

Petőfi for All Seasons: Political Changes in the Cult of Petőfi between 1942 and 1956

March 22 – May 28, 2023

Historical myths and the evocation of historical heroes were—and still are—usually needed by political regimes that cannot justify their existence or their power by their own right, on the basis of popular consent and legitimacy, or of their own performance in promoting the common good. The period between 1942 and 1956 was the most turbulent period of an already turbulent 20th century in Hungarian history. Defeat in war, genocide, successive waves of political persecution, five successive regime changes, the fall of political regimes, the Arrow Cross coup, the communist coup, the revolution, and then, as the last event in this sequence, the counter-revolution and the restoration of the dictatorship.

Yet there is a common thread running through the period: each successive and opposing set of political actors needed Petőfi to lend credence to their political goals and ambitions for power. The war propaganda of the Horthy regime referred to him, as did the Arrow Cross movement which overthrew it. Petőfi's banner was raised by various groups protesting against the war, the German occupation and the Arrow Cross coup. In the spring of 1948, the Communists timed the most important steps of their takeover, nationalization, party unification and the liquidation of political opposition, to the centenary of 1848, while putting the "holy trinity" of Petőfi, Kossuth and Táncsics on a pedestal. The Rákosi regime disguised itself as the fulfilment of Petőfi's revolutionary dreams, but Petőfi also served as the symbol of social resistance to this Hungarian version of Stalinist dictatorship, and then of the 1956 revolution itself. Then the Kádár regime, which crushed the revolution with Soviet help, again found its historical archetype in Petőfi.

Petőfi for all seasons. The exhibition uses contemporary films, photographs and documents to show the political transformations of the figure of Petőfi, and the consecutive attempts to expropriate his memory in this narrow but all the more traumatic decade and a half.

The curators of the exhibition, András Mink, historian, and Katalin Székely, art historian, will give **guided tours of the exhibition for groups of students.**

Registration for the guided tour: jelentkezés@osaarchivum.org

For details of the **PETŐFI MIRAGES** event series accompanying the exhibition, see: osaarchivum.org

Blinken OSA Archivum | Galeria Centralis | Arany János utca 32, 1051 Budapest, Hungary

Tuesday – Sunday: 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

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