

# Review of: "The “Bird of Paradise”: Heller and Márkus"

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Comment on the paper *The “Bird of Paradise”: Heller and Márkus* by John Grumley

So far, John Grumley’s book (*Agnes Heller: A Moralist in the Vortex of History*, 2004) is by far the most comprehensive of the books and studies written about Heller outside Hungary. Only one of the books written by Hungarian authors, *The Monkey on the Bicycle* (1998), an “interview-novel” by János Kőbányai stands the test of time like the *Vortex*.

Grumley would say about his academic career even today that György Márkus’s “work and personality has been a source of continual inspiration” for him. He submitted for a doctorate at the University of Sydney in 1985 under the title *Lukacs and Totality: The Historical Transformation of Concept*. Márkus was the supervisor of his post-graduate work. He was struck by Márkus’s “greatness as a teacher and his vast range of his knowledge of the history of Philosophy”. Three decades later, he repeated commented on the little-known debate between Jürgen Habermas and György Márkus. These insights show that there is hardly a better connoisseur than Grumley of Márkus’s life-work.

Reading this great paper, it begins to dawn on me that the recently deceased Gáspár Miklós Tamás (1948-2023), who revived the idea of renaissance of Marxism in an innovative way was the most talented follower of Heller’s virtuoso philosophising.

As a reviewer, let me make two critical comments on J Grumley’s paper.

#1 The first sentence of the abstract says as follows: “Agnes Heller and György Márkus became two of the leaders of what became known as the ‘Budapest School’ in the early 1960’s.”

The real situation is that this name ‘Budapest School’ has been existing since 1971, though the four ‘chosen’ members of Lukács’s followers have actually operated as a working group since the early 1960’s. In the *Times Literary Supplement* of 11<sup>th</sup> June 1971 (no. 3615), Georg Lukács introduced the English speaking world to the members of what he dubbed the *Budapest School*. The original letter had dated 15<sup>th</sup> February 1971 and appeared seven days after Lukács’s death.

According to Mihály Vajda, the only living member of the group, the organiser and manager of the school was Fehér Ferenc. The idea came from Fehér, Ágnes Heller’s second husband, and he persuaded Lukács to write this letter. (See, M. Vajda. *Nail in the Sack [Szög a zsákban]* Budapest, Magvető, 2017).

#2 Grumley writes: “Heller thought that one of Márkus’s great virtue was his cognitive empathy where he is drew on the thinkers he liked and avoided those for whom he had a distaste.”

In the psychotherapeutic literature cognitive empathy refers to the phenomenon when someone uses the right phrases that are associated with empathy without necessarily feeling empathy. Those individual with whom someone exercises cognitive empathy can feel talked down, patronised and ashamed. (Mihály Vajda describes Fehér as such.)

According to Grumley, Márkus was a friendly, kind, modest, very ethical, sensitive and decent man who also appreciated a joke. These traits indicate a congruent person conveying affective empathy. For these reasons, I would suggest to tweak the use of the concept of cognitive empathy in the text.

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