусик, "Об'єкти Всесвітньої спадщини ЮНЕСКО як елемент іміджевої складової України," Історико-політичні проблеми сучасного світу, no. 46 (2022): 79–89; К. Д. Іорданова, "Проблеми та перспективи розвитку Всесвітньої спадщини ЮНЕСКО в Україні," in Матеріали І Всеукраїнської конференції (2023), https://ir.nmu.org.ua/handle/123456789/165322.
K. D. Iordanova and O. A. Patsybina, *Problems and prospects for the development of UNESCO World Heritage Ukraine,* 2023.

10 Jørgen Jørgensen and Geir Hønneland, "Implementing Global Nature Protection Agreements in Russia," Journal of International Wildlife Law & Policy 9 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1080/13880290500341974.

11 Gertjan Plets, "Heritage Statecraft: Transcending Methodological Nationalism in the Russian Federation," in The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History After 1945 (Springer, 2018); Gertjan Plets and Linda van der Pol, "World Heritage and Cultural Statecraft in Putin's Russia: Patriotic Agendas, Flexible Power Relations, and Geopolitical Ambitions," *Change Over Time* 11, no. 2 (2022): 200–224.
Gertjan Plets and Linda Van Der Pol, "World Heritage and Cultural Statecraft in Putin's Russia: Patriotic Agendas, Flexible Power Relations, and Geopolitical Ambitions," *Change Over Time* 11, no. 2 (2022): 200–224.

of Tatarstan proved to be exceptionally ambitious and successful in this regard.[12] However, all these changes had little impact on Russia's relationship with UNESCO in general, which in the 1990s did not differ much from that of other post-Soviet states. After the fall of the Soviet Union, new relationships were established at the institutional level, and states sought to adopt the good practices of West, with Russia also striving to accept and apply the global standards of heritage preservation.[13]

Since the beginning of the new millennium, with the consolidation of Putin's power, cultural heritage has once again become a key instrument of foreign policy and Russian geostrategy, as it was during the Brezhnev era. The first sign of this was that in 2002 when the UNESCO office in Moscow was given regional responsibilities covering the CIS countries. In 2006, IFESCCO was established to perform tasks similar to those of UNESCO in the post-Soviet region, which at that time already did not include Ukraine, Georgia and the Baltic states. As Russia's global political ambitions grew stronger, World Heritage representation became increasingly important for the Russian leadership as part of a "soft power" offensive aimed at presenting the "new Russia" as an unavoidable cultural force.[14] In this context, Vestnik UNESCO, the representative publication of the Russian UNESCO Committee, was relaunched in 2004.[15] In addition to presenting Russian culture to Western audiences in line with the government narrative, it has since published a special issue on each WH nomination, showcasing the narratives around each new site. The publication also indicates, as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov confirmed in his welcoming speech, that Russia wants to become a decisive factor within UNESCO by participating in its programs and determining the organization's agenda.[16] However, increasing Russian influence was not the final goal—the Russian government's aim is to establish itself as an independent civilization and, in opposition to the former Western dominance, to create a multipolar system in which it is one of the poles where Western expectations and rules are not considered universally valid.[17]

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12 K. E. Graney, Of Khans and Kremlins: Tatarstan and the Future of Ethno-Federalism in Russia (Lexington Books, 2009), https://books.google.hu/books?id=7ydo7Idyqj0C.

13 Gertjan Plets, "Post-Soviet Heritages in the Making," International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity 7 (2019), https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.600.

14 A. N. Alekseyeva, "Sochi 2014 and the Rhetoric of a New Russia: Image Construction through Mega-Events," *East European Politics* 30 (2014): 158–74.

15 Russian Commission for UNESCO, Vestnik UNESCO, https://unesco.ru/en/ (accessed January 30, 2026). [Publication-specific details require verification.]

16 Russian Commission for UNESCO, "Sergey Lavrov Summarises Russia's Participation in UNESCO Activities at a Meeting of the National Commission," https://unesco.ru/en/news/01012026003/ (accessed January 30, 2026).

17 Plets and van der Pol, "World Heritage and Cultural Statecraft," 209.

Russian cultural diplomacy saw UNESCO as a suitable arena for creating this anti-Western pole because, in the second decade of the 2000s, significant tensions arose within the organization between northern and southern member states, as well as between member states and advisory bodies.[18] In his book on the history of World Heritage Committee meetings, Brumann refers to what happened in the Committee after 2010 as a "southern revolt,"[19] while others, from a different perspective, describe it as "politicization" of the Committee's decisions. This was primarily manifested when the Committee increasingly opposed the advisory bodies and the World Heritage Centre, inscribing sites that were advised for deferral/referral/non-inscription, and in one case, rejecting on a political basis a nomination that the advisory bodies would have considered worthy of World Heritage status.[20] According to Meskell and Bertacchini's analysis,[21] lobby groups had already formed at the beginning of the decade that systematically helped each other's nominations and pushed decisions through the Committee against the advisory bodies' recommendations. One such important pressure group and supporter of the "southern revolt" was the BRICS, which had been coordinating its activities in the Committee since 2010.[22] In addition to coordinated nominations, BRICS cooperation was also expressed in steps such as the 2013 deal on Jerusalem, which was brokered by Russia and Brazil.[23] These geopolitical changes in the Committee were also helped by the spread of the anthropological concept of heritage, which, at least at the level of declarations, prompted the Secretariat and the leadership of UNESCO to give space to the demands of the South, accepting them as legitimate and taking on the accusation of Eurocentrism.[24] By the middle of the decade, the conflict had reached the

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18 Lynn Meskell, "The Rush to Inscribe: Reflections on the 35th Session of the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO Paris, 2011," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 37, no. 2 (2012): 145–51.

19 Brumann, Best We Share, 224–57.

20 Tamás Szűcs, "Anatomy of a Failure in Heritage Diplomacy: The Tel Dan Case before the World Heritage Committee" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

21 Lynn Meskell, "States of Conservation: Protection, Politics, and Pacting within UNESCO's World Heritage Committee," *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, no. 1 (2014): 217–43; Enrico Bertacchini, Claudia Liuzza, and Lynn Meskell, "Shifting the Balance of Power in the UNESCO World Heritage Committee: An Empirical Assessment," International Journal of Cultural Policy 23, no. 3 (2017): 331–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1048243.
Enrico Bertacchini et al., "Shifting the balance of power in the UNESCO World Heritage Committee: an empirical assessment", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 23, no. 3 (2017): 331–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1048243.

22 Ida Breckan Claudi, "The New Kids on the Block: BRICs in the World Heritage Committee" (master's thesis, University of Oslo, 2011), https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/13149.

23 Tamás Szűcs, "The Jerusalem Question, UNESCO and Global Heritage Policy 1968–1999," *Acta Universitatis de Carolo Eszterházy Nominatae, Sectio Historiae* 48 (2021): 69–90.

24 Christoph Brumann, "Anthropological Utopia, Closet Eurocentrism, and Culture Chaos in the UNESCO World Heritage Arena," Anthropological Quarterly 91, no. 4 (2018): 1203–33.

point where, according to Francesco Bandarin, then Vice-President of the World Heritage Centre, the functioning of the advisory bodies had become completely meaningless.[25]

For Russia, the alliance with the Global South proved useful when it sought to gain support for its own allies—particularly Syria[26]—in the Committee, or when it sought to have its own sites added to the list. ICOMOS -the advisory body evaluating cultural sites - has given a negative assessment of Russia's changing heritage protection. Plets and Cecil show how restoration practices in Russia, which had previously followed Western norms, have been replaced by a practice that can be considered more of a reconstruction, focusing on monumentality and attractiveness rather than authenticity. This search for monumentality fits in perfectly with Putin's political program emphasizing "Russian greatness."[27] At that time, Russian heritage protection justified these characteristics of restoration with "local cultural patterns," rejecting "Eurocentric" and "imperialist-colonialist" criticisms. The emphasis on the "non-Western" nature of Russian heritage protection is fully consistent with the broader state policy in which Russia is presented not as part of West, but as its antithesis. However, this contradicts the fact that most of the buildings that were placed under protection were built in the 16th 19th centuries, when Russia considered itself part of the European cultural sphere, and the buildings themselves—in terms of their materials and character—are much closer to European architecture than to those clearly defined as "non-Western" in the Nara Document.[28] However, alongside this kind of open opposition, Russian heritage diplomacy also sought to persuade the Committee members and engage in intensive lobbying. The most powerful—and by far the most expensive—tool for this was hosting the committee meeting, as organizing countries always have priority in inscriptions, data shows.[29]

The tension between the World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and Russia in the years preceding the escalation of the Russian Ukrainian conflict was primarily evident in the nomination of Bolgar and Sviyazhsk, which Plets[30] analyses in detail. Bolgar was first nominated

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25 Francesco Bandarin, interview by Christina Cameron and Mechtild Rössler, June 20–22, 2014, Doha, Qatar, Oral Archives of the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, https://whc.unesco.org/en/oralarchives/francesco-bandarin/.

26 Lynn Meskell and Claudia Liuzza, "The World Is Not Enough: New Diplomacy and Dilemmas for the World Heritage Convention at 50," *International Journal of Cultural Property* 29, no. 4 (2022): 391–407, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0940739122000030.

27 Plets and van der Pol, "World Heritage and Cultural Statecraft."

28 Tim Winter, "Beyond Eurocentrism? Heritage Conservation and the Politics of Difference," International Journal of Heritage Studies 20, no. 2 (2014): 123–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2012.736403.

29 Enrico E. Bertacchini and Donatella Saccone, "Toward a Political Economy of World Heritage," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 36, no. 4 (2012): 327–52.

30 Gertjan Plets, "Ethno-Nationalism, Asymmetric Federalism and Soviet Perceptions of the Past: (World) Heritage Activism in the Russian Federation," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 15 (2015): 67–93, https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605314555601.

by Russia in 2000, together with the Kazan Kremlin. At that time, the World Heritage Committee rejected the dossier, primarily because of the dubious reconstruction of the Great Minaret. Russia tried again in 2001, but the result was the same. By 2011, a new dossier had been prepared, which no longer emphasized the architectural uniqueness of the site, but rather its importance within Russian Islam as a cultural landscape. In addition to downplaying the lack of authenticity in the renovation, this also had political benefits, as Russia, as in the Brezhnev era, was seeking partners among the countries of the Global South by promoting domestic Muslim minorities and Islam in general as a part of Russian culture.[31] In 2012, in order to gain more support for the nomination, the Committee session held in St. Petersburg was invited to visit Kazan for the UNESCO Youth Days. Then the site was scheduled to be inscribed in 2013. In the autumn of 2012, President Putin himself visited Bolgar, signaling the importance of the project. Also in the autumn of 2012, an ICOMOS delegation arrived to evaluate the site—they ultimately recommended that the World Heritage Committee reject the nomination. This was followed by a long debate at the World Heritage Committee session. Only the representative of Estonia argued in favor of the ICOMOS recommendation not to inscribe the site. The Indian delegation strongly criticized ICOMOS, accusing it of being biased, while several other southern delegations—Iraq, Qatar, South Africa, Mexico and Algeria—argued in favor of inscription, citing the importance of Islam as an "underrepresented" element. The Emirati delegate admitted that "it may not meet the criteria, but its spiritual significance must be recognized." The Mexican delegate cited the Nara Declaration, which relativized the importance of authenticity. The representative of Serbia also spoke in favor, while the French delegate urged a consensual decision. Finally, as it is not customary to add a site to the list immediately after a rejection proposal, a one-year referral was agreed upon.[32] In 2014, several delegates, mainly from the Global South, jointly proposed the inscription of the site.[33] The representatives of Poland and Germany raised objections, with the latter stating that the Committee was giving Bolgar "exceptional treatment," but the vote was in favor of inclusion.[34] At the same time, Russia withdrew its nomination of Sviyazhsk for revision—originally intended for 2014—which was added to the list in 2017. This site is also located in Tatarstan, and the problems with it were similar to those raised by ICOMOS in the case of Bolgar—according

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31 Ekaterina Braginskaia, "'Domestication' or Representation? Russia and the Institutionalisation of Islam in Comparative Perspective," *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 3 (2012): 597–620.

32 UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Report of the Decisions Adopted by the World Heritage Committee at Its 37th Session (Phnom Penh, June 16–27, 2013), 152.

33 The states named in the original text are Lebanon, Portugal, the Philippines, Kazakhstan, Japan, Qatar, India, Jamaica, Finland, Algeria, Croatia, Serbia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Turkey.

34 UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Report of the Decisions Adopted by the World Heritage Committee at Its 38th Session (Doha, June 15–25, 2014).]

to an independent Russian assessment, a "Potemkin village" had been built on the island. For similar reasons, the inclusion of Pskov was postponed from 2017 to 2019.

The voting patterns in 2013–14 clearly show the significant role that geopolitical fault lines played in the decisions of the World Heritage Committee and the extent to which Russia could count on the coordinated votes of the Global South. This not only shows that Russia has succeeded in fully establishing itself as a leader for the Global South—building on the traditions of the Brezhnev era and the anti-Western stance dubbed as "anti-imperialism"—but also that it has successfully marginalized those positions within the World Heritage Committee in the 2010s that question the Russian approach. This indirectly prevented the post-Soviet states from framing their own struggles as "anti-imperialist" or "anti-colonialist."[35] Until the full-fledged war, this seemed secondary from Ukraine's point of view, given Ukraine's low performance in the field of world heritage. However, after 2014, it became essential for the post-Soviet region to recognize Russian aggression, including its cultural implications, as an imperialist colonial war.

The pre-war phase of the conflict 2014–22

The conflict reached the World Heritage Committee in its early stages, immediately after the events of 2014. The strategic goals of the two sides were already clear during this period. Ukraine's primary goal was to symbolically punish Russia by having the international community condemn its aggression, while Russian cultural diplomacy aimed to block these steps, seeking to maintain its influence among the countries of the Global South by interpreting the representation of its own interests as anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist activity.[36]

Ukraine has achieved some minor successes, but Russia has avoided more significant condemnatory actions, even "naming and shaming." UNESCO, as a specialized agency of the United Nations, did not recognize the annexation of Crimea, and since 2014, statements on Crimea have regularly included the issue of sites under Russian occupation. Formally, the first step was taken in 2014 when the ICOMOS General Assembly, at the request of the Ukrainian National Committee of ICOMOS, adopted a resolution condemning the occupation. Between 2016 and the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the UNESCO Executive Board addressed the issue of the occupied Crimea on 12 occasions. The wording of the

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35 David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique," *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 111–28.

36 Christoph Brumann, "Slag Heaps and Time Lags: Undermining Southern Solidarity in the UNESCO World Heritage Committee," *Ethnos* 84, no. 4 (2019): 719–38.

resolutions follows the UN principle of the inviolability of borders, referring to the peninsula as the "Autonomous Republic of Crimea" and clearly considering the Ukrainian authorities to be the "responsible authorities," while referring to the Russians as the "occupying power." Compared to the 2016 resolution,[37] which referred exclusively to the Ukrainian side and did not express its own opinion, the wording became more decisive in 2021, with the resolution clearly condemning Russian violations.[38]

This is largely due to the Ukrainian side's more serious efforts. On the one hand, Ukraine has begun to use more proactively the opportunities offered by international law to protect its cultural heritage.[39] The greatest success in this regard was the 2016 decision by a Dutch court ruling that the artifacts loaned by the Russian Crimean Peninsula prior to its annexation must be returned to the Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv. The Dutch court's decision was based on the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the Netherlands, Russia, and Ukraine all signed and ratified in 2009, 1988, and 1988, respectively.[40] Meanwhile, the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture has successfully brought the issue of the Aivazovsky exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow to the attention of the international community. The exhibition featured several paintings that had been removed from the Aivazovsky Museum in Fedosia—a move that, according to Ukraine, constitutes a violation of international law.[41] In January 2018, the Ukrainian National Commission for UNESCO convened a meeting with Ukrainian state bodies with the aim of emphasizing the issue of cultural heritage in communications related to Crimea. This resulted in an action plan that included traditional tools of cultural diplomacy, such as consultations with UNESCO leaders and various programs in Paris aimed at presenting Ukraine's position on Crimea, particularly with regard to the Khan's Palace in Bakhchisaray, to the bureaucracy of international organizations.[42] On the other hand, the Ukrainian cabinet

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37 UNESCO Executive Board, Summary Records, 200 EX/5, 43–44.

38 UNESCO Executive Board, "Follow-Up to Decisions and Resolutions Adopted by the Executive Board and the General Conference at Their Previous Sessions," part I, "Programme Issues," section E, "Follow-Up of the Situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Ukraine)."

39 Nour A. Munawar and James Symonds, "Empires of Lies? The Political Uses of Cultural Heritage in War," in *War and the Historic Environment* (Routledge, 2024).

40 Evelien Campfens, "Who's Cultural Heritage? Crimean Treasures at the Crossroads of Politics, Law and Ethics," *Art, Antiquity and Law* 22 (2017): 193.

41 Sophia Kishkovsky, "Moscow's Tretyakov Gallery under Fire over Crimean Loans in Blockbuster Show," *The Art Newspaper,* August 19, 2016.

42 "Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage as an Instrument for the Protection of Monuments in the Occupied Crimea," *Voice of Crimea,* 2020, https://culture.voicecrimea.com.ua/en/convention-concerning-the-protection-of-the-world-cultural-and-natural-heritage-as-an-instrument-for-the-protection-of-monuments-in-the-occupied-crimea/ (accessed January 30, 2026). "Send a letter to the Director-General of UNESCO regarding the state of preservation of Ukraine's cultural heritage as a result

then began more active legislative work to sanction measures related to cultural heritage in Crimea that are illegal under international law.[43]

As regards the World Heritage Site (Tauric Chersonese)[44] and the sites on the tentative list (namely Bakhchisaray and Sudak), the problems/grievances raised by the Ukrainian side were similar to those raised by the Palestinians in the case of the similarly occupied and disputed city of Jerusalem: Expropriation by the occupying power (in this case, the inclusion of the sites in the Russian register of monuments), excavations that are illegal under international law (Chersonese), construction work (the Tavrida highway, which passes through a former Muslim/Tatar cemetery in Kerch), lack of proper maintenance (towers collapsed in Sudak Castle) and inadequate reconstruction work (Bakhchisaray).[45]

However, the contradictory nature of the situation is indicated by the fact that these Ukrainian grievances appear exclusively in the texts compiled by the Secretariat for the Director-

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of large-scale illegal works in the Crimea by the Russian occupation authorities, including on the territory of the Bakhchisaray Khan's Palace "

"To send a note of protest to the Russian Federation regarding the destruction of the Bakhchisaray Khan's Palace as a result of the occupation authorities' so-called "Restoration work", which should be implemented without collegial coordination by virtue of the powers of each specific agency,

"Organize an information event on the protection of cultural heritage in the Crimea, including Bakhchisaray Khan's Palace, at the Embassy of Ukraine in France with the participation of representatives of the UNESCO Secretariat, ICOMOS, ICCROM, permanent delegations of UNESCO member countries, journalists, the public "To hold public hearings and expert consultations," and "To hold consultations in international expert circles on the participation of relevant specialists in the mission (missions) of international monitoring in the Crimea. Bakhchisaray Khan's Palace, at the Embassy of Ukraine in France with the participation of representatives of the UNESCO Secretariat, ICOMOS, ICCROM, permanent delegations of UNESCO member countries, journalists, the public," and "To hold public hearings and expert consultations." "To hold consultations in international expert circles on the participation of relevant specialists in the mission (missions) of international monitoring in the Crimea." Bakhchisaray Khan's Palace, at the Embassy of Ukraine in France with the participation of representatives of the UNESCO Secretariat, ICOMOS, ICCROM, permanent delegations of UNESCO member countries, journalists, the public, "To hold public hearings and expert consultations." "To hold consultations in international expert circles on the participation of relevant specialists in the mission (missions) of international monitoring in the Crimea." Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage as an Instrument for the Protection of Monuments in the Occupied Crimea Paris 2020 https://culture.voicecrimea.com.ua/en/convention-concerning-the-protection-of-the-world-cultural-and-natural-heritage-as-an-instrument-for-the-protection-of-monuments-in-the-occupied-crimea/ (accessed 01.30.2026.)

43 "Sanction Policy of Ukraine and Cultural Heritage of Crimea," *Voice of Crimea,* 2020, https://culture.voicecrimea.com.ua/en/sanction-policy-of-ukraine-and-cultural-heritage-of-crimea/ (accessed January 30, 2026).

44 For discussion of Tauric Chersonese, see Anna Gaynutdinova, Heritage Re-Contextualisation in Post-Soviet Russia (n.d.) [publication details not supplied]; Plets and van der Pol, "World Heritage and Cultural Statecraft." Anna Gaynutdinova, *Heritage re-contextualisation in post-Soviet Russia.*
Plets and Van Der Pol, "World Heritage and Cultural Statecraft in Putin's Russia: Patriotic Agendas, Flexible Power Relations, and Geopolitical Ambitions".

45 The original note distinguishes the 2003 tentative-list spelling "Bagçesaray" from the 2012 cultural-landscape nomination spelling "Bakhchysarai."

General.[46] Within the Executive Board itself, support for the Ukrainian case was much less pronounced. According to the summary records, the fault lines of geopolitics after 2014 were also reflected in UNESCO: the European (Slovak, German, Latvian, EU) delegations emphasized the importance of recognizing Ukrainian sovereignty in the debate and argued in favor of adopting the draft texts. The Russian delegate—joined, as usual, by Venezuela and, after 2017, Hungary—basically attacked Ukraine and the Baltic states on the issue of minority language rights.[47] The delegates from the Global South—when they commented on the issue—only emphasized the importance of compromise. When it came to the vote, most states abstained, and the texts were adopted by only a slight majority—which the Russian Foreign Ministry emphasized in a press release, indicating that the resolution adopted in the Executive Board had in fact represented a minority position.[48]

However, not even this much has happened in the World Heritage Committee. Unlike in the case of Jerusalem, where the decisions of the Executive Board were reflected in the decisions of the World Heritage Committee and the Palestinian complaints were incorporated into the decisions unchanged, only one decision has been made in the case of Ukraine after 2014. In 2016, the case of Tauric Chersonese was brought before the World Heritage Committee.[49] The initiator—again on Ukraine's initiative—was ICOMOS, which would have recommended the "in danger" classification. Although the decision refers to the relevant decisions of the EC, it does not mention the occupation or the damage it has caused, merely "calling on all parties to refrain from taking any action that would result in irreversible changes to the site, to fulfil their obligations under international law and to protect the site by all means." It further stipulates that, as soon as the situation allows, a fact-finding committee should travel to the site. However, the resolution makes no mention of the "in danger" classification proposed by ICOMOS. The

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46 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, "UNESCO Enhances the Monitoring of the Situation in the Occupied Crimea," https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/67720-junesko-aktivizuje-monitoring-situaciji-v-okupovanomu-krimu (accessed January 30, 2026).

47 UNESCO Executive Board, Summary Records, 202nd Session (October 4–18, 2017), 13; Summary Records, 205th Session (October 3–17, 2018), 61; Summary Records, 210th Session (December 2, 2020–January 27, 2021), 50; Summary Records, 211th Session (April 7–21, 2021), 30; Summary Records, 212th Session (October 6–20, 2021), 38.
Executive Board 210th session Paris, 2 December 2020–27 January 2021 50.
Executive Board 211th session Paris, 7–21 April 2021 Summary records 30.
Executive Board 212th session Paris, 6–20 October 2021 38.
Executive Board 205th session Paris, 3–17 October 2018. 61.

48 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, "Press Release on UNESCO Considering the Crimea Issue within Its Competence," https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1526313/ (accessed January 30, 2026).

49 UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision 40 COM 7B.62, 40th Session (Istanbul, July 10–20, 2016), 75.

state of conservation report was also adopted in the same year, indicating that they had not received adequate information about the site, but there is no mention of occupation. The state of conservation is assessed based on data from 2013, before the occupation.

Ukraine sought to provide even greater protection for Ukrainian heritage in Crimea, submitting the nomination dossier of the Khan's Palace in Bakhchisaray to the World Heritage Committee twice, in 2014 and 2015. However, the World Heritage Centre, which handles nominations, rejected the documentation on both occasions as "incomplete". Although Ukrainian literature also interprets this as that the documentation was "not ready,"[50] only the publication of the archival materials will reveal exactly what the exact objections were – but in all likelihood, they wanted to avoid controversy surrounding the disputed site. The inclusion of Jerusalem and Preah Vihear on the World Heritage List confirms that the World Heritage Committee has the right to include sites of disputed ownership on the list—in the case of Jerusalem, even proposed by a State Party that does not have de facto control over the site—but the rejection of Tel Dan in 2010 and 2011 indicated that even the support of the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS is not enough in the case of a disputed site if there is no appropriate political consensus behind it. The votes on Bolgar in 2013–14 showed that if there is conflict between Russia and the advisory bodies, the majority of the Committee, consisting of southern States Parties, tends to lean towards the Russian opinion. Thus, although it cannot be proven in the absence of archival sources that Russia intervened in any way in the nomination process, the conflict-averse behavior of the Secretariat handling the proposals makes it likely that they took into account in advance that the nomination would not be successful, and the Russian delegation's subsequent efforts in the case of Odesa prove that the Russians had the intention to block Ukrainian nominations.

The Ukrainian failures suffered in the World Heritage system were somewhat compensated in the field of intangible cultural heritage,[51] enabled by the fact that Russia did not sign the UN Convention. Ukraine first added an item to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2013 (Petrykivka decorative painting), followed by Cossack songs in 2016 and Kosiv ceramics in 2019. The nominations only had clear political connotations from 2021 onwards, when Ukraine successfully nominated Crimean Tatar decorative art for the list.[52]

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50 Elmira Ablialimova-Chyihoz, "The Tools of Modern Russian Colonization: The Case of the Bakhchysarai Khan's Palace," in *War in Ukraine: Theological, Ethical and Historical Reflections,* ed. Christina Dietl, Khrystyna Fostyak, Thomas Schulte-Umberg, Olha Uhryn, and Noreen van Elk (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2025), 30–43, https://doi.org/10.17438/978-3-402-25102-7.

51 Наталія Терес, "Міжнародна охорона нематеріальної культурної спадщини: світовий та український досвід," *Етнічна історія народів Європи,* no. 36 (2011): 58–63.

52 UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, "Ornek, a Crimean Tatar Ornament and Knowledge about It," https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ornek-a-crimean-tatar-ornament-and-knowledge-about-it-01601 (accessed January 30, 2026).

Conclusion

Overall, we can say that the two countries started the conflict from very different positions. While Russia had reestablished itself as a global player in heritage diplomacy since the late 1990s and had global goals with a corresponding network of contacts, Ukraine was virtually invisible in international heritage diplomacy until the start of the open conflict, with its world heritage policy serving more to achieve its own national goals—the building of a European Ukrainian nation. Nevertheless, between 2014 and 2022, Ukraine achieved partial success in winning over the Bureau and the advisory body (ICOMOS), getting several resolutions adopted, but Russia managed to block any condemnatory decisions within the Committee and, through direct or indirect influence, prevented Ukraine from submitting controversial sites. Unlike in similar cases (Jerusalem, Preah Vihear), the Committee did not take an active role in conflict management, not even at the level of "naming and shaming", due to the geopolitical changes in the Committee.

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Rodriguez Julieta Atenas

From Lockdown to Media Lens
Review on *Covid-19 in Film and Television: Watching the Pandemic,* Routledge, 2025.

Pro&Contra 8

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From Lockdown to Media Lens
Review on *Covid-19 in Film and Television: Watching the Pandemic,* Routledge, 2025.

The Covid-19 Pandemic reshaped not only global society but also the way visual media responded to and represented crises, offering new ways to understand and interpret cultural shifts. The consequences of this disruption became evident in film, television, and digital media, particularly in the current aesthetic shifts that emerged. The book offers a fitting, well-curated, and broad analysis of these developments. Bringing together scholars across disciplines, the volume examines not only how the Pandemic appeared in visual media, but also how it modified the modes of production, storytelling, and broader representational politics through an intersectional lens. While primarily focused on UK and US examples, the volume offers essential insights into the global shifts in media representation brought on by the Pandemic, contributing to the growing body of Pandemic-related research and offering a compelling read for anyone interested in how crises reshape the stories we tell and the ways we tell them.

The framework offered by *Covid-19 in Film and Television* is built on an interdisciplinary foundation of media studies, cultural theory, and crisis scholarship, advancing an analytical approach that treats Covid-19 as both content and context. The authors and editors are especially careful to trace out the numerous paths along which the Pandemic reshaped audiovisual cultures, from its disruptive impact on production to how it rewired character and space in narrative. The effect is a broad survey of how screen media accounted for, reacted to, and, in many cases, actively made public knowledge of the Pandemic. Early in the book, it is noted that "the Pandemic represented an opportunity, in that it brought to light issues that had been simmering in the background for a long time and were suddenly given renewed attention," including innovations and developments in diverse media products and their reception by audiences. (2) Chapters 7 and 8 particularly focus on intersectionality by exploring how the Pandemic disproportionately affected marginalized groups, with Chapter 7 examining racial and class-based disparities in healthcare access and media representation, while Chapter 8 notably analyzes how *The Good Fight* (2017) incorporates a racialized gothic narrative to reflect these inequalities in its Pandemic storytelling.

The book's intersectional perspective, embedded in its narrative analyses, extends its critical scope by examining how the impact of the Pandemic varied by race, gender, class, and labor. The editors stress that Covid-19 was "not just a medical crisis but a social, economic, political and cultural one as well," revealing and expanding existing inequalities. (2) The book consists of eight chapters, with the first one discussing changes in how cinematic and social events were perceived by people, prior to discussing changes in production environments. In contrast yet in alignment with the first chapter, the later chapters explore how the Pandemic

was incorporated into stories and what political implications arose from these decisions. For instance, Chapter 6 documents that "the entertainment industry could choose to ignore the Pandemic" but highlights how many shows decided to tackle it directly, by incorporating it and offering a biting commentary on the crisis through its narrative strategy, on-screen subjects' development, and camera-work. (102)

The volume opens with a clear theoretical premise retelling how Covid-19 has affected every aspect of the media ecosystem in both a negative and positive manner, pointing out how it signaled the end of several media production elements but also forced more audience engagement as the lockdown occurred. Along with this the first chapter frames the political input that was present through the different stages of the Pandemic, as well as the plurality of voices in those scenarios. This attention to both political dynamics and the multiplicity of voices during the Pandemic works not only as a backdrop for the individual case studies that follow, but as a central organizing principle that highlights the collective experience shaped by the crisis. The essays in the collection are diverse in focus, spanning from mainstream television series, independent short films, streaming practices, to reality TV. Yet, they share a commitment to the Pandemic as a structuring force in media and as a diagnostic lens through which they examine evolving cultural forms.

One of the volume's most compelling recurring themes is its focus on narrative strategies, particularly how storytelling adapted to Pandemic-era conditions and reflected the influence of the Youtubization of media. Various shows adopted formats and aesthetics reminiscent of YouTube content through their cinematography, spatial composition, and focalization. Several chapters investigate how the home interior, isolation, and disjointed temporalities became central aesthetic and thematic preoccupations of the lockdown-era media. Previously assembled storytelling and big-budget films used to dominate, whereas during the Pandemic stories were inward-turned towards the interior of the house, the screen-within-a-screen, and the recurring cycles of solitude. Multiple chapters argue that these changes in the narrative were not simply a reflection of production constraints but actually represented a profound cultural response to anxiety, uncertainty, and broken frameworks of time. This turning away from prior narrative linearity, both on television and in daily life, is also exhibited in the public-private space mixing, the attention to interior spaces, and the linearity of temporality that governed the texture of Pandemic storytelling.

Of equal significance is the volume's strict emphasis on production cultures, where the Pandemic catalyzed an unprecedented rebalancing of work flows and working conditions in media. Rather than merely offering inventory disruptions, the essays examine how the crisis was, to some extent, normalized, how safety protocols were retooled as production, virtual previsualization tools repurposed as long-term solutions, among other facets. A telling example arises in the discussion in Chapter 3 of daytime talk shows, where hosts' makeshift home studios

quickly turned into a new paradigm of how audiences could "welcome the host into their homes on a daily (weekday) basis," eroding boundaries between private space and broadcast infrastructure. (63) The volume emphasizes how what appears on the horizon is not a clean break but a diagnostic filter: the Pandemic disclosed and amplified the industry's pre-existing addictions to precarious labor, just-in-time logistics, and algorithmic control. The book thus reframes Covid-19 as both a propeller and as a diagnostic tool for the changes in media.

What sets this volume apart from other accounts of Pandemic media is its close attention to how Covid-19 reshaped the formal and temporal dimensions of storytelling. Instead of listing Pandemic-themed content, the chapters investigate how the virus altered narrative form, genre conventions, and aesthetic tone. Some works address the Pandemic directly, while others reflect its impact through changes in pacing, space, and social dynamics. This distinction between Covid-19 as a narrative topic and as a shaping force helps structure the volume's analyses. By following this approach, the contributors show how media responded to the Pandemic not only in content but in form, capturing shifts in tone, rhythm, and viewer experience. These essays trace how stories adapted to new conditions and how those changes reflect deeper cultural responses to uncertainty, risk, and prolonged disruption.

Since the book tackles different media and forms, the collection might have benefited from more sustained dialogue across contributions. While the inclusion of numerous and varied media forms reflects the fragmented and omnipresent nature of Pandemic media itself, the variety sometimes comes at the expense of depth. Some of the chapters include thickly packed critiques, while others are explanatory and create a patchy reading experience. For instance, although the Pandemic is approached through multiple frames, this diversity, apart from the final chapters, tends to concern spatial representation rather than discursive variation, which contributes to an uneven reading experience. Therefore, the book at times lacks coherence and a sustained theoretical thread except for the fact that all the events occurred during the Pandemic and are somehow related to media. This weakens it as a unified scholarly intervention, although remaining quite useful as a set of case-based remarks. Nevertheless, the decentralized form also reflects the distributed and international nature of the Pandemic itself, a crisis which refused tidy narrative or disciplinary containment.

Overall, *Covid-19 in Film and Television* will be of most significance to media and cultural studies scholars, but it also productively converges with sociology, public health, labor studies, and gender studies. Its interdisciplinarity makes it well-suited for discussions about the future of screen media. The essays are accessible without sacrificing depth, and the diverse range of case studies assures applicability across a wide spectrum. Ultimately, what the collection offers is not necessarily an archive of Pandemic media, but a critical approach to conducting media research in times of crisis. Its interdisciplinarity and focus on intersectionality makes it a valuable contribution to media industries, cultural studies, and the social sciences, offering

critical insight into the evolving visual culture of the Global Pandemic. This collection not only charts the cultural impact of the different stages of Covid-19 but also calls for critical self-examination regarding the evolving nature of media and global crises in the 21st century.

Abdelrahman Morshed

Review on *The Palgrave Handbook of Neo-Victorianism*.
Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Pro&Contra 8

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Review on *The Palgrave Handbook of Neo-Victorianism*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

The Palgrave Handbook of Neo-Victorianism, edited by Brenda Ayres and Sarah E. Maier, is a comprehensive and ambitious contribution to the field of Neo-Victorian studies. Comprising 27 chapters, the volume could be organized thematically into seven core groups that reflect the multi-disciplinary and increasingly global nature of the field. These categories are Hauntology and Spectral Narratives; Media, Adaptation, and Visual Culture; Postcolonialism and Globalization; Biofiction and Literary Reinterpretation; Gender, Sexuality, and Queer Studies; Material Culture and Environmental Perspectives; and Poetry and Neo-Victorian Poetics. This diversity in topics highlights both the thematic coherence and the intellectual range of the collection.

Hauntology, as theorized by Jacques Derrida, permeates several chapters in the handbook, particularly those by Brenda Ayres. In Chapter 2, Ayres addresses the use of spectral motifs in Neo-Victorian ghost stories, arguing that such stories are not simply horror tales, but complex metaphorical engagements with the instability of historical knowledge. For example, she interprets Elizabeth Brooks's *The Whispering House* (2021) as a layered narrative that utilizes the haunted house as a structural and symbolic site of "epistemological decay and recovery" (19). Rather than offering a clear path to truth, the novel embraces ambiguity, allowing the past to "whisper" rather than speak, which challenges the linearity of historical narrative. Riley Sager's *Home Before Dark* (2020), another of Ayres's case studies, furthers this point by offering alternating timelines, revealing how memory, narrative, and trauma intersect to construct a haunted reality, where the "truth remains ever just out of reach" (21).

Ayres deepens her exploration in Chapter 21 through a cinematic case study: Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015). Here, hauntology manifests not only in the ghosts that haunt the film's decaying mansion but in the entire environment, which is described as "visually decomposing under the weight of its own history" (394). The film's narrative circularity in which it begins and ends in the same traumatic space, emphasizes how the past refuses to die, returning in spectral form to claim the present. By invoking Derrida's formulation that "the specter begins by coming back," Ayres suggests that Neo-Victorianism is always already haunted by the unresolved ethical and ideological tensions of the nineteenth century.

Neo-Victorianism thrives in visual media, a point richly explored across five chapters. In Chapter 3, Rachel M. Friars and Connor E. R. DeMerchant dissect representations of Queen Victoria on screen, such as in *The Young Victoria* (2009) and *Victoria & Abdul* (2017). They argue that these portrayals offer more than biographical insight as they also reflect contemporary anxieties about monarchy, gender, and postcolonial memory. In *Victoria & Abdul*, for instance, the exoticization of Abdul serves to critique British imperial nostalgia even as the film remains complicit in certain orientalist tropes. The film's deliberate focus on intimacy and emotion

contrasts sharply with the political aloofness traditionally associated with Queen Victoria, thus engaging in what the authors call "emotional revisionism" (41).

Antonija Primorac's Chapter 4 offers a compelling argument for the legitimacy of screen adaptations as sites of scholarly analysis. She focuses on the 2018 TV series *The Terror*, adapted from Dan Simmons's *The Terror* (2007), which reimagines the doomed Franklin Expedition as a metaphor for imperial pride. Primorac emphasizes how the visual language of the show with its emphasis on desolate landscapes, bodily decay, and eerie silence, highlights themes of racial and ecological exploitation. The series "remediates history through horror," challenging viewers to rethink the colonial narratives embedded in Victorian exploration literature (60) .

Chapter 16, by Anna Maria Jones, turns to graphic novels, including Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999) and Bryan Talbot's *Alice in Sunderland* (2007). Jones highlights how these texts "unmaster the archive" by juxtaposing canonical Victorian figures with countercultural, fantastical, and postmodern narratives. Such works embody a "visual palimpsest" that not only reinterprets history but questions its very legibility (298). The multiplicity of panels, timelines, and genres in these texts mirrors the fragmented and multifaceted nature of Neo-Victorian memory work.

The third thematic group offers a pointed critique of Neo-Victorianism's often Eurocentric tendencies by introducing rigorous postcolonial frameworks. Felipe Espinoza Garrido's Chapter 6 leads this intervention by arguing that many Neo-Victorian texts, while seemingly critical of colonialism, frequently re-center white British perspectives. He uses Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a distinguished text in postcolonial Neo-Victorianism, as an example of a work that successfully challenges the racialized foundations of canonical literature. Rhys's portrayal of Antoinette Cosway not only rewrites Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), but reveals how British literature often erased or exoticized colonial subjects. Garrido critiques the field for embracing this novel as an isolated example while largely ignoring non-Western Neo-Victorian perspectives. He calls for a "methodological decolonization" of the field that prioritizes narratives by, for, and about the formerly colonized (91).

Sutirtho Roy's Chapter 11 complements this critique by examining the subgenre of prehistoric adventure fiction, particularly through works such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). Roy explores how modern reinterpretations of these texts, like Stephen Baxter's *The Time Ships*, invert colonial tropes, turning imperial exploration into an allegory of ethical failure and mental violence. In contrast to Doyle's original, where dinosaurs and indigenous peoples are "discovered" and categorized, Baxter's narrative presents time and history as fractured and vague, undermining the Victorian urge to classify and control (195).

Martin Danahay's Chapter 26 tackles steampunk, asking whether it should even be considered part of Neo-Victorianism. Danahay argues that while steampunk often fetishizes Victorian technology and style as in *The Difference Engine* (1990) by Gibson and Sterling,

it still engages in serious speculative critiques of history. He proposes a globalized model of steampunk that includes works from Brazil, Japan, and India, offering a more inclusive and critical framework. This thematic group collectively urges Neo-Victorian scholars to expand their geographical and epistemological scope.

The genre of biofiction, explored across several chapters, reflects Neo-Victorianism's fascination with literary celebrity, authorial myth, and historical revisionism. In Chapter 17, Barbara Braid defines biofiction as "the deliberate fictionalization of historical figures with the aim of exposing narrative gaps and ideological distortions in the historical record" (317). She discusses texts such as Emma Tennant's *Heathcliff's Tale* (2005) and James Tully's *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë* (1999), noting how these works blur the boundary between biography and invention, often casting well-known authors in sensational or psychologically rich narratives.

Braid's reading of *The Crimes of Charlotte Brontë* is particularly compelling. She shows how the novel casts Charlotte not only as a writer but also as a potential murderess, reframing her authorship through gothic tropes that reflect Victorian anxieties about female creativity and moral agency. The novel becomes a metafictional commentary on the Brontës' legacy, interrogating how their lives have been canonized and commodified.

In Chapter 8, Brenda Ayres examines Neo-Victorian representations of childhood, focusing on Dickensian tropes. She compares adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *David Copperfield* (1850), arguing that contemporary retellings shift from moral instruction to psychological exploration. For instance, in Armando Iannucci's 2019 film adaptation of *David Copperfield*, the diverse casting and emphasis on humor and resilience reframe Dickens's narrative as one of "cultural plurality rather than social determinism" (137).

Anne-Marie Beller and Claire O'Callaghan's Chapter 13 investigates the afterlives of Elizabeth Siddal, using texts like *Desperate Romantics* (BBC, 2009) and Fiona Mountain's novel *Pale as the Dead* (2002). They argue that Siddal's posthumous identity has become a site of "feminist recuperation and commodification, reflecting ongoing tensions between muse and maker, objectification and authorship" (241).

Neo-Victorianism's commitment to recovering marginalized voices is particularly visible in its treatment of gender and sexuality. In Chapter 24, Rachel M. Friars analyzes lesbian identity and representation through a range of texts including Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) and Emma Donoghue's *Frog Music* (2014). Friars underscores how these narratives use Victorian settings to interrogate performative femininity, same-sex desire, and the limits of archival recovery. *Tipping the Velvet*, for example, centers on cross-dressing and theatricality, destabilizing binary gender categories while reasserting the importance of lesbian history. Friars writes, "the performative becomes the political," emphasizing how historical costume and stagecraft create spaces of queer resistance (451).

Chapter 19, by Brooke Cameron, focuses on Peter Ackroyd's *The Limehouse Golem*, where female agency is enacted through violence and mystery. The narrative's central character, Lizzie Cree, becomes a symbol of Victorian anxieties around female sexuality, literacy, and criminality. Cameron argues that Lizzie's final transformation from accused criminal to theatrical figure illustrates how Neo-Victorian texts explore the intersection of "spectacle, gender, and justice" (359).

Sophie Franklin, in Chapter 18, shifts the focus to racialized bodies in narratives such as Sara Collins' *The Confessions of Frannie Langton* (2019). Franklin's analysis highlights how depictions of slavery, violence, and bodily autonomy challenge romanticized visions of the Victorian era. The protagonist, a Jamaican-born servant accused of murder, narrates her own story, destabilizing both the legal and historical record. Franklin concludes that such narratives enact a "counter-archive" that emphasizes trauma and testimony over institutional authority (341).

Neo-Victorianism's attention to material culture and its symbolic significance is central to the sixth thematic group. In Chapter 20, Eckart Voigts addresses Neo-Victorian representations of dirt, waste, and filth, examining their historical and metaphorical resonance. Voigts argues that Victorian anxieties about hygiene were deeply classed and gendered, reflecting societal concerns about order, decay, and purity. He reads Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) as an influential Neo-Victorian text that revisits these themes with brutal specificity. The novel's protagonist, Sugar, operates in a world filled with sensory excess such as fog, grime, and bodily fluids. These substances, Voigts contends, are not incidental details but ideological tools: "Faber's filth articulates a cultural memory of Victorianism as a space of repression, rupture, and contamination" (377).

In Chapter 14, Brenda Ayres examines the symbolism of gloves in Victorian and Neo-Victorian narratives. In Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), gloves serve as markers of class division and sexual tension. Ayres argues that gloves are figurative, representing not only touch but also concealment as in what is socially acceptable to touch, who may be touched, and under what circumstances. The glove, she writes, "embodies the paradox of exposure and protection, intimacy and inhibition" (255). This reading transforms a seemingly mundane object into a site of contested cultural meaning.

The engagement with material culture extends to settings and architecture as well. Neo-Victorian texts often emphasize interior spaces such as drawing rooms, parlors, and asylums, not merely as backdrops but as narrative agents. These interiors are imbued with historical trauma and psychic resonance. In Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015), for example, the house bleeds literal red clay from its walls, materializing the rot of aristocratic lineage and the horrors of inheritance. Thus, material culture in the Neo-Victorian mode is not static decor but active and ideological.

Though often underrepresented in Neo-Victorian criticism, poetry offers a unique lens for engaging with Victorian legacies. In Chapter 15, John Morton addresses this scholarly oversight by examining how contemporary poets rework Victorian forms, figures, and themes. He argues that Neo-Victorian poetry constitutes a crucial site of intertextual and ideological dialogue, where historical voice is not only echoed but actively reconfigured. Morton defines the form as "verse that revisits Victorian themes, forms, and figures, but through the lens of contemporary ethics and aesthetics" (275).

He analyzes Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife* (1999) as a quintessential Neo-Victorian poetic intervention. In poems such as "Mrs. Darwin" and "Anne Hathaway," Duffy reframes male-dominated histories through the voices of women sidelined in traditional narratives. By adopting dramatic monologue and ironic parody, techniques rooted in Victorian poetry, Duffy gives voice to female perspectives historically marginalized. Morton describes this method as "archival in method but subversive in purpose," where Duffy retrieves and repurposes the cultural past to critique patriarchal historiography (278).

Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) is another key text Morton evaluates, particularly for its engagement with settler colonialism and female subjectivity. Atwood's fragmented verse mimics Moodie's nineteenth-century prose, only to break it apart and expose its ideological gaps. Morton argues that Atwood's poetry performs a "textual haunting," where Victorian discourses re-emerge to be interrogated, revised, or undone through poetic form (278). This reflexive mode of poetry, he suggests, enables a powerful condensation of historical critique.

By incorporating poetic voices and expanding genre boundaries, Morton's chapter urges Neo-Victorian scholars to take poetry seriously as a form that both preserves and dismantles the Victorian archive. His contribution opens the door to interdisciplinary conversations between literary history and poetic innovation.

The Palgrave Handbook of Neo-Victorianism is an informative and multifaceted contribution to the field, both in breadth and depth. One of the handbook's greatest strengths lies in its methodological diversity. Contributors employ a range of critical lenses, including hauntology, adaptation theory, postcolonialism, feminism, queer theory, and ecocriticism to demonstrate that Neo-Victorianism is not a monolith but a heterogeneous field. In addition, The integration of textual analysis, media critique, and cultural theory ensures that the volume is equally valuable for literary scholars, cultural historians, and interdisciplinary researchers.

Equally important is the volume's attention to previously marginalized genres and voices. The inclusion of poetry, graphic novels, and global perspectives marks a significant move toward inclusivity, both in content and methodology. Chapters like those by Garrido, Morton, and Braid expand the field's horizons, reminding readers that the Victorian past continues to shape and be shaped by present cultural imperatives.