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Hungarian Folk Art Exhibitions in the USA in 1914

Zoltán Fejős

The March 7 issue of the New York Hungarian daily *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* [American Hungarian People's Voice] briefly announced that soon a Hungarian folk art exhibition will open in the city. What happened was that the National Arts Club had decided that the American public should become acquainted with the "wonderful products of Hungarian folk art that are admired world-wide." The announcement added that the exhibition will be held on the Club's premises from the 11th of March on. In charge of the event will be Sándor Konta, which in itself will guarantee the exhibition's excellent quality. This development, went on the news-report, was largely the initiative of J. Nilsen Laurvik who spent much time the previous summer in Hungary and acquainted himself with Hungarian folk art, in fact became "an instant admirer of it" and established a collection from its products.¹ The paper also informed its readers about the exhibition's opening day. Among those in attendance were several illustrious persons, including Geroge F. Kunz, the CEO of the Tiffany firm; Madame Gadski, the celebrated opera singer; Adolf Stern the textile manufacturer, and Géza D. Berkó, the *Népszava*'s editor. According to another newspaper report, a representative of the Tsar of Russia was also present, about whom more will be said later. The ceremonies were commenced by the orchestra playing the *Rákoczi March* and Hungarian orchestral works were featured throughout the evening. The exhibition lasted two weeks and was free to the public. The *Népszava* reported that beautiful products of folk art were exhibited but never went into detail in describing them neither in its report on the exhibition's opening nor at any time later.²

Another Hungarian-American daily, the *Szabadság* of Cleveland, also reported on the event. It emphasized that the exhibition

lauded the Hungarian people's tastes and skills in arts and that it let the American public know that there is a handicraft industry in Hungary whose products can be used to decorate elegant homes. The report was signed "Botond" — which was no doubt the pen-name of paper's New York correspondent. His article was clearer and better composed than those of the *Népszava* other journalists. He wrote more about handicrafts and consumer goods than folk art. He pointed out that the German-Americans were not organizing folk art exhibitions but imported million dollars' worth of handicrafts. The products they brought in for the Christmas market were largely the products of German handicraft industry resulting in profits for the craft-makers of the Grand Duchy of Baden, the villages in the neighbourhood Nuremberg — without having to leave their home country and emigrating to America. In contrast to this, the news-report went on, Hungary exports little to America and the products of the Hungarian crafts can hardly be found in America's retail outlets — in spite of the fact these crafts often surpassed in quality those of other nations. The reporter contended that an exhibition such as the one put on by the National Arts Club in New York and a similar one being planned for San Francisco, can only be moral successes especially for private entrepreneurs, and leave them without any profits. The promotion of Hungarian crafts on America's markets could only be done effectively through state-sponsored advertising campaigns. This journalist's message is undoubtedly practical, we might say "American": "A special Hungarian exhibition," he concluded, "which is well advertised and to which the masses of Americans can be attracted, can be not only moral but also monetary success. The millionaires would order items for their homes..."³ Botond evaluated the Hungarian exhibition not from the point of view not of folk art but from that of commercial possibilities. This latter viewpoint was hardly the original concept of the exhibition's sponsors, as we shall see later, who meant to emphasize the exhibited items' originality rather than marketability.

At the same time the article in the Hungarian paper made a valuable marginal note in that it pointed to two concrete cases — which it deemed examples of unexploited possibilities that might serve with information for the marketing of Hungarian needlework. "Not long ago," it can be read at the start of the article, "in one New York department store they were selling embroidery from Kalotaszeg, a notable regional folk art centre in Hungary (today in Romania). It was popular with the customers. They sold everything they imported. "The

store ordered more but on receiving the order the price was adjusted upward and the order was cancelled.” “I recall” — continued the article — “that a compatriot of ours wanted to import gilded embroidery from the Pozsony (today’s Bratislava) area, but the prices were so high that the items could only be sold at a loss. No one wants to incur losses because of patriotic feelings when doing business, and the importation of such embroidery fell through.”⁴

These two unrealized plans prove that in American-Hungarian commercial circles, as well as among American retailers, there was an interest in the importation of handicraft items from Hungary, and the planning of the exhibition by the art committee also suggest that such interest was there, but we have very few records as to the extent of such commerce and its significance is beyond the scope of our present inquiry.

The National Arts Club had been established in 1898 by Charles De Kay, poet, author, and art critic for the *New York Times*. His aim was to call American society’s attention to art and to popularise American art. By 1906 the Club was in possession of a substantial collection when it moved into its new premises, which continues to serve as its home. The building had been renovated by its former owner, New York Governor Samuel Tilden. It is located across from Gramercy Park on 19th Street, three blocks north of Union Square.⁵ In the years after 1900 the Club used to stage a dozen exhibitions a year playing a role in the popularisation of new branches of art, such as photography and decades later, video art. The exhibition it staged in 1914 about Hungarian folk art, more precisely peasant art, fitted into this programme of popularisation of novel art-forms. It was linked to the Club’s annual exhibition of “arts and crafts”, but even within this it was greeted by the press as a novelty. In 1913 the Club had staged an exhibition of German industrial arts. Right before the Hungarian exhibition, the Club had organized an exhibition of contemporary art that featured the latest experiments in modern art.⁶ It was in this connection that William B. McCormick, a *New York Press* art critic, wrote that the Hungarian art exhibition served as an excellent “rebuke” of the “collection of Modernist horror” of the previous exhibition. “The National Arts Club,” McCormick continued, “has never so nearly reached the implications suggested by its ambitious name as in its Hungarian peasant art exhibition.”⁷

The initiator of the “Hungarian Peasant Art” exhibition was Johan Nilsen Laurvik (1877-1953), the Norwegian-American journal-

ist, art critic, writer, translator of Ibsen, photographer, who in those times was NAC's Chairman of the Committee of Exhibitions. His name re-surfaced — also in a Hungarian context — above all in connection with the great Panama-Pacific International Exposition that was held in 1915 in San Francisco. Laurvik collected and researched the exhibition's European material. The Hungarian aspect of this affair casts a long shadow, for the paintings collected for it, creations of members of the Group of Eight, took most of a decade to be returned to Hungary — and some of them never made it home.⁸ But, this is another story.

At the National Arts Club Laurvik had been involved in exhibitions with a Hungarian theme before. In 1910 the Club had facilitated the exhibition of the works of the Hungarian painter Lajos Márk (1867-1942). For this occasion the painter himself had brought with him thirty-four of his works. In the exhibition's catalogue Laurvik remarked how little the works of East European artists were known in America. The exhibition was opened by László Hegenmüller, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to the United States. The audience at the opening ceremonies included the staff of New York's Austro-Hungarian Consulate, and the Hungarian flag was hoisted on the Club's building.⁹ The Hungarian organizers had intended the event to be a demonstration in which the joint Austro-Hungarian diplomatic apparatus — including the Ambassador — could serve Hungarian interests. This came in handy for the diplomatic corps, and countered the criticisms voiced in the Hungarian-American press that Hungarian interests took a back seat in Austro-Hungarian diplomacy. It is worth noting that Lajos Márk, who from this time on spent most of his life in America, became an instant success as a portrait painter. By March of 1913 his portraits were featured in the elegant Gallery Knoedler of Fifth Avenue.¹⁰ Artúr Halmi (1866-1939), another Hungarian artist and a good friend of Márk, was also successful in New York's social circles. His portraits were also exhibited by Gallery Knoedler. At the request of the Hungarian Republican Club Halmi painted a portrait of President Taft which achieved notoriety both in American and Hungarian-American circles.¹¹ The exhibition of the National Arts Club belongs in this artistic tendency that favoured painting and which made it possible for Hungary's cultural elite, together with the Hungarian-American community's leading elements, to build bridges to America's cultural elite. This nationalistic cultural propaganda was directed toward the upper layers of American society. Those in atten-

dance at the opening of the 1914 exhibition — on both sides — were people who “counted”.

In June of 1913 Laurvik travelled to Hungary as the reporter for several American periodicals to cover the proceedings of the 7th International Women’s Suffrage Congress. Folk art, which at the time was at the height of its popularity, attracted Laurvik’s attention. In this the congress’ general atmosphere played a positive role, as did several programs associated with the event. Many delegates to the congress appeared in folk costumes. Among other enthusiasts Jolán Ferenczi came to the gathering dressed as a Slovak peasant woman from Nyitra County — no doubt to advertise her own folk art and handicraft store among the suffragettes attending the conference.¹² In one of the congress’ localities there was an exhibition of Hungarian handicrafts¹³ at which, according to press reports, one American delegate spent a vast sum buying needlework and embroidery.¹⁴ A Hungarian-American merchant refers to this exhibition; subsequently he tried to import more Hungarian handicrafts to stores in California. “I was taken aback by the needlework’s rich colours, beautiful motifs, and artistic proficiency... I am convinced that they would also be a hit with [American] consumers.”¹⁵ The congress’s participants made it to a few locations in the Hungarian countryside. They made excursions to Lake Balaton, the Bend of the Danube, to Debrecen, Szeged and Szabadka (today’s Subotica in Serbia) and a group, made up of 60 to 80 people, visited the Tátra Mountains. On their way there they stopped over in Mezőkövesd, where they were greeted with a folk celebration and a casual exhibition of local *matyó* embroidery.¹⁶ There was a lot to see for the visitors both during the official reception and beyond the organized parts of the programme. The local paper reported on the event:

From the railway station [the visitors] were transported by privately-owned carriages and they had a lot to see already since this was also a day of a nation-wide market and the market-goers crowded the roadway... The visitors proceeded from the marketplace to the chapel where they attended mass and could admire the churchgoing crowd in their picturesque folk-costumes.... Afterwards the visitors returned to the schoolhouse on market square where they could admire the exhibit of folk-embroidery that was organized in their honour. From there almost every one of them departed with pieces of embroidery they had bought.¹⁷

All this must have been seen by Laurvik. He might have taken part in the excursion to Mezőkövesd — of which we have no record. But *matyó* folk art made up a substantial portion of the New York exhibition. It must be added that the atmosphere was ripe for the popularity of folk art everywhere in Hungary, as evidenced by the publication of the compendium *A magyar nép művészete* [The folk art of the Hungarian people] which had just published its fourth volume. Laurvik must have also been reading the 1911 Austro-Hungarian special edition of the renowned periodical *The Studio* with its spread on “Peasant Art in Austria and Hungary.” Among the advertisements in this publication was one placed by the Budapest downtown store of the National Association of Hungarian Home Industries, which included the address of its London agency: Baum, Straus & Co.¹⁸ Laurvik’s stay in Hungary probably also coincided with the preparation of the winter issue of *Magyar Iparművészet* [Hungarian Applied Art] which was dedicated in its entirety to folk art. The issue featured articles by prominent Hungarian writers and illustrations from the collections housed by the Ethnographic Department of the National Museum of Hungary.¹⁹ It is also possible that during his visit Laurvik also heard of the preparations for a folk art exhibition by the Művészház [Artist-house] that was to open in October.²⁰ All we know for sure that he spent six weeks in Budapest and vicinity,²¹ so he had ample opportunity to get personally acquainted with the folk art of the neighbouring villages and their handicrafts. He might have visited exhibitions of the latter. In June the Association of Kalotaszeg Craftsmen had organized an exhibition in the town of Kalocsa. We don’t know if Laurvik attended the affair but we know that he visited the exhibition’s agile organizer, Imre Bokor of Budapest, and that he probably paid a visit to the Kalotaszeg Association’s Budapest outlet. This venture featured goods not only from Kalotaszeg but also from other regions of the country.²² The embroidery section of the Association’s marketing program was directed by Bokor’s wife,²³ which suggests that Laurvik might have gotten information on this aspect of the organization’s activity first hand. In addition to all this, Laurvik had at his disposal the offerings of dealers in needlework with ample samples of the products of Kalotaszeg and northern Hungary.²⁴ Unfortunately for him, the crafts outlet maintained by the Museum of Commerce in Városliget was no longer open. The marketing of such products was theoretically taken over by the Hungarian National Bank, but only the most determined customers made it to the basement store of the building oper-

ated for this purpose on Vadász Street.²⁵ Perhaps Laurvik belonged to the few who did.

The shipment of products that eventually made it to the New York exhibition started to be collected by Laurvik, but for the continuation of this activity and the professional shipping of the collection became the task of Döme Koperly, the director of the Hungarian Home Industry Association. Koperly also wrote a short description of Hungary's movement for the promotion of handicrafts for the exhibition's catalogue. Its text was translated into English by Elma Pálos (1887-1970), the stepdaughter of the world-renowned Sándor Ferenczi.²⁶ Elma recalled later that in the summer of 1913 there was a congress of the international women's suffragette movement in Budapest at which she acted as an interpreter. According to Elma, Laurvik took part in the congress' proceedings, probably as a reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Boston Transcript* and the *New York Magazine*. Not long after our first meeting, Elma reminisced, he proposed to marry me. We got engaged and a few weeks later he returned to the United States, after making a promise that he'll return a year later and we'll get married.²⁷

In the assembling of the collection then, Laurvik's future wife had also played a part. The significance of this development is that through her Laurvik made numerous and important artistic and social connections. As a result of his marriage he came into contact with new and different people than he had been connected to before. His interest was no longer focused on commercial painters, sculptors and purveyors of modern art.

It's not clear what might have been the role of Sándor Konta (1862-1933) in the staging of the exhibition. What did a New York Hungarian press report allude to when it claimed that Konta had been asked to organize the exhibition? There is no information on this matter either in the exhibition's catalogue or in other Hungarian-American press products. Sándor Konta had been an eminent figure of the Hungarian-American community. He was at once a banker, a brilliant journalist, a politician, a patron of the arts, translator, and a philanthropist, who on occasion got involved in controversies. He came to America as a young journalist and married the daughter of a fabulously rich beer-maker of St. Louis — whom he soon divorced — but not before making connections in various American circles. He moved to New York in 1901 where he first made a living as a banker and then the owner of a brokerage firm. In 1911 he established a historical society for the

preservation of relics of modern urban living: photographs, films and phonographs. In the midst of this he found time to stage the theatrical works of Ferenc Molnár. Alexander Konta as he was known in America, was frequent visitor at the homes and offices of America's highest elite, including in the time of President Woodrow Wilson, the White House. In American circles he was the best-known Hungarian. During the war, when Hungarians in America became enemy aliens, to demonstrate the loyalty of Hungarian immigrants to America, Konta organized the American-Hungarian Loyalty League.²⁸ He accepted several public roles and he was a member of a dozen artistic and scientific institutions: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural History and the National Arts Club where he was for a while in charge of financial affairs. According to press reports he, along with Emil Zerkowitz, the New York representative of the Commercial Museum of Budapest, brought about the above-mentioned Lajos Márk exhibition.²⁹ It is quite possible that in connection with the peasant art exhibit he acted as liaison person between the National Arts Club on the one hand and the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic staff as well as the Hungarian Home Industry Association on the other.³⁰ He might have even extended a helping hand in the transportation of the exhibition's collections to America. He no doubt exercised his roles through his extensive contacts and he was the exhibition's organizer only in this sense, since the staging of the Hungarian Peasant Art exhibition was the work of Laurvik, who also launched its catalogue. He achieved all this even if there were Hungarian backers of the idea in Budapest as well as in New York.

In the preface of the exhibition's sixteen-page catalogue Laurvik emphasized that this is the first exhibition of its kind in America. It featured objects that had never been seen outside of Hungary. This business of "never before" and "never this kind" was accepted by the press.³¹ It might be worthwhile to take a closer look at these two closely-linked claims.

As far as the "never before" claim is concerned, we're confronted by a surprising fact. More precisely we are witnessing a forgotten fact. This can be ascribed more to the writing of the American art critic than his Hungarian partners. No one called Laurvik's attention to the fact that a decade earlier at the Universal Exposition held in St. Louis Hungarian folk art and handicrafts had been exhibited. It is a well-known fact that these items were featured, according to the plans of Pál Horti (1865-1907), in Székely-style courtyard built inside a

huge commercial arena. The building had four wooden turrets as well as wooden gate built in the Székely architectural style. This was the hallmark of the St. Louis Hungarian exhibition and there are many photographs of it. With the passage of time the memory of this building remained and the fact that the exhibition featured a great many samples of peasant art and handicrafts was largely forgotten.³²

The exhibitors received a substantial profit from sales during the exposition,³³ and several items as well as collections, including one from Kalotaszeg and another from Brassó (today's Braşov in Romania), got prizes for their artistic excellence. The Exposition's *Grand Prix* was awarded to the Izabella Handicrafts Association while the National Handicrafts Association received the gold medal.³⁴ Some items exhibited were not representative of peasant folk art but were included for other reasons as for example the permanence of their colours, or because they were the creations of known artists.³⁵

The vast majority of the items exhibited in the St. Louis exposition found buyers, and if similar articles appeared in America's art shops subsequently then the claim made in the catalogue of the New York exhibition that its collections were never before seen in America is certainly inaccurate. We have to acknowledge however, that there were hitherto unseen articles exhibited in New York. The fact that in Laurvik's catalogue a reference to the St. Louis exposition is omitted is made even more surprising since both events were the result of Döme Koperly's efforts. Laurvik perhaps did not know about the earlier exhibition or he did not mention it so that he could show the exhibition of the National Arts Club in a more novel light. Another consideration in this omission might have been the fact that Laurvik held "his" exhibition to be superior from the artistic point of view. In this light his reasoning that such material had never before been seen in America is only partially accurate and it is to some extent the consequence of his own prejudices.

The "art object" vs "handicraft" controversy reared its head also in the discussions concerning originality. Several press reports emphasised the novel nature of the exhibited material. Writing about the exhibition, Julius Krause, the editor of the largest German-American daily, remarked that now at last it is possible to get acquainted with the "real thing, the hand-made products of peasant arts, done in the old farm house during the long winter months" instead of "factory products, worked by machinery after old Hungarian patterns" which "are now offered for sale in big stores."³⁶ At the same time ac-

ording to sparse evidence, American merchants and stores were selling similar handicraft articles made in Hungary. There might have been differences in their quality but essentially they were the same type of merchandise. In connection with machine-produced Hungarian-like textiles raising the issue of “originality” is unfortunate since in these cases we can only talk of crude imitations. The periodical *Magyar Iparművészet* [Hungarian Applied Art] had the following to say about press reactions to this controversy:

[The press reports] emphasize that American department stores constantly offer Hungarian needlework and Hungarian-style art objects, but these are products of mass production and have nothing to do with authentic Hungarian folk art. In this exhibition Americans had the opportunity to get acquainted with the latter... and in the future they will have the means of differentiating between true and bogus merchandise.³⁷

This summary simply overemphasized accounts of the American press since at the time most American merchants were offering their costumers neither Hungarian needlework nor Hungarian handicrafts in big quantities. The purpose of the contrasting of mass-produced and authentic materials was to emphasise the originality of the exhibited items. The press sang praises of a class of materials that differed from mass-produced merchandise, but it defined this in a misleading fashion by the term “original”.³⁸

What items and collections did this Hungarian folk art or peasant art exhibition consist of? We have no accurate answer to this question but from a laconic catalogue, a few surviving photographs, and press reports we are able to get an idea of the exhibited materials’ attributes. In connection with the catalogue we should add that we’re not talking about a text that confirms to today’s standards. It contained two introductory sections as well as an enumeration of the exhibited material according to their category such as “embroidery” and “earthenware”. The descriptions of these were usually confined to telling which part of the country they came from. Despite this concrete place-names are few and far between. Examples of these vague geographic terms include Mezőkövesd, Slavonia, Transylvania... The text often selects a particular item and describes it in a little more detail but only very rarely offers information that would allow us to envision the object wholly. We should also add that the catalogue, which lists items according to where they were placed in the exhibition, starts the num-

bering of the items described anew. This has led to some confusion regarding the total number of items exhibited. According to the art journal *Magyar Iparművészet*, this number was 4,108.³⁹ In reality the numbers of exhibited objects was between 1,300 and 1330, which is a substantial number nevertheless.

Hungarian art historian Edit Pikler-Freund (1886-19??) who happened to have been in America at the time described the exhibition for the readers of the Budapest daily *Az Ujság* in friendly terms: “A first-time visitor looks around with pleasant feeling at this exhibition even if he or she happens to be not an American but Hungarian.... That is because natives of Hungary rarely have an opportunity to view the folk art of various regions in a well-ordered... exhibit such as this one.”⁴⁰ We’ll be quoting more from this author’s writing below, it being the only appraisal by a professional critic of the exhibition organized by Nielsen Laurvik.

As an overall generalization it can be said that the exhibition’s principal aim had been to present the great variety of regional folk art and to highlight the existence of relatively numerous categories of such art. The exhibition started with a collection of embroidery from Matyó numbering over 150. In the exhibition’s catalogue Laurvik wrote the longest description about this collection. For this reason we can suspect that he had visited Mezőkövesd. He wrote that here “inhabitants have continued to dress in such coloured costumes up to the present day.” He mentions aprons worn by men and women, and a shirt worn by men only. The collection also contained many cushion covers, embroidered chiefly on black linen or cloth, with silk or wool. The Matyó material also comprised of items made by home industry workshops for urban use, such as coloured embroideries for tea-cosies, curtains, bags, covers and even automobile overcoats. Laurvik praised the rich colours of the needlework, their colour-harmony and variety. He emphasized that every item is unique and differs from the others in its composition.

The richly decorated, wide-necked shirts and the aprons worn by young men were noted in some press-reports.⁴¹ The art critic of the *New York Herald* commented on the colourful embroideries on a black background and “the beautifully decorated drinking horns, made by herdsmen and shepherds whose only tool was a pocket knife.”⁴² Bull-horns “carved artistically by the herdsmen” were also Laurvik’s favourite — unfortunately he did not give their provenance. According to the catalogue there were other examples of sculpted items: a few

painted wooden boxes (perhaps matchboxes) and picture-frames. Some items were over a century old. Edit Pikler-Freund also commented on the great age of some of the exhibited items. Like “ancient linen runner from Kőrösőfő ornamented with conventionalized lions” or white laces. On the whole, however, the great majority of objects exhibited were the products of contemporary handicrafts.

In the catalogue the term “Transylvanian” described about seventy items of embroidery. “The most interesting are the table-cloths embroidered, with white silk or wool, upon white or raw linen. Those tablecloths are worked in *raw* linen show perfectly the artistic taste of the inhabitants of Transylvania. They are worked for their own households.” The catalogue’s text obviously refers to the art of the Kalotaszeg region, but there were cushion covers and tablecloths from other regions as well. The catalogue also mentions needlework from northern Hungary possibly from the region known as Palóc. From Halas there were at least a dozen pieces of lace. The exhibition contained a wide range of samples of children’s and ladies’ blouses, collars from all regions of Hungary. There were also cups worn by peasant women and handkerchiefs. Also, aprons with golden embroidering from south Hungary — probably of South-Slav origins. There were also products of artistic embroidered leather works such as *kulacsok* (shepherd’s flasks) and *tarisznyas* (satchels). The exhibition did not feature complete outfits. The organizers illustrated the costumes of Hungary’s regions through dolls dressed in folk-apparel. This method of presentation represented a recently developed trend in the displaying of Hungarian handicrafts. The *New York Times* even featured a photo of a group of these dolls.⁴³ The exhibition’s catalogue identified each doll’s attire according to its region of origin.

The admiration of American press reports focused above all on the world of form and colour of the exhibited textiles. The *New York Sun* compared the colourful embroideries to the latest creations of futurists and declared that the carvings of the shepherds compared “favourably with the best work done by trained artisans.”⁴⁴ On another occasion the *Sun* wrote: “Mr. Laurvik and the others of the committee apparently have rightly regarded the textiles and embroideries with the seriousness of first rate works of art and the gala garments of the Hungarians have been as carefully placed upon the walls as paintings should be.”⁴⁵ The photographic evidence left by the exhibit underscores this suggestion.⁴⁶ The detailed account of the exhibition published by the *Evening Post* emphasised the “clean colours” of the ob-

jects exhibited, especially the needlework and the apparels. It noted the dominance of red, “sounds ‘Hungarian’ and ‘Hungarian’ looks like red”, which combined with other colours such as yellow, blue and green, created a lively impression. On the other hand this press report considered the pottery less interesting, precisely because of its “lifeless” colours. The daily cited Laurvik’s words from the catalogue to the effect that the “bright, vividly colored designs, executed for the most part in pure color ‘kaleidoscopic fantasies’ of the Futurists” are antedated.⁴⁷ These sentiments were echoed by the *New York Tribune* when it wrote that “The fount of the Futurist school of art has been found. It is the work of Hungarian peasants.”⁴⁸

Here we have to cite the views of the Hungarian art-critic who also reported on the exhibition and who also emphasized that the originality and the unusual nature of the colour-schemes impressed the exhibition’s visitors. She believed that the artistic impression left by the embroidery derived from their spontaneity. “The spontaneous love of colours, of the objects of nature, their whole existence exudes from the embroidered textiles. This is the secret of their effect. The art-critic cannot but view with amazement the decorative elements’ fineness and the richness that emanates from [this exhibition] of peasant art.” Following this, Pikler-Freund commented on the broader question of the relation of peasant art to Futurism. She deemed the *New York Tribune*’s view that there was similarity between Futurism and Hungarian peasant art a crude error. She explained that perhaps laymen in New York regarded all unusual art as “futurist” because they remembered the art that had been part of an exhibition of Cubist and Futurist art the previous winter in the city. Professional art critics however, in Pikler-Freund’s opinion, should know better and not link peasant art with Futurism which was an expression of artificial ideological processes. On the other hand Pikler-Freund hinted, the relationship between peasant art and Impressionism was more of a reality.⁴⁹

The New York exhibition’s setup included the idea that the extensive collection of the *matyó* material be counter-balanced by an art piece using the *matyó* embroidery colours and design. Closing this part of the exhibition was a “still-life picture of flowers executed in embroidery” by a peasant woman of Mezökövesd from a design made by the noted artist and writer Anna Lesznai (1885-1966). This was item number 4108 of the exhibition. “This piece affords an opportunity,” went the text of the catalogue, “to compare the design of a sophisticated trained artist with the work of the untutored peasants.” The

idea might have originated with Laurvik, although during his visit to Hungary he might have seen samples of such handicraft designed by Lesznai — especially pillow cases — since they were widely known. They had appeared at both artistic and home industry exhibitions in Hungary and abroad.⁵⁰ The inclusion of Lesznai's work in these exhibitions was most likely the result of the efforts of the artist herself. Throughout these times she lived in Paris where she promoted her artwork.⁵¹

The journal *American Art News*, which followed developments in art in the USA closely, also reported on the exhibition, albeit briefly. In its report it emphasized that the designs of items of everyday use were all the work of “untutored and uneducated country people.” The report's author also commented on the rich colours of the exhibited textiles which he attributed to Slavic influence.⁵² This surprising observation appears to be the result of being misinformed. Although the exhibition contained Slovak and South-Slav embroideries, the majority originated from Hungarian regions. But the question of “Hungarian or Slav?” did emerge in the discussion of the exhibition. The *Szabadság* of Cleveland reported the following incident: two Slovak visitors of the exhibition sought out its secretary. One of them, the editor of a local Slovak newspaper, protested the fact that the exhibition was called Hungarian “when the objects displayed were Slovak and their makers were Slovak too.” As proof he produced books published in Prague and Brno, which he borrowed from a public library, and which contained illustrations of Slovak peasant art. It so happened that also present at this discussion was a Hungarian architect who explained what was Hungarian about the exhibit and what was not. The report of the *Szabadság* does not explain what proof this intervener presented in support of his reasoning nor how he justified the inclusion in the exhibition of a collection assembled by the Izabella Home Industry Association of Pozsony (today's Bratislava in Slovakia) which included Slovak peasant embroideries and laces. The two visitors who protested the exhibition's name probably had this collection in mind in the first place. The press report does not tell which party the exhibition's official agreed with — he probably avoided siding with either.⁵³

This incident is further proof that a significant part of the overall exhibition was a collection of workshop mode embroidery sponsored by the Izabella Association of Pozsony. This fact is also suggested by other press reports, although the exhibition's catalogue doesn't mention this association by name. The reports explain that in

industrialized countries such home industry is maintained by the government through support for associations that foster and promote ancient handicrafts. This was the most important message of Döme Koperly's short writing in the catalogue. This emphasised the two purposes of such aid: the preservation of "old patterns and motives of the peasant art" and the provision of work for the people who cultivated it. A press report that appeared after the exhibition had closed stressed how the Austro-Hungarian Royal Court had fostered Hungarian peasant art, in particular the pro-home-industry activities of Archduchess Izabella (1887-1973).⁵⁴ Such support made the work of the peasants respectable and their products worth buying.

The Hungarian vs. Slovak controversy expresses the view characteristic for this age that every people, every ethnic group possesses a unique culture — in this case peasant art. The view that folk art is a carrier of national character was confounded by the multinational character of the Hungarian Kingdom and by the fact that the origins of Hungarians and of their Slavic neighbours differed widely. Both of these facts provided ample grounds for controversy at home in Hungary and on the other side of the ocean, especially for a public not very informed about European conditions, these facts confused those who adhered to the concept of "one people one culture". The debate was confounded by the competition between various art forms: whose art is the most beautiful and most valuable. Hungarian press reports, as might be expected, voiced the superiority of Hungarian folk art and craftsmanship. It might be mentioned in this connection that, according to contemporary press reports, Alexander de Yourevitch, a courtier of the Romanov family, was sent to America to gain the support of the Russian community there for Tsarist political aspirations. His plans included a deal with the National Arts Club to organize an exhibition of Russian peasant art.⁵⁵ The idea for this no doubt came from the Club's Hungarian exhibition, the opening of which the Tsarist emissary attended. (According to the records of the National Arts Club, the plan for the Russian exhibition never materialized.)

The Exhibition's After-life: The Exhibition in Newark

Subsequent to the New York exhibition — which was planned as a touring affair — it moved to the nearby New Jersey city of Newark. Its locale was the Newark Museum, more precisely the top floor of that

building. The opening day was Easter Sunday, April 11.⁵⁶ According to documentation held by the museum the Newark exhibition was organized and managed by Nilsen Laurvik who lived in the neighbouring city of Elizabeth. One document held by the Museum tells that 567 items were exhibited and were collectively valued at \$10,000. The Museum was rented for a \$350 fee for the week-long affair.⁵⁷

The name of the exhibition was, for local consumption, modified: *The applied arts of Hungarian peasants*. The reason for the change is not known, in any case the new definition better defined the nature of the exhibition than either the term “peasant art” or “folk art”. It also reflected better the concept that Anna Lesznai used in Hungary: “háziiparilag munkált népművészet” (folk art produced through home-industry).⁵⁸ The distinctions implied by these definitions probably meant little for contemporary American public consciousness. Not even Edit Pikler-Freund, the above-mentioned Hungarian art-critic, felt a need to comment on it. On the other hand it should be emphasized that the exhibition in Newark, in the realm of the presentation and acceptance of everyday culture and handicrafts by a museum, constituted a pioneering development.⁵⁹ In a speech given at the time, John Cotton Dana (1856-1929) explained that his ideal of the function of a museum was not marble corridors decorated by great white statues and paintings but a place where the “everyday work of the everyday people of the everyday city” is displayed and praised. Given such attitudes, it is not surprising that the exhibition from Hungary made it to the Newark Museum. This ideology was conceived in contemporary America’s liberal and reforming uterus, but it went beyond it in that it aimed to connect two seemingly opposing poles: culture and industry. The focal point of this aspiration was the elevation of the work of everyday citizens to valuable objects.⁶⁰ According to such interpretation the products of industry appear not as the opposite of art but the produce of peasant applied art and products of industry derive aesthetically from common everyday objects.

The exhibition in Newark filled two rooms. Because of local conditions more objects were placed in display cases than had been in the case of the New York exhibition. On the walls between the display cases needlework was featured or in one instance objects were placed on shelves. In connection with this it is useful to comment on the exhibition’s earthenware element even though without a catalogue with colour illustrations it is difficult to identify many of the objects displayed. What is sure is that the six objects featured in the catalogue

derive from very different branches of this art. The two *bokálys* (a *bokály* is a wine-pitcher) are probably old, the products of folk pottery, unlike the plates displayed that were contemporary pieces. One of the *bokálys* is from Szászkezd, the other is probably from Brassó or possibly also Szászkezd (today both in Romania). They were probably made during the first half of the 19th century. One of the plates is from Óbánya (today in Romania), its pair is evidently not a piece of folk art but the work of a highly-trained ceramist. Such objects, produced by trained master-potters and promoted by artists Pál Honti and István Gróh, had been featured in other contemporary exhibitions — and had proved very popular with the public.⁶¹

The Newark Museum Association, the civic organization that sustained the Newark Museum, sponsored the exhibition with an original idea. They utilized the slogan “bring us an object” and appealed to the city’s Hungarians to contribute to the affair with their own appropriate objects. This idea was not a fleeting concept but a fundamental part of John Cotton Dana’s theory about the role of libraries and museums in the education of America’s public. He saw the role of museums as means of bridging and overcoming differences in the cultures of a city two-thirds of whose population was made up by immigrants. The key word in this conception was cooperation. The followers of this ideology wanted to use both libraries and museums to demolish or at least to lessen class, status and gender differences. The great 1915 pottery exhibition put on by the Museum recruited objects from collectors, factories and women’s clubs and resulted in museum attendance reaching the same proportions as library attendance.⁶² The call for members of the public bringing objects for the exhibition was tried out in the 1914 Hungarian exhibition. Hungarians constituted only a small portion of Newark’s immigrant population, approximately 6,000, about 5.5 percent of the total.⁶³ Nevertheless the attention paid to them by the exhibition’s organizers demonstrates their determination to extend to everyone recognition and the chance of cooperation and inclusion.

The Newark Museum Association approached the city’s Hungarians to contribute to the exhibition by a letter. “Everyone can exhibit” wrote the local Hungarian newspaper *Newarki Híradó* “who has some unique Hungarian product.” The objects offered will be under the guardianship of the city. These objects will be received during the week before the exhibition’s opening. Each object will be documented. The newspaper understood the museum’s purpose and encouraged its

readership to offer as many objects as possible for the exhibition arguing that the exhibit's success was in the interest of America's Hungarian community. The *Híradó's* editor, Presbyterian minister János Dikovics (1875-1963) followed the preparations for the exhibition closely. "It's very praiseworthy," he wrote, "that the local Hungarian community brought... very beautiful objects for the exhibition." Dikovics mentioned that the exhibition had been advertised in all local English-language press products.⁶⁴ The *Newarki Híradó* reproduced almost in its entirety the news report the largest Newark daily, the *Newark Daily News*, published on the exhibition. This report extolled the quality and colourfulness of the exhibition and gave a not very well-informed historical introduction to the Hungarian nation, emphasizing the nomadic, "Turanian," origins of the Magyars.⁶⁵

In the name of the Newark Museum Association J.C. Dana had written a letter to Minister Dikovics, enclosing the Exhibition's catalogue and inviting the congregation's members to view the exhibition. He even suggested a "Hungarian evening" when Hungarians collectively could come to the museum, which in any case was free to attend for every citizen of Newark. In this letter Dana had high praise for Hungarian folk art. Not surprisingly Dikovics published Dana's letter.⁶⁶

The cooperation between the Museum and Newark's Hungarian community was successful. According to Hungarian press reports twelve local individuals contributed to the exhibition. From the exhibition's description we learn how the appeal for contributions was interpreted by potential donors, that is what objects local Hungarians considered worthy of lending to the Museum. These descriptions are also valuable in throwing light on what the material culture of Hungarian immigrants was at the time, on what objects they cherished and kept as newcomers, or produced in their new environment.⁶⁷

Who were the people who brought objects for exhibition and what can be said about the latter? The sources relating to this question are scarce but we have been able to get information on a few. About one person we are sure: Emil Germanus (1856-1925) was Newark's best-known Hungarian citizen — he had lived in the city for decades. He was a nationally-known banker, travel agent, notary public and a kind of master of all things. He was involved in municipal affairs and for years he did public service as a justice of the peace. To him can be attributed the fact — as had been done by the author of his obituary — that the Hungarian community was a substantial factor in Newark's

life. He was a member — and even president — of numerous associations, many of which he had founded. Among the latter was the city's Hungarian Reformed congregation. And he participated in the work of the self-improvement association and other Hungarian organizations. Being a well-to-do person, he often visited Hungary. And he travelled in other countries too, in the weeks after the opening of the Newark exhibition he went to Panama, Cuba and other Central American lands.⁶⁸ His nephew, who lived in Budapest, was the world-renowned orientalist, Gyula Germanus.⁶⁹

The *tulipános láda* (treasure chest) that Emil Germanus lent to the exhibition was an unusual object. It did not come from Hungary but was the product of local craftsmanship. We know that one of its creators was György Mihályi a master cabinet-maker who was a leading member of Newark's Hungarian Reformed congregation and a close friend of Germanus. He had been in America for over a decade and had taken part in virtually all Hungarian community undertakings.⁷⁰ Another person involved in the production of Germanus's treasure chest was Géza Dobossy, who was also active in Newark's Hungarian community. He was born in Keszthely, trained as a painter in Nagykanizsa and then concentrated as a commercial artist on painting frescoes in church buildings. He, along with his wife and two sons, settled in Newark in 1906. He played leading roles in several Hungarian associations, including the theatrical group and an amateur choir.⁷¹ He was responsible for decorating the treasure chest — in his new homeland, America.

Another person who lent objects for the exhibition, Samu Ax, was also a longstanding member of Newark's Hungarian community. According to a press report published at the time of the exhibition he had been living in Newark for three decades. He was born in Kassa (today's Kosice in Slovakia) a city which he visited in the spring of 1914. His daughter, Emilia Ax, was a well-known violin soloist. Ax himself was involved in all kinds of Hungarian causes.⁷² From another source we know that he operated a jewellery store in Newark.⁷³ This helps to explain the fact that he lent gold and silver objects, applied art pieces, for the exhibition.

About the others who lent objects it is not possible to know much. We know that Máthé István Nagy was warden of the Reformed congregation but we couldn't find any more information about him.⁷⁴ Pál Ádám, who brought an entire Hungarian outfit for the exhibition, had come to America in 1904, had three children and worked as a tan-

ner in a leather making factory.⁷⁵ The beautifully-carved model of a hay-cart that was lent by Imre Várady who had been born in Vásárhely. At the time of the exhibition he was thirty-six-years old and lived in Newark with his wife and two children.⁷⁶ The carving was probably his work. Géza Pritula who lent a Hungarian-style plate for the exhibition, was probably a factory worker. He had joined his brother in Newark in 1899. We also know that he was a member of Newark's Hungarian Roman Catholic parish.⁷⁷ About the other lenders of objects we know even less.⁷⁸

It is difficult to draw conclusions from such sparse records. They perhaps tell us that the offer from the Museum to gather exhibit items from the public had attracted the attention of those Hungarians who had roots in the city that is those who had lived there for a substantial time. We know about almost all of them that they had taken out American citizenship. Many of them belonged to the local ethnic elite, had leadership positions in the Hungarian community and were active in it. The desire to promote social integration, something that the Museum desired, worked in their case. Their cooperation found a receptive response in the outside society's outreach to them.

The object that can be most precisely identified among those that were lent to the exhibition came from Máthé István Nagy, the chief elder of the Reformed congregation. This was a beautiful table made by Zsigmond Oszterhuber in Keszthely. The maker of this object, as can be determined from the scarce sources, had an interesting history as an immigrant. Oszterhuber arrived in New York on March 21, 1905, on the ocean-liner *Ultonia* from the Austro-Hungarian port city of Fiume (today's Rijeka in Croatia). His arrival document states that he was born in Körmend, that he was 36-years old, that he was a cabinet maker, and that he wanted to join his brother Béla in Newark.⁷⁹ Within six months he was joined by his family: his 29-year-old wife Etelka, three daughters and 6-month-old son Zsigmond.⁸⁰ We have the impression that they came with the intention to stay in America. Soon, the family increased in size when twins were born.⁸¹ Zsigmond's brother Béla also lived with his family in Newark, he had arrived in 1901 to join the third brother, Géza, also a cabinet maker. The three brothers were followed by other members of the Oszterhuber extended family.⁸²

Where did Zsigmond live when the "beautiful" table lent to the Newark exhibition was made? How did the table get to Máthé István Nagy? These questions are not answered by the sources and we

can only guess as to what happened. It's notable that the city of Keszthely doesn't occur in the documentation of any of the Oszterhuber brothers. Perhaps the information that the table made there is erroneous and it was really made in Körmend. Its maker might have brought it with himself, and then sold it or gave it away when he, together with his family, contrary to his original intention of staying in America, returned to Hungary in 1912. This is the best explanation for the fact that after that year there is no reference to Zsigmond in American records while there is a reference to a "Zsigmond Oszterhuber" in a 1912 business directory of Vas County in Hungary that refers to him as a cabinet maker in Körmend.⁸³ If in spite the evidence presented above the table was made in Keszthely, there are two possibilities. One is that Zsigmond studied with a master cabinetmaker in that city and the table had been his master's project, and the other is that he, after his return to Hungary, temporarily put up shop there, made the table, and from here his acquaintance or friend Nagy brought it to the United States. The object's biography is evidently incomplete, nevertheless it still reflects in material form upon the complex nature of an immigrant family's — and community's — American experience.

The collection of exhibited objects that had gone from New York City to Newark was returned to New York in June. Despite plans for further exhibitions nothing was done in this respect for the time being. In July Nilsen Laurvik travelled again to Hungary where he, as he had promised, married Elma Pálos. He returned to New York in September bringing Elma with him. Subsequently he started preparations for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Plans for the Hungarian travelling peasant art exhibition now hit a snag. This plan was never really endorsed by the elite Hungarian circles of New York and they no longer helped Laurvik in his efforts. Despite this two more exhibitions were staged during the latter part of 1914 but these were not independent exhibitions but ones in which a part of the Hungarian peasant crafts items was displayed alongside other material. By this time the collection was not complete. Parts of it had made their way to various institutions and collectors. An inventory of the collection that had been made in Newark notes that some objects had been "sold".

Exhibitions in Chicago and Indianapolis

One of the places where such a diminished and modified Hungarian exhibit was staged was Chicago. It constituted a part of the 13th Annual Exhibition of “Industrial Art” of that city’s Art Institute and it consisted of about hundred pieces of embroidery, twenty-seven pottery products and a few carvings.⁸⁴ There is only one photograph of the exhibition in the Art Institute’s library, and it doesn’t depict the Hungarian collection, but from it we can conclude that the exhibition was probably presented in a professional art-type manner. “Hungarian peasant potters and weavers” were treated the same way as the annual art show’s trained artists.

For the sake of completeness it is worthy of mentioning that this exhibition had another Hungarian connection. In the section of the exhibition that presented industrial art there were items displayed by two artists who were related in a way to Hungarians: Edmund Bokor and Frances Barothy. From Bokor there were two jewellery pieces and from Barothy there were three Japanese-style objects.⁸⁵ Who were these artist? Edmund that is Ödön Bokor (1886-1979) was a silversmith from Budapest who in 1907, with his friend Ernő Gould, emigrated to America. In 1912 the two opened a jewellery store named Chicago Art Silver Shop. They won prizes, established other retail outlets and became a part of the city’s silversmith establishment. Ernő died in 1954 but Edmund continued to produce artistic creations into his 90s.⁸⁶ Painter Frances A. Barothy (1884-1957), born into a respected American family, was the wife of the noted Chicago Hungarian surgeon Árpád Baróthy (1870-1933). She was one of the Art Institute’s first graduates. Árpád’s father had come to America with Kosuth in the early 1850s but returned to Hungary after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. Árpád himself visited Chicago twice as a child. He also attended pharmacy school and completed his medical training there. He settled in the city in 1895. While his mother was alive he regularly visited Hungary along with his art-loving wife. Throughout their travels in Europe and the Americas the affluent couple accumulated a substantial collection of art.⁸⁷

The last known locale of the exhibitions put on by Lauvrik was in Indianapolis. In the John Herron Art Institute — which is now known as the Indianapolis Art Museum — the exhibition opened on the sixth of November. Here the Hungarian collection was featured as a part of the annual exhibition of the Society of Western Artists.⁸⁸

Without detailed information about this affair it is safe to assume that the Hungarian exhibition here was a repeat of the one that had been presented in Chicago. No information has been found so far as to what was the collection's fate after Indianapolis. Perhaps the National Arts Club safeguarded it for a while in the hope of further exhibitions. Perhaps it sold it or gave it away. One thing is sure: there were no plans to return it to Hungary. The Hungarian Home Industry Association "has put at the disposal of the National Arts Club" the collection, as its president, Döme Koperly penned in the catalogue, to give "to the people of the United States a perfect picture of the art activities of the Hungarian peasant." Perhaps if individual items made it to a museum, or a major private collection, these might re-surface eventually.

Conclusions

The story of the 1914 *Hungarian Peasant Art* exhibition has not been told by either by American or Hungarian historians of museum and exhibition activities — nor by ethnographers. Its significance can be deduced from several viewpoints. Firstly this exhibition carried to the New World again — after the Universal Exposition in St. Louis but with the experience gained in European exhibitions (in Brussels [1897], Paris [1900, 1912], Milan [1906], Berlin [1909] London [1911] and Scandinavia) a well-selected cross-section of Hungarian peasant arts and crafts in the form of home industry products. Here it was not a small part of an unfathomable world exhibition, as it had been in St. Louis and in some European cities, but it was an independent affair staged in a dedicated gallery whose leaders were full with fresh ideas. In this the 1914 exhibition resembled more those that had been staged in Paris and Berlin. But in Berlin the exhibition had been organized mainly through the efforts of a Hungarian artist couple who lived in the city, while in Paris it was the result of the work of a Hungarian countess and her aristocratic helpers. In contrast, the exhibition in New York was stage-managed by one of the noted institutes of American artistic life, or more precisely, the leader of that institute, even if he had the help of a few local Hungarians as well as experts from Hungary. Here the Hungarian collection was presented in a professional manner. All this contributed to the rise of contacts between American and Hungarian artistic institutions and movements. Al-

though these did not prove lasting, they played roles in the preparations for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.

The exhibitions of 1914 helped to pave the road to closer cultural cooperation between the Hungarian immigrant community and American society. In New York, Newark, Chicago and Indianapolis the visitors to the exhibitions could look upon the embroidery, pottery, and carvings brought from Hungary as the artistic creation of a nation whose members were playing a significant role among the massive wave of “new immigrants” that was pouring into America. These newcomers were not received with understanding precisely because of their “newness”. The exhibitions contributed to the awakening and strengthening of the American public’s sympathy toward Hungarian immigrants. In Newark the visitors could perceive these sentiments even closer as their museum wanted to let them know how their city’s Hungarians valued their artistic heritage. The support for peasant art, or as Americans were inclined to call it “ethnic culture”, became a more important factor in the integration of immigrants during the World War and the early and mid-1920s.⁸⁹ The reception of the *Hungarian Peasant Art* exhibition in Newark and the opening to the public that accompanied it — in today’s parlance “outreach” — can be regarded as a precursor of the later and often repeated practice by museums to respond to newer and newer social situations. In today’s museum world the practice initiated by Newark’s public library and museum of basing exhibitions on social collaboration between them and the general public is considered to be one of the most innovative ideas in American museum management. By chance, in the birth and development of this innovation an American-Hungarian community played a part. And the prompting for this was provided by Hungary’s home industry whose support the Archduchess Izabella validated in a speech she gave on the occasion of her acceptance of becoming the patron of the Hungarian Home Industry Association: “We hope that we can preserve the connection to their ancestral roots of many people who have been forced to earn their living outside of their homeland. In this manner the Home Industry becomes a national enterprise.”⁹⁰

In addition to having outlined the background to the preparation of the *Hungarian Peasant Art* exhibition, the connection of the materials displayed to similar exhibitions held elsewhere, and their various contexts, it is worth describing the moment that greeted a visitor to the exhibition. As closing let us give the word to the Hungarian art-historian who has been quoted this study more than once:

It was Mister Lauvrik's considerate idea that the exhibition was opened to the tunes of the Rákoczi March and that [throughout the event] beautiful folk-songs were played by New York's Hungarian Gypsy musicians. Their *cimbalom* made special impression since many of those in attendance had never seen or heard such an instrument. The public listened to the strange but beautiful music coming from a unusual instrument and admired with astonishment the wonderful art that had come to them from an exotic environment. As they soaked up the strange sounds and as their eyes absorbed the strange colours and drawings, they found that the Hungarian music and Hungarian art expresses the same thing, they complemented and explained each other. Who knows to what extent this observation derives from emotions or from the truth?

But what is certain is that after the [exhibition's] opening ceremony in the imagination of many Americans a distant but beautiful country appeared whose unassuming people were capable of producing quite unique, almost exotic, rich and lively art and music.⁹¹

NOTES

A somewhat longer Hungarian version of this article, entitled “‘Újszerű mint a futuristák munkája’ Magyar népművészeti kiállítás Amerikában 1914-ben” [As Novel as Futuristic Work: Hungarian folk art exhibition in the United States in 1914] appeared in *Néprajzi Értesítő*, vol. 97 (2015), pp. 87-114. It was slightly abridged and translated into English by Nándor Dreisziger in consultation with the author.

¹ *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, 7 March 1914, p. 2. See also the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 7 March 1914.

² *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, 12 March 1914, p. 1.

³ *Szabadság*, 21 March 1914, p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.* The scarcity of documentation prevents us from identifying which department store was involved.

⁵ See <http://www.nationalartsclub.org>

⁶ Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, *A Finding Aid of the National Arts Club, 1898-1960*. Series 7.2.

http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/national-art-club-records-9697/more#section_7_2.

⁷ *New York Press*, 22 March 1914.

⁸ “The Panama-Pacific International Exhibition: The American Debut of Hungarian Art or its Bermuda Triangle?” *Centropa: a journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts* 10, 3 (September 2010): 259–271; “A Debut of Hungarian Art in America,” in James A. Ganz, ed.: *Jewel City: Art from San Francisco’s Panama-Pacific International Exposition* (Berkeley – San Francisco, University of California Press – Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 2015): 325–335; Gergely Barki, “A magyar művészet első reprezentatív mutatkozása(i) Amerikában” [The first exposition(s) of Hungarian art in America], in *Nulla dies sine linea: tanulmányok Passuth Krisztina hetvenedik születésnapjára* [Studies on the occasion of Krisztina Passuth’s 70th birthday], ed. Ágnes Béres, L. Mária Molnár and Erzsébet Tatai (Budapest: Praesens, 2007), 99–113.

⁹ *Pesti Hírlap*, 15 Feb. 1910, p. 15. Anthony Geber, “Lajos (Louis) Márk: His Life and Art,” *Hungarian Studies*, 6, 1 (1993): 99–127, in particular p. 107.

¹⁰ *Uj Idők*, 22 Oct. 1911, pp. 281f, 380, 392.

¹¹ *New York Times*, 27 March 1912; in connection with the 1913 exhibition see Árpád Timár, “Magyar művészek grafikai kiállítása Amerikában, 1913-1914. A tárlat magyarországi sajtóvisszhangja,” *Ars Hungarica*, 40, 2 (2014): 247–256, in particular 252–253.

¹² *Uj Idők*, 29 June 1913, p. 9.

¹³ *Budapesti Hírlap*, 25 May 1913, p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20 June 1913, p. 7.

¹⁵ István Hollósy, “Amerikai ajánlat a magyar háziiparnak,” *Mezőkövesd és Vidéke*, 7 June 1914.

¹⁶ *Budapesti Hírlap*, 25 May and 21 June 1913. Re. the visit to Szeged see Edit Csizmadia, “A feminista Móra. Móra Ferenc és a feministák kapcsolata sajtócikkek tükrében (1908-1928),” in the *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve*, 2 (2015): 295–296.

¹⁷ *Mezőkövesd és Vidéke*, 22 and 29 June 1913, p. 2.

¹⁸ Charles Holme, ed., *Peasant Art in Austria and Hungary* (London, Paris, New York: The Studio, 1911).

¹⁹ *Magyar Iparművészet*, vol.10 (1913).

²⁰ Judit Gömöröy and Nóra Veszprémi, eds., *A Művészház 1909-1914. Modern kiállítások Budapesten* (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Galeria, 2009), 135-160.

²¹ *The Evening Post*, 14 March 1914, p. 2.

²² Kálmán Sebestyén, "A kalotaszegi faragás története," in *Korunk évkönyv*, 1978, p. 235.

²³ Kálmán Sebestyén, *Kőrösi Riszeg alatt: Egy kalotaszegi település évszázadai* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2007), 106.

²⁴ Mónika Lackner, "Budapesti kézimunka-kereskedők képes árjegyzékei," in *Életmód, szemléletmód és a módi változása a parasztság körében a 19-20 század fordulóján*, ed. Mária Flórián (Budapest: MTA Néprajzi Kutatóintézete, 2010), 321-322.

²⁵ Hollósy, "Amerikai ajánlat," p. 2.

²⁶ *The Evening Post*, 14 March 1914, p. 2.

²⁷ Quoted in Emanuel Berman "Sándor, Gizella, Elma: A Biographical Journey," pt. 2, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 85 (April 2004): 489-520.

²⁸ See the article that appeared when he died: *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, 29 April 1933, p. 4. *New York Times*, 29 April, 1933, p. 13. See also the *Pesti Napló*, 12 Oct. 1912.

²⁹ *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, 13 Feb. 1910.

³⁰ The records of the consulate did not survive, and it was not possible to find information relating to the exhibition in the records of the joint Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry.

³¹ Touring Exhibition, *Touring Exhibition of Hungarian Peasant Art organized under the auspices of the National Arts Club of New York...* (New York: The Club, 1914), see the introduction.

³² Descriptions of this exhibition can be found in Pál Horti, *Magyar Iparművészet*, 1, 6 (1904): 249-313, in particular p. 302; Emil Zerkowitz, "Magyarország Amerikában," *Vasárnapi Ujság*, 51, 39 (1904): 661-663; and Miklós Székely, *Az ország tükre* (Budapest: Centart Egyesület, 2012), 162. See also the *Official Catalogue of Exhibitors, Universal Exposition St. Louis, U.S.A. 1904. Division of Exhibits* (St. Louis: The Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company, 1904), 109-110.

³³ *Magyar Iparművészet*, 2 (1905): 177.

³⁴ *Magyar Hírmondó*, 8 Dec. 1904, p. 1.

³⁵ *The St. Louis Republic*, 1 Nov. 1904, p. 7.

³⁶ *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 18 March 1914. Hungarian Peasant Art exhibition papers, Newark Museum Archives, Newark Museum Archives, Newark, New Jersey.

³⁷ *Magyar Iparművészet*, vol. 11, no. 5 (1914): 225; for virtually the same report see *Budapesti Hírlap*, 7 June 1914, p. 18.

³⁸ On problems of originality or authenticity of contemporary peasant embroidery see Lou Taylor, "Peasant Embroidery: Rural to Urban and East to West Relationships 1860-1914," *The Journal of Decorative Arts Society* 14 (1990): 43-51.

³⁹ Touring Exhibition, *Touring Exhibition. Magyar Iparművészet*, 17, 5 (1914): 225.

⁴⁰ Edit Pikler-Freund, "Magyar parasztművészeti kiállítás New-Yorkban," *Az Ujság*, 19 April 1914.

⁴¹ *The Hudson Evening Register*, 17 March 1914.

⁴² *New York Herald*, 14 March 1914, p. 12.

⁴³ *New York Times*, 15 March 1914, p. 69.

⁴⁴ *The Sun*, 12 March 1914, sec. 1, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *The Sun*, 16 March 1914, sec. 2, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Archives of American Art, National Art Club, 7, 8 Album, 1910-1921; Hungarian Peasant Art. 1914 (Reel 4260, frames 87-90). One photo can be reached on the internet: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/viewer/installation-view-hungarina-peasant-art-exhibition-national-arts-club-12086> A richly illustrated article about the exhibition is Zoltán Fejős, "Amerikába mentünk, Háziiparunk címere... Hungarian Peasant Art: Magyar népművészeti kiállítás az újvilágban 1914-ben," *Múzeumcafé*, vol. 9, no. 45 (2015): 37-48.

⁴⁷ *The Evening Post*, 14 March 1914, sec. 2, p. 2.

⁴⁸ *New York Tribune*, 12 March 1914, p. 7.

⁴⁹ As she wrote elsewhere in more detail: Edit Pikler-Freund, "Decoratív és realiztikus művészet," *Művészet*, 2, 12 (1913): 37-39.

⁵⁰ Petra Török, comp., *Sorsával tetováltan önmaga. Válogatás Lesznai Anna naplójegyzeteiből* (Budapest-Hatvan: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum and the Hatvany Lajos Múzeum, 2010), the volume's preface, also p. 496, with illustrations on pp. 73, 77, 81 and 85.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 18-20, 496; Petra Török, *Formába kerekedett világ. Lesznai Anna művészete és hagyatéka...* (Hatvan: Hatvany Lajos Múzeum, 2001), 33.

⁵² *American Art News*, vol. 12, no. 24 (21 March 1914): 7.

⁵³ *Szabadság*, 25 March 1914, p. 2.

⁵⁴ "Hungarian Art Fostered by Royalty," *New York Press*, 26 April 1914.

⁵⁵ *New York Times*, 27 March 1914.

⁵⁶ Erza Shales, *Made in Newark: Cultivating Industrial Arts and Civic Identity in the Progressive Era* (New Brunswick – London: Rivergate Books, 2010).

⁵⁷ Hungarian Peasant Art exhibition papers, Newark Museum Archives, Newark, New Jersey. See also *The Evening Post*, 11 April 1914.

⁵⁸ Anna Lesznai, "Háziipar és népművészet," *Magyar Iparművészet*, 16, 9 (1913): 369-386, in particular p. 370.

⁵⁹ Shales, *Made in Newark*, pp. 182, 290. Shales describes other exhibitions featured by this museum that had similar implications. See *ibid.* pp. 153-220.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 80; 1-2.; <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/danaj.htm> On J.C. Dana see Nicolas Maffei, "John Cotton Dana and the Politics of Exhibiting Industrial Art in the US," *Journal of Design History*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2000): 301-317. See also François Mairesse, "La belle histoire, aux origines de la nouvelle muséologie," *Public et Musées*, nos. 17-18 (2002): 33-56.

⁶¹ Elemér Czakó, "A torinói kiállítás," *Magyar iparművészet* 5, 4 (1902): 166.

⁶² Shales, *Made in Newark*, 161.

⁶³ Bureau of the Census, 1928, p. 758.

⁶⁴ *Newarki Híradó*, 28 March and 4 and 11 April, 1914.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 25 April 1914, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁶⁷ For a detailed list of these objects see Fejős, "Újszerű," p. 104.

⁶⁸ *Newarki Híradó*, 11 April and 9 May.

⁶⁹ *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* (obituary), 25 Nov. 1925.

⁷⁰ *Newarki Híradó*, various numbers, 1914.

⁷¹ *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, 25th anniversary special edition, 20 April 1924.

⁷² *Newarki Híradó*, 2 May 1914. “U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925,” database, *Ancestry*.

⁷³ United States Census, 1910, database with images, *FamilySearch*, Samuel G. Ax, Newark Ward 3, Essex, N.J., ED 20, sheet 5B.

⁷⁴ *Newarki Híradó*, 28 Feb. 1914.

⁷⁵ United States Census, 1910, database, *FamilySearch*, Paul Adam, Newark Ward 12, Essex, N.J., ED 101, sheet 24A.

⁷⁶ New Jersey Census, 1915, database, *FamilySearch*, Emery Varyady.

⁷⁷ United States Census, 1920, database, *FamilySearch*, Geza Pretula, Newark Ward 13, Essex, N.J. sheet 8B. Also, *Newarki Híradó*, 18 April 1914.

⁷⁸ For a few details about them see Fejős, “Újszerű,” p. 106.

⁷⁹ <http://libertyellisfoundation.org>

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ The twins were named Augustus and Julius. New Jersey, Births and Christenings index, 1660-1931, database, *Ancestry*.

⁸² <http://libertyellisfoundation.org>

⁸³ Zoltán Nagy, *Körmend város kézművesei a XVII-XIX században* (Szombathely: Vas Megyei Múzeumok, 2004), 365.

⁸⁴ L. M. McCauley, “Industrial Art at the Art Institute of Chicago,” *Art and Progress*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1914): 28-29; *Thirteenth Annual Exhibition of Industrial Art including Hungarian Peasant Potters and Weavers* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1914), 1128-1251.

⁸⁵ *Thirtieth Annual Exhibition*, nos. 123-124 (the jewellery), and 84-86 (the Japanese-style objects).

⁸⁶ Sharon S. Darling, *Chicago Metalsmiths. An Illustrated History* (Chicago, Chicago Historical Society, 1977), 91-94.

⁸⁷ Frances A. Barothy (obituary), *Chicago Tribune*, 14 Feb. 1957. On Árpád Baróthy see Kálmán Káldor ed., *Magyar-Amerika írásban és képen I-II* (St. Louis: Hungarian Publishing Co., 1937), vol. I, p. 139.

⁸⁸ WorldCat.org: *November exhibitions: Nineteenth Annual Exhibition of the Society of Western Artists, November 6 to 29; an exhibition of*

Hungarian peasant art ending November 29 (Indianapolis: John Herron Art Institute, 1914). See also *Indianapolis Star*, 15 Nov. 1914.

⁸⁹ Simon J. Bronner, *Grasping Things. Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986); and the same author's *Following Tradition: Folklore in the Discourse of American Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1998) in particular chapter 9; Diana Greenwood, "'The Great Palace of American Civilization' Allen Eaton's Arts and Crafts of the Homelands, 1919-1932," *Contemporaneity: Historical Presence in Visual Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2014): 98-115 (<http://contemporaneity.pitt.edu>); Zoltán Fejős, *A chicagói magyarok két nemzedéke, 1890-1940* [Two generations of the Hungarians in Chicago, 1890-1940] (Budapest: Közép-Európa Intézet, 1993), 153-158 and 205-215; Shales, *Made in Newark*, 189-320.

⁹⁰ Archduchess Izabella, "Izabella főhercegnő a háziiparról," *Magyar Iparművészet*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1909): 67.

⁹¹ Pikler-Freund, "Magyar parasztművészeti kiállítás." Patrons of certain Hungarian restaurants in New York and attendees at Hungarian peasant dances there must have been familiar with *cimbalom* music at least since the turn of the century.

A Hungarian Author in the World of Cinema: Lajos (Ludwig) Biró (1890-1948)

Ágnes Széchenyi

This study deals with a part of the long and eventful career of the Hungarian writer and political personality Lajos Biró. It is a revised version of a longer work that appeared in the present author's book published in Hungarian in 2016: *Pályaképek. Művelődéstörténeti metszetek a 20. századból* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó).

Here I would like to outline a special aspect of Biró's work, an aspect that has been largely forgotten in Hungary, or more precisely, has been relegated to the not very respected category of "writing drama for export". But there is no reason to be ashamed of such activity, since some other great Hungarian writers had done the same including Ferenc Molnár and Menyhért Lengyel.

Lajos Biró's activities span many fields. He was at once a writer, a journalist, editor and politician. He began his career as a journalist in Nagyvárad (today's Oradea in Romania) where he settled in 1900 virtually the same day as the poet Endre Ady. They became close friends. Both in Nagyvárad and later in Budapest they lived in a room they rented together. To the very end of their lives they remained in contact. Biró was one of the few people who could have written much about Ady, twentieth century Hungary's outstanding through sometimes controversial genius. In 1904 the two of them also arrived about the same time in Budapest to join József Vészi's publication the *Budapesti Napló*. In those days this daily was the gathering place of the progressive writers who later contributed to the journal *Nyugat*: Dezső Kosztolányi, Gyula Szini, Endre Nagy, Géza Csáth, Géza Lengyel and others. The *Napló* persevered to the end with its demand for universal suffrage. Vészi deserted the daily to become the press manager of the government of Géza Fejérváry and took with him both Ady and Biró — an act that caused a great decline in the paper's popularity. In the meantime Biró married Jolán Vészi, about the same time that Ferenc Molnár also married into that family when he became the husband of Mar-

git Vészi — and almost the entire family moved for some time to Berlin to await the cooling down of the controversy József Vészi had caused.

In the German capital Biró acted as correspondent of several Hungarian dailies. After his return home he participated in the launching of the progressive press-organ *Világ* — and became known as a combative editorial writer. He and his radicalism were not liked by the other side. He gave many lectures to the Galilei Circle, knew the painters Károly Kernstok and Dezső Czigány, and was frequent speaker at the Művészház where the artists known as the *Nyolcak* [The Eight] exhibited their works. Throughout these years Biró published hundreds of journalistic pieces in Hungarian press organs, in Budapest and in other cities. He is considered to have had a major impact of the public opinion of his times. He was not only a practicing journalist but was a student of legislation regarding journalism, a scholar of journalistic traditions, and a theoretician of journalism. During his stay in Berlin he developed contacts with the publisher Ullstein. These relations he maintained during his years of emigration when he continued to act as an editor for the firm.

In 1914 we find Biró involved in the founding of the Hungarian Radical Party and he developed — and kept for a long time — close ties with one of the Party's leading lights, Oszkár Jászi. We cite only one passage by him which illustrate both his style and concerns in those tumultuous times. When Mihály Károlyi became President of the Hungarian Republic in the fall of 1918 he wrote the following: "The Hungarian Republic offers the greatest honour that it can bestow on one of its citizens not as holiday gift, a glittering decoration. It presents it as a garland of thorns. Wear this, our appointed leader, until you collapse from the pain it causes." Biró himself couldn't tolerate for long the agony that serving the new regime brought. He was assistant to Jászi taking care of nationality affairs — which were the most contentious problems facing the Republic in the fall of 1918. The desire of the country's nationalities to separate — which he understood more than most of his compatriots — and worrying about the forthcoming peace settlement caused him to resign from his position. (In those days his name often came up in connection with the appointment of ambassadors since he was a sensible, highly cultured individual who spoke several languages.) He greeted the establishment of the Hungarian Republic of Councils with high expectations and supported it through his writings. After the new regime's collapse he was forced into exile. The story presented below starts with this development in his life.

For North American readers we should add a relevant fact: in 1913 Biró's younger brother János, who would later be known as John Biro,

emigrated to the United States. There he became editor of the Hungarian daily *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, and involved himself as an émigré intellectual in many progressive Hungarian-American causes. After Lajos arrived in the United States, he made a career for himself as a writer for the cinema. He was associated with the Korda brothers: Sándor Korda (who later became Sir Alexander Korda), Vince Korda and Zoltán Korda. We cannot say that there were no precedents for Lajos Biró involving himself with film. From his very first novels silent films had been made in Hungary in which later film critics detected certain elements essential to cinema. The critic Antal Szerb saw in him a writer who was inclined toward complex plots and romanticism, and the writer Dezső Kosztolányi called him a representative of “redeeming literary cosmopolitanism”. Kosztolányi found that Biró wrote in the style of telegraphic script, and Pál Relle thought that in Hungarian literature Biró was the inventor of the film. Alfred Kerr also wrote about him when he analysed the modern art of Hungarians in the weekly *A hét* [The week]. He, like some others, regarded Biró a “manufacturer” of melodrama.

In the Hungary of today there is a renaissance of Biró’s works: his books are being re-published and theatres again present his dramas. A few years ago the Hungarian National Theatre performed his play *Sárga liliom* [Yellow Lily].

The émigré politician meets the world of cinema

Biró left Hungary during the summer of 1919. For a while he lived in Vienna’s Hotel Klomser, the building in which the notorious Colonel Alfred Redl committed suicide in 1913. For some time he dreamed about a return to Hungary and provided news services for radical Hungarian émigrés living in Austria. He eked out a living by selling his writings, from theatrical royalties, and after meeting Alexander Korda, working with the new medium of film. Korda was also forced into emigration because during the 1919 Hungarian Republic of Councils he had been in charge of expropriating cinema companies.¹ Their acquaintance dated back at least a decade. From 1912 on, young Korda had been in charge of the film column of the daily *Világ*, that is he was a colleague of Biró. Korda had also been the founder of several film magazines and kept writing for these and others.² He was only nineteen at the time but he was already writing articles dealing with film theory for the magazine *Mozgófénykép Híradó* [Moving-picture newsletter] and was devising subtitles for foreign films; in 1914 he

produced his first film, *A becsapott újságíró* [The deceived journalist]. His contacts with Biró continued throughout the decade. Not only with Biró but with other young writers associated with the *Nyugat*, as film-historian István Nemeskürty explained in one of his studies:³ “Within *Nyugat* there was a special group of friends whose members [...] some evenings went to the cinema. [...] This group in a certain sense acknowledged Alexander Korda as its leader. Among them were the artists [Marcell] Vértés, [Henrik] Major, [Mihály] Biró, [Lipót] Gedő; and the writers Móricz, Somlyó, Andor Gábor, Lajos Biró, Kosztolányi and Lajos Nagy, [...]”.⁴ Korda once wrote an article about Biró, whom he respected, and Biró in turn patronized the much younger Korda in whom he probably saw himself at the time he was at the beginning of his career. In Vienna the well-connected Korda got a job as a script-writer for Biró. In the isolated world of émigrés their getting together was inevitable. Nevertheless Biró stayed away from the world of “as many coffee houses as many political parties” and avoided becoming involved in émigré in-fighting. His writings were not about his fellow émigrés but were critiques of the regime of Admiral Mikós Horthy that was consolidating itself in Hungary.⁵

For Biró the appearance of Korda in Vienna was a godsend. It helped him materially and rescued him from slumping into lethargy. Already in 1920 the two were shooting scenes of their joint film, the moderately successful *Koldus és királyfi* [The pauper and the prince] in the studios of the recently established Austrian film company Sascha Film-industrie. This was followed by a more substantial commission for Biró by Korda, the making of a film from his novel *Serpolette*, also under the Sascha Company. The film was shot on scene, outdoors, on the Dalmatian coast. The cast was mainly Hungarian, but the film became an Austrian production: *Eine versunkene Welt*. The film was shown at the first post-war international film festival, in Milan’s *Concorso Cinematografico Internazionale*. Biró won first prize for script-writing.⁷ After this, one commission to produce a film followed another. Biró made a film based on his detective novel *A Molitorház* (1922). Soon, he would be working for Hollywood, the new-born Mecca of the film industry.⁸

Biró’s first visit to the United States came in 1922.⁹ Many who wrote about him testify that Biró was not a typical journalist: he was not a bohemian, he had affection for his family, especially his brother János. In exile he strove to help his wife to earn a living, he was attached to his daughter (who suffered from epilepsy), and when a niece of theirs was orphaned, they took her in.¹⁰ He was attracted by America, but he did not like to live in Hollywood. To understand his reservations about this place

we have to turn to the experiences of Alexander Korda who also tried to integrate himself there in an effort to become a Hollywood film-maker.¹¹ We cite a passage from the Korda legend:

Alex [Sándor] was dispirited, ill-at-ease and lonely. He was tormented by home-sickness and cultural shock. In Budapest, Berlin and Vienna he was an acknowledged producer [also a writer]. There [when he entered a restaurant] the head-waiters made sure that “Herr Korda” got the best table. Journalists sought interviews with him, with artists he discussed art, with politicians politics, with writers literature, and with financiers, finances.

This last statement was not true for Biró — certainly not at that time. True, unlike in the case of his writer friends in Hungary, by this time his financial affairs were handled by agents. As for Korda, when he was sitting alone in an ocean-front establishment he pondered “what kind of a devilish fate made him end up in Los Angeles, three thousand miles from the nearest outpost of civilization [New York].”¹² Before the time of air-travel, Los Angeles was four-and-a-half days travel time by railway from the East Coast. To get from Los Angeles to Europe or back, was a major undertaking. And in the 1920s Los Angeles was not the place it is today. Where today film stars and multi-millionaires live there was a desert. Many people who had come there regretted the decision and committed suicide — by simply walking into the sea. The noted European director, Alexander Korda, was regarded as someone that could be hired for a day — or as a technician. Everything depended on the producer.

Biró was not untouched by the bitter American experience. He wrote a novel with the simple title *Beszélgetés* [Talk] in which he compared his American and European experiences. He placed the story into New York and not the emerging centre of the film world Hollywood. (In doing so he made the story more of an American story and less of what he himself experienced in Hollywood.) The protagonists of the story were mainly media or film moguls but with a few influential theatre personalities — both Americans and Europeans. The novel’s main theme unfolds gradually, it reveals the life of Jesus though the name is not mentioned. The main protagonist comes from a godforsaken place that the people of the “big city” haven’t even heard of. The story’s hero is a young apprentice, an incredibly talented lad. He is received with reservations. Those who think in clichés, protested. Short-sighted businessmen don’t realize that with this story they are put through a probe. The novel’s conclusion is not at all heart-warming. The film-moguls are not freed by the author from

being depicted as laughable. In the end the author among the novel's cast of characters is the one who is made to feel ashamed when his publisher tells him flatly that his story is ridiculous, that he doesn't know his audience and that "not one copy of his book would find a buyer."¹³ Relief for him comes when someone begins to talk of other things. The conflict of the two cultures, the American and the European, the clash between a mind-set focused on success and monetary gain on the one hand and that concerned with "eternal values" surfaces in this sadly ironic story.

This piece by Biró was published in 1926 by Pantheon Press in the volume entitled *Az élet arénája* [The arena of life]. It is clearly a reaction to Biró's first American experiences. The volume is a compendium of the writings Biró sent home from his involuntary exile and *Beszélgetés* is the last of such works that he wrote. It has many themes: the conflicts that faced émigrés, the difficulties of integration they experienced, and the unavoidable sacrifices they had to make. (It would be interesting to examine from these perspectives the experiences of the 1,400 German filmmakers who escaped to America in the Nazi Era, and those of the 100 Hungarians who left Hungary in 1919 and lived first mainly in Germany and then in the United States.)¹⁴

At the time Biró relied on heavily, one might say exclusively, on his friendship with Alexander Korda who reciprocated Biró's attachment to him. When Biró paid visits to Europe, Korda kept sending him letters complaining about his circumstances. The family lore of the Kordas places Biró at the highest point and Korda on one occasion admitted that for him the greatest consolation was the fact that he could work together with Biró.¹⁵ This assessment is confirmed by the literature about the two men.¹⁶ At the time he was a new arrival in Vienna, Biró told Oscar Jaszi that he wished to visit America for at least six months so that he could learn enough English to write for journals there.¹⁷ At the same time Biró was learning Italian too.¹⁸ Learning foreign languages is a complex process and needs to be commented on. To enter into another culture is only possible through learning its language and the more successful that process is the more thorough becomes our self-understanding. Assisting Biró in his quest to learn more languages was his association with the Korda brothers. At first during their exile they spoke Hungarian among themselves, but as they became more and more involved in film-making they began to perfect their language skills, began to speak languages idiomatically and did so without having to fear stumbling in the process.

Biró's family remained in Europe and with the advent of more normal political conditions in Hungary, returned there. József Vészi,

Biró's father-in-law, in the 1920s was in charge of the German-language paper *Pester Lloyd* and on his seventieth birthday, and the fiftieth anniversary of his journalistic career, he received an award from Miklós Horthy's regime. Biró himself became a frequent visitor to Hungary and there he often stayed with his wife and daughter who lived at times in Mária Valéria Street's distinguished Lloyd house and other times in the upper-class Klotild palace.¹⁹

Biró and his family also spent time in California — and complained about living conditions there. Testifying to this effect is a letter written by Biró's sister-in-law Margit Vészi in which she states that the Birós "are now in California" where they hate the whole unscrupulous business and don't escape from there only "because they make much money."²⁰ Biró did not want to return to Hungary either, he would have preferred to work in Berlin. He commuted between the western shores of America and Europe. By now he was a sought-after script writer who had been honoured by America's Film Academy. His fame extended to Hungary where journalists sought interviews with him and often reported his triumphs in bombastic language. The *Pesti Napló* described him as Hollywood's official Hungarian writer, and this was a modest characterization of him compared to others.²¹ There was heightened interest in cinema at the time in Hungary, especially after the appearance of the first "talkies". Up to then all of Biró's films had been silent ones. To his friends he said with some trepidation that the script of his latest film was for a talkie. He also predicted — and this is typical of progress which overtakes even the modernist of the age — that the talkie will bring a "catastrophe" for the cinema. The new films with sound will be in English and might result in the end of the particular blessing of the silent films: their appeal to a universal audience. He predicated that the careers of many European exile actors will be jeopardised if they cannot speak English. In any case for writers and actors success in the film business was often a matter of luck. Biró once talked of a "very talented" colleague of his who had to leave Hollywood completely dejected.²² At the same time he defended American cinema and disagreed with the writer Dezső Szabó according to whom Hollywood "poisoned writers" and "destroyed [the art of] drama." In Biró's view Hollywood was not dreadful even if it sometimes called itself such. It was a place, he argued, where "artistic tendencies could flourish, after all Hollywood attracted all kinds of talent from all corners of the world." He cited the example of the movies *The Way of the Flesh* and *Seventh Heaven*.²³

Biró's years in England

The Korda brothers returned to Europe and settled in London. There, in 1932 they founded the company called London Film Productions. They came to Britain at a propitious time: the British film industry was nearly non-existent. The English film market was dominated by American films: at one point out of the one-hundred films being shown, ninety-five were made in America. In 1927 British Parliament passed a quota-law for the advancement of home-produced films.²⁴

The company established by the Korda brothers was based on their cooperation. The firm's script writer [*dramaturg*] was Biró who at the beginning even owned shares in the company.²⁵ In the Korda brothers' operation a *dramaturg* was an artistic-literary father figure who was in charge of inventing the story and the film's script. He devised the dialogue and the roles played by the actors. When Alex and Lajos selected the story, they spent weeks, sometimes months to make a movie out of it. They also determined which actor will play which role. The whole thing was formulated so that it confirmed with Alex's ideas, sense of humour and world view.²⁶

The collaboration of Alexander Korda and Lajos Biró resulted in brilliant successes such as the movie about the private life of Henry the Eighth. The film was more of a classic tale than an English nationalistic epic, but the British sense of self-deprecating humour allowed the ironical depiction of a national hero.²⁷ Biró and Korda had studied Shakespeare and the other English classics but in the end they did not select any such work as the base for their movies. What influenced them more was Francis Hackett's recently released biography of Henry.²⁸ Another consideration they kept in mind was what historical figures could the actor Charles Laughton credibly play. The movie about Henry was a success even in the commercial sense of that term. Its principal actor received an Oscar for his performance and the film got nominated for an Oscar in the "best picture" category. Korda and Biró experimented with other biographical films also, with less success.

The first reports in Hungary about Biró's successes appeared in the tabloid press. But now even a serious journal such as *Nyugat* began taking notice of his career. It declared the film about Henry VIII a "great film, good film..." And that it had been "dreamed up" by Lajos Biró and "produced" by Sándor Korda with much money. "That they were not stingy with the money, was obvious from [the film's] every scene." "Such

a film,” concluded the article in *Nyugat*, “competed with a good theatrical production, which is the most that can be said about a movie.”²⁹ The film was part of a series called “private lives” that had started with *Helen of Troy* produced in 1927 still in the United States. At a later date *Nyugat* again reported about Biró and Korda in connection with the third film of the series and claimed that it was well received by such dailies as *The Morning Post*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Sunday Pictorial*, the *Evening Standard* and *The Daily Telegraph*.... “This enormous success was the *Private Life of Don Juan*.” The report went on to say that the English press mentioned the film’s script-writer and producer at times with the following words: “Story and dialogue by Lajos Biró. Directed by Alexander Korda.” The *Nyugat* article claimed that these two names are tops in the world and are examples of “our cultural superiority.”³⁰ These successes obscure the struggles and the risk-taking behind these films. In Biró’s opinion Korda had bet his shirt and pants on this film; had it failed, “Korda would have been left stark naked.”³¹

The film *Rembrandt* (1936) could have fit into this series. Korda had a deep interest in the painter and the foundering of his career. But the film produced about him was not an ironic one but a real drama — the best and most demanding Korda had produced. It was not a classic success. What the Hungarian author Zsigmond Móricz said about this film is interesting. He found it true to life, produced with no money spared, with good taste, expertise and ambition — and with *hóhem* typical of someone from Pest.³² *Hóhem* is a Yiddish word with multiple meanings: self-confident, crafty, smart, a tramp, or an underworld figure. Its use by Móricz is a fine hint at Jewish talent and ability to get ahead.

Long before his successes in film, Biró had left the world of Hungarian literature. His writings had last appeared in book form in 1927. We can suspect that not even he strove for their re-publication — which did not happen till 1957. True, the Hungarian media did not forget about him. *Nyugat*, for example, kept his name on its masthead between 1926 and 1929. In the latter year, when Zsigmond Móricz took on the task of saving the periodical from financial collapse, he wrote to Biró. The letter probably had an antecedent as Móricz began it by saying that whoever claimed that *Nyugat* and Cecile Tormay’s *Napkelet* should join forces was an “idiot”: “she is as far from us today as she had been yesterday...”³³ The rumour of these two periodicals getting together must have perturbed Biró — who was ill-at-ease with conservative Christian ideology. We should explain that the onset of the Great Depression negatively impacted the financial situation of *Nyugat*: its number of subscribers in Budapest de-

clined to 390. Móricz wrote to Biró because he wanted to expand the periodical's circle of writers. He reminded Biró how great their collaboration had been many years ago and expressed the hope that Biró might start writing for the journal again. "[Leo] Tolstoy had also re-started writing after a decade's hiatus." All this was in vain as Biró was gradually retiring from the world of Hungarian *belles-lettres*. He produced no such work during the rest of his life even though he did publish a volume in English.³⁴

The final years

In 1947 when a Hungarian journalist asked him if he no longer wrote in Hungarian Biró replied that he did: "I translated the prologue of Faust into Hungarian."³⁵ The love of his native tongue prompted him to give a chance to a classic piece of writing to be translated into Hungarian but Biró went no further: the translation remained his and his only. He was also preoccupied with the conclusion that the Hungarian language could not be translated into other languages. With his daughter Vera, who had literary ambitions of her own, they tried to translate a particularly unique Hungarian saying into English and concluded that the resulting words sounded more like a grave-stone inscription than a true reflection of the original.³⁶ To the question whether he would ever come back to Hungary, Biró responded with a no: "I have lost contact with people who live [there] ... Every emigrant has to be aware of the reality right from the beginning of emigration: after the lapse of a certain time there is no return."³⁷

Let us cite here the opinion of Ferenc Molnár, Biró's brother-in-law, on this question. He, already in his New York days, described emigration as a "sickness."³⁸ While someone is a tourist in a certain place, he lives a normal life. But an émigré, after the passage of years, transmutes into an emigrant. At first, only his friends notice his symptoms: his unnerved nerves, the large volume — and little substance — of his complaints, his diminishing desire to communicate with his compatriots; and the deteriorating quality of his English because "he, in his advanced age, had given up the struggle to master a foreign language." For such a person the first sign of the fact that he had become an émigré is the fact that he cannot sleep without a sleeping pill. With some people this symptom appears sooner, with others later. "With people who live alone, they appear sooner. With family men, later. With well-off people, later. With poor people, sooner. Children don't get this illness: emigration is not a childhood disease...." As a person ages "he [or she] remains the same as he [or

she] was while his [or her] surroundings differ more and more from what they in the beginning appeared.” An émigré doesn’t make peace with his surroundings, doesn’t get used to the country he lives in, but gets used to his own situation. At this time his illness enters another phase. This condition is recognized by medical science: his doctor prescribes medications for him. And what can be done if the patient becomes disappointed in hapless doctors? For Molnár there was only one effective remedy: his friend Ferenc Göndör, the leftist editor of the New York émigré publication *Az Ember* — who happened to be a close associate of Biró’s brother János. Göndör’s special treatment for his “patient” was paying him attention: he phoned often, asked questions and provided pleasant news, invited him to his home and made peace between him and another émigré. Molnár wrote about all this but didn’t say how Göndör succeeded with such treatment with his other “patients”. And his “treatment” of Molnár had few long-term effects. For Molnár, this author who was locked into the world of Hungarian culture, exile in America proved a slow death. His career as a literary figure and his personal fate were sharply separated.

With the passage of time Biró lost most of his earlier contacts. He corresponded with Milán Füst and in the immediate post-World War II period gladly responded to this constantly complaining author’s requests: good cigarettes, English thread, carbon-paper, razor blades, needles for injecting medications, even sleeping pills — and, sometimes, a little money. Biró was always generous. To Béla Reinitz, his friend and former chess and bridge partner, who had led a disorderly lifestyle and was incapable of concentrating on his work, he (as well as Korda) regularly sent money.⁴⁰ We have a record of his sending financial aid to Frigyes Karinthy also.⁴¹ We also have documentation to the effect that Gyula Földessy suggested that in the matter of supporting Ady’s mother, wealthy Jews such as Biró and Korda be approached as it was “no use” approaching wealthy Christians in this matter.⁴² We don’t know whether Földessy’s suggestion was implemented. We know, however, that Biró was part of the commemorative issue produced in Ady’s honour by *Nyugat* and that he gave the farewell, grave-side address at Ady’s funeral. The valuable collection of documents he held about Ady was sent to Géza Lengyel after Biró’s death by his widow. We might also mention here that Ferenc Molnár, who otherwise was parsimonious, also aided his one-time friend Elek Falus who for some time lived in misery in post-World War II Hungary; as well Dániel Jób, the prominent theatre director who also fell on hard times after the war and, especially, after the communist takeover three years later.⁴³

Although Biró did not want to go back to Hungary, he continued to work hard. Death came to him unexpected in 1948 by which time Hungary's beginning communist transformation was in plain view for many. In Hungary's *Huszdik Század* he was remembered with fond words by Géza Supka. In the American journal *Az Ember* Ferenc Göndör did the same. Both of them knew Biró well, and their ideal of a society was what they had dreamed up together at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the Hungarian daily *Népszava*, Zoltán Horváth hit on a more analytical and more critical note.⁴⁴ Horváth's connection to Biró is interesting. Biró was the uncle of Horváth's first wife Márta Molnar (better-known as Márta Sárközi) and Horváth might have known some things about Biró that others did not (despite this, his obituary contains many errors). Zoltán Horváth at the time was an ardent supporter of the union of Hungary's two workers' parties. A decade later, after he spent time in communist dictator Mátyás Rákosi's prisons, he wrote a monograph about the early twentieth century radical civic movements. In this he claimed that in Biró the First World War caused the separation of the writer from the journalist. "And while [Biró] the journalist hit upon a tone that was increasingly radical and revolutionary, [Biró] the literary figure increasingly descended from [the writing] of fine novels... to the churning out of bestsellers and theatrical dramas for export." Horváth, who at the time employed a class-struggle analysis, attributed this fact to Biró being essentially a bourgeois individual. Horváth complained that at one point Biró gave the answer to the question whether Hungarian society, given the choice between a Parisian and a Moscovite system, came down on the side of the latter. It is possible that Biró had written such a statement. But this was more likely a politically compelled pronouncement — and we also have to keep in mind that at the end of World War I there was a fear in Hungary about what peace terms the victorious Western powers might impose on the country. And Horváth belittles Biró's achievements as a film-maker too. "From this time on," he writes, "[Biró's] life had nothing to do with the Hungarian people or with Hungarian literature. His works became merchandise and it makes little difference whether it was of good or bad quality." We have to keep in mind that this critique of Biró was produced from the narrow expectations of the day's "socialist-realist" aesthetics.

Biró was a pioneer of the new medium of the twentieth century, the cinema. The nature of his talents played a role in the twists and turns of his life's career, as did the unexpected transformations brought about by politics. He was not averse to melodrama, he had a bias for deep feelings and sensationalistic solutions, and he was capable of writing works that

some found substandard literature. It was a coincidence that the early cinema accepted these qualities — in fact appreciated them.⁴⁵ Biró became a celebrity of the art of producing film-scripts. All this does not hide the fact that he was a melancholic, even unhappy, person, but — from another perspective — a very successful émigré.

NOTES

This study was translated from the Hungarian by Nándor Dreisziger in consultation with its author.

¹ *A magyar film a tanácsköztársaság idején*, ed. Erzsébet Garai (Budapest: Magyar Filmtudományi Intézet, 1969).

² Korda's magazines included *Pesti Mozi*, *Mozi* and *Mozihét*. His writings deserve an anthology. Other writers who wrote for *Pesti Mozi* included Zoltán Ambrus, Zsigmond Móricz, Dezső Kosztolányi, Zoltán Somlyó and Frigyes Karinthy.

³ István Nemeskürty, "A Nyugat írói és a filmművészet a tízes években," *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* 44, 4 (1960): 674-683.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 681. For István Várni's reminiscences about the *Pesti Mozi* and Biró's denunciations of Count István Tisza's policies see Viktor Lányi, István Radó, and Albert Held, *A 25 éves mozi: a magyar kinematográfia negyedszázados története* (Budapest: Biró Ny., 1920), 74.

⁵ György Litván, "Irányzatok és viták a bécsi magyar emigrációban," in: *Magyar gondolat – szabad gondolat. Válogatott történeti tanulmányok*, ed. János Gyurgyák (Budapest: Osiris, 2008), 227-260.

⁶ Gyöngyhi [sic] Balogh, "Die Anfänge zweier internationaler Filmkarrieren: Mihály Kertész und Sándor Korda," in *Elektrische Schatten. Beiträge zur Österreichischen Stummfilmgeschichte*, ed. Francesco Bono, Paolo Cappanale and Günter Krenn (Vienna: Filmarchiv Austria, 1999), 77-100.

⁷ Herbert Polak, *30 Jahre Sascha-Film: Festschrift der Sascha-Film Verein- und Vertriebs-Ges. m. b. H. Wien* (Vienna, 1948).

⁸ Lewis Jacobs, *Rise of the American film* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930); Gabler Neal, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (Crown, 1988); Allen J. Scott, *Hollywood: the Place, the Industry* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁹ Documents concerning Biró's visa application are held in the National Archives of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár): K 58 1922-III/1, bundle 14 (1021-1259). In the US János Biró (1881-1954) was a bank official and journalist. He was the editor of the Hungarian-American papers *Szabadság* and *Képes*

Világlap, and the editor-in-chief of *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*. From 1916 on he was also the manager of the European department of the Sunbeam Motion Picture Co.

¹⁰ Ágnes Széchenyi, “Vészi József a műhelyteremtő és a dinasztiaalapító, 1858-1940,” in Széchenyi, *Pályaképek*, 17-40.

¹¹ Gene D. Phillips, *Exiles in Hollywood: Major European Film Directors in America* (Bethlehem – London: Lehigh University Press – Associated University Presses, 1998). This book describes the émigré years of five film-directors: Fritz Lang, Willam Wyler, Otto Preminger, Fred Zinnemann and Billy Wilder.

¹² Michael Korda, *A szerencse fiai. A Korda testvérek regényes élete* (Budapest: Európa, 1983), 101-106 (this is a Hungarian translation of the original book by Michael Korda: *Charmed Lives. A Family Romance* (New York: Random House, 1979). See also, Paul Tabori, *Alexander Korda* (London: Living Books Inc, 1966).

¹³ Lajos Biró, “Beszélgetés,” in *Arabella*, ed. Ferenc Szabó (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1975), 307–315.

¹⁴ Rob Burns, ed., *German Cultural Studies. An Introduction* (Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), 30–36, 88–92. See also: Tibor Frank, *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919-1945* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 299. About the difficult experiences of German émigrés in the US Thomas Mann has written especially in the journal *Aufbau*, 29 November 1939; cited in Tibor Frank, “Thomas Mann egy európai Magyarországon és az Egyesült Államokban, in *Idegen költők – örök barátaink. Világirodalom a magyar kulturális emlékezetben*, ed. Bálint Gárdos, Ágnes Péter, Veronika Ruttkay, Andrea Timár and Máté Vince (Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2010), 160.

¹⁵ Korda, *A szerencse fiai*, 104.

¹⁶ The friendship lasted a lifetime. For Korda, the death of Biro in 1948 must have been a particularly great blow. From then on there was no one for Korda to confide in.

¹⁷ Letter, Biró to Jászi, 25 Dec. 1919. Oscar Jaszi Papers, box 5. Columbia University, Butler Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. Quoted by Frank, *Double Exile*, 90. For his relations with Jászi see inid., 89-92.

¹⁸ Letter, Biró to Jászi, 24 Nov. 1919. Oscar Jaszi Papers, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ Information from Gábor Márkus, conveyed to the author in 2007.

²⁰ Letter, Margit Vészi to Lajos Hatvany 4 April 1927, in *Levelek Hatvany Lajoshoz*, ed. Lajosné Hatvany (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1967), 371.

²¹ *Pesti Napló*, 4 March 1928. See also *Színházi Élet*, 7 Oct. 1928; and *A Toll*, 23 June 1929.

²² “Az ötvenéves Biró Lajos őszinte vallomása,” *Magyar Hírlap*, 20 Aug. 1930, 5-6.

²³ Sándor Faragó, “Biró Lajos csalódottan visszament Hollywoodba,” *Színházi Élet*, vol. 17, no. 41 (1927): 50-51. *The Way of all Flesh* was directed by Victor Fleming. The film’s script was produced by Biró, Jules Furthman, Julien Johnson and Ernest Maas. The movie’s principal actor, Emil Jannings (1884-1950) won an Oscar in 1929. As far as we know no copies of the film survived. Biró was not part of the production of *Seventh Heaven*. Both films were melodramas.

²⁴ *The British Film Industry. A report on its history and present organisation, with special reference to the economic problems of British feature film production* (London: PEP [Political & Economic Planning], 1952), 32-92, 294; Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), and *Pioneers of the British Film* (London: Bishopsgate Press, 1983); *Studies and Documents of a Pioneer of the Film Narrative* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998).

²⁵ Áron Tóbiás, *Korda Sándor* (Budapest: Magyar Filmtudományi Intézet és Filmarchívum – Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, [1980]), 46. Tóbiás’s source was Vince Korda with whom he had a long interview in 1976.

²⁶ Michael Korda, *A szerencse fia*, 104.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

²⁸ Francis Hackett, *Personal History of Henry the Eighth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929).

²⁹ László Lóránth, writing in *Nyugat*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1934).

³⁰ *Nyugat*, vol. 27, no. 19 (1934).

³¹ Cited in Tóbiás, *Korda Sándor*, p. 56.

³² Cited *ibid.*, p. 71.

³³ Letter, Móricz to Biró, 23 Dec. 1929. Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum (hereafter PIM), Manuscript Archives, 1994, collection M 110.

³⁴ *Gods and Kings. Six plays by Lajos Biro* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1945).

³⁵ Guidó Majádi, “Interjú Biró Lajossal, az angol íróval,” in *Szivárvány*, vol. 2, no. 42 (18 Oct. 1947), p. 7.

³⁶ Letter, Biró to Lajos Hatvany, 14 March [1940], *Levelek Hatvany Lajoshoz*, 534. The Hungarian phrase they tried to translate was “mentünk mendégeltünk, álltunk áldogáltunk, sírtunk sírdogáltunk.”

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Ferenc Molnár, *Szülőfalum, Pest* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1962), 584-587.

³⁹ Ferenc Göndör (Kaposvár, 1885 - New York, 1954), was a war correspondent in World War I. In 1919 he fled to Austria from where he emigrated to the US in 1926. He founded the liberal, left-of-centre journal *Az Ember* late in 1918 — and took it with him first to Vienna and then to New York. It published till 1952.

⁴⁰ László Flórián and János Vajda, *Reinitz Béla* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1978), 132-133, 150-151, 160-161.

⁴¹ Letter, Margit Vészi to Hatvany, 9 April 1936. *Levelek Hatvany Lajoshoz*, 489-490.

⁴² Undated letter, Földessy to Hatvany, *ibid.*, 437.

⁴³ Elek Falus (1880-1950), engraver, commercial artist. PIM manuscript collection V. 4326/197.

⁴⁴ Zoltán Horváth, "Biró Lajos 1880-1948," *Népszava*, 11 Sept. 1948.

⁴⁵ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity. Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 37-58.

Ethnohistory in Hungary between the Two World Wars: Elemér Mályusz and István Szabó

Vilmos Erős

Historical method as we know it today was established in the nineteenth century when the professionalism pioneered by Leopold von Ranke was adopted first by German historians, and then spread to France, England, the United States, and even Russia and Italy.¹ The gist of Ranke's methodological reform was to apply the techniques of textual criticism to the writing of history. What counted as historical evidence from that time on was documentary sources: deeds, grants, and charters. Verifying the authenticity of these sources and establishing what exactly they meant came to be considered the historian's most important task, and the single best guarantee of historical objectivity, the historian's duty being, in Ranke's words, to tell his tale *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. Essentially, all the contemporary advances in the teaching of history served to promote the new methodology. The departments of history being set up at the major European universities for the first time ever offered a new kind of professional training, one which included exercises in source criticism, and the study of auxiliary disciplines such as diplomacy, paleography, heraldry, epigraphy, and so on. There were also other indications of the growing emphasis on professionalism. Vast source collections were published (most of them modeled on the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*), and historical journals sprang up all over Europe, as did historical societies dedicated to the coordinated research of the particular nation's history.

Reformist that he was in the sphere of methodology, Leopold von Ranke was thoroughly conservative in his philosophy of history. Ranke put the weight of his immense authority behind the established practice of identifying "history" with affairs of state and foreign policy, expressly formulating the doctrine of the primacy of foreign

affairs (*Primat der Außenpolitik*). He held that historians, like politicians, must focus not on social issues or a nation's internal conditions, but on the problem of power and the shifts in the balance of power. The struggle of the various nations to maintain what power positions they had, Ranke argued, or to extend their sway at the expense of the others, was the very driving force of history. Due in no small part to Ranke's immense prestige, historians continued to focus on narrative political history, and on the lives of statesmen and military leaders, "great personalities" who shaped their times. This entire approach, called historicism by some scholars, took a modern turn with the advent of New History in the United States, the *Annales* in France, and the new social history that started in Germany after the Second World War. What all these schools had in common was the determination to establish "scientific" history writing. Reassessing the role of the historian, they emphasized not so much the critical evaluation of the sources, but the need to analyze the law-like regularities behind all phenomena, and the main trends of development. These law-like regularities, they held, were most evident in a society's material culture and the patterns of social and economic development. To reconstruct them, one needed to study not documentary sources, but new types of historical evidence: maps, censuses, church registers (for births and deaths), tools, foodstuffs, and so on. To help investigate this source material, the "scientific" schools turned to the insights and techniques of the "other" social sciences: ethnography, geography, linguistics, anthropology, archeology, sociology, and economics. The change was reflected also in the training recommended for would-be historians. Rather than focusing on the auxiliary sciences, as their nineteenth-century counterparts did, historians were encouraged to acquire competence in all the social sciences. All the above schools concurred in their repudiation of Ranke's *Primat der Außenpolitik*. They concurred also in their belief in the *Primat der Innenpolitik*, i.e., that the main responsibility of the historian lies in fostering initiatives aimed at improving society.

The modernization of historiography under the impact of New History and the *Annales* began in the inter-war years, but it was only after the Second World War that the "scientific" trend really came into its own. The Rankean type of narrative political history, however, has more than managed to linger on, as the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s so spectacularly demonstrated.

In Hungary it was not until the post-1867 dualist era that historians came to identify with the professionalism advocated by Ranke.² The landmarks of this development were similar to those marking the progress of historicism elsewhere: source publications, reliance on the auxiliary sciences, and the establishment of historical societies and journals. And while few historians were as rigorous as Ranke in their sifting of the “historical evidence,” narrative political history was the focus of most history writing. There were, of course, initiatives that went counter to the prevailing trend. Gyula Pauler, for instance, who had high praise for Comte’s positivism, advocated probing for the universal features of human progress, and urged the investigation of collective, mass phenomena, and aspects of life generally subsumed under the heading of cultural history.³

Between the two world wars the dominant trend in Hungarian history writing was *Geistesgeschichte* (spiritual history, sometimes called intellectual history or the history of ideas) as represented by the works of Gyula Szekfű, Bálint Hóman, Gyula Kornis, Tibor Joó, József Deér, and Péter Vaczy. Fully versed in the works of Ranke, Meinecke, Dilthey and Lamprecht, Gyula Szekfű, the most prominent of these historians, was also the one to conclude that Hungarian history would lend itself admirably to a consistent synthesis.⁴ In his *A magyar állam életrajza* [The biography of the Hungarian state] (1918), and in his *Bethlen Gábor* [Gábor Bethlen] (1929), Szekfű expressly models his approach on Meinecke’s,⁵ and tells the entire story from the vantage point of *raison d’état* and the national point of view. This meant that for him the central issue of Hungarian history was the territorial integrity of historic Hungary, the Hungary of St. Stephen. This particular outlook is even more evident in Szekfű’s *Három nemzedék* [Three generations] (1920), the veritable Bible of the period. Here, he blames the nineteenth-century Hungarian liberals for being responsible for the disintegration that resulted in Trianon. Blinded by the political tradition of the nobility’s struggle for Hungarian independence throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ran Szekfű’s indictment of the liberals, they construed the word “freedom” to mean “independence from the Habsburgs,” and failed to realize that the territorial integrity of historic Hungary (i.e., Hungarian rule over the nationalities) could be maintained only with the support of an outside great power, namely, the Habsburg Empire. (This correlation was something that Széchenyi had recognized, and Szekfű, accordingly, esteemed him as by far the greatest Hungarian.)

One finds the same train of thought in all the sections that Szekfű wrote in *Magyar Történet* [Hungarian History] (published in 1929-1933), a seven-volume synthesis he produced together with Bálint Hóman. (Szekfű authored the period stretching from King Matthias Corvinus and the Renaissance to the date of publication). In the final analysis, at every stage of Hungary's history, we find him dividing the leading politicians into two groups: those who believed in "Small Hungary" and those who believed in "Greater Hungary". The "small Hungarians" were those whose primary goal was national independence from the Habsburgs. But this aspiration of theirs, he maintained, was motivated not by some lofty ideal — the love of freedom, for example — but by selfish "class interest" (the nobility's determination to protect its privileges), coupled with a passion for dissension and upheaval inherited from their Eastern ancestors. Another name for this "passion" was Protestantism, which as Szekfű saw it, was inspired by the resolve to spark denominational conflict and create disorder.

The "great Hungarians" on the other hand, had always appreciated that the great power status of the Habsburg Empire was a historical necessity. They recognized the need for political compromise, and strove to promote social reform and the nation's material improvement and intellectual progress (naturally, with Habsburg support). Szekfű's synthesis presents the Baroque culture of the eighteenth century as the zenith of Hungarian history, a time when the country's territorial integrity had been more or less restored, when religious (Protestant vs. Catholic) and political (Estates vs. absolutism) infighting no longer undermined the unity of the nation, when the country's economic and cultural development picked up momentum, and its resettlement began.

Even in the late '30s, Szekfű was very much preoccupied by matters of external politics and national sovereignty. In his *Allam és nemzet* [State and Nation] (1942), he rejected both the French notion of a political nation and the German "ethnic nation" concepts, and presented a uniquely Hungarian notion, one rooted in St. Stephen's tolerance toward the "foreigners". It was a nation concept which guaranteed the country's minorities a high degree of autonomy, while its *raison d'être* was to safeguard and restore Hungary's territorial integrity.

Elemér Mályusz

One historian who strongly and openly rejected Szekfű's views right from the beginning of his own professional career was Elemér Mályusz. The first tilt in his intellectual and ideological jousts with Szekfű was his article "A reformkor nemzedéke" [The Reform Generation].⁶ In this study Mályusz refuted Szekfű's claim that the middle nobility of the Reform Era was prompted to armed confrontation with the Habsburgs only by its obsessive determination to redress the Court's encroachment on its political privileges and argued that its goal was the country's ennoblement. To substantiate his interpretation, Mályusz pointed to the reports of the various county committees appointed by the 1791-92 Diet, which already contained the outlines of a program of modernization and "bourgeois transformation". As for the anti-government posture of the uneducated lesser nobility, that, Mályusz maintained, was a consequence of their deteriorating social status and their resentment of attempts by the great landowners and the central government alike to curtail their customary rights through enclosure.

Mályusz also rejected the interpretation advanced by Szekfű in *Magyar Történet*, his main objection being to the inconsistency of Szekfű's vision of the country's cultural development.⁷ Szekfű saw the Hungarian Renaissance as confined to the reign of Matthias Corvinus, and gave no explanation for the subsequent "immobility" that set in up to what he considered to be the beginning of the Baroque in the eighteenth century. Mályusz, on the other hand, held that "the Renaissance" was applicable to the Hungarian culture of the entire sixteenth century, and that the seventeenth century was already the time of the Baroque in Hungary. In other words — and this is Mályusz's main thesis — Hungary's early modern cultural development kept pace with the intellectual and cultural trends of Western Europe, and had kept abreast even in earlier times for — as he demonstrated with an analysis of the legend of Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád⁸ — as early as the thirteenth century, Hungary had been able to absorb the Gothic, the most modern cultural trend of that time. Mályusz also took exception to Szekfű's views on Transylvania and the Transylvanian Reformation. As he saw it, both the Transylvanian educational system, with its emphasis on the natural sciences, and the Transylvanian Reformed denominations, with their gospel and practice of tolerance, were veritable harbingers of the Enlightenment. In short, Hungarian

cultural development at the time was on a par with that of England and the Netherlands.

Mályusz considered the tolerant religious policies of Ferenc II. Rákóczi to be the culmination of this development, and proof that, left on its own, Hungary would have been capable of ennoblement and modernization. One of the gravest tragedies of Hungarian history, he maintained, was the period of Habsburg reaction that set in following Rákóczi's defeat — a time of resurgent religious fanaticism and subverted national sentiment, a time when Hungarian Protestants were driven off their lands and foreigners were brought in and were settled all over the country.

In essence, it was on a political and ideological plane that Mályusz attacked Szekfű's *Geistesgeschichte*-inspired interpretation of history. The most serious shortcoming of this representation of Hungarian history, as Mályusz saw it, was that Szekfű attributed far too positive a role to the Habsburgs, and seemed to have no sense of Hungary as a sovereign and autonomous culture. A dangerous attitude, given that Hungary could depend on nothing but its own strength in the pursuit of its national aspirations — and here Mályusz, too, was thinking of Trianon. Thence his eagerness to see ethnohistorical research start up; it was, he believed, the only way to demonstrate the sovereignty of Hungarian culture. This was an issue he would return to time and time again.⁹ In other words, Mályusz realized that to win his battle against *Geistesgeschichte*, he needed not only to refute its ideology, but also to transcend its methodology.

The roots of Mályusz's ethnohistory¹⁰ go back to the early 1920s. His own doctoral thesis, *Turóc megye kialakulása* [The Formation of Turoc County] published in 1922,¹¹ deals with a topic that anticipated the theses his students were to write a decade later. That all this, though not called ethnohistory at the time, was part of a full-fledged historiographic program is illustrated by Mályusz's 1924 study on the challenges of doing local history.¹²

After describing the work of Dezső Csánki and Károly Tagányi, two late nineteenth-century pioneers of local history and historical geography, he goes on to urge historians to follow the lead of the German *Territorialgeschichte* [territorial history], and focus more on local history. The study of "non-documentary" sources (land registers, church registers, place names, etc.) would facilitate the clarification of questions of settlement history, public administration,

property relations, and genealogy, and would lend a sociological dimension to Hungarian historiography.

The importance of the sociological approach to the study of local history remained a key concept also in "A népiség története" (Ethnohistory) written in 1931,¹³ and the most comprehensive formulation Mályusz would ever give of his program. The study starts with a definition of the notion of "the ethnic". As opposed to "the national", the conscious expression of a people's cultural and political aspirations, "the ethnic" was shorthand for the spontaneous ways and cultural preferences of a particular people. The best way to get started in ethnohistorical research, he went on to say, was to write "synthetic" local and/or county histories. By "synthetic" he meant just the opposite of the village by village approach of the prewar county histories: the historian was to focus on the small, organically related historic, geographical units: estates, valleys, plains, and so on — units he would later call "cultural regions", and whose study he expected to reveal an entire network of Southern, Eastern and Northern cultural contacts.

Mályusz honed his theory by clashing swords with proponents of the most powerful historical ideology of his time.¹⁴ Taking a direct stab at *Geistesgeschichte*, its preoccupation with Western cultural influences and its exclusive reliance on the evidence of the written word, he set ethnohistory the task of concentrating on "spontaneous" cultural elements such as roads, means of transportation, architecture, settlements, systems of local political and administrative organization, and "anthropological" data of every kind that might serve to give an accurate picture of the day-to-day life of the people.

Mályusz's views on the nature and techniques of ethnohistory, were thus fully developed by the time he came to give his "Introduction to Ethnohistory" course in the 1936-37 academic year. One of the main issues addressed in the lectures was the matter of the "auxiliary disciplines" which Mályusz proposed to "modify" with a view to making them integral parts of the discipline of ethnohistory. He was particularly enthusiastic about the potential of ethnography and of linguistics, attaching great importance to the study of dialects (and their exact geographic mapping), and to tracing the origins of place names and personal names. He was also keen to have his students learn to use questionnaires, and to set up the institutional framework of ethnohistorical research.¹⁵

The last of Mályusz's theoretical works on ethnohistory was the series of articles collected and published as *A magyar történet-*

tudomány [Hungarian Historiography] in 1942. In these articles he called upon the most prestigious of the country's scholarly bodies — the Academy of Sciences, the Budapest Pázmány Péter University, the Historical Society — to shift the focus of their activities to ethnohistory. The Academy, he suggested, should offer bursaries to students of ethnohistory, which he wanted to see introduced as one of the subjects in which prospective secondary school teachers could major at the university. Mályusz also called upon his fellow historians to chart the layout of all the towns in Hungary, to do research on the question of assimilation, and to introduce the notions “ethnic ground” [*Volksboden*] and “cultural ground” [*Kulturboden*] among the accepted terms of historical geography. The program carried explicit political overtones as well: the Historical Society, Mályusz submitted, would do well to set up an institute for the study of the Jewish question. It was this book that cost Mályusz his job at the university after the war, when he was also stripped of his membership in the Academy of Sciences.

Mályusz was not just a theoretician, first and foremost he was a practicing historian. His first attempt to put his program of ethnohistory into practice was his doctoral dissertation, in which he examined how, thanks to a consistent policy on the part of the exchequer, the crown land of Zólyom evolved in time into the noble county of Turóc. His next work of ethnohistory was written ten years later at Pál Teleki's behest. *Geschichte des ungarischen Volkstums* (finally published in 1940)¹⁶ tells the story of the peoples of Hungary focusing on the Magyars' internal colonization of Pannonia in the decades following the Conquest, the progressive consolidation of their rule over the entire area, the settlement of the region by successive waves of immigrant peoples, and the pattern of social development that evolved in the region up to Werbőczy's time.

Mályusz's next major works with an ethnohistorical slant grew out of the lectures he gave in the latter half of the '30s on “the ethnic ground” and “the cultural ground” of the Magyars in medieval times. *A magyarság és a nemzetiségek Mohács előtt* and *A középkori magyar nemzetiségi politika* both appeared in 1939,¹⁷ the latter giving rise to considerable controversy, and not just in academic circles. In the study on the country's ethnic composition prior to Mohács, Mályusz argued that in respect of the ethnic composition of the population, fifteenth-century Hungary fell into three major areas: 22 counties inhabited only by Magyars, 26 counties where Magyars comprised 80 percent of the

population, and 9 counties where Magyars were a minority, i.e., they comprised 20 percent of the population. From all this he concluded that the medieval Kingdom of Hungary was Magyar in character — not primarily because of its Magyar political institutions but because of its predominantly Magyar population. Mályusz had made much the same point in his lecture series on the Magyars in medieval times, where he demonstrated that the House of Árpád had pursued a deliberate settlement policy in establishing villages in the Military Frontier Zone for the protection of the Magyar population.¹⁸ Addressing Szekfű in his *A középkori magyar nemzetiségi politika*, Mályusz presents yet further evidence to support his contention that there was nothing arbitrary in the immigration policies pursued by Hungary's medieval kings. A close study of place names of medieval origin, he points out, indicates that the immigrant peoples were not settled on large, contiguous tracts of land, but interspersed among the Magyar population, obviously with a view of accelerating their assimilation.

Mályusz does not dispute the reality of a tolerant, “democratic” nationality policy, one that respected the autonomy of the minorities, but he dates it not to the time of St. Stephen but to the fifteenth century, a time of growing influence for every one of the three estates, a development which tended to strengthen the local organs of self-government. In other words, unlike Szekfű who, by way of providing the Kingdom of St. Stephen with moral legitimacy, posited a spirit of tolerance toward the national minorities going back to the “Catholic spirituality” of St. Stephen, Mályusz insisted that tolerance was a product of social development. His purpose was to prove the strength and autonomy of Hungarian culture. The spirit of ethnic tolerance, he claimed, was not the legacy of some foreign priest — the author of the *Libellus de institutione morem* (written in the name of St. Stephen for the instruction of his son Imre) — it was something that the Hungarian nation achieved through mobilizing spiritual resources of its own.

As the first step to providing ethnohistory with an institutional framework, in 1932, Mályusz, working under the auspices of the National Archives, started a seminar, rather a working group on the settlement history of Upper Hungary. The aim was to establish the exact border between the Hungarian and Slovak linguistic zones; the tangible outcome was the publication of the *A magyarság és a nemzetiségek* [The Magyars and the National Minorities] series.

Another milestone in the institutionalization of ethnohistory came in 1937 when the Institute for Ethnohistory and Settlement History was set up at the Pázmány Péter University. The institute was meant to publish the *Település és Népiségtörténeti Értekezések* [Studies in Settlement History and Ethnohistory], the series in which the doctoral dissertations submitted by Mályusz's students would appear.¹⁹

As indicated earlier, other important researches of Mályusz's can be referred to also. I have already mentioned some of his social historical studies, but to them can be added for example "A patrioniális királyság," "A karizmatikus királyság," "A magyar köz-nemesség kialakulása," "A magyar társadalom a Hunyadiak korában," "A Rákóczi kor társadalma."²⁰

In these studies Mályusz outlined the development of the Hungarian society, from its beginnings till the 19-th century and even further.²¹ One of the most striking features of this panorama is the central position of the nobility, which — according to Mályusz — possessed a higher elite imbued with European culture and political capability. This social elite was in Hungary the leading force of the social reforms and modernization, even that of embourgeoisement, in contrast to the Western countries where the "third estate" fulfilled this function. The bourgeoisie in Hungary could have played the same role since it was of German origin and analyzing the self-government policy of the towns reveals that they had an aristocratic constitution.²²

Other important directions of Mályusz's researches were his partly ecclesiastical and spiritual history (*Geistesgeschichte*) studies, some of which have been already mentioned. The most outstanding of these were "Árpádházi Boldog Margit" [Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád], "A türelmi rendelet," "A pálosrend a középkor végén" [The Paulist Order at the End of the Middle Ages], and the monographs *Az egyházi társadalom a középkori Magyarországon* [Ecclesiastical society in Hungary in the Middle Ages], *A gótika Magyarországon* [The Gothic in Hungary], *Magyar renaissance - magyar barokk* [Hungarian Renaissance, Hungarian Baroque], *A felvilágosodás Magyarországon* [The History of Hungary in the Age of Enlightenment.] and his chronicle-studies: *Thuróczy János krónikája* [The Chronicle of János Thuróczy], and *V. István-kori geszta* [The Gesta of the Age of Stephen V.],²³ etc. From these studies is obvious that Mályusz did not reject completely the *Geistesgeschichte* tradition, only the type of *Geistesgeschichte* represented by

Hóman and Szekfű. Similar ideas can be detected in Mályusz's ecclesiastical researches. For example in his *Egyházi társadalom a középkori Magyarországon* [Ecclesiastical Society in Hungary of the Middle Ages] (the roots of which go back to the thirties, to his lectures at the University of Budapest, entitled "A gótika Magyarországon")²⁴ he attempted to prove that the paramount feature of the social development in Hungary was the "secularization" process, the formation of a certain secular intellectual rank within the society. This prepared the (also secular) ideas of the Reformation and Protestantism which arose from deep social and cultural desires.

István Szabó

Another important figure of the Hungarian "ethnohistory" was István Szabó²⁵ whose synthesis about Hungary's demographic development is widely known.²⁶ According to the literature dealing with this historian from Debrecen,²⁷ Szabó was involved mainly in three fields of historical research.

First of these fields was his researches dealing with the history of his native city, Debrecen, including his studies about the town during the revolution in 1848-1849 when it became for the first time the capital of the country.²⁸ After the Second World War he returned to this theme when on the occasion of the centenary of the revolution he edited — with the well-known protestant bishop and church historian, Imre Révész Jr. — the book with the title *Debrecen*, the capital of the independence war in Hungary.²⁹ The book stirred up heavy debates and provoked fierce criticism from communist historians, to which subject I'm going to get back later. Other important studies of Szabó concerning the history of his native city and its surroundings (The Great Hungarian Plain) include: "A debreceni tanyarendszer kialakulása" [The development of the settlement system around Debrecen], "A tokaji rév és Debrecen" [The ford of Tokaj and Debrecen], "A debreceni közösség" [The community of Debrecen], "*Debrecen a történelemben*" [Debrecen in the history (of Hungary)], etc.³⁰

The striking feature of these studies is what he started originally with the political aspects of the history of the city ("*histoire evenementielle*," "drum and trumpet" history), then shifted gradually towards the social historical aspects. His main concern became (see his later studies about the haiduks, market towns, etc.³¹) the possibilities of

a special Hungarian ways of bourgeois development based mainly on the peasantry. According to him the situation of the peasantry even in the Middle Ages was improving, and at the end of the Middle Ages the decline can be explained not by the deteriorating situation, exploitation of the peasantry, but much more by the “attracting effect” of the market towns, offering the possibility of higher standard of living within their walls.³²

Another important field of research for Szabó was his “ethno-” or “population” history studies. His main works in this respect include the *Ugocsa county* (1937), The biography of the Hungarian People (1941),³³ *Az asszimiláció a magyarság történetében* [The Assimilation in the History of Hungary] (1942), [The Settlement History of the Nationalities in Hungary],³⁴ *A középkori magyar falu* [The Hungarian Village in the Middle Ages] (1966), *A falurendszer kilakulása Magyarországon* [The Development of the Hungarian Village System] (1969).³⁵

As also mentioned above, in these studies Szabó meticulously explored the proportion of the Hungarians and other peoples during the 9-th and 10-th centuries, the questions of assimilation in the Middle Ages, the devastations of the Turkish occupation, the new settlement in the 18-th century, and the demographic shifts of the 19-th century. These studies (like those of Mályusz) can be evaluated by two different points of view: by the methodological one they strengthened the social historical aspect of his orientation. In contrast to Szekfü,³⁶ Szabó concentrated much more on the social, population aspects of Hungarian history,³⁷ applying widely the methodological innovations of Mályusz (relying on new, non-written sources, cooperation with allied sciences, linguistics, statistics, geography, ethnography, etc.). From the ideological aspect he represented the “ethnic” nation concept, in contrast to Szekfü’s “political” nation idea. That meant for example³⁸ that he analyzed the history of assimilation in Hungary’s history from its beginnings, stating from the time when the Hungarian “ethnic” character took shape at the time of the occupation of the Carpathian Basin. Basically this character (in spite of the different stages and phenomena of assimilation, settlement of other nationalities, etc.) didn’t change during the later development. Or, if it changed, e.g. in the 18-th century, with the settlements of the Germans and other foreigners in the territories administered from Vienna, Szabó evaluated it as a factor that worked to the detriment of Hungarians.³⁹

The third important direction of the historical researches of Szabó's was the history of the Hungarian peasantry. His best known works in this respect are *A magyar parasztság története* [The history of the Hungarian peasantry] (1940), (the first synthesis of the history of this important social class, apart from the book of Acsády), *A jobbágy birtoklása az örökös jobbágyság korában* [The possession of the serfs in the era of second serfdom] (1946), *Tanulmányok a magyar parasztság történetéből* [Studies on the history of the Hungarian peasantry] (1948), and the two volume *Tanulmányok a parasztság történetéhez a kapitalizmus korában* [Studies about the peasantry (in Hungary) in the Age of Capitalism] (1965).⁴⁰

The best way to evaluate the ideas developed by Szabó in these works seems to be to focus on the controversies that these works evoked. One of them (which was co-authored with Gyula Kristó) described the level of the Hungarian culture during the conquest of the Carpathian Basin and later in the early Middle Ages.⁴¹ In his famous book about the evolution of the village system in Hungary Szabó advanced the view that the so-called "winter settlements" can be regarded as the antecedents of the Hungarian village system. This interpretation meant that the Hungarians of the times were not nomadic, but a half nomadic people, that is to say that they had a much higher level of civilization and standard of living even before the conquest of the Carpathian Basin.

Another important tenet of Szabó's researches was the conclusion that the situation of the Hungarian serfs improved during the Middle Ages.⁴² In 1954 he published a study, launching a debate with the "Young Turk" spokesman of the Marxist historiography György Székely, about the significance and interpretation of the serf laws, enacted in 1351.⁴³ In this study Szabó attempted to prove that these laws do not mirror the deteriorating situation of the peasantry. In the preceding years an epidemic swept over the country after which emerged a severe shortage of manpower and the feudal lords attempted to attract the serfs to their demesnes with the promise of not levying the taxes for a certain period. This gesture could be made by the big land-owners but not by the lower nobility and that is why in the Diet of 1351 they enacted the law levying the *nona* (ninth). According to Szabó this law was in tune with the other laws of that Assembly.

Szabó's paramount debate with the Marxist historians dealt with the so-called "second serfdom" theory, which became one of the fundamental tenets of the Marxist historiography after the Second

World War.⁴⁴ The roots of Szabó's ideas go back to the researches of the famous agricultural history school led by Sándor Domanovszky whose students explored the big estate structures in Hungary's economy and society in the early modern period.⁴⁵ The theoretical and ideological bases of these studies was intended against Gyula Szekfű's *Geistesgeschichte* school, according to which Hungary's historical evolution is part of Western Europe, and for instance Transylvania was the last bastion of the European culture: the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Enlightenment, Protestantism, etc. in contrast to the culturally underdeveloped Balkan and East-European territories. Domanovszky and his followers contested this thesis and wanted to emphasize (instead of the cultural superiority of the Hungarians) much more the similarities in the historical development of these small nations,⁴⁶ and they found these parallel motifs in the circumstances of social historical developments. Applying the models of the German agricultural history they distinguished the terms *Grundherrschaft* (demesne) and *Gutsherrschaft* (estate). According to this thesis the East-European (among them the Hungarian) development took a turn from the Western one at about the beginning of the 16th century, when instead of the *Gutsherrschaft* a new form of big estates, the *Grundherrschaft* (demesne) came to the fore in these territories, which had the consequence that the nobility and the lords took the agricultural production in their hands — instead of establishing the freeholder system of Western Europe, which become a direct forerunner of the modern capitalist system. The consequence of this “turn” was the deteriorating situation of the peasantry in these territories, the modernization process came to a standstill, the bourgeoisie remained weak, and the phenomena of the so-called “re-feudalization” process strengthened causing other political problems later, for example the failure of bourgeois revolutions.⁴⁷

After the Second World War and with the communist takeover, the new Marxist historiography capitalized linked together (for his own political/ideological sakes) with the ideas of Lenin about the “Prussian” way of capitalistic development in Eastern Europe (from the Elbe River to the East) which had the function to deliver a legitimizing ideology of the Soviet occupation of this region (and justify the political decisions of Yalta dividing Europe, and rendering Eastern Europe to the Soviet interest sphere.)⁴⁸

The starting point for Szabó's ideas developed in his studies partly before and during the Second World War, but mainly after

1945,⁴⁹ were the outcomes of the debate with the Domanovszky school, that means the similarities of the East European development (instead of stressing the one-sided Western orientation of the Hungarian culture and history respectively). But, according to Szabó, the Hungarian development neither belongs exclusively to the Eastern phenomena, because for example the Hungarian serf never was a *holop*, a slave who could not possess any personal rights. Therefore we cannot speak of a “second serfdom” in Hungary, not even of a first one in the Middle Ages, as we could observe in the former studies (see his debate with György Székely) the situation of the peasants were improving even at that period (they could freely move to another place, or flee to market towns, they could even elevate themselves to the ranks of nobility, etc.). This tendency continued even after the Dózsa uprising,⁵⁰ when after a certain time the serfs could move freely again which opened many possibilities to improve their situation: they could move to market towns, they could become members of the military garrisons, they could become “*hajdu*”. In the 18-th century the German peasants could not have been attracted to repopulate territories depopulated during the Ottoman occupation with the promise of becoming serfs, deprived of all personal rights and possessions.⁵¹

One of the most significant studies in this respect written by Szabó is *A jobbágy birtoklása...* [The possession of the serf...] (1946) in which he analyses in detail the rights of the peasants for possessing vineyards, forests, etc. We have to add to the above mentioned interests his special fascination for the phenomena of the “farmstead” (*tanya*), which from the end of 18-th century became a special feature of the development of Hungarian settlement patterns (first of all on the Great Plain), proving that not all of the peasantry belonged to the great nobles — so there are many signs of a bourgeois development in Hungary that were based on a free peasantry.

All in all, according to Szabó, Hungary’s development can be placed between Eastern and Western Europe — it is a Central European, transitional phenomenon — and this idea was at that time in direct conflict with the official, Marxist ideology. It embodied in many respects the “third road” theory conceived between the two World Wars by the famous populist writer László Németh.⁵² Szabó was also, in a certain sense, also a forerunner of Jenő Szücs and his well-known theory about the three regions of Europe conceived in the 1980’s.⁵³

Mályusz and Szabó played very important roles in the editing and publishing of historical source materials. Mályusz’s work in this

respect includes a volume containing the papers of Palatinate Archduke Alexander Leopold, and another volume of documents dealing with Joseph II's Toleration Edict, and still another one dealing with the age of King Sigismund. Other relevant documentary collections of István Szabó are the records of Ugocsa County, another volume containing documents dealing with the history of the Hungarian peasantry, and still another containing the tax-rolls of the Bács Bodrog region.⁵⁴ The first remark that can be made regarding these publishing activities is that they secured a very solid scientific basis for their theories. These documentary collections underpinned, for example, Mályusz's criticism of Szekfű and later of the populists, or the members of the National Romantic School (Jenő Csuday, István R. Kiss, and Jenő Zoványi).⁵⁵

This also resulted in the fact that, based on the very scholarly source collection about the documents regarding the age of King Sigismund Hungarian academics today have quite clear picture about Sigismund. In the literature published prior to Mályusz's volume he was portrayed as a ruler not being interested at all in the problems of the Hungarian nation — that was why he was either despised or neglected. Mályusz discovered him as the initiator of many modernization tendencies of the country (including his laws supporting the towns, the institutional system, etc.) and in this way he was placed between Róbert Károly and King Matthias as one of the three outstanding promoters of the social and institutional reform of Hungary in the second half of the Middle Ages.⁵⁶

The other important feature of these source collections is that they feature the approach to Hungarian history of both historians. Mályusz in his introduction to these volumes depicts in detail the social and cultural background of the periods covered. These collections contain many so-called non-written sources which reflect the wider social history of several elements of society, including the upper classes, and in the case of Szabó, even the peasantry. These new sources include settlement names, names of persons, letters written by peasants, village laws, tax polls, tribunal records, town maps, municipal papers, etc. And they represent an interdisciplinary approach: Anthropology, Ethnography, Linguistics, Geography, etc., which was deemed necessary in order to explore and in solving historical problems.

In this connection a supplementary remark can be added that in the case of Szabó these activities included also ideological aspects.

After the Second World War he initiated (on the centenary of the revolution of 1848-49) a series of documentary volumes pertaining to the history of the Hungarian peasantry.⁵⁷ For this undertaking (supported warmly by another outstanding social historian, István Hajnal⁵⁸) Szabó employed the strict scholarly methods and wanted to recruit the collaborators including Imre Wellmann, Jenő Berlász, Kálmán Guoth,⁵⁹ Bálint Ila and others — all old fashioned, “bourgeois” historians. But the leadership of this undertaking was taken out from his hands by people who alleged that Szabó portrayed relations between the serfs and their lords as being too idyllic, neglecting the “class war” fought between these social classes.⁶⁰

Finally we have to refer briefly to the political aspects of Mályusz’s and Szabó’s historical writing. Mályusz’s main work in this respect is his pamphlet *The Fugitive Bolsheviks*⁶¹ that Count Pál Teleki had commissioned him (along with Szekfű) to write in 1927.⁶² In the end Mályusz wrote the work alone because Szekfű had taken over the editorship of *Magyar Szemle* (Hungarian Review.) C. A. Macartney evaluated the book as a genuine political pamphlet (being full of invectives) because in the work Mályusz denounced the most important participants of the revolutions in 1918-19 (already in emigration at that time) as traitors whose behavior during the revolution and emigration could be explained by their egoistic, anarchic “revolutionary soul”, which was embodied foremost of all by the “Jewish” Max Stirner. In this respect another stone of astonishment in Mályusz’s career is his also widely known book entitled *A magyar történettudomány* [The Hungarian Historical Scholarship] (1942), published originally in a form of a series of articles in the extreme right oriented journal of Béla Imrédy, *Egyedül Vagyunk* [We Are Alone]. In this work Mályusz claimed that the whole Hungarian historical scholarship needed restructuring according to the principles of *Volksgeschichte* or ethnohistory. (He regarded ethnohistory not as one of the many branches of history, but he felt that all other branches should be reconstructed in order that they pursue exclusively “ethnohistorical” researches.)

In the introduction of this book Mályusz conceived his ideas about the “political” and “ethnic” nation proposing the carrying through of the latter, which comprised the purging of the Hungarian nation from the foreigners, its enemies (Jews first of all). Mályusz even claimed the establishment of an institution for the research of the

“negative” role of the Jews in Hungarian history, but his proposal has not been materialized.

The political consequences of István Szabó’s views about Hungarian historical development are reflected by the fierce debates about his books: studies about the Hungarian peasantry and Debrecen the capital of Hungary during the second phase of the independence war 1848-49.⁶³ The second of these works was especially heavily criticized by Marxist historians who alleged for example that Szabó was too lenient toward of the so-called “Peace Party” and eulogized the role of burghers of Debrecen — instead of the role of the working class. The most striking charge against Szabó was that he and his followers were uncritical of Kossuth’s peasant policy. Szabó had justified Kossuth’s policy of “free soil possession” and opposed the approach (of land distribution) advocated by more radical leaders (Vasvári, Táncsics, etc.) of the revolution. Szabó stuck to the rightness of the policy of Kossuth claiming that the land distributing policy of the leftists would have alienated the nobility from the goals of the revolution and the independence war. Szabó was right: the nobility was the leading force of the rebellion against the Habsburgs in 1848-49 — and even in the uprisings of the previous centuries.⁶⁴

The officials of the reigning power didn’t dare to touch Szabó personally, although he was persecuted to a certain extent, but two of his collaborators were sentenced to prison in the infamous penal colony of Recsk with the accusation of a planned uprising against the regime. Many followers of him took an active part in the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 when he was elected to a co-president of the revolutionary committee at the university of Debrecen in that October-November days of the uprising against the Stalinist-communist system.

Conclusions

At this point we can venture an evaluation of the contribution Mályusz and Szabó made to Hungarian historiography. Mályusz’s ethnohistory was the revival of the positivist traditions of the nineteenth century. The legacy of positivism, as his contemporaries were quick to point out, was evident in his preoccupation with the collective, and with the law-like regularities of development, and in his concentration on cultural history. But ethnohistory proposed to give an account of

cultural development with full regard to its grounding in economic history and historical geography. Instead of political and administrative units, it took organically related historical and/or geographic regions for its units of analysis, and investigated them at all levels and with all the tools that we have come to associate with micro-history and micro-geography. The picture is tainted, however, by the fact that the contemporary inspiration of Mályusz's ethnohistory was the *Volkstumskunde* associated with Aubin, Kötzschke, Keyser, and Spamer in the inter-war years. *Volkstumskunde* itself harked back to the nation concept espoused by Herder, Arndt, Fichte and the brothers Grimm, which posited race and ethnicity as the basis of nationhood, and defined national affiliation in terms of a community of descent, language and culture. It was an approach humanist in inspiration, but wide open to racist exploitation. Thus it was that by the turn of the century, the pan-German movement had made it into an ideology of world domination, one serving to substantiate the doctrine of the Germans' racial superiority over the Slavs. Allied with *Ostforschung*, another *fin-de-siècle* intellectual trend, *Volkstumskunde* came to present German history as essentially a crusade to spread German culture and to extend the area of German settlement (the German "ethnic ground" or *Volksboden*), principally toward the east. Empire building: the founding of cities, the introducing of the German legal system, organizing churches, was, according to this view, at the very heart of German history, as was the struggle for pan-German unification. (Paradoxically, for all its chauvinism, *Volkstumskunde* proved to be a highly fruitful trend in German historiography. As opposed to the tradition represented by Troeltsch, Meinecke, and the concentrating on the state, and the history of ideas and great personalities *Volkstumskunde* explored collective phenomena and material culture for sources of historical evidence, and encouraged a basically interdisciplinary approach.⁶⁵

Considered purely as a methodology, *Volkstumskunde*, like Mályusz's ethnohistory, would have had the potential for providing relatively impartial, in-depth depictions of particular segments of the past. There is, however, no way to disregard their political and ideological thrust. Mályusz's introductory lecture to the second semester of his course on ethnohistory leaves absolutely no doubt as to his explicitly political agenda. His studies of the early 1930s on the new German nationalism bear this out. Post-war Europe, he noted (and would continue to reiterate for another decade), had given rise to a

new kind of nationalism, one predicated not on state formations, but on ethnicity.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of Mályusz's concept of an "ethnic nation" was that it necessitated his excluding the country's Jews from the body politic. "Let us exclude the Jewry from our nation," he wrote; "let us dismiss, in amicable accord, all those who do not, in their heart of hearts, feel that they are thoroughly Hungarian."⁶⁶ Admittedly, Mályusz was not a racist: he did not believe that history was, in essence, the struggle of the various races for *Lebensraum*, with the superior races winning. In fact, in his "A népiség története" of 1931, he criticized German historians for identifying "culture" with German culture. The task facing Hungarian historians, he insisted, was to preserve for posterity what the Magyars had achieved jointly with the Slavs in the way of culture.

Mályusz's (and Szabó's) cultural nationalism was anti-German in several respects. For one thing, his very emphasis on the autonomy of Hungarian culture implied resistance to Hitler's attempts at expansionism. But there was also another aspect to it. Mályusz's cultural nationalism, as he himself admitted,⁶⁷ was meant to lay the groundwork for revisionism. His resolute underscoring of the strength and autonomy of Hungarian culture was meant to provide an alternative to Szekfű's vision of a Hungary whose fortunes were irrevocably tied to that of the Habsburgs.⁶⁸ Given the opportunity, Mályusz was suggesting, Hungary would be capable of carrying through a territorial revision on its own. All in all, however, Mályusz might most equitably be judged as having posited — as opposed to Szekfű's concept of nation as state — concept of the nation as culture.⁶⁹ For all its manifest ideological and political bias, in respect of methodology, ethnohistory anticipated some current approaches to social history. The lesson might prove as timely as the German re-visitation of *Volkstumskunde* has proved to be.

On the other hand we should remark that with the studies of Szabó in applying much more on the lower ranks of the society, the progressive message, the sociological aspects of the Hungarian "ethno-history" became much stronger, even paramount, which was able to offer a real alternative to the reigning *Geistesgeschichte* orientation between the two world wars. On top of all that, with his striving for applying the so called "third road" theory it became one of the most important opponents of the dominating communist historiography after 1945. This idea can be seen as a "scientific" protest against the Soviet

system and occupation. On the other (methodological) side it strengthens even the comparative aspects of the Hungarian historical understandings, which epitomizes the overtaking of the one-sided Hungarian-centered view of this scholarship and opens a door towards a comparative, East-Central European history.

NOTES

¹ E. Fueter, *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie* (München: Oldenbourg, 1911); H.E. Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1963); E. Breisach, *Historiography* (Chicago-London, 1983); Georg G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975); *Atlas of European Historiography (The Making of a Profession 1800-2005)*, edited by Ilaria Porciani and Lutz Raphael (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Vilmos Erős, *Modern historiográfia. Az újkori történetírás egy története* [Modern historiography. A history of modern historical writing] (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2015).

² For the development of Hungarian historiography see Emma Léderer, *A magyar polgári történetírás rövid története* [A Short History of Hungarian Bourgeois Historiography] (Budapest, 1969); Ágnes R. Várkonyi, *A pozitívista történetészlelet a magyar történetírásban* [Positivism in Hungarian Historiography], I-II, Budapest, 1973; Bela Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976). Ignác Romsics, *Clio Bűvöletében: Magyar történetírás a 19-20. században — nemzetközi kitekintéssel* [In the spell of Clio: Hungarian historiography in the 19th and 20th centuries — with international perspectives] (Budapest: Osiris, 2011). For Hungarian historiography between the two world wars, see also Ferenc Glatz, *Nemzeti kultúra - kulturált nemzet* [National Culture – a Nation of Culture] (Budapest, 1988.)

³ Gyula Pauler, “A pozitívizmus hatása a történetírára” [The Influence of Positivism on the Writing of History], *Századok*, 1871(5): 527-645, 624-641; and Gyula Pauler, “Comte Ágost és a történelem” [Auguste Comte and History], *Századok*, 1873 (7): 225-241, 391-406, 462-481.

⁴ Szekfű's major works, in chronological order: *A Magyar állam é/etrajza* [A Biography of the Hungarian State] (Budapest: Dick Manó, 1918); *Három nemzedék* [Three Generations] (Budapest, 1920); *Történet-politikai tanu/mányok* [Historical-political Studies] (Budapest: Magyar Irodalmi Társaság, 1924); *Bethlen Gábor* (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1929), *Magyar történet* [Hungarian History] (Budapest: Magyar

Történelmi Társulat, 1929-33), and *Állam és nemzet* [State and Nation] (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1942).

⁵ For Meinecke see Walter Hofer, *Geschichtsschreibung und Weltanschauung* (München: Oldenbourg, 1950); Ernst Schulin, “Das Problem der Individualität (Eine kritische Betrachtung des Historismus-Werkes von Friedrich Meinecke)” [The problem of individuality. A critical analyses of the historicism-work by Friedrich Meinecke], *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1963 (197): 102-133; Hans Klueing, “‘Vernunftrepublikanismus’ und ‘Vertrauensdiktatur’, Friedrich Meinecke in der Weimarer Republik,” *Historische Zeitschrift*, 1986 (242): 69-98.

⁶ Elemér Mályusz, “A reformkor nemzedéke” [The Generation of the Reform Period], *Századok*, 1923 (57-58): 17-75.

⁷ Elemér Mályusz, “Magyar reneszánsz, magyar barokk” [Hungarian Renaissance-Hungarian Baroque], *Budapesti Szemle*, 1936 (241): 159-179, 293-318; (242): 86-104, 154-174.

⁸ Elemér Mályusz, “Árpádházi Boldog Margit” [Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád], in *Károlyi Árpád emlékkönyv* (Budapest, 1933), pp. 341-384.

⁹ Elemér Mályusz, “A történettudomány mai kérdései” [The Problems of Doing History Today] (A Lecture given in Kecskemét in 1936); Elemér Mályusz, *A magyar történettudomány* [Hungarian Historiography] (Budapest: Bolyai Könyvek, 1942).

¹⁰ Elemér Mályusz, *Népiségtörténet* [Ethnohistory], ed. Soós István (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete: 1994).

¹¹ Mályusz’s “Turóctól Thuróczyig,” where he recollects that in the early 1920s he had wanted to write up the settlement history of all of Upper Hungary: “Turóctól Thuróczyig” (prepared for publication by István Soós), *Sic Itur ad Astra*, 1990/1-2: 128-138.

¹² Elemér Mályusz, “A helytörténeti kutatás feladatai” [The Tasks Facing Research into Local History], *Századok*, 1924 (57-58): 538-66.

¹³ Elemér Mályusz, “A népiség története” [Ethnohistory], in *A magyar történetírás új útjai* [New Trends in the Writing of History in Hungary], ed. Bálint Hóman (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1931), 237-69.

¹⁴ Elemér Mályusz, “Három folyóirat” [Three Journals], *Századok* (68), 1934: 45-65.

¹⁵ The lecture dealing with anthropography has not been included in the edition of *Népiségtörténet* in 1994. Mályusz had given three reasons for attaching importance to anthropography: its methodology lent itself to a degree of objectivity equal to that of the natural sciences; it helped to

reconstruct ancient history; it could be crucial to determining the origin of certain ethnic groups, e.g., the Székelys. Unlike Szekfü who held that the concept of race had no place in history, Mályusz approved of research aimed at establishing the racial origins of peoples. He rejected, however, the identification of “race” with “ethnic group”.

¹⁶ Elemér Mályusz, *Geschichte des ungarischen Volkstums von der Landnahme bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters* [Hungarian Ethnohistory from the Conquest until the end of the Middle Ages] (Budapest: Pannonia-Bücher, 1940), 120.

¹⁷ Elemér Mályusz, *A magyarság és a nemzetiségek Mohács előtt* [The Magyars and the Minority Nationalities prior to Mohács], *Magyar Művelődéstörténet* II (Budapest, 1939), pp. 105-124; and “A középkori magyar nemzetiségi politika” [Nationality Policy in Hungary in the Middle Ages], *Századok* (73), 1939: 257-94, and 385-448.

¹⁸ Elemér Mályusz, *A középkori magyarság település- és nemzetiségi politikája*. [Settlement- and nationality policy in Hungary in the Middle Ages] Edited by Soós István (Budapest: Lucidus, 2002).

¹⁹ As we know from Elemér Mályusz’s memoirs, a total of eight dissertations appeared in the “Település és Népiségtörténeti Értekezések” series. See Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography*, pp. 248-49.

²⁰ Elemér Mályusz, “A patrimonális királyság” [Patrimonial Kingship] *Társadalomtudomány*, 1933/1-2: 37- 49; Elemér Mályusz, “A karizmatikus királyság” [Charismatic Kingship] *Társadalomtudomány*, 1934/3: 153-178; Elemér Mályusz, “A magyar társadalom a Hunyadiak korában. A hűbériség és rendiség problémája” [Hungarian Society in the Age of the Hunyadis. The Problem of Feudalism and Estatism.] In Lukinich Imre (ed.), *Mátyás király emlékkönyv születésének ötszázéves évfordulójára*. I (Budapest, 1940), 309-433. And Elemér Mályusz, “A magyar köznemesség kialakulása” [The Development of the Hungarian Nobility] *Századok* (76) 1942: 272-305, 407-434.

²¹ Elemér Mályusz, “Kossuth működésének társadalomtörténeti háttere” [The Social Historical Background to Kossuth’s Activities] *Napkelet*, 1928(6), 11: 166-183.

²² Elemér Mályusz, “Geschichte des Bürgertums in Ungarn” [The history of bourgeoisie in Hungary] *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1927 (20): 356-407. The self-government of the cities — so argues Mályusz — consisted of the inner (small) council and the outer (big) council, the members of the later (originally all of the citizens) elected the representatives of the former body. After a certain time the members of the big council were not elected, but nominated by the older families, because

they wanted to keep away the immigrating (mostly non-German, Hungarian) inhabitants from the leading positions of these communities.

²³ Elemér Mályusz, *Magyarország története a felvilágosodás korában* [The History of Hungary in the Age of Enlightenment], edited by István Soós (Budapest: Osiris, 2002). Elemér Mályusz, *A Thuróczy-krónika és forrasai* [The Chronicle of Thuróczy and its Sources] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1967). Elemér Mályusz, *Az V. István-kori gesta* [The Gesta of the Age of Stephen V] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971). Elemér Mályusz, “A pálosrend a középkor végén” [The Paulist Order at the End of the Middle Ages] *Egyháztörténet*, 1945 (3): 1-53.

²⁴ Elemér Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom a középkori Magyarországon* [Ecclesiastical society in Hungary in the Middle Ages] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971).

²⁵ For literature about Szabó see Vilmos Erős, “Szabó István körül” [About István Szabó], *Aetas*, 2000/3: 110–126; Vilmos Erős, “Szabó István és 1848/49” [István Szabó and 1848-1849], *Valóság*, 2003/7: 94–108; Vilmos Erős, *Asszimiláció és retorika* [Assimilation and rhetoric] (Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó, 2005); Vilmos Erős ed., *A harmadik út felé. Szabó István történész cikkeiben és dokumentumokban* [Towards the Third Way. The Historian István Szabó in articles and documents] (Budapest, Lucidus Kiadó, 2006); Vilmos Erős, *A szellemtörténettől a népiségtörténetig (Tanulmányok a két világháború közötti magyar történetírásról)* [From Spiritual History to Ethnohistory. Studies about the Hungarian Historiography between the two World Wars] (Debrecen: Debrecen University Press/Egyetemi Kiadó, 2012).

²⁶ István Szabó, *A magyarság életrajza* [The Biography of the Hungarian People] (Budapest: MTA, 1941).

²⁷ Vilmos Erős, *A szellemtörténettől a népiségtörténetig (Tanulmányok a két világháború közötti magyar történetírásról)* [From Spiritual History to Ethnohistory. Studies about the Hungarian Historiography between the two World Wars].

²⁸ In his doctoral dissertation Szabó István, *Debrecen 1848/49-ben* [Debrecen in 1848-1849] (Debrecen, 1928).

²⁹ István Szabó ed., *A szabadságharc fővárosa, Debrecen, 1849. január-május* [Debrecen, the capital of independence war in 1849] (Debrecen, 1948).

³⁰ István Szabó, “A debreceni tanyarendszer kialakulása” [The making of the settlement system around Debrecen] *Föld és Ember*, 1929/5: 214–244. István Szabó, “A tokaji rév és Debrecen 1565–67-ben” [The ford at Tokaj and Debrecen in 1565-67] *Debreczeni Képes Kalendárium*, 1934: 89–97; István Szabó, “A debreceni uradalom a mohácsi vész korában [The estate of Debrecen at the age of Mohács], *Debreczeni Képes Kalendárium*, 1935:

85–90; István Szabó, “A debreceni közösség” [The community of Debrecen] *Debreceni Képes Kalendárium*, 1940: 73–77.

³¹ István Szabó, “A hajdúk 1514-ben,” *Századok* 1950 (84): 178–198, 478–488.

³² István Szabó, “Hanyatló jobbágyság a középkor végén” [Declining Serfdom at The End of the Middle Ages] *Századok*, 1938 (72): 10–59.

³³ István Szabó, *Ugocsa megye* [Ugocsa county] (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1937).

³⁴ István Szabó, *Népiségtörténeti tanulmányok* [Studies in Ethno-history] edited by Vilmos Erős (Budapest: Lucidus Kiadó, 2005).

³⁵ István Szabó, *A falurendszer kialakulása Magyarországon (X–XV. század.)* [The Evolution of the Village System in Hungary in the 10-th to the 15-th Century] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966); István Szabó, *A középkori magyar falu.* [The Medieval Hungarian Village] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969).

³⁶ Julius Szekfű, *Der Staat Ungarn. Eine Geschichtsstudie* (Stuttgart-Berlin: D.V.A., 1918)

³⁷ István Szabó, *A magyarság életrajza* [The Biography of Magyar-dom] (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1941).

³⁸ Erős, *Asszimiláció és retorika* [Assimilation and rhetoric].

³⁹ It should be mentioned that after 1945 Szabó, like Mályusz, was not able to pursue further these population history studies. Despite this he published some smaller essays concerning these questions and two major monographs about the settlement history and the village network in the Middle Ages. In these masterpieces he deepened in many respects the social historical aspects of his former researches concentrating — beside the historical demography, social and settlement history — on the historical-anthropological aspects of the problem. (Feasts, church going, games played, the housing, furniture, utensils, the plot system, etc.)

⁴⁰ István Szabó, *A magyar parasztság története* [The History of the Hungarian Peasantry] (Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1940), István Szabó, *A jobbágy birtoklása az örökös jobbágyság korában* [The possession of serfs in the age of the perpetual serfdom] (Budapest: MTA, 1947), István Szabó, *Tanulmányok a magyar parasztság történetéből* [Studies about the history of the Hungarian Peasantry] (Budapest: Teleki Pál Tudományos Intézet, 1948). István Szabó (ed.), *A parasztság Magyarországon a kapitalizmus korában (1849–1914)* I–II [Studies about the peasantry in Hungary in the Age of Capitalism (1849–1914)] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1965).

⁴¹ See for example Gyula Kristó, “A honfoglaló magyarok életmódjáról” [About the patterns of living of Hungarians in the 10-th Century], *Századok* (129) 1995/1. 3-62.

⁴² Szabó, *A magyar parasztság története* [The History of the Hungarian Peasantry].

⁴³ István Szabó, “Az 1351. évi jobbágy törvények” [The serf laws of the year 1351], *Századok*, 1954 (88): 497–527.

⁴⁴ Pál Pach Zsigmond, “Der Baueraufstand vom Jahre 1514...” [The peasant uprising in 1514], in Pach, *Hungary and the European economy in Early Modern times* (Budapest 1994), pp. 275-301.

⁴⁵ Erős, *A szellemtörténetől a népiségtörténetig* [From Spiritual History to Ethnohistory].

⁴⁶ There are many parallels in this respect with the views of István Hajnal. About him see László Lakatos, *Az élet és a formák. Hajnal István történelemszociológiája* [The Life and its Forms. The Historical Sociology of István Hajnal] (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1996).

⁴⁷ Vilmos Erős, “Szabó István ellentörténelme-i az 1950-es években [István Szabó’s “counter-histories” in the 1950’s], *Magyar Szemle*, 2012/3: 98-119.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ István Szabó, *A jobbágy birtoklása az örökös jobbágyság korában*. [The possession of the serfs in the age of the perpetual serfdom]; Szabó, *Tanulmányok a magyar parasztság történetéből* [Studies about the history of the Hungarian Peasantry].

⁵⁰ Szabó, “Hanyatló jobbágyság a középkor végén” [Declining Serfdom at The End of the Middle Ages].

⁵¹ Stefan Szabó, “Das Ungarntum des Tieflandes im 18. Jahrhundert” [The Hungarians of the Great Hungarian Plain in the 18-th century] *Ungarn*, 1943: 369-375.

⁵² László Németh, *Sorskérdések* [Fate questions] (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó 1989). There are some similarities with the ideas of the Romanian writer and thinker E. Lovinescu. See his *A modern román civilizáció története* [The history of the modern Romanian civilization] (Palamart Kiadó, 2002).

⁵³ Jenő Szücs, *Vázlat Európa három történelmi régiójáról* [About the three historical regions of Europe] (Budapest: Magvető, 1983).

⁵⁴ Elemér Mályusz ed., *Iratok a türelmi rendelet történetéhez*. [Documents Concerning the Toleration Edict] (Budapest: Magyar Protestáns Irodalmi Társaság, 1940); Mályusz ed., *Sándor Lipót főherceg nádor iratai, 1790-1795* [The Papers of Palatinate Archduke Alexander Leopold, 1790-1795] (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1926) and the multi-volume

work Mályusz ed., *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár* [Documents Concerning the Age of Sigismund], I. 1387–1399, II/1. 1400–1406, II/2.1407–1410 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1951–1958). István Szabó ed., *Bács, Bodrog és Csongrád megye dézsmalajstromai 1522-ből* [Tax rolls from the counties Bács, Bodrog and Csongrád from the year 1522] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1954).

⁵⁵About the National Romantic School see Vardy, *Modern Hungarian Historiography*.

⁵⁶Elemér Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund in Ungarn 1387-1437* (Budapest: Corvina 1990).

⁵⁷Erős ed., *A harmadik út felé. Szabó István történész cikkekben és dokumentumokban* [Towards the Third Way. The Historian István Szabó in articles and documents].

⁵⁸Ibidem.

⁵⁹Already dead at that time.

⁶⁰Erős ed., *A harmadik út felé. Szabó István történész cikkekben és dokumentumokban* [Towards the Third Way. The Historian István Szabó in articles and documents].

⁶¹Elemér Mályusz, *Volkskommissare und Genossen im Auslande* [The Fugitive Bolsheviks] (Munich, 1931), see note 67.

⁶²István Soós, “Szekfű Gyula és Mályusz Elemér A vörös emigráció című műve” [The work of “The fugitive Bolsheviks” by Gyula Szekfű and Elemér Mályusz.] in: *A negyedik nemzedék és ami utána következik. Szekfű Gyula és a magyar történetírás a 20. század első felében* [The fourth generation and what follows after. Gyula Szekfű and the Hungarian historiography in the first half of the 20th century] edited by Gábor Ujváry (Budapest: Ráció Kiadó, 2011), pp. 238–250.

⁶³Szabó ed., *A szabadságharc fővárosa, Debrecen, 1849. január-május* [Debrecen, the capital of independence war in 1849].

⁶⁴Erős, *A szellemtörténetől a népiségtörténetig* [From Spiritual History to Ethnohistory].

⁶⁵For the latest literature on *Volkstumskunde* see Willi Oberkrome, *Volksgeschichte: methodische Innovation und völkische Ideologisierung in der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft 1918-1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck-Ruprecht, 1993); Michael Fahlbusch, *Wissenschaft im Dienst der nationalsozialistischen Politik? “Die Volksdeutschen Forschungsgemeinschaften” von 1931–1945* (Baden–Baden: Nomos, 1999); Karen Schönwaelder, “The Fascination of Power: Historical Scholarship in Nazi Germany” *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997): 133–154; Manfred Hettling ed., *Volksgeschichten im Europa der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

⁶⁶ Mályusz's anti-Semitism goes back to the '20s. In his essay "Kossuth működésének társadalmi háttéré" [The Social Background of Kossuth's Political Activity], he puts the blame for the delays in Hungary's modernization squarely on the Jews, arguing that it was the amoral selfishness of the post-Compromise Jewish immigrants that shattered the two social classes which had the potential of becoming the backbone of a democratic bourgeoisie: the urban middle class and the middle nobility. He makes the same kind of argument in "A vörös emigráció" [The Fugitive Bolsheviks] a notorious series of articles that appeared in *Napkelet* in 1931. Here, responsibility for the revolutions of 1918-19 is laid at the door of the selfish and anarchic "personality types" represented by Max Stirner as most common among Jews.

⁶⁷ See his manuscript memorandum to Domanovszky of 1928, in the Manuscript Archives of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The manuscript was published by Vilmos Erős with the title "Mályusz Elemér feljegyzése egy Magyar Történelmi Intézet felállításáról" [Elemér Mályusz's memorandum about the establishment of a Hungarian Historical Institute] *Történelmi Szemle* 1998/1-2: 113-126.

⁶⁸ I would like to remark at the same time that not even the school of Szekfű represented an exclusively state centered, political history. The most important difference between them was rather, that *Geistesgeschichte* focused more on the higher, elite culture, while "ethnohistory" concentrated on the material, even everyday life, notwithstanding the political or ideological implications of these differing conceptions. But both were on the same platform, in opposing the narrow political "*histoire événementielle*" historiography of the Dualist Age, rather that of National Romantic School.

British Strategy in Hungary in 1944 and the Hungarian Jewish Commandos of the Special Operations Executive

András Becker

Introduction

This article concerns British political and military strategy in Hungary in the autumn of 1944. This broad framework is discussed through the prism of the relationship between war strategy and post-war politics, and throws light upon their often-differing requirements. The focus is on the strategic planning of the SOE (Special Operations Executive)¹ regarding operations in Hungary in August-September 1944. The analysis considers the ways the Foreign Office and the British military interacted with these SOE efforts, and the extent the SOE was able to shape British strategy in East Central Europe at the crucial juncture of its history, when the region became the battleground of Nazi Germany and Soviet-Russia.

First, the article evaluates the joint SOE – Jewish Agency² plan to drop hundreds of Jewish volunteers into occupied Hungary, and identifies this scheme as a key element tying political and military strategy in Hungary together. Second, it uses the perspective of Allied bombing of Hungary, as well as two still mostly unknown SOE operations (the Csíky and the Szombathelyi missions), which, with the aid of Jewish volunteers both aimed to foment a pro-British military coup in Budapest in September 1944. These seemingly unrelated SOE schemes worked towards the same end; they aspired to expand British political and military influence in Hungary at the end of war, and to ensure a more favorable position for Britain in postwar Europe. Analysing and contextualizing this array of interplaying perspectives adds to the understanding of the neglected subject of British strategy in East Central Europe, as well as provides much-needed insights into SOE activities in Hungary.

Since SOE operations forms the focus of this analysis, the institution and its relationship to Hungary and the Jewish Agency needs a longer than usual introduction. Amongst the steadily expanding historiography of the SOE one could only encounter passing references to missions seeking to penetrate into German dominated Hungary. General surveys treated SOE's history mostly from a British national standpoint and isolated theatres in the war effort, such as Hungary, were overlooked based on Hungary's lesser strategic value for Britain in the war, as well as SOE's inability to effectively penetrate the country.³ The historiography of the SOE engages many issues of strategic and military controversy in World War II, but this reduced approach in turn produced interpretations that failed to understand the clandestine and subversive opportunities Hungary offered against Nazi Germany (at the crossroads of substantial German economic and military transit).⁴ Thus, SOE bids for increased attention to Hungary (which we find plenty in SOE documents) were left unexplained. From a broader perspective, the existing historical accounts fail to resolve the contradiction between London's decreased political attention to Hungary (as a minor enemy state), and the SOE's constant pressure to expand Hungarian operations. Resolving this controversy would finally achieve equality between the military and non-military dimensions of British war strategy, would also help explaining the relationship between war strategy and postwar-planning, as well as would direct closer attention to the immediate and long-term political ramifications of SOE exploits for British strategy in Hungary and the region.

Since early 1943 (when reliable news about the Final Solution were received), SOE and MI9 (a War Office department tasked with organizing the escape of British prisoners of war (POWs) from the continent) separately sponsored and dropped small groups of Yishuv (Jewish residents of Palestine, mostly of European origin) volunteers into occupied East Central and South East Europe. The task of these limited missions was to facilitate the escape and evacuation of POWs, but at the same time they strove to help European Jewry on the ground by participating in the Jewish underground, providing training in resistance and committing acts of sabotage against enemy targets. Although arrangements for this British – Yishuv cooperation were on a seemingly mutually beneficial basis, it was clear from the outset that the SOE exploited Palestinian Jewish enthusiasm to fight the Nazis for their own ends in the war. Until mid-1944 these small-scale operations characterised British – Yishuv collaboration in Hungary, and we have to clearly distinguish them from the large-scale commando missions later proposed in July 1944 by the Yishuv.

Research investigating the contribution of these limited operations to the war effort, and their role in SOE strategy, exist exclusively in Jewish studies, and thus follows the historiographical convention that placed any military perspective of the Holocaust almost entirely outside the purview of World War II studies.⁵ Linguistic barriers have also been a key issue hampering the emergence of international scholarly debate on the topic of Jewish SOE agents and synthesizing Holocaust and World War II studies under the umbrella of this topic. Recent decades spurred a river of Hebrew language scholarship on SOE's Jewish parachutist (and their efforts to rescue Jews and organize Jewish resistance), but these rarely went beyond the limited confines of Hebrew sources or were mainly dominated by attention to how Jewish agents (as war heroes) helped forming modern Israeli identity. More troubling is that the scholarship is guilty of serious neglect of British archival documents, as well as the inability to discriminate among sources (they relies far too often on Yishuv memoirs and oral history).⁶ Given these constraints, Tuvia Friling produced a noteworthy history of the British-Yishuv relationship, but in the absence of a conceptual framework (one that uses methodologies of both World War II and Jewish studies) it drowned readers in detail.⁷

This article examines the evolution of SOE policy towards the lesser known second phase of SOE – Yishuv collaboration in the war, the so-called Shertok-Zazlanyi plan in 1944. Responding to the mass deportation of Hungarian Jews (starting in May 1944), Moshe Shertok (later Moshe Sharett, leader of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, and later Prime Minister of Israel, 1954-55) and Reuven Zazlanyi (head of the Yishuv intelligence)⁸ energetically lobbied all political and military specters of the Allies (among them the British and the SOE) for the creation of larger-scale volunteer Hungarian Jewish Palestinian commandos. The aim was to abandon the use of small-scale missions, as these were ineffective and proved unable to actively help and organize Jews in Hungary. Until now, historiography has ignored this second phase in view of the eventual British rejection to support it in September 1944.

This article argues that regardless of this British disapproval this phase of British – Yishuv cooperation, the subject merits close scrutiny. The analysis of British reactions to the Shertok-Zazlanyi plan provides a useful frame in which to understand an evolving British war strategy in East Central and South East Europe (and not least towards Soviet-Russia), and Britain's post war political aims in Hungary, as well as contributes to the understanding of British policy in Palestine. Also, investigating the

factors that determined the rejection of this plan (regardless of Churchill's and the SOE's wholehearted approval) helps understanding the dynamics of official British policy-making, and particularly the maze of civil – military – SOE relationship. Moreover, it is also becoming increasingly important to consider the broader political and cultural implications of SOE activities in Hungary, as well as the details the British rejection of a large-scale Anglo – Yishuv collaboration tells us about the sensitive question of British anti-Semitism during the war.⁹

This article draws upon more than the well-mined general records of British policy-making, and, perhaps a first for works of this kind, also uses material related to Hungary from the SOE and British Military archives.¹⁰ Within this broad framework the argument employs a thematically organized approach, as far as possible, and explores first the subversive, then the military and finally the political aspect of the topic. Occasional overlaps will be necessary to enable the complete consideration of the issue at hand.

Hungary in the SOE – Jewish Agency Relationship in 1942-1944

After the fall of France in June 1940, SOE was founded on the strategic assumption that subversive operations in continental Europe would direct the enemy's attention away from the British Isles, and by severely affecting the enemy's war effort would help winning the war. It was against this backdrop that France (as the largest and most populous country under German occupation), and neutral capitals such as Lisbon, Stockholm and Istanbul (as they offered the least German countermeasures) became the centers of SOE attention in Europe. Although taking a close interest in subversive opportunities in Hungary in the early years of the war, the SOE remained inefficient in that country. Among the difficulties the SOE encountered in Hungary were a government deliberately refraining from angering Berlin with any pro-Allied measures, and a highly authoritarian and policed environment, which in turn resulted in popular dispassion towards resistance and a general sense of disconnection from the Allied cause. Lack of cooperation on the part of the British embassy only made matters worse. For example, in mid-1940, British Minister Owen O'Malley averted the SOE scheme to blow up the Budapest bridges arguing that such an act would compromise Britain's good image in Hungary.¹¹ On account of these difficulties, planning further operations in Hungary was halted in late 1940, and after Hungary joined Hitler's Balkan campaign in April 1941,¹² the SOE effectively abandoned Hungarian operations.¹³

After the Balkan campaign, Hungary also joined the invasion of the Soviet Union, for which Britain declared war on her in December 1941. However, overwhelming Allied victories in North Africa in late 1942 prompted the Hungarian regime to make tentative contacts with the Allies and to initiate secret peace talks from early 1943.¹⁴ The SOE played a key role in these negotiations, which at the same time rekindled its interest in Hungary. Yishuv volunteers would spearhead these renewed clandestine efforts. For Britain and the SOE, Hungarian peace overtures offered rare opportunities of badly needed triumph on the continent, and an easy access to sabotaging vital German communicational lines to-and-from the Balkans and Soviet-Russia, especially as the Horthy regime expressed its willingness to receive, shelter and support an SOE mission in the country.

Before analysing the significance of the Shertok-Zazlanyi plan in British planning, it is essential to recapture some of the background of the British – Yishuv relationship. During the Arab Revolt (1936-39) in the Palestine, both Britain and the Jewish Agency were seeking mutual cooperation against the common enemy (the Arabs), but after the British severely restricted Palestinian Jewish immigration in 1939, the relationship reverted to strong reciprocal suspicion. However, after the victories of the German Africa Korps in early 1942 in Libya and Egypt, the threat of Axis occupation of Palestine convinced both sides to put aside their differences and unite against the enemy. While preparations were made for the defense of Palestine, the so-called ‘European option’ (engaging the enemy in occupied Europe) soon sparked off an intense political debate in the Jewish Agency. The best method to help European Jews became the main political fault line with one side led by David Ben-Gurion (chairman of the executive committee of the Jewish Agency, and later Prime Minister of Israel 1948-54, 1955-63) argued for limited engagement, while others favoured broad collaboration with the British, and active participation in European Jewish resistance.

In the latter group, in an apparent clash with Ben-Gurion, Shertok and Zazlanyi vigorously lobbied the British to lend support for the dropping of large numbers of Jewish volunteers over occupied Europe, who would energize and organize Jews for resistance.¹⁵ In 1942, the SOE and the British Army agreed to facilitate these missions, but Whitehall made every effort to limit Yishuv influence in Europe and thus insisted to control them by an umbrella organisation, and to limit their size as far as possible. Other frictions also immediately emerged between London and the

Yishuv. For example, the national/political character of the whole enterprise (British vs. Jewish/Zionist), the Palmach's (Yishuv underground army in Palestine) continued underground resistance and agitation against Britain in Palestine (regardless of providing most of the Jewish volunteers for the SOE) were complications that burdened the relationship. These, coupled with the diminishing German threat to the Middle East after the Allied victory at the Second Battle of El Alamein (October-November 1942), eventually caused a further one-year delay to the scheme.

However, military developments again proved decisive in a new shift in British attitude towards the Jewish parachutists. After the Axis defeat in North Africa in May 1943, Britain refocused its attention back onto the Balkans. In this phase, Palestinian Jews (among other European refugees) with local contact and background, and with knowledge of the language and local customs became indispensable both for the Army and the SOE for intelligence and subversive purposes. Accordingly, small-scale missions of Palestinian Jewish volunteers (usually comprising only two parachutists: one agent and one wireless operator) were again given a green light. The various near-suicide missions of Hannah Szenes and her companions, who were dropped into Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Austria as part of this scheme, are well-documented deeds in Jewish World War II resistance.¹⁶

During 1943, deeply dissatisfied with the continued official British indifference towards the plight of European Jews, as well as seething with frustration about British vetoes on anything but small-scale operations, the Yishuv aimed for a new purpose. This involved the ambition to remodel its European project, and to even more energetically organize, aid and participate in European Jewish resistance, large-scale rescue and clandestine missions. This proposal did not only represent a dramatic shift in policy, but added distinct political and national ambitions to the moral character of earlier small-scale operations. This shift in Yishuv attitude towards the Allies received little prominence in the historiography. Previously, Hannah Szenes and her comrades had one ambition: to help the persecuted in Europe in any way possible. In contrast to them, Shertok and Zazlanyi went beyond the sole purpose of morality when proposing sizeable Jewish military participation with a distinct Zionist character. Thus, in this way, for the Jewish Agency this second phase attempted to move towards some sort of a co-belligerent status with the Allies, and as such aimed to bring Palestine to the international theatre.

Starting with early 1943, the Yishuv had already lobbied the British for large scale, commando style operations, and both MI6 (military

intelligence service) and Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean General Alexander granted their approvals to a scheme presented by Zazlanyi in early 1943 to deploy approx. 300 Jews by parachute to occupied Europe (Zazlanyi presented a revised but very similar plan in January 1944 also). The plan only aimed to secure British logistical help (transport, equipment and arms), and aimed for a purely Jewish character to the operation. However, the War Office swiftly intervened, and killed these propositions in their infancy by labelling them unrealistic and impractical.¹⁷ In reality for the British, although Jewish commandos promised certain tactical advantages against Nazi Germany, underlying political reasons seemed to outweigh the military ones, and became responsible for the quick disapproval. Namely, by 1943 Britain was already deeply involved in postwar planning, and was careful to limit meddling in East Central European affairs, which (since as early as late 1940) was considered in the corridors of power to become a Soviet sphere of influence after the war.¹⁸ This train of thought remained a key element in British strategy in the region, and, as we would see, continued to characterize attitudes towards Jewish clandestine operations in East Central Europe.

The mass deportation of Hungarian Jews from May 1944 on again shifted Yishuv policy, and moral arguments increasingly became as important as the Zionist ones in justifications for parachutist actions (at least in Hungary). In July 1944, taken courage from the earlier positive attitude of the British military Shertok and Zazlanyi again started lobbying SACMED (Supreme Allied Command in the Mediterranean) to secure British (and/or American) help and approval for commando raids into Hungary. Their new scheme again envisaged the drop of approx. 300 Hungarian and Romanian Jewish volunteers trained by the Palmach into Ruthenia and the Szatmárnémeti [Satu Mare] area in North East Hungary. The Palmach claimed to have built up close contacts with the local Jewish underground, and promised widespread support for the operation and hinted at the potential of recruiting local Jews and industrial workers for clandestine operations.

With the dual aim to help rescuing Jews, and “turn victims into fighters [...] and to instil a fighting spirit into the remnants of Hungarian Jewry and rouse them to resistance, sabotage activities and guerilla warfare” the mission would have initially dropped several small groups into Northern Hungary (Kökényes [Ternovo] and Szatmárnémeti [Satu Mare] regions) who would have assumed command and recruited more people locally from the masses of Jewish industrial workers drafted for forced

labour. These groups then planned sabotaging the war industry, German military transports, railway lines and bridges. Only a second phase of drops would have brought in the bulk of the mission. They would have parachuted into the Western Bánát in Northern Yugoslavia (under German military administration) for the reason that the nearby intersection of the Hungarian, Yugoslav and Romanian border area, and the close vicinity of Tito's partisans promised a suitable geographical location for operations and retreat. From this base they planned seeking out contact with the North Hungary Jewish parachutist group, as well as Tito's partisans.¹⁹

Compared to the earlier 1943 Jewish Agency proposals, which argued for a purely Jewish mission, now in July 1944, reacting to the apparent British distaste for such arrangement, Shertok and Zazlanyi agreed to British command and the recruitment of volunteers both from the British Army as well as from Palestine, but did not give up insisting on a Jewish character. This shift in attitude can be explained by the deep anxiety felt towards the ongoing plight of Jews in Hungary. Shertok's proposal is dotted with outcries for utmost urgency:

The worst apprehensions underlying our proposals have been justified and events are now moving [in Hungary] with catastrophic rapidity. According to our latest information, over 400, 000 Hungarian Jews have already been sent to their doom [...] and the deportation of the remaining 300, 000 is about to start. Much has thus been already missed, and if anything at all is to be done, it must be done with the greatest possible speed. [...] I would like once more to stress the extreme urgency of the whole thing. I think I need not go here into the reasons morally compelling the Allies to assist the Jews [...].²⁰

First, SACMED advised the Yishuv leaders to refer the case to the SOE arguing that all military means were stretched to the maximum since the recent landing in Normandy. Skilful in his tactics (and making good use of his connections), Shertok got in touch with SOE Major Randolph Churchill (son of the Prime Minister), and through him the Prime Minister's Office, in order to secure political backing, something he lacked in his earlier bids. Shertok quickly managed to obtain the approval of both Randolph and Winston, although the Prime Minister expressed his concerns about the potential political implications of the mission.²¹ At this point, with political approval in their pocket, all circumstances seemed to favour the Shertok-Zazlanyi scheme.

British Strategy and the Question of Jewish SOE Commandos in Hungary

Regardless of the Prime Minister's close interest in the mission, the SOE soon raised concerns. Initially it expected the mission to evolve into the "monster scheme" of arranging the escape of masses of Hungarian Jews out of Europe, and raised doubts about the feasibility of such operation.²² However, concrete Yishuv information about the existence of widespread Hungarian popular support both for the Allies and Jewish parachutists soon put Shertok's proposal in a different light.²³ Although unable to verify the credibility of Yishuv intelligence about Hungary, as well as knowing very little about the military capabilities of the parachutists, the promise of inflicting damage in Hungary convinced the SOE to support the mission. Here, one might immediately suspect deeper underlying reasons behind the approval. Later, the SOE was repeatedly accused of being prepared to sacrifice foreign agents for its own ends, and the often debated question of British anti-Semitism during World War II can also be brought up here. Backing the quasi blind-drop of dozens of Jewish parachutists deep into virtually unknown enemy territory on suicide missions certainly gives room to such claims.²⁴ While we will have reason to return to these claims, here we aim to highlight a different explanation first.

For the SOE, Hungary was a tough nut to crack in World War II. Basil Davidson, head of operations in Hungary (until April 1941), could only claim putting together a fragile network of Anglophiles in the high society, but failed to energize Hungarians for acts of sabotage and partisan operations against the Axis. After Britain declared war on Hungary in December 1941, and to an even greater extent following the German occupation (19 March 1944), intelligence virtually ceased from the country, which significantly reduced SOE capabilities to plan and carry out operations. Subsequently, regardless of several attempts to penetrate the country in 1943, SOE was able to rely on only about a dozen agents and a handful of Hungarian sympathizers in the country.²⁵ Thus, the attractive clandestine

and subversive opportunities Hungary offered as a transit hub of German economic and military traffic remained largely untapped.²⁶ In the eyes of the SOE, the horrors of the Final Solution in Hungary made Shertok's claims about an active and blossoming Hungarian Jewish underground very credible, and exploiting the skills of Jewish volunteers (in the face of past SOE failure) made perfect sense in London in a country that earlier seemed impenetrable.²⁷

The Shertok-Zazlanyi proposal received official SOE approval in early August, but with considerable changes to the original Jewish Agency aims. In order to deprive the Yishuv of leadership experience, and to limit the spread of Zionism with European Jewry (which threatened with an increase of unwanted Jewish immigration to Palestine), the SOE demanded stripping the mission of its Jewish character completely, and provisioned a British Liaison Officer for each drop effectively putting the parachutists under British command. The volunteers were offered SOE training, and would have infiltrated as SOE agents in a standard SOE operation. This, in effect, blocked the Jewish Agency from gaining political credit at home for fighting for a moral purpose, as well as prevented the Palmach (the Jewish underground army in the Palestine) to freely train its own agents who, after the war could have been used against the British. These, coupled with cynically worded memos from a senior British official ("the plan would remove a number of active and resourceful Jews from Palestine"), vividly demonstrate that in the absence of moral considerations, preventing Jewish independence in Palestine was also a key element in British contemplations.²⁸

We must place great stress on the fact that in the summer of 1944 SOE Mediterranean Command [SO(M)] was very keen to undertake this mission. Obviously, the successful infiltration of Jewish commandoes promised ample opportunities for sabotage, and the ambition to weaken the Jewish movement in Palestine by engaging its agents was also a crucial factor behind the SOE interest, but broader strategic motives also lay behind the urgency. In the autumn of 1944, intelligence developments in the murky world of neutral Portugal and Turkey promised to achieve even more in Hungary in the autumn of 1944. Working through multiple channels of collaborators and sympathizers in Lisbon, Madrid, Istanbul and Budapest,

the SOE was plotting a coup d'état in the Hungarian capital in August-September 1944, with the ultimate aim to shorten the war by forcing a military surrender on the pro-British regime that SOE aimed to impose.

Encouraged by the emergence of a new phase of Hungarian peace-feelers in August 1944, whom all frantically endeavoured to avert Hungary's Soviet occupation in the eleventh hour, the SOE saw the moment ripe for regime change in Hungary.²⁹ Veteran SOE agent György Pállóczy-Horváth (left-wing Hungarian publicist, who left Hungary after it joined the war in 1941, he was also chief British negotiator with the Kállay peacefeeler in Turkey in 1943) managed to convince the British about the existence of an active, confident and well-organized Hungarian democratic left-wing underground, which would be able to grab power at the appropriate moment with the right assistance.³⁰ With his help, the SOE recruited the Hungarian commercial attaché in Istanbul Csíky for a special mission to Budapest in order to make use of his valuable contacts in Hungarian political and military circles for the planned change of government. On the 19 August, Csíky, traveling on a Wehrmacht military train which transported hundreds of German troops north from the Balkans, departed to Hungary carrying plenty of cash, an SOE wireless transmitter, and with full SOE briefing on how to organize the coup. For this scheme the SOE aspired to win over General Lajos Csataj (whom the British trusted since he had been Minister of Defense in Kállay's government, 1943-44) and Horthy himself, whose cooperation were vital in relation to ensure control over the Hungarian Army, as well as to accommodate the SOE commandoes in the country, which were the British prerequisite for any cooperation.³¹ As to the next steps of the conspiracy, the survived SOE documents remain very vague. It only mentions that the Hungarian army (as one would expect) will turn against Germany (presumably in collaboration with these SOE commandoes), and this way would ensure "the shortening of the war so that far fewer Allied and Hungarian lives should be lost."³²

In return for the collaboration, the SOE advised Csíky to inform Budapest that Hungary's Soviet occupation had not been

decided between the Allies, and that Hungarian military cooperation now would most likely ensure an Anglo-Americans occupation.³³ Of course, this only aimed to strike a chord with Hungarian wishful thinking. In truth, Hungary's Soviet occupation was a done deal, just like the Allies consensus that Nazi satellites should surrender to all three Allies and not only to the British. Furthermore, playing on deeply entrenched Hungarian animosities felt towards Romania, the memorandum explicitly highlighted that with an immediate military commitment Hungary „can avoid Romania doing a similar step sooner”, and thus could guarantee for itself a favourable position in Allied perceptions. There is no trace of the Hungarian reaction to all this either in the files of the SOE or the Foreign Office, or among the papers of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. However, the fact that both Csatay and Horthy were leading figures in the ill-fated attempt to leave the German alliance less than two months after the Csíky-mission on 15 October, suggest some level of British involvement in that event also.³⁴

However, the SOE did not rely only on Shertok, Zazlanyi, or the Csíky mission, and in order to bring about a Hungarian coup kept several irons in the fire. Using Lisbon as an additional channel, it made further attempts to ensure the Hungarian Army was controlled by Anglophiles. The evidence strongly suggest that simultaneously with the Csíky mission, prolonged discussions had taken place between Hungarian Minister in Lisbon Elemér Újpestery, Liaison officer between the Hungarian General Staff and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Lieutenant Marjai, Hungarian Military attaché in Lisbon and Madrid Colonel Szántai on the one hand, and the SOE on the other about bringing about the re-appointment of Ferenc Szombathelyi as Chief of General Staff.³⁵ Szombathelyi, as a key figure in the Kállay peace negotiations in 1943 was a well-known critic of the German (and Hungarian) war effort, and as such enjoyed the trust of the SOE. The documents suggest the existance of an extensive pro-British conspiratorial circle around Szombathelyi in Hungary, which made him the right candidate to steer Hungary out of the war. According to the plan, Újpestery, Szántai and Marjai conspired with the SOE to pressure Horthy to reappoint Szombathelyi, who would direct a military coup and then initiate

immediate peace talks with the Allies through intermediaries in Lisbon.³⁶

Although the afterlife of these missions are unknown, for all intents and purposes they failed. Crucially for our perspective, it was not a coincidence that the SOE simultaneously worked towards the Csíky and Szombathelyi missions, as well as the Shertok-Zazlanyi plan. Hence, although the survived documents do not explicitly refer to this, one might suggest that since both the Csíky and Szombathelyi missions called for the need of airdrop commandoes, the SOE had taken the Jewish offer on board, and included the Shertok-Zazlanyi volunteers in its strategy. The steps the SOE had taken towards this coup enriches our understanding of British policy in Hungary in 1944. Historiography so far has been governed by the perspective of the uniformity of reduced British attention in East Central Europe in the face of Soviet expansion.³⁷ For the SOE, the questionable information Pállóczy-Horváth provided about an effective and capable Hungarian resistance clearly confirmed the similar claims coming from Shertok earlier, and subsequently it looked at this constellation as a golden opportunity in Hungary, and thus strived to link the benefits of the Csíky, Szombathelyi and Shertok-Zazlanyi missions in the hope that they would foster a pro-Allied Hungarian *volte-face*.

Hungary in British Military and Post-War Planning in September 1944

So far we have concentrated mainly on SOE actions, and considered only to a lesser extent Whitehall countercurrents and the inter-departmental dynamics in the British government. In order to understand SOE's strategy as part of British policy-making, two additional perspectives need closer attention. First, we need to determine the reasons for SOE's assiduity towards Hungary in 1944 (in contrast to the limited attention from the political sphere), and have to carefully measure the role SOE played in determining official British policy.

SOE planned meddling in Hungarian affairs came at a critical time in the war. The Wehrmacht's collapse in France in July-August 1944, its

simultaneous catastrophic defeats in the Eastern Front, and the Red Army's push to the frontiers of Hungary and Romania suggested the premature end of the war, and East Central and South East Europe's Soviet occupation. Soviet penetration into the region raised the problem of British – Soviet rivalry.³⁸ Since the Bolshevik Coup in 1917, Soviet influence in the region had troubled British policy-makers. However, in the war, as early as late 1939, London had already reckoned with East Central and South East Europe becoming a Soviet sphere, but did not give up trying to bring its influence to bear on certain political and strategic developments there. Most importantly, it aimed to prevent the region from falling under the political or military domination of one potentially hostile power, since that would challenge the security of Middle Eastern and North African imperial assets and communications. To avert such scenario, the British periodically toyed with the idea of opening a Balkan front during the war to thwart the region's complete German and/or Russian subordination.³⁹ The Balkans was even suggested to become the Allied second front, but American veto and British military weakness (and the decision to land in Normandy instead) finally removed the military option from British Balkan strategy. Consequently, the inability to influence events in South East Europe militarily presented an almost insoluble strategic dilemma, especially after the Red Army almost destroyed the Wehrmacht in the Eastern Front in the 1944 summer offensives. In July-August 1944, anticipation of an immediate Russian advance towards the Straits thus presented a direct strategic threat, and London had to urgently devise ways to limit Russian expansion.⁴⁰

It was for this reason that, in conjunction with the SOE, British military commanders at the Allied Balkan Air Force (BAF) (the section of Allied Air Force responsible for bombing raids in Hungary and South East Europe) also paid careful attention to Hungarian affairs. The persistent lobbying of Shertok and Zazlanyi, who simultaneously lobbied the SOE and the British armed services, triggered this unusual attentiveness. The Zazlanyi proposal coincided with a major Hungary policy review at Balkan Air Force. Since the German occupation of Hungary, the Allies initiated a massive bombing campaign mainly against Hungarian oil installations, oil supply transportation, armament factories and major communicational and logistical hubs. In August 1944, in the wake of the sweeping Allied victories in France, the British military planners at the BAF were looking for ways to end the war in the near future.

For this reason, plans to knock Hungary out of the war with a massive bombing campaign against civilian targets and with the complete dev-

astation of Budapest were seriously considered. However, after some hesitation, the decision was made that the mass bombing of the Hungarian capital should be avoided for political reasons. It was believed that large numbers of civilian casualties would alienate the Hungarian population from the Allies (and would make postwar cooperation difficult), and, reflecting on the military perspective, it was concluded that while such campaign “might knock Hungary out of the war, the effort would not equal its results” (i. e. it would not significantly accelerate German defeat). As an alternative, the BAF recommended the replacement of the mass bombing campaign with limited engagement. Hence, the targeted bombing of Hungarian communications and war industry was recommended in conjunction with the deployment of Zazlanyi’s Jewish volunteers. This way, SOE’s Yishuv agents were integrated into British military strategy, as targeted bombing and their deployment was interpreted as the most viable solution to inflict war damage and cause widespread havoc in Hungary.⁴¹ Eventually, this military proposal got bogged down in the bureaucracy of the British government, and was soon outpaced by events on the Eastern front. By late September 1944, while SACMED was still waiting for political approval for its new strategy, the Red Army overrun the proposed drop zones in Northern Hungary, and the plan was dropped.

But, while the SOE was allowed to roam freely in occupied Europe during the war, there was a point when considerations about the political and post war implications of its actions prevailed over their tactical benefit. While it was a general British interest to salvage as much of the interwar political influence (and trade and economic interests) in East Central and South East Europe as possible, openly deranging Soviet actions in the region with subversive operations was unthinkable, since Britain relied on Moscow’s cooperation in retaining influence over the Mediterranean after the war. Thus, while subversive operations in the war were useful tools to substitute for military weakness, the evidence shows that by the autumn of 1944 (when winning the war began to appear only a matter of time), the SOE could not assert as much influence on British strategy as it wanted to, and played only a limited role in determining British official post-war priorities in Hungary.

The juxtaposition of Foreign Office and SOE documents reveal the eruption of a simmering dispute between the two departments about the ways Hungary should be handled at this time, and reveal the fault lines within the government. The Foreign Office decision that Hungary should surrender through a political process (by sending a plenipotentiary to offer

unconditional surrender to all three major allies) was in stark contrast to the two-pronged attack on Hungary envisioned by the SOE comprising a high-level military coup complemented by the subversive operations of British and Jewish commandoes.⁴² The Foreign Office – SOE quarrel essentially ran along geopolitical considerations, in which a dispute with Moscow was out of the question. Besides, the decision was an illustrative example of the policy-making process about regional issues. While one would expect the indisputable influence of the Prime Minister (who, as we remember, was fully behind Hungarian SOE operations) this was not the case. While Churchill was famous for closely following the war, he dedicated only intermittent attention to relatively unimportant problems such as Hungary, particularly if it threatened a major collision with Moscow. Thus, the issue was dealt with by a small number of senior officials already conducting the day-to-day business with Hungary. Among them, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden valued the cooperation of Moscow, and interpreted an SOE military coup as the continuation of the Horthy regime, which he despised for its attitude towards Yugoslavia in 1941. Hence, he favoured a less lenient treatment of Hungary and would only consider unconditional surrender from Budapest to all three major allies.⁴³

More importantly from our perspective, the Foreign Office linked the question of Hungarian Jewish parachutists to talks with Hungarian peace negotiators (both in 1943 and now in 1944). There were two focal points around which peace talks with Hungary clustered: bringing about Hungarian surrender, and securing its efficient implementation as soon as possible. In this context, exactly because of the weakness of Hungarian resistance movements, and due to the authoritarian character of the Horthy regime, the venture promised the highest degree of success if done in collaboration with Horthy. The apparent reluctance of the British government to complicate talks by giving support to Jewish (or Zionist) resistance in Hungary might seem to confirm arguments about the existence of elitist British anti-Semitism, but, in this case, as we have seen, such British viewpoints had instead crude military considerations. Consequently, back in 1943, Whitehall only gave green light for small-scale Jewish missions (such as the one of Hannah Szenes) once negotiations with the Hungarians reached a standstill in September 1943.⁴⁴ And now in 1944, it was military developments in the war (Soviet breakthrough at Jassy-Kishinev and the consequent Romanian *volte-face*) that forced London to abandon supporting the Shertok-Zazlanyi scheme.⁴⁵

Conclusion

This article has shown that analysing SOE actions and ambitions in Hungary in 1944 is an effective instrument for illustrating the interplays between British war strategy and policy towards Mandate Palestine on the one hand and postwar great power politics in Hungary and East Central Europe on the other. British governmental reaction to SOE's planned meddling in Hungarian affairs, with particular reference to their potential long-term implications, opens a window to the complexity of British foreign political thought towards East Central Europe. A broad range of previously unresearched British primary sources reveals the noticeable disagreements that existed between the SOE, the Foreign Office and the British military about the ways Hungary and the region should be handled. By analysing these dynamics, this article went beyond traditional works about British regional strategy and diplomatic history, which are based mostly only on Foreign Office correspondence. It demonstrated just how pragmatic policy-makers in the Foreign Office could be in the interest of *realpolitik*, referring here particularly to the expected post-war great power dynamics in the region, and relationship with Moscow. This way, it concluded that the Jewish Agency's propositions for the deployment of Yishuv commandos to occupied Europe came at a strategic juncture when broader and long-term post-war imperial interests began to overwrite tactical advantages in the war. Hence, regardless of the subversive benefit they offered, the plan was rejected due to the potential complications it posed to Anglo-Soviet relations.

The analysis of the British reactions to the Shertok-Zazlanyi proposal also provided additional explanations to the British – Yishuv relationship in the war. In its nature, the partnership in the war (either small or large scale in its extent) was a temporary arrangement, and lacked any long-term strategic foundation. Primarily, the Yishuv fought for self-government in Palestine, and aimed for an open-door immigration policy (for European Jews), something the British were keen to prevent. During the war, these fundamental differences manifested themselves in the diverging strategic aims in Europe. The British primary concern was the Shertok-Zazlanyi plan's contribution to the war (and how it helped sabotage efforts, and the rescue of POWs), as well as the ways these would affect the Yishuv's post-war positions in Palestine. For the Jewish Agency, the scheme promised some obvious political benefits (spreading Zionism among European Jews), but an element, which put the cooperation under evident strain, was the clear moral impetus (rescue and aid) behind Yishuv

actions.⁴⁶ Thus, besides political considerations, mutual suspicion between London and Palestine also prevented the development of small-scale Anglo – Yishuv cooperation into a fully-fledged alliance in the war against the Nazis.

British archival sources also reveal that SOE had a multilayered strategy in Hungary, and apart from contemplating the use of Palestinian Jewish commandoes, it also attempted bringing about a coup d'état in Budapest in the autumn of 1944. Until now, historians have maintained that in the face of Soviet expansion in the region Britain had no option but to desist. But, the historiography have been unaware of SOE's quick realization of the emergence of a pacifist current in the high circles of Hungarian politics, and its swift actions (especially in contrast to the reluctance of the Foreign Office) to take advantage of these with the ultimate aim to create a more favourable position for Britain in the region. The Csíky and Szombathelyi missions (initiated and sponsored by the SOE) also reveal the existence of a more advanced pro-British conspiratorial circle in Hungary than we have previously understood, and points to the necessity to further explore these links in order to better understand Hungary's history in these turbulent months.

Notes

¹ SOE was a British organisation conducting espionage, sabotage and reconnaissance worldwide in World War II.

² The Jewish Agency for Palestine was the representative of the Jews in Mandate Palestine. At the same time, this institution also strived to represent the interests of Jewish diasporas worldwide. In this form it was recognised by the British in 1930.

³ See for example: Michael R. D. Foot, *SOE: An Outline History of the Special Operations Executive* (London: Pimlico, 1999); William Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE: Special Operations Executive, 1940-1945* (London: St. Emins, 2002).

⁴ Historian Neville Wylie identified the 'no bangs' (not confrontational) SOE policy in neutral countries, and a conspiratorial (rather than action) focus of neutral SOE stations as the crux of the historiographical oversight that confined states such Hungary to the periphery of historiographical interest: Neville Wylie, "SOE and the Neutrals" in *Special Operations Executive. A New Instrument of War* ed. Mark Seaman (London: Routledge, 2006), 157-178 (157).

⁵ An exception is the so-called Auschwitz bombing debate. This explores the military and moral backgrounds to the absence of large scale Allied bombing campaigns against Nazi extermination camps; see particularly: Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berendaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies Have Attempted It?* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

⁶ Two English language monographs deal with SOE Jewish parachutist and the British – Yishuv relationship, but neither use British official sources or SOE archives: Tuvia Friling, *Arrows in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership, and Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust*, 2 vols., vol. 1., (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Perfect Heroes: the World War II Parachutists and the Making of Israeli Collective Memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010). See also: Yehuda Bauer: *From Diplomacy to Resistance: the History of Jewish Palestine, 1939-1945* (Atheneum: London, 1973).

⁷ Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, 261-355.

⁸ In the historiography, his name also appears as: Zaslanyi, Zazlani or Zaslani. As head of Yishuv intelligence, it seems he intentionally used several variations of his name for conspiratorial reasons. Here, we have adopted the spelling ‘Zazlanyi’ which was used in British official and SOE sources.

⁹ For the topic of British anti-Semitism; see particularly: Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989); Tony Kushner, “Different Worlds: British perceptions of the Final Solution During the Second World War” in *The Final Solution* ed. David Cesarani (London: Routledge, 1994), 246-67; Meier Sompolinsky, *The British Government and the Holocaust* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Here, it is vital to add a brief note on the availability of SOE sources on Hungary. After the war, the SOE archive was the subject of several so-called ‘bonfires’, when large proportions of original documents were incinerated due to their sensitivity. Dossiers on country-specific strategy and high-level policy-making were particularly hard hit. In relation to the Shertok-Zazlanyi proposal the documents containing SOE – Whitehall – military correspondence, and SOE decision-making mechanisms are mostly missing, which significantly hampered the reconstruction of these vital elements in the pages below.

¹¹ Basil Davidson, *Special Operations Europe. Scenes from the Anti-Nazi War* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1980), 54-60.

¹² For allowing the Wehrmacht to attack Yugoslavia from Hungarian territory Britain broke off diplomatic relations with Budapest on 3 April 1941.

¹³ SOE officer Basil Davidson was sent to Hungary in late 1939 with the vague instruction to ‘organise resistance’. His accounts about the intransigent atti-

tude of O'Malley, and the difficulties he found in bribing Hungarians and organizing them into an active resistance convinced the Foreign Office to halt Hungarian operations: minute by Cadogan, 7 June 1940, Foreign Office (FO) 371/24984, R 6415/195/37, The National Archives, Kew, UK (TNA).

¹⁴ Secret talks with the British have been studied extensively in the following works: Gyula Juhász, *Magyar-Brit titkos tárgyalások 1943-ban* (Kossuth: Budapest, 1978); Laura-Louise Veress, *Clear the Line: Hungary's Struggle to Leave the Axis During the Second World War* (London: Professional Pr., 1996). However, the SOE archives still house important and largely untapped sources relating to Hungarian peace talks in 1943 and 1944.

¹⁵ Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, 284-287. Ben-Gurion was convinced that individual emissaries (instead of commandoes) were more suitable for helping European Jewry and spreading the idea of Zionism. Moreover, there was significant disagreement in the Jewish Agency about the extent to which parachutists should be involved in resistance in Hungary. In this initial phase the Jewish Agency concentrated on forming Jewish sabotage units recruited from the British Army (Baumel-Schwartz, *Perfect Heroes*, 8).

¹⁶ Most of these attempts ended in swift failure (7 parachutists were imprisoned and killed by the Nazis) primarily, because through an intelligence leak, the Nazis were waiting for them when they landed: Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, 283. Hannah Szenes and the other Jewish heroes sparked a plethora of literature, both scholarly and fictional; see for example: Anthony Masters, *The Summer That Bled; The Biography of Hannah Senesh* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972); Hannah Senesh and Marge Piercy (foreword), *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary* (Nashville, TN: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004).

¹⁷ Force 133 (Bari) to SOE HQ London, 8 August 1944, Records of Special Operations Executive: Eastern Europe (HS) 4/108; see also: Friling, *Arrows in the Dark*, 290.

¹⁸ Keith Sword, "British Reactions to the Soviet Occupation of Eastern Poland in September 1939", *Slavonic and East European Review* 69, 1 (1991), 81-101.

¹⁹ Shertok to Randolph Churchill, 2 July 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

²⁰ Shertok to Randolph Churchill, 2 July 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

²¹ SOE documents referring to Churchill's viewpoint are predictably fragmentary. The second page of the Prime Minister's Office memo detailing Churchill's political reservations did not survive: Note from PM's office to C.D., 6 July 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

²² MP to MPH2, Record of conversations with Shertok of Jewish Agency, 21 July 1944, HS 4/108, TNA. Later, to the SOE's great satisfaction, the Yishuv dropped any references to mass rescue from the proposal. Again, the ques-

tion of rescue was abandoned for tactical reasons, sensing British disapproval of a mayor Hungarian rescue operation.

²³ MP/HU/6183, 21 July 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

²⁴ Hannah Szenes, and early parachutists were painfully aware of the bleak and hopeless prospects of their mission, and that in all probability they would not return. Baumel-Schwartz quotes the emotive episode of a parachutist who said goodbye to his loved one knowing perfectly well they would never see each other again (and indeed, that volunteer was captured and killed by the Gestapo): Baumel-Schwartz, *Perfect Heroes*, 15-20.

²⁵ In 1943 and early 1944 SOE concentrated on infiltrating Southern Hungary (the Mecsek Mountains and the city of Pécs), as well as Budapest and other industrial centers with the aim of targeting the Hungarian war industry. It also attempted to infiltrate Hungary from the north from Slovakia. Alan Ogden has recently offered a summary of SOE operations in Hungary and other countries in the region. His work is strong on the chronological narrative, but weaker on analysis to the extent that general patterns are lost: Alan Ogden, *Through Hitler's Back Door: SOE Operations in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria 1939-1945* (London: Pen and sword, 2010), 38-58. For SOE's own summary of its Hungarian missions; see: Force 399 to Istanbul, 11 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

²⁶ In September 1944, the SOE had 8 agents in Hungary (4 British and 4 Hungarian) actively engaged in subversive operations. Another group of 8 (also 4 British and 4 Hungarian) were in Northern Yugoslavia en route to Hungary: HS 4/114, Hungarian Operations, 28 September 1944. The number of Hungarian collaborators actively helping these groups with providing safe houses, transport, or other means of survival is unknown. Estimations can be made from SOE documents listing reliable Hungarian collaborators. According to these documents their numbers were not more than a few dozen. It is important to distinguish these collaborators from the Jewish underground helping Jewish parachutists.

²⁷ SOE London HQ to Force 399 and Force 133, 9 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

²⁸ Minute by Frank Roberts [Central Department, Foreign Office], 6 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

²⁹ There are profound reasons for the SOE's involvement in secret talks with Hungarians. The SOE, taking advantage of its intelligence potential, effectively dominated talks with Hungarian peacefeelers during the war. Also, since there were no diplomatic relations between London and Budapest, and neutral embassies seemed reluctant to accommodate secret talks, these Hungarians in 1944 (similarly to the Kállay group in 1943) was only able to initiate contacts with the SOE in neutral capitals.

³⁰ Pállóczy-Horváth to Basil Davidson, 7 August 1943, HS 4/115, TNA; Translation of extracts of Foreign Office circular addressed to Departments abroad, dated 22nd July, regarding the political situation in Hungary, HS 4/115, TNA.

³¹ It is important to note here that the entire Csiky mission was made to look like a British response to the Hungarian initiative to resume peacefeelers talks, and the SOE wanted it to appear as an action coming from anti-German Hungarians from abroad. In fact, the evidence clearly attests that the initiative came from the SOE; see: Istanbul SOE to London SOE, 28 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

³² A/H 6 (Palóczy-Horváth), detailed note on the Csiky mission, 19 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA; Istanbul SOE to London SOE HQ, 22 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

³³ The memorandum mentioned the possibility of an Allied landing on the Istria (Croatia) in the near future. From there, it suggested the rapid advance of Anglo-American troops into Hungary through the Ljubljana-gap. The river valleys of Slovenia had been the subject of British military planning in relation to a potential Balkan front, as they provided relatively easy access from the Adriatic Sea to the Hungarian plains through the mountainous regions of Yugoslavia. In reality, the Ljubljana-gap plan was more interested in a northward attack towards the heart of Austria, and in any case was dropped by September 1944; see: War Office (WO) 204/7821, TNA.

³⁴ On 15 October 1944, Horthy announced an armistice in a nationwide radio broadcast. However, because the Hungarian Army received contradictory commands, the surrender was unsuccessful. In response, the SS swiftly occupied Budapest Castle and kidnapped Horthy's son, and forced the Regent to resign and appoint Arrow-Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi as Prime Minister.

³⁵ L.H. Mortimor to H.B.M.'s Minister, Hungarian Matters, note nr.3, 25 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA; Újpestery's memoir does not mention this SOE link: Elemér Újpestery, *Végállomás Lisszabon* (Budapest: Magvető, 1987).

³⁶ After the Szálasi takeover, Szombathelyi, as a well-known critic of the war, was arrested and deported to Germany. Later the Americans turned him over to Hungary and then to Yugoslavia, where he was executed for his alleged role in the controversial anti-partisan operations in Hungarian occupied Yugoslavia in early 1942.

³⁷ Recently, researchers considered mostly untapped military, political and SOE documents in a unique volume and aimed to provide a bird's eye view-point of British regional strategy, and this way to penetrate beyond standard diplomatic and political approaches: *British Political and Military Strategy in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe in 1944* eds. William Deakin, Elisabeth Barker and Jonathan Chadwick (London: St. Martin's Press, 1988). While this

significantly contributed to our knowledge, its focus on Hungary remained limited to internal affairs, and did not explore British sources; see: Gyula Juhász, “Problems of the Hungarian Resistance after the German Occupation, 1944”, in *British Political and Military Strategy* eds. Deakin et al., 180-189.

³⁸ This question has been the subject of continued scholarly inquiry. For a perspective that explores British policy in the Balkans in relation to the Soviet Union; see: Christopher Catherwood, *The Balkans in World War II: Britain's Balkan Dilemma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Keith Neilson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³⁹ Grand strategy of the Allies, 23 March 1940, Cabinet Papers (CAB) /66/6/33, TNA.

⁴⁰ In the Jassy-Kishinev operation (20-29 August 1944) the Soviets defeated the Axis in East Romania, and achieved a major military breakthrough. The victory opened the way for the Red Army to Romania, Hungary and the Balkans, knocked Romania out of the war, and created the opportunity to bypass the Carpathians, a major geographical obstacle. This military success made Soviet occupation of East Central and South East Europe inevitable.

⁴¹ Headquarters Balkan Air Force, Policy Committee Meeting, 13 August 1944 (report date 17 August 1944), Air Ministry, Balkan Air Force (AIR) 23/8119, TNA; Balkan Air Force to AFHQ (Allied Force Headquarters – Allied operational forces in the Mediterranean), 14 August 1944, AIR 23/8119, TNA; Force 133 (SOE Bari under Cairo) to London SOE (?), 8 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

⁴² From MP (SOE) to CD (through AD/H), 29 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA; Foreign Office to Moscow, 1 September 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

⁴³ It is not the goal of this article to analyse the numerous Hungarian peacefeeler's attempts from September 1944. While the British showed openness to receive such Hungarian bids, official British attitude in the end was determined by this Eden decision. For a good summary of British policy to Hungarian peacefeeler's in the autumn of 1944; see: MP/HU/6241 to CD, 29 August 1944, HS 4/108, TNA.

⁴⁴ Secret peace talks with Hungary produced mixed results. In September 1943 Hungary provisionally surrendered to the Allies, but the British agreed the act to be postponed until the ‘right moment’. In Hungary, surrender was deferred pending arrival of the British – American military to the frontiers of the country, which never materialized. As a result, Hungary kept fighting on Germany's side.

⁴⁵ The remaining political option to retain some form of influence in the region was to negotiate with the Soviets about the delineation of spheres of influence, or about some form of shared post-war control. Historians saw the so-called

Churchill-Stalin 'Percentage Agreement' in October 1944 as a last minute British attempt to achieve this. From the British imperial perspective this was a success since it provisioned British dominance in Greece; see: András D. Bán, "A Százalékegyezmény: Európa megmentése vagy Kelet-Európa elárulása?" *Európai Utas* 25, 1 (2000), 12-25.

⁴⁶ Baumel-Schwartz, *Perfect Heroes*, 3-44; compare this to Ben Hecht, who portrayed these as purely rescue operations: Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (London: Milah Press, 1997), 118-133.

The Acknowledgement of Helplessness: the Helplessness of Acknowledgement, Imre Kertész: *Fatelessness*

Anna Menyhért

“And exactly this, the aporia, must be maintained
in memory. Metaphorically speaking, every step leads to
the door of the gas-chamber, but no step leads inside.”
Reinhart Koselleck¹

“And they do not stop explaining things,
to acknowledge their meaning even when they are
closed in ghettos, herded together and deported.”
Randolph L. Braham²

The following study analyzes Imre Kertész’s novel *Fatelessness* in the context of the theories of Berel Lang on the ideological language of genocide in Nazi Germany and Hannah Arendt on the impact of linguistic particularities of dictatorship on individuals; it develops the concept of steps according to which dictatorship makes people get used to its measures gradually so as to prevent them from acknowledging the possible consequences of what they experience. The novel, for which Imre Kertész was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 2002, presents this gradual process in the identity development of the teenage protagonist showing how he — step by step — gets used to being in a concentration camp and begins even to like it by taking everything for granted. According to the appraisal of the Swedish Academy, Imre Kertész’s novel explores the possibility of living in eras in which the individual is almost totally subjugated to authority and in which “Auschwitz is not an exceptional occurrence that like an alien body subsists outside the normal history of Western Europe. It is the ultimate truth about human degradation in modern existence.”³ In this sense, the Holocaust — owing to the those authors and theoreticians who, similarly to Kertész, construe and conceive the Holocaust experience as a linguistic experience⁴ — is not merely a topic in

literature, humanities and culture in general but a paradigmatic linguistic approach. Not only does the Holocaust determine the language that is used to write about it, but it has an impact on writings that are thematically not related to it.

Holocaust research from a linguistic or partially linguistic aspect examines, on the one hand, the diaries of the victims, the memoirs of the survivors and interviews recorded with them, and, on the other hand, the official language of the Third Reich, the linguistic manifestations of Nazi ideology and their effect on the individuals and their language use. Even though studies progressing on similar paths and having similar findings — differ in their hypotheses and conclusions,⁵ some of their elements can still be integrated in the following train of thought.

Hannah Arendt's highly debated book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*⁶ is very instructive in this respect, primarily because it demonstrates how the language of the Third Reich, a totalitarian state, can overwhelm an individual without secure cultural background and an own language, how language becomes decisive in one's actions, and how the individual language user animates the power that "stands behind" the language, embodied in it, by accepting and applying its linguistic rules. In Arendt's interpretation, Eichmann was the "déclassé son of a solid middle-class family," was unable to finish high school, or even to graduate from the vocational school" as he preferred "being a member of something or other" and eventually joined the SS in 1932 by mistake instead of a freemasons' association. In 1934 he got a job in the Himmler-led Security Service Main Office (*Sicherheitsdienst [SD] Hauptamt*) in the department responsible for Jewish affairs, and as his strongest skills were organising and negotiating, he became the logistics coordinator and later chief organiser of Jewish emigration and then deportations.⁷

According to Arendt, Eichmann's "great susceptibility to catch words and stock phrases, combined with his incapacity for ordinary speech, made him, of course, an ideal subject for 'language rules'."⁸ He also admitted that "officialese [*Amtssprache*]" is the only language he spoke. During the court hearings Arendt saw that Eichmann "was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché." "His inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else;" and he "always thought within the narrow limits of whatever laws and decrees were valid at a given moment."⁹

Arendt goes into great detail in studying Nazi language regulation (*Sprachregelung*) along similar lines as Berel Lang in his book: *Act and*

Idea in the Nazi Genocide.¹⁰ According to Lang, language regulation — the rules on what words and phrases are allowed and which are prohibited in the official documents and texts that reach the public in the Third Reich — creates a new, previously undefined rhetorical formula: the figurative lie, in which lies work differently from their usual moral aspect. In the case of figurative lies it is not the given speaker who is a liar but the expression itself (of course, he adds, those using figurative lies often lie themselves).¹¹

Lang bases his argument on the analysis of the most important expression regarding the extermination of Jews: *Endlösung* (the Final Solution). However he believes that the same applies to almost everything in the dictionary of language regulation — i.e. as Arendt mentioned in regard of “officialese” used by Eichmann — the expressions *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment), *Aussiedlung* (evacuation), and *Auflockerung* (thinning out — in practice moving people from the ghetto) mean murder and *Umsiedlung* (resettlement) and *Arbeitseinsatz im Osten* (labour in the East) refer to deportation.¹² Lang explains that in traditional rhetoric the expression *Endlösung* may seem ironic, a euphemism or an oxymoron, however the totalitarian thought is unable to adopt a double viewpoint, which would be essential in the case of irony. In euphemisms — in Lang’s example the frequent use of “gone to sleep” instead of “died” — the fields of reference of the expressions overlap (in the given case the motionless and unconscious state, which is only temporary when it refers to sleeping) and the oxymoron does not hide but emphasise the tension between the contrasting meanings of the references.

Thus, it seems that genocide, and the series of unprecedented crimes committed by the Third Reich required and formed a new language with new rhetoric devices.¹³ Lang’s definition of figurative lie is the following: regarding the expression *Endlösung*, “the denotation of the term, although logically consistent with it (in principle, *any* act might be called a solution), substantively contradicts it; that the term itself is abstract and general but designates an event or object that is concrete and specific (...) and is meant to draw attention away from both this change and from the individual aspects of its referent, thus concealing what is denoted (and attempting to conceal the fact of concealment as well)”; it “links two contradictory literal references, it also attempts, in asserting the connection, both to deny the contradiction and to conceal the denial.”¹⁴

Lang believes that genocide elevates lie “to a principle of discourse.”¹⁵ This phenomenon had an effect on the language of “everyday” life as well,¹⁶ the symptoms of which can be tracked down in expressions

of monumentality, exaggeration, the normalisation of hyperboles, the rewiring of archaic words and the adaptation of certain foreign words. The latter two were introduced to mystify the German past and, at first sight quite contradictory to the previous, to represent the irrefutability of technology.¹⁷ Dim slogans building on puns and alliterations are also characteristic of the era. (“Das Leben des Führers bleibt nicht eine Wirklichkeit sondern wird zu einer Wahrheit” [The life of the Führer does not remain a reality but becomes a truth].) According to Lang, the aim and meaning of the above is “to rationalize language and to subordinate to authority, that is, to make it into a political instrument which in its own structure would incorporate the features of moral violation that otherwise constitute the lie,”¹⁸ but the language of genocide “(...) reveals the intention to turn language itself into an instrument of domination and deceit.”¹⁹

In a similar interpretation by Arendt, language regulation — as the phrase itself describes a lie — actually means the systematisation of lies and thus created a brainwashing mechanism: “The net effect of this language system was not to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, “normal” knowledge of murder and lies.”²⁰ The Nazi regime could manage this on the one hand by using catch phrases invented by Himmler, which Eichmann called “winged words” and the judges “empty talk”, for example: “These are battles which future generations will not have to fight again.”²¹ The principle behind this was to ensure that those participating in the murders, being normal people by nature, could direct the feeling of remorse from their victims to somewhere else, namely themselves as heroes dealing with tasks fit for super-humans.²² On the other hand, in the Third Reich the command of the Führer was the centre of legal order and experts transcribed his spoken orders into regulations,²³ which resulted in that finally “evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it — the quality of temptation.”²⁴ This idea of Arendt together with her view on the banality of evil is widely debated.²⁵ In the given context — from a linguistic and cultural aspect instead of a moral one — it can be interpreted in a way that the reason why evil was hard to detect in its usual or “normal” way of being different was that it appeared in the form of legality (and although consequences following from this view would lead far from the discussed topic, it may be added that appearing camouflaged is not far from the traditional nature of evil). Arendt uses the above reasoning to explain how Eichmann — a person who is narrow-minded, has difficulty in speaking, tends to boast but is unable to recontextualize, i.e. incapable of abstraction — turns into a mass murderer:

“The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. (...) this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together for it implied (...) that this new type of criminal, who is in actual act *hostis generis humani*, commits his crime — under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong.²⁶ Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to identify himself with Richard III and “to prove a villain...” It was sheer thoughtlessness — something by no means identical with stupidity — that predisposed him to become “one of the greatest criminals of that period.”²⁷

Imre Kertész in his novel *The Fiasco* — also reflecting on Richard III and arguing the point of view Semprun’s *Long Voyage* represents by presenting Ilse Koch, the wife of the commander of Buchenwald concentration camp as a perverted murderer, i. e. creating an image of her as a unique villain — takes a standpoint similar to Arendt’s: “Richard III vows to be a villain, however, the mass murderers of a totalitarian system take an oath to serve public good.”²⁸

According to the parabolic hypothesis about the relationship of murderer and victim as presented in *The Fiasco*, murderer and victim are the two sides of the same mechanism, however there is no sharp border between the two sides: it is by pure chance which takes which role. Thus the question of the tangibility and representability of evil — i. e. its literary and linguistic mediation — will be of most importance to the author. If evil does not appear as a unique and bloody murderer in a society that created the Holocaust, if it steps out from the paradigm of “blood, lust and demon”²⁹ and is a simple assiduous citizen who kills out of diligence,³⁰ then the most important question is how this new paradigm can be mediated.

According to the harsh judgement of Hannah Arendt the eighty million citizens of Germany lied to themselves the same way that Eichmann did.³¹ Self-deception, hiding from the facts, not acknowledging knowledge can all be interpreted as linguistic phenomena and can be compared to the behaviour — which is regarded similar by many — of the Jewish victims who self-deceptively became used to the incomprehensible. The novel *Fatelessness* arrives at a similar picture.

At the end of *Fatelessness* the speaking and thinking style of the teenage boy protagonist returning from Buchenwald changes, his linguistic competence increases. He is now able to produce individual, evaluating

and contextualising streams of thought, interpret his own actions and the situation he is in, as well as locate himself in the world. This ability of self-definition becomes visible in the meaningful conversation at the end of the novel when he is trying to explain to his old neighbours back at home what he means by “steps”:

Everyone took steps as long as he was able to take a step; I too took my own steps, and not just in the queue at Birkenau, but even before that, here, at home (...). I would now be able to tell her what it means to be “Jewish”: nothing, nothing to me at least, at the beginning, until those steps start to be taken. None of it is true, there is no different blood, nothing else, only (...) I too had lived through a given fate. It had not been my own fate, but I had lived through it, and I simply couldn't understand why they couldn't get it into their heads that I now needed to start doing something with that fate, needed to connect it to somewhere or something; after all, I could no longer be satisfied with the notion that it had all been a mistake, blind fortune, some kind of blunder, let alone that it had not even happened. (...) I made it clear to them that we can never start a new life, only ever carry on the old one. I took the steps, no one else, and I declared that I had been true to my given fate throughout. The sole blot, or one might say fly in the ointment, the sole accident with which they might reproach me was the fact that we should be sitting there talking now — but then I couldn't help that. Did they want this whole honesty and all the previous steps I had taken to lose all meaning? Why this sudden about-face, this refusal to accept? (...) They too had taken their own steps. They too had known, foreseen, everything beforehand, they too had said farewell to my father as if we had already buried him, and even later on all they had squabbled about was whether I should take the suburban train or the bus to Auschwitz... At this point not only Uncle Steiner but old Fleischmann as well jumped to his feet. Even now he was still striving to restrain himself, but was no longer capable of doing so: “What!” he bawled, his face red as a beetroot and beating his chest with his fist: “So it's us who're the guilty ones, is it? Us, the victims!” I tried explaining that it wasn't a crime; all that was needed was to admit it, meekly, simply, merely as a matter of reason, a point of honor, if I might put it that way.³²

This scene, through re-reading the whole story of the novel retrospectively, raises several issues essential for the interpretation of the novel and help cast light on the pictures of the Holocaust it draws. It is a significant fact that the first interpretations of the novel did notice the

importance and complexity of the notion of steps mentioned by Gyurka Köves. However, eventually, as with the characters of Steiner and Fleischmann who think that past and future can be separated,³³ the notion of steps was taken out of its context within the novel, its potential social implications became neglected (as becomes apparent from the reactions of the participants of the above cited dialogue) and finally the focus of interpretation shifted onto teleological determinism, i.e. understanding survival, the conscious behaviour of slowly approaching a positive future and the faith in keeping up the value of life under all circumstances as the main aim.³⁴

In contrast to the traditional way of relating the idea of steps to determination and destination, Gyurka Köves rather speaks about the fact that each individual is responsible for their steps even if they do not know where they will lead them; and that steps define one's fate even if they do not know where they are heading or if they take no notice of having stepped at all; and that people continue their steps even if they would rather forget about them. Throughout the novel, Köves's steps are unreflected means of adaptation and learning as he gradually gets used to the given life conditions he faces. Köves explains this theory of "graduality" in a conversation with a journalist:

I tried to explain how different it was, for example, to arrive in a not exactly opulent but still, on the whole, agreeable, neat, and clean station where everything becomes clear only gradually, sequentially over time, step-by-step. By the time one has passed a given step, put it behind one, the next one is already there. By the time one knows everything, one has already understood it all. And while one is coming to understand everything, a person does not remain idle: he is already attending to his new business, living, acting, moving, carrying out each new demand at each new stage. Were it not for that sequencing in time, and were the entire knowledge to crash in upon a person on the spot, at one fell swoop, it might well be that neither one's brain nor one's heart would cope with it.³⁵

This passage may cast light on how the book could mislead the reader regarding the interpretation of steps, how it can make the impression that the gradualness of steps — in harmony with the reading strategies of the interpretative paradigm³⁶ dominant in communist Hungary at the time of the first publication of the book — indicate an ambitious and determined behaviour. The absurd irony of this reasoning is given by the fact that it seems that gradualness serves the survival of the victim, while in

reality it is not life but death it helps getting used to. The cooperation of the victims, their reliance on the ease of graduality is a way of participating in their own murder in pre-measured doses. The deportation experts of the Nazi regime used graduality — i.e. a series of lies — to make their extermination mechanism more successful and to break the opposition of the deported and in a wider context to gradually dismantle the public's opposition to deportations. The preparation of the acceptance by the public of anti-Jewish actions started in Germany with the 1935 anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws, while in Hungary with the introduction of the First anti-Jewish laws in 1938, and later by ordering the Jews to wear a yellow badge (in Hungary introduced through the Prime Ministerial Decree of 30 March 1944) — which signified the last phase before the deportations began.³⁷

The journalist's reaction to Gyurka Köves's reasoning, especially his gestures indicate that, to some extent, he has understood how the former prisoner's way of thinking has been affected by the concentration camp and such a turn in their conversation may serve as an answer for both of them:

“That, roughly, is the way you have imagined it.” At this, still in the same position as earlier, only now instead of holding the cigarette, which he had meanwhile discarded, with his head between his hands and in an even duller, even more choking voice, he said: “No, it's impossible to imagine it.” For my part, I could see that, and I even thought to myself: so, that must be why they prefer to talk about hell instead.³⁸

On the one hand, the above paragraph explains Köves's problem with interpreting allegorisation, the fact that he does not understand why the journalist calls the concentration camp hell.³⁹ Although this problem already appears at the very beginning of the conversation, when the journalist's use of the word is put in quotation marks in the text, similarly to other phrases that are said by Köves but appear in citation marks — phrases he cannot identify himself with: “Have you come from Germany, son?” “Yes.” “From the concentration camps?” “Naturally.” “Which one?” “Buchenwald.” Yes, he had heard of it; he knew it was “one of the pits of the Nazi hell,” “as he put it”⁴⁰ — and thus he finds himself facing the insharebility of the act of “imagining”, and, realizing it, he goes into explaining himself until finally the journalist poses the question “Can we imagine a concentration camp as anything but a hell?” and admitting the impossibility of comparison or allegorisation, he answers it himself: “No, it's impossible to imagine it.”

On the other hand what Gyuri Köves says serves also as an answer to the journalist's previous question, which in fact coincides with the puzzling phenomenon readers and interpreters of the book are most preoccupied with: why does Köves keep answering "naturally" to all questions?

"Did you have to endure many horrors?" to which I replied that it all depended what he considered to be a horror. No doubt, he declared, his expression now somewhat uneasy, I had undergone a lot of deprivation, hunger, and more than likely they had beaten me, to which I said: naturally. "Why, my dear boy," he exclaimed, though now, so it seemed to me, on the verge of losing his patience, "do you keep on saying 'naturally,' and always about things that are not at all natural?" I told him that in a concentration camp they *were* natural. "Yes, of course, of course," he says, "they were *there*, but ...," and he broke off, hesitating slightly, "but ... I mean, a concentration camp in itself is *unnatural*," finally hitting on the right word as it were. I didn't even bother saying anything to this, as I was beginning slowly to realize that it seems there are some things you just can't argue about with strangers, the ignorant, with those who, in a certain sense, are mere children so to say.⁴¹

The journalist embodies the reader who tries to "imagine", metaphorise, compare, translate into their own language or build into stories what they hear or read. Köves/the book keeps refusing or denying all such commonly used methods of interpretation. The failure of shareability in all of the previously known ways raises the question of how it is possible for those who did not experience the Holocaust or were not witnesses to it, i.e. how could future generations read about the Holocaust and read its literature if the traditional ways of reading do not work here any more? The fact that the book treats the journalist's solution of writing an article cooperating with Gyuri Köves as well-meant but unsatisfactory suggests that the reader is expected to do something else.

Seeing the large number of alienating quotation marks in the excerpt, and deriving from this the fact that Gyurka Köves is primarily dissatisfied with the journalist's phrasing, and that the disagreement is focused on interpreting "natural" we can conclude that a change in the language used for describing the Holocaust is expected. The Reformulation of public disclosure is to provide both the witness and the non-witness with access to the experience of the Holocaust to enable them to talk about it, and enable us to understand that concentration camps and the Holocaust

are in our past and, even if considered unnatural in the 20th century, are — unfortunately — natural as part of our history.

The interpretation which assumes that readers can be made familiar with the idea of the Holocaust or, in a broader sense, the destructive mechanisms of the totalitarian state with the help of language, or more precisely, that these ideas are primarily observed as linguistic experience (as this type of interpretation appeared in interviews with Kertész commenting on *Fatelessness* and, in the reception of the novel shortly after the Nobel-prize)⁴² all involve the idea that the Holocaust is a linguistic paradigm. Imre Kertész was asked in an interview whether the fact that the protagonist feels homesick when he thinks about the camp had personal connotations, too; he answered: “I cannot talk about that” and continues: “this novel might be about language, about how we related or relate to the totalitarian mechanism. (...) life in the lager can only be imagined as a literary text. One simply cannot think about its reality.”⁴³

Similar manifestations — on the possibilities of literary and aesthetic mediation of the Holocaust and its exclusiveness — are presented in the novel *Gályanapló* [Galley Boat Log] (1992), other Imre Kertész-essays,⁴⁴ and the above-cited excerpt of *Fatelessness* as well: they deal with the fact that the primary mediating approach to the Holocaust is a linguistic one because it can be (even if at least partially) tracked down in the linguistic mechanisms of both the victims and the murderers and, deriving from the above, it can be understood primarily as a linguistic and cultural experience by future generations. This idea is also dominant in some of the approaches to the literature on the Holocaust.⁴⁵ James E. Young in his research on Holocaust literature — diaries, memoirs, films on the testimonials of eye-witnesses, video recordings, monuments and secondary Holocaust-literature (by authors like Sylvia Plath who identify with the victims in their imagination) — reckons that the Holocaust, from the nonsensical and incomparably unique has turned into a trope or even an archetype⁴⁶ and its sole chance of surviving in memory is its literary-cultural representation.⁴⁷ Hayden White,⁴⁸ arguing with the previously mentioned Berel Lang, claims that literary pieces about genocide lack the chronicler’s authenticity that would be required in a topic like the Holocaust; on the contrary, through metaphorical language and the person of the author, they add something redundant to true historical facts. He reckons that Lang’s reasoning is not only valid for literature but also for all types of descriptive history, i.e. any attempt at presenting the Holocaust as a narrative.⁴⁹ White makes a contrasting concept according to which we have to take into account that our ideas regarding history have changed

and intransitive writing, mediality, the concept of the simultaneous with the act of writing creation of the subject of writing enable us to describe particularly 20th century experiences which seemed intangible in previous modes of representation. *Fatelessness*, similarly to the way in which Hannah Arendt describes Eichmann, reveal the effects of the totalitarian state on human behaviour as linguistic experience⁵⁰ in the phases of language change the protagonist goes through, like the steps (as the expression is used by Gyurka) that lead to Auschwitz. In the previously cited excerpt describing the principle of graduality, readers who take irony into account may see that Gyurka Köves treats the viewpoint of those who aim at destroying him as his own viewpoint. This loss of viewpoint happens in the novel gradually, the first significant — and at the same time terrifying in the eyes of the reader — occurrence is the scene where he sees himself and the other prisoners through the eyes of the Birkenau camp doctor. The change of perspective at this point is only momentary and explicitly reflected, although, unlike the reader the boy does not see either his own lack of prospects in the situation he is in or the grotesque nature of identifying himself with the doctor.

The flood of people rolled along in an unbroken stream, was constrained in a narrower channel, accelerated, then branched in two in front of the doctor. (...) Everything was in motion, everything functioning, everyone in their place and doing what they had to do, precisely, cheerfully, in a well-oiled fashion. (...) I soon figured out the essence of the doctor's job. An old man would have his turn — obvious, that one: the other side. A younger man — over here, to our side. Here's another one: paunchy but shoulders pulled stiffly back nonetheless — pointless, but no, the doctor still dispatched him this way, which I was not entirely happy about as I, for my part, was disposed to find him a shade elderly. (...) Thus, I was also driven to perceive through the doctor's eyes how many old or otherwise unusable people there were among them.⁵¹

However, Gyurka Köves “realizes” or finds too many things “natural” even previously in the novel from the point his father is taken to Labour Service. At the beginning of the novel he has a totally different connection to “realization”: in the first chapter he doesn't take things for granted, he emphasises the difference between his own viewpoint and others', and, using a special reporting tool, he reflects on the text — in a way looking out from it — and indicates the source of the reported information: “My father fiddled around a long time with the two gray

padlocks — to the point that I had a feeling he was doing it deliberately. He then handed over the keys to my stepmother, given that he would no longer have any use for them. *I know that, because he said as much.*⁵²

On the other hand, he does not always understand the implications of these pieces of information — in this case the fact that the expression refers to the likelihood of his father's death. He does not understand, for example, the conflicts indicated in flashes between his father and stepmother, he does not see that his father hides his not-unfounded fear that while he is away he will lose his wife (by the time the boy arrives home, his stepmother is married to Mr. Sütő). He cannot read underlying meanings, or the emotional-sexual components of situations: in chapter two Mr. Sütő nominally takes over their business due to the legal restrictions on ownership. In the absence of Gyurka's father, Mr. Sütő starts bringing food for his stepmother. The woman asks the boy what he thinks about this because she can sense that Mr. Sütő is courting her, however, the boy does not see this.

He is at the age when he is learning in what ways secondary meanings and allegorical narratives are usually related to the physical and emotional experiences and behaviour of people in a given society. That is how he realises that a kiss — that happened just by chance during an air-raid — has secondary meanings and according to the actualised interpretation of Annamarie, it is a sign of a love affair: "Later on, while we were talking, I learned one or two interesting things as to her thoughts about me: she said she would never have imagined "a time would come when I might mean something else" to her other than merely "a good friend."⁵³

Although Gyurka Köves does not possess the adequate experience in social contacts at the beginning of the story, he is aware of the fact that there are things that he does not know and thus he can differentiate between societal demands and his own opinion and he realises the extent to which he actually adjusts himself to the demands of society:

My stepmother made no response, but I heard a noise, and when I looked up I saw what it was: she was crying. It was again highly embarrassing, so I tried to keep my eyes fixed just on my plate. All the same, I noticed the movement as my father reached for her hand. A minute later I could hear they were very quiet, and when I again took a cautious glimpse at them, they were sitting hand in hand, looking intently at one another, the way men and women do. I have never cared for that, and this time too it made me feel awkward. Though the thing is basically quite natural, I suppose, I still don't

like it, I couldn't say why. It was immediately easier when they started to talk.⁵⁴

The fact that an instance of adaptation has occurred is indicated by the use of the word "natural": things that are natural to others are not necessarily natural to him. The word "natural" appears at yet another instance in the chapter and thus forecasts the meaning of the word in later chapters: the second instance also proves that the word is used by people to convince others by presenting ideas not as convictions thus not openly requiring agreement: "My stepmother had spoken about them just beforehand: only close family, was how she put it. Seeing my father make a gesture of some kind, she added, "Look, they just want to say good-bye. That's only natural!"⁵⁵

Gyurka Köves's limited distance-creating ability is still apparent when he is confronted by lots of new information; at this point he can still see the limits of his own ability to interpret things: the text indicates this with the use of quotation marks, the separation of voices, the keeping up of the limits between his own and others' speech. In this respect the father's farewell dinner in chapter one is an important episode, especially for the self-deceptive conversations taking place about the probable events of the war and the "common Jewish fate". Here, the boy — guided by the behaviour of his father and following the patterns he learnt from his stepmother — uses the word "naturally" as a part of the — pretentious — societal rules. The chapter prepares the later attitude to the word "naturally" (and all the other synonymous expressions that are still not present at this point but later become frequent: "of course", "I realize", "I suppose", "needless to say", "quite naturally") this is the knowledge he can take with him to the concentration camp.

The last person to arrive was my stepmother's oldest brother, Uncle Lajos. He fulfils some terribly important function in our family, though I'd be hard put to define exactly what that was. (...) Uncle Lajos then unexpectedly drew me into service. He said he would like "a little word" with me. He hauled me off to a secluded corner of the room and pinned me up against a cupboard, face-to-face with him. He started off by saying that, as I knew, my father would "be leaving us" tomorrow. I said I knew that. Next he wanted to know whether I was going to miss his being here. Though a bit annoyed by the question, I answered, "Naturally." Feeling this was in some way not quite enough, I immediately supplemented it with, "A lot." With that he merely nodded profusely for a while, a pained expression on his face."⁵⁶

It becomes evident at the beginning of chapter two that during the two months that have passed after his father left — and together with this the loss of the secure linguistic guidance provided by his father previously and after his own world became totally upset — Gyurka Köves has lost the ability to reflect on his language. His voice in the reported speech of the narration has almost completely become subordinated to the voice of others. In the following passage, words heard from his stepmother appear as the boy's opinion — the first person singular narrator gives opinion and background information about a third person singular character and later it is easy to notice the shift, in the third sentence the two voices merge. At this point, the subject of the text is the narrator himself, however instead of the “I say what they say about me” reporting technique, he eliminates the third person from the previous position and uses a structure of “I talk about myself” — a kind of self-quoting, while the source of the words is clearly a third person:

My stepmother, though, was thrilled most of all about the identity papers, because up till then every time I set off on any journey, she always got herself worked up about how I was going to vouch for myself should the need arise. Now, though, she has no reason to fret as the ID testifies that I am not alive on my own account but am benefiting the war effort in the manufacturing industry, and that, naturally, puts it in an entirely different light. The family, moreover, shares that opinion.⁵⁷

The problem becomes even more complicated by the fact that the stepmother's voice is not her own, nor reflected; it contains popular belief regarding the given question, which is mediated this way towards the boy. Thus, the type of discourse that can be learnt from adults in this world is not reflected or thoughtful but a discourse of pretension where the voices of self and other are blurred.⁵⁸ Imre Kertész recalls this in his essay: “The Exiled Language”:

A specific experience left a mark on my childhood, which made me suffer a lot but I still could not understand, grasp, find or name it. I had the feeling that I was taking part in a huge general lie, but this lie is the truth and it is only my fault that I feel that it is a lie. I did not know that this experience is language-related and in reality it is an unconscious protest against the society surrounding me, against the pre- and pro-fascist society of Budapest in the 20s and 30s, which wanted me to accept the lurking danger as my normal fate.⁵⁹

The “big lie” — the behaviour of the Hungarian Jewry who have assimilated to assimilation and clung onto law, or the lack of it, to its pretence; who have not changed their former life strategies and who adjusted their current life circumstances exclusively to previously valid self-interpretative narratives — appears in the novel through the merging of voices, told by Uncle Willie and Uncle Lajos. Phrases quoted from the opinion of Willie and Lajos are satisfactory even without the boy’s logical linkers to compile the theory of international pacts and procrastinating attitude supported by boasting insiderness: “from a confidential source”, “absolutely reliable”, “a decisive shift in our position is to be anticipated”, “secret negotiations”, “between the Germans and the Allied powers, through neutral intermediaries”, “had by now come to recognize that their position on the battlefronts is hopeless”, “the Jews of Budapest”, “coming in handy”, “to wring advantages, at our expense, out of the Allies”, “an important factor”, “world opinion”, “shocked”, “the bigger game, in which we are actually pawns in an international blackmailing gambit of breath-taking scale”, “what goes on behind the scenes”, “a spectacular bluff”, “events unfold”.⁶⁰ The quoted utterances also make it clear that through the character of Uncle Lajos the general idea according to which the present situation is directly related to the persecution of Jews over the millennia is conveyed. That is why he suggests to Gyuri Köves that adulthood is to be interpreted as participating in the common fate and common suffering: “the happy, carefree years of childhood”, “would keep an eye on us”, “what worry and self-denial are”, “man-to-man”, “unbroken persecution that has lasted for millennia”, “have to accept with fortitude and self-sacrificing forbearance”, “in accordance with our strengths and abilities”, “profound feelings and a deep sense of responsibility”.⁶¹ It cannot be a coincidence that here, in chapter two, under continuous pressure and in the given context, the expression: “realized” appears for the very first time in the boy’s speech: “Uncle Lajos then drew me aside to exchange a few words of a more serious nature, among which he exhorted me not to forget that when I was at the workplace I was not representing myself alone but “the entire Jewish community,” so I must mind my behaviour for their sake too, because on that basis judgments would be formed with regard to all of them collectively. That would truly never have occurred to me; still, I realized that he might well be right, of course.”⁶²

Previously, Gyurka Köves’s gradual language and identity loss halts when, as a result of an emotional shock he thinks about the things said by the “elder sister” from next door. The girl actualises the public-

identity-forming narrative of Jewish sufferings, relates it to everyday experiences of exclusion, and as a result of this Gyurka Köves comes to the flash-like realisation of how he could be affected by this narrative and what possible consequences could follow if he tried to resist this common narrative. As it turned out before — for example on commenting how his father, stepmother and Mr. Sütő say good-bye to each other or during his conversation with Uncle Lajos when reading body language was a certain type of guidance for him to read the situation and to unconsciously express his disapproval⁶³ — the boy is receptive to the signs of the body: at the beginning of the story he perceives them but does not match their conventional interpretations to them. In contrast, at the end of the novel he is partially capable of integrating knowledge deriving from emotional intelligence⁶⁴ into his behaviour when he is able to react to the sorrow of Bandi Citrom's sister (Bandi is a boy he met in the Zeitz who never returned home) in a socially accepted way and he is able to interpret a dialogue of gestures going on between mother and sister — which is not necessarily a positive change.⁶⁵

The text at this point, and at several others, informs the reader, that, compared to the characters of the novel, it possesses a follow-up perspective and excess knowledge. One of the most important means to achieve this aim is the quasi-present tense of the narrative, the transferring of events to the present again through remembering them up to the last chapter, the homecoming, where narration turns to past tense. On the other hand, in chapters three and four, during the captivity in the brickyard, the train journey and the arrival in Auschwitz, the naive and infantile perspective of the narrator constantly clashes with the perspective of the reader, who continuously notices that Gyurka Köves does not draw the right self-defensive consequences from the things that happen to him: he could escape during the march to the brickyard but he does not do so out of “honor”.⁶⁶ In the sequence of events he is unable to prioritise the significant over the insignificant⁶⁷ and even though certain situations resemble a black comedy (an example is when the boy misunderstands the conversation when a gendarme calls on the deported on the train to hand over their valuables saying: “Where you're going,” (...) “you won't be needing valuables anymore.” Anything that we might still have the Germans would take off us anyway, he assured us. “Wouldn't it be better, then,” (...) “for them to pass into Hungarian hands?” (...) “After all, you're Hungarians too when it comes down to it!”⁶⁸ — as a result somebody, in exchange for water is willing to hand over the valuables but finally the transaction falls through). The reader suspecting or, having read

the book already, being exactly aware of what comes next becomes more and more desperate as he sees that, even though the boy already knows that he is a prisoner in a concentration camp, this does not change his attitudes for a long time. “At all events, in any place, even a concentration camp, one gets stuck into a new thing with good intentions, at least that was my experience; for the time being, it was sufficient to become a good prisoner, the rest was in the hands of the future — that, by and large, was how I grasped it, what I based my conduct on...”⁶⁹

In the concentration camp (chapters 5–8), Gyurka Köves accepts and acknowledges everything and understands everybody: why the doctors are selecting them for life and death, the people who shaved them, why the sadist soldier who was appointed as their supervisor and tormented them was all right, why it is righteous of the lice to feed on his wound and why the worms’ affirmation of life is more appropriate than his. He acknowledges that his former friend cannot help him any more and also that another prisoner can righteously take away his benefactor, the medical assistant who brought him extra portions of food. While he reaches a point at which he can understand his own total exploitation from the others’ point of view and he does not regard the phases of this exploitation as aggression, it slowly turns out that his knowledge brought from home is not suitable to interpret the concentration camp. The only thing that he brought from home and can make use of is the acknowledgment of identifying with others’ viewpoint, finding it natural, and his ability to adjust gradually to new conditions.

Gyurka Köves finds the stages leading to helplessness and death natural, however on the contrary, he does not find it natural that he survives the complete exhaustion that comes with an idea of giving up his life — he finds it strange that such a thing can happen in a concentration camp. After this incident, his attitude changes: he is not unsuspecting any more, he becomes careful, he does not hurry with his assessment of things, he does not believe himself, he is always alert. In the hospital he identifies a lemon and an egg step-by-step, he makes sure that what he sees is in line with the reality of a lemon and an egg according to his background knowledge:

when all of a sudden I saw a glint of yellow, then a knife and, with Pyetchka’s assistance, a metal mug materialized, a crunchy rasping — and even had I not believed my own eyes, my nose was now able to give irrefutable proof that the object I had just seen was, no two ways about it, truly a lemon⁷⁰ (...) “on another occasion, notice the distinctive light clunk and sudden surge of sizzling caused (it was

caught by my eyes just as I averted them again, though they long remained near-dazzled in total stupefaction) by a yellow-centred, white-fringed object — an egg⁷¹

This process of identification is just the opposite of the unsuspecting and hurried assessment that is typical at the beginning of the novel, for example, in the case of mistaking a whip for a walking stick:

yet I saw many also had a stick in their hand, like a regular hooked cane, which slightly surprised me, since they were, after all, men without any problems walking, and manifestly in prime condition. But then I was able to take a closer look at the object, for I observed that one of them, up ahead with his back half-turned toward me, all at once placed the stick horizontally behind his hips and, gripping it at both ends, began flexing it with apparent boredom. Along with the row, I came ever-closer to him, and only then did I see that it was not made of wood but of leather, and was no stick but a whip.⁷²

Thus, it seems that in a certain respect *Fatelessness* is a traditional education novel.⁷³ Gyurka Köves learns something: routine skills and experience gained in one thing — the world — cannot be applied to another one without modifications. The continuity he built his life on previously is upset and a different continuity takes its place, which consists of steps that do not follow each other in a natural way and lack consequential logic accompanied by reflection and continuous doubt regarding previous expectations.

In view of the above outlined process, the change after the conversation with Uncle Steiner and Uncle Fleischmann is not as surprising as it first seems. Through this change the difference between the viewpoints of the reader and the protagonist gains a new meaning, the excess tips the balance to the other side: up to this point the reader “knew more”. During the course of the novel up to the last chapter the reader represents the viewpoint that possesses historical knowledge and additional information, and later — clashed with the protagonist’s lack of knowledge and preparation — they themselves become continuity and historical remembrance. Gyurka Köves’s experiences, his unpreparedness, his naive ‘good boy’ behaviour and his complete exploitation, which is totally incompatible with the above, triggers a number of reactions from the reader: sorrow, sympathy and later remorse and the feeling of shame and responsibility.

Such reactions from readers primarily are the result of the book's special narration technique that enables the readers to evoke what was the new and unknown element of the events they recall at the time of their occurrence. This technique is unusual and unique because normally, due to the characteristics of the process of remembering, apart from some scarce impressions or glimpses of the past, we are not able to recall the onetime new element in the memory, as we will have already built the onetime experience in by the time of remembering. It has become part of our remembering self that defines our viewpoint looking at the past. In this case, however, the recalling of past events happens in a way that even though, as a consequence of the events the person who remembers also changes and integrates memories, it still appears that in the process of remembering he can find himself in the present tense of the past events without the experiences gained through recalling and thus events can be presented as a fictively brought back past in the present.

The strangeness of the past shown from the present, the quasi-memory nature of memories contribute to the book's harshness and enables the people who remember to have the possibility to undergo self-inflicted cruelty themselves. The rememberer is not tactful towards himself, he does what most narrators — especially in case of an admittedly autobiographical novel — are not able to do: he does not show his recalled self in a good light, he does not embellish the past. Kertész uses this method in other works as well; the protagonists of *The Fiasco* and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* are also fallible.

By way of comparison, in Péter Esterházy's book *Javított kiadás* [Revised Edition] (2002) the author who learns that his father was an agent of the communist secret service chooses a completely different method for exploring the past; by rewriting the process of learning and exploring he avoids the type of facing with facts so typical of Kertész, he is searching for an explanation retrospectively. Except for the emotionally driven introductory part he does not allow himself — his recalled self — to be "bare", he does not provide the reader with the glasses of history. Thus the reader is not ashamed and may only suspect that the rememberer is ashamed as he does not mention this: he is tactful towards himself and his reader. He does not make his palpable remorse explicit because he feels that he should have known something that he did not know.

Kertész's narrator is not tactful, neither with himself nor with the reader. Gyuri Köves lacks the feeling of shame, which is self-critical and predisposes remorse and self-deceit. His attitude of accepting everything "naturally" triggers — instead of the rememberer's reaction of "I should

have known” — a reaction from the reader towards the protagonist, “he should have known”, which serves as a way of “encouragement”. (An interesting manifestation of this type of cheering is Ágnes Heller’s account of referring to her own life and experience when reading *Fatelessness*: when Gyuri Köves is on his way to the brickyard, she would have liked to encourage him to escape as she did in a similar situation.⁷⁴) On seeing the futility of “encouragement” — i.e. after the bitter acknowledgement that our reading strategies feeding on the schematic adventurous-heroic-escaping themed literary and cinematic interpretations of the Second World War fail here — the feeling of shame stemming from the victim’s lack of knowledge puts pressure not on the narrator but the reader; it puts pressure on a culture that allowed it to happen and on the reader embodying history.

In an interview titled significantly “I want to hurt my reader” Imre Kertész says: “...it would be a shame to write a novel about Auschwitz that does not hurt the reader.”⁷⁵ The above cited conversation analysing the steps can be the moment when the time of writing, the present of remembering, can meet the story, the present of the memories. At this point this special education novel, similarly to *The Fiasco*, reaches its unexpected climax — the sudden revelation of the protagonist.

The impossibility of the humanistic education novel was shown previously in a multifaceted manner, in its grotesque twist: as follows from the clash resulting from the sharp contrast between the quoted word use and its field of reference: Gyurka Köves prepares for deportation as for a new life, he expects “orderliness, employment, new impressions, and a bit of fun” from labour in Germany and he also hopes it “might also be a way of getting to see a bit of the world,”⁷⁶ on arriving in Auschwitz he regrets that he is not glad enough because of having waited for too long,⁷⁷ he sees the sadist labour supervisor as his educator, and he calls the apathy preceding his total breakdown “peace, tranquillity, and relief.”⁷⁸ However at this point the novel’s grotesque tone suddenly switches to its direct opposite thus easing the reader’s suffering a result of excess knowledge, while also alleviating the bitter comedy during the reading of which the reader is looking forward to the moment when the protagonist realises his own situation, which everybody else is aware of except for him.

Delaying is not an end in itself, neither is it non-functional for the reader even though it can be sensed as such for a long time due to the reader’s outsidership and excess knowledge. There is also something at stake for the reader, namely his own linguistic viewpoint aimed at interpreting the Holocaust, which turns out to be non-functional at the moment

when Gyurka Köves realises that the “steps” were his own steps. That is how the protagonist and reader meet at the end of the novel, in a way restarting the reading, learning from the previous experience that new situations need — would have needed — new attitudes, new norms. This new situation — for the writer, the reader and European culture in general — is the one of post-Auschwitz, the struggle for defining the experience of the Holocaust directly or indirectly, the situation of education, awareness and development that occurs after a knowledge of Auschwitz.

In the contemplation that follows the last conversation Gyurka Köves’s tone changes. He feels homesick for the concentration camp and he is able to reflect on this feeling by interpreting the frequently mentioned “naturalness”: “there is nothing impossible that we do not live through naturally.”⁷⁹ He observes that instead of the “hardships”, people should rather talk about the “happiness of concentration camps”, thus considering the mediation of the Holocaust experience.

At this point the narrator steps forward as the conscious user of literary language, not as filtered through the eyes of the rememberer, but for the first time dominant and the protagonist’s own. Instead of the previously characteristic irony we experience pathos here as if the narrator captured the moment of finding his language, his aim thus himself. Irony appeared as the clash of forms and voice as the narrator in the role of the writer, the recalling self and the first reader reads his own recalled “languageless” self thus forcing the reader of the novel to follow through these clashes, depriving them of the possibility of creating a unified form and voice and identifying with the speaker.

The dichotomy of the clashed form and voice of the recaller and the recalled may also suggest that if, according to the novel, the Holocaust experience can only be understood linguistically, than the mediation of this understanding can only be done through and embodied in traditional literary language. The fact that Gyurka cannot access what he experiences is due to the lack of a suitable language. The language — the languagelessness — of his experience can be sensed as a limitation in access to literary language, which appears in the novel as the lack of the ability to speak literary language in a situation where that is the only way. Thus if we wonder what answers *Fatelessness* gives to questions regarding the language of the Holocaust, we can claim that linguistically it presumes a continuity between pre- and post-holocaust language. The unsharability of the Holocaust in the pre-holocaust language can only be told in a language, which is the result of the breakage in which the unsuitability of pre-holocaust language comes to the surface.

This type of continuity also differs from the pre-holocaust one owing to the fact that the Holocaust and totalitarian dictatorship create a paradigm which, through camouflage and brainwash, operates as a lie both in a moral sense and as a trope operating as a linguistic component and through the gradual dismantling of resistance, habituation and the institutionalisation of violence it eventually succeeds in engulfing the individual and making him recognise the ideology that nurtures him as his own.

The language of the Holocaust marks the other as if it was its own thus depriving the individual of creating an identity and the community of building narratives valid for its members. In Arendt's book *Eichmann* is locked up in a language of lies up to the end of his life; even before his execution he is only capable of saying clichés that seem grotesque in the given situation.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, even if the perpetrator of the dualistic system of totalitarian dictatorship could not change, the victim could. *Fatelessness* does not end on a negative note; Gyurka Köves survives concentration camp with the help of those who did not apply those schemes that were natural to him by that time and on returning home he interprets phrases which he used previously without reflecting on them (e.g. speaking about the impossibility of "starting a new life.")⁸¹ Thus the book acknowledges resistance against linguistic influence, which Gyurka Köves calls stubbornness,⁸² and through the example of which he can learn that it is necessary to question our preconceptions continuously. Arendt shares this point of view: "...under conditions of terror most people will comply but some people will not, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that "it could happen" in most places but it did not happen everywhere".⁸³ *Fatelessness* finds hope in the ability for self-reflection and doubt suggesting that post-holocaust language is not naïve or unsuspecting anymore, it rather builds on doubt or even reservations, suspicion and distrust as the experience of interruption and breaking is dominant in it: the urge to reinterpret, the acknowledgement of the relative nature of acknowledgment and the constraint of keeping the memory of helplessness. In this sense, *Fatelessness* is striving to find an intermediary field where impersonal and personal may intersect, where the alienation of the recalling and the recalled self can be presented and what is at stake is to find a personal language the speakers of which know that they cannot rely on as they are aware of its simultaneous alien and impersonal nature. These features are not far from those that are said to characterise European literature in the second half of the 20th century in general and the fact that these particular features are attributed to the given literary era shows the impact of the Holocaust as well. It seems that the

Holocaust did not only build in the thinking of the second half of the 20th century thematically but also as an experience of the break in language, which enables the Holocaust to keep up — the otherwise claimed as its own particular — alienation as a cultural border-experience. When paraphrasing Adorno's famous sentence ("to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,")⁸⁴ Imre Kertész says: "after Auschwitz one may only write poetry about Auschwitz."⁸⁵ In the above described context, Kertész's words may be modified: one may write not about Auschwitz as a topic but only together with the cultural experience.⁸⁶

NOTES

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¹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Az emlékezet diszkontinuitása* [The Discontinuity of Memory], trans. Gábor Schein, in *2000*, 1999/11, 3–9, especially p. 6.

² Randolph L. Braham, *A magyar Holocaust* [The Hungarian Holocaust.] (Budapest–Wilmington: Gondolat–Blackburn International Inc., 1988), I. 85.

³ <http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/2002/press-h.html>

⁴ About the ontological dimensions of this literary and linguistic experience see Karl Vajda, *Das ungewisse Etwas. Das literarische Kunstwerk und seine Überwindung nach Heidegger* (Hamburg: Kovac, 2014), 260–265.

⁵ Arendt and Lang reach very different conclusions through their linguistic studies regarding the nature of evil and the role of the Jewish Councils. In contrast to Arendt's highly debated hypothesis on the banality of evil, Lang — while studying the moral philosophical aspects of the Nazi genocide — reckons that (at one point in agreement with Arendt) there might be banality in the appearance and manifestation of evil, genocide is the consequence of the intentional and conscious choice of evil and selfish volition. Regarding the Jewish Councils, Arendt makes a sharp note of their leaders' individual responsibility and questions the necessity of cooperation with the Germans by stating that those who ignored the Jewish leaders' advice had better chances for survival. On the other hand, Lang in his book devotes a chapter titled: "The decision is not to decide" to claim that for the twentieth century the previously dominant communal self-image was replaced by an individual self-image resulting in the consequence that the leaders of the Jewish Councils did everything to save (at least) some members of their com-

munity. Regarding Lang and Arendt see: Róbert Braun, *Holocaust, elbeszélés, történelem* [Holocaust, Narratives, History] (Budapest: Osiris, 1995), 160–204, especially 181–182. For the famous debate and correspondence between Arendt and Gerschom Scholem see: Gerschom Scholem – Hannah Arendt: “Eichmann Jeruzsálemben.” Gerschom Scholem és Hannah Arendt levélváltása [Eichmann in Jerusalem. Correspondence of Gerschom Scholem and Hannah Arendt]. Trans. Beáta Markó, *Szombat* 6 1994. 4. 15–19. A heated debate followed the Hungarian publication of Arendt’s book (twenty years after the original publication) regarding the above mentioned two topics: Ágnes Böhm, “A holokauszt tabutémái” [Taboo Topics of the Holocaust], *Élet és Irodalom*, 2001/20, 2001/32; Péter Mesés, “Arendtről, Eichmannról, tényekről” [On Arendt, Eichmann and Facts], *Élet és Irodalom*, 2001/29; László Karsai, “Arendt, Eichmann és a történelmi tények” [Arendt, Eichmann and Historical Facts], *Élet és Irodalom*, 2001/31; Judit Molnár, “Arendt és a Magyar Zsidó Tanács [Arendt and the Hungarian Jewish Council], *Élet és Irodalom*, 2001/32; Péter Mesés, “Arendtről, még egyszer [On Arendt, Once More], *Élet és Irodalom*, 2001/34; Ágnes Erdélyi, “Az akarat csele. Hannah Arendt: Eichmann Jeruzsálemben” [The Trick of Will: Hannah Arendt: Eichmann in Jerusalem], *Holmi*, 2002/1, 117–126.

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann Jeruzsálemben. Tudósítás a gonosz banalitásáról*. [Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil]. Trans. Péter Mesés (Budapest: Osiris, 2000).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41, 44–45, 57.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 61–62., 181.

¹⁰ Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹² Cf.: Lang. op. cit., 92; Arendt, op. cit., 102.

¹³ Lang, op. cit., 89, 92, 96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 91, 92.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁰ Arendt, op. cit., 103

²¹ Ibid., 123.

²² Ibid., 214.

²³ Ibid., 172.

²⁴ Ibid., 173.

²⁵ Regarding the topic of temptation, see: Ágnes Heller, “Elmélkedések Arendtről, avagy a gonosztevőről és a gonoszlól” [Thoughts on Arendt, that is, on the Evil-Doer and Evil], *Ex Symposion*. 1999/26–27. Regarding the topic of evil, see: Mihály Vajda, “A rabszolgamorál gondolatatlansága, avagy hogyan működik a totális rendszer?” [The Thoughtlessness of Slave Morals, or How Do Totalitarian Regimes Work?] *Ex Symposion*, 1999/ 26–27.

²⁶ Arendt, op. cit., 304.

²⁷ Ibid., 315.

²⁸ Imre Kertész, *A kudarc* (Budapest: Magvető, 2000), 53.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 59.

³¹ Arendt, op. cit., 65.

³² Imre Kertész, *Fatelessness*. Trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Vintage–Random House, 2004), e-pub edition, 443–444.

³³ “At some point they fell silent, then, after a pause, old Fleischmann suddenly asked: “And what are your plans for the future?” I was mildly astonished, telling him I had not given it much thought. (...) “Before all else,” he declared, “you must put the horrors behind you.” Increasingly amazed, I asked, “Why should I?” “In order,” he replied, “to be able to live,” at which Uncle Fleischmann nodded and added, “Live freely,” at which the other old boy nodded and added, “One cannot start a new life under such a burden,” and I had to admit he did have a point. Except I didn’t quite understand how they could wish for something that was impossible, and indeed I made the comment that what had happened had happened, and anyway, when it came down to it, I could not give orders to my memory. I would only be able to start a new life, I ventured, if I were to be reborn or if some affliction, disease, or something of the sort were to affect my mind, which they surely didn’t wish on me, I hoped.” Ibid., 440.

³⁴ See the following contemporary reviews: Erzsébet Sinka, “Rémszürke napok. Kertész Imre: Sorstalanság [Frightful Grey Days. Imre Kertész: Fatelessness],” *Élet és Irodalom*, 1975/28. 10.: “(...) one of the main thoughts of the novel is the steps. The steps that somehow helped him through it all. Always one

step — just one more from morning till evening and then the next day. To avoid thinking of the unreachable only the next step — this is how — maybe — it was possible to survive it all. A rule? Not. Only the individual realisation that this “step” was something to hold onto, the minimum that always had to be done again and again.” And: Júlia Lenkei, “Kertész Imre: Sorstalanság,” *Kritika*, 1975/8, 30.: “He rejects to be seen as a victim, he emphasises the importance of individual steps contrasted to the type of remembering of his acquaintances. He refuses to see his fate as merely accidental but also denies that it is destined and “fate-like”, thus the title of the book. (...) Through the denial of being merely a victim and realising the importance of self-reliance and activity, he becomes an adult — an individual — and that is how the novel ends, too.”

³⁵ Kertész. *Fatelessness*, op. cit., 427.

³⁶ See Péter Szirák’s overview of the contemporary reception of *Fatelessness* and the analysis of the background that the novel preceded its era. In: Szirák, op. cit., 10.

³⁷ See also the op. cit. study by István Bibó’s with special focus on the chapter: “The reasons for Hungary’s moral failure” regarding the fact that the Hungarian population gradually got used to the persecution of Jews. In: Bibó, op. cit., 406–410., and: Gyurgyák, op. cit., 135–188.

³⁸ Kertész. *Fatelessness*, op. cit., 430.

³⁹ “Would you care to give an account of your experiences, young fellow?” I was somewhat dumbfounded, and replied that there was not a whole lot I could tell him that would be of much interest. He smiled a little and said, “Not me — the whole world.” Even more amazed, I asked, “But what about?” “The hell of the camps,” he replied, to which I remarked that I had nothing at all to say about that as I was not acquainted with hell and couldn’t even imagine what that was like. He assured me, however, that it was just a manner of speaking: “Can we imagine a concentration camp as anything but a hell?” he asked, and I replied, as I scratched a few circles with my heel in the dust under my feet, that everyone could think what they liked about it, but as far as I was concerned I could only imagine a concentration camp, since I was somewhat acquainted with what that was, but not hell.” *Ibid.*, 425–426.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 424.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 425–426.

⁴² See: Szirák, op. cit., 54, 41–42, and György Vári, “Esztétikum, Auschwitz, történefilozófia. Értelmezések az elmúlt századból” [Aesthetics, Auschwitz, Philosophy of History], *Sensus Füzetek* (Pécs: Jelenkor, 2002), 153–182.

⁴³ “Sors és sorstalanság. Csáki Judit beszélgetése Kertész Imrével” [Fate

and Fatelessness. Judit Csáki Interviewing Imre Kertész], *Kritika*, 1992/3, 25.

⁴⁴ “Concentration camp can exclusively be imagined as a literary text not as reality; not even — or maybe then the least — when we live in it.” In: Imre Kertész, *Gályanapló* [Galley Diary] (Budapest: Magvető, n. d.), 286. “The Holocaust may only be imagined through the power of aesthetical imagination.” In: Kertész, “Hosszú, sötét árnyék” [Long, Dark Shadow], *A száműzött nyelv* [The Language in Exile], op. cit., 62.

⁴⁵ Representatives of the other position — like Lang — claim that that the Holocaust cannot be mediated aesthetically solely with historical authenticity.

⁴⁶ “It is ironic that once an event is perceived without precedent, without adequate analogy, it would in itself become a kind of precedent for all that follows: a new figure against which subsequent experiences are measured and grasped.” In: James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust. Narrative and Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington–Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 99.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 132–133.

⁴⁸ Hayden White, “A történelmi cselekményesítés és az igazság problémája” [Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Representation], trans. Éva John, in *A történelem terhe* [The Burden of History], ed. Róbert Braun (Budapest: Osiris: 1997), 251–278.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁵⁰ See the following excerpt from an interview: “*Fatelessness* may even be called a linguistic critical work. It is not so much about the lager, rather than linguistic exclusion.” In: “Kertész Imrével beszélget Budai Katalin” [Imre Kertész Interviewed by Katalin Budai], *Magyar Napló*, 1991/14. 16.

⁵¹ Kertész, *Fatelessness*, op. cit., 149.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17–18., highlights in italics by Anna Menyhért.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁸ This is how the boy describes the shopkeeper from whom they buy the necessary equipment for the labour service: “On the whole, he was very tactful

and sympathetic in the way he spoke to us, always doing his best to avoid having to employ the term ‘labour service.’” *Ibid.*, 20–21.

⁵⁹ Kertész, “A száműzött nyelv” [The Language in Exile], *op. cit.*, 278.

⁶⁰ Kertész, *Fatelessness*, *op. cit.*, 33.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶³ “Grasping my chin with his fingers, the uppers of which were covered in tufts of hair and the undersides slightly moist with sweat, he now tipped my face upward, and in a quiet, slightly trembling voice said the following: ‘Your father is preparing to set off on a long journey. Have you prayed for him?’” *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁴ In an interesting way, several interpreters find Gyuri Köves emotionless, like György Spiró in his exploratory study of the novel in 1983. Cf. György Spiró, “Non habent sua fata” [Have Their Own Fate], *Magániktató* [Private Filing] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1985), 383. However, the excerpt below suggests that the boy is able to recognise real (without an ideological background and motivation) feelings: “What stayed with me as maybe the strangest experience of that entire evening was Grandfather’s sole act to draw attention to himself when he pressed his tiny, sharply defined bird’s head for no more than an instant, but really fiercely, almost crazily, to the breast of my father’s jacket. His entire body was racked by a spasm.” In: Kertész, *Fatelessness*, *op. cit.*, 44.

⁶⁵ “‘I’m looking for Bandi Citrom,’ to which she too said, ‘He’s not home.’ She, though, took the line “Come back some other time; maybe in a few days,” but I noticed that the younger woman responded to that by slightly averting her head, in an odd, defensive, and yet somehow feeble movement, meanwhile raising the back of a hand to her mouth, as if she were seeking, perhaps, to suppress, stifle as it were, some remark or sound she was anxious to make.” *Ibid.*, 421.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁷ At the beginning of chapter three, Gyurka and the boys are made to get off the bus by the policeman and they are waiting in a customs post along the main road. The reader learns that the situation is worse than Gyurka imagines when it turns out that adults had also been taken to the building. However, the narrator does not supply this as a piece of information, he talks about what types of games the boys invent to spend the time and later incidentally mentions the adults: “After that I took a look at each of the grown-ups as they came in. They too had been rounded up by the policemen from the buses in just the same way as us. That, in fact, is how I realized that when he was not with us, he was out on the highway, engaged in the same pursuit as in the morning. One by one, there must have been seven or eight of them who were collected that way, all men.” *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 233.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 376.

⁷¹ Ibid., 371.

⁷² Ibid., 146.

⁷³ Cf.: “*Fatelessness* is actually a coming of age novel, the story of a child-adult socialising to concentration camp as a normality...” In Sándor Radnóti, “Auschwitz mint szellemi életforma. Kertész Imre Kaddisáról” [Auschwitz as a Spiritual Mode of Life], *Holmi*, 1991/3. 373.

⁷⁴ Ágnes Heller, “A holocaust mint kultúra. Kertész Imre könyveiről” [The Holocaust as Culture. On Imre Kertész’s Books], in *Az idegen* [The Alien] (New York–Budapest–Jeruzsálem: Múlt és Jövő, 1970), 93.

⁷⁵ “Bántani akarom az olvasómat” [I Want to Hurt My Reader], Spiegel interview. Trans. Judit Tarnói. *Élet és Irodalom*, 24 May 1996. 5.

⁷⁶ Kertész. *Fatelessness*, op. cit., 110.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 205.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 294.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 450.

⁸⁰ Arendt, op. cit., 278.

⁸¹ See the quotation in note 38.

⁸² Bohoosh, the nurse does not let himself — for reasons of belonging to a common language and community — be taken away from the boy: he is fair and supports those in need equally: “I was all the more astonished when scarcely a minute later Bohoosh bustled in through the door, this time heading straight for me. From then on, his visits were meant for both of us. On one occasion he would bring a ration for each of us separately, on another just one in total, depending on what he could manage, I suppose, but in the latter case he never omitted a hand gesture to indicate that it was to be shared fraternally. (...) I think I came to understand these people, at least by and large. In light of all my experiences, piecing together the entire chain, yes, there could be no doubt, I knew it all too well myself, even if it was in a different form: in the final analysis, this too was just the selfsame factor, stubbornness.” Kertész. *Fatelessness*, op. cit., 387.

⁸³ Arendt, op. cit., 258.

⁸⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society,” *Prisms* (Trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 19–34.

⁸⁵ Kertész, “Hosszú, sötét árnyék” [Long, Dark Shadow], op. cit., 61.

⁸⁶ Tamás Gábor Molnár’ study of *Fatelessness* interprets the relationship between the text, narrator and the Holocaust similarly: “the text cannot be about Auschwitz as with the withdrawal of the narrating subject, the writer makes Auschwitz speak. Thus, the novel is mainly about talking about and with Auschwitz.” Gábor Tamás Molnár, “Fikcióalkotás és történelemszemlélet. Kertész Imre: Sorstalanság” [Creating Fiction and Approaching History], *Alföld*. 1996/8: 69.

Book Reviews

Gluck, Mary. *The Invisible Jewish Budapest: Metropolitan Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2016. Hardcover. ISBN 9780299307707. 254 pages.

When a cultural historian as insightful and elegant as Mary Gluck writes a new book, it is difficult not to have high expectations; particularly because she is among a handful of scholars providing an English-reading audience access to the nuances and intricacies of Hungarian Jewish literature and culture. Such high expectations notwithstanding, this book does not disappoint. On the contrary, Gluck has produced a true *tour de force*, seamlessly wedding together the most engaging aspects of Hungarian Jewish history, cultural, and urban life.

From the outset Gluck whets her readers' appetites, particularly those of us with some familiarity with the complexity of Habsburg and Hungarian Jewish history. Her point of departure is to elucidate what, for more than a century, has been glossed over in a few pat statements: namely, that most Jews in Budapest were highly assimilated and devotedly Hungarian. Building on a historiography that has dwelt largely on the political and ideological dimensions of this axiomatic representation — that Hungarian Jews and, in particular, Neolog Judaism, were the great beneficiaries and defenders of Hungarian Liberalism and single-mindedly devoted to Magyar nationalism and culture — Gluck dives in headlong to ask the singularly important yet hitherto largely un-posed follow-up questions: what does this mean? how did this assimilatory devotion to *magyarság* manifest itself? and how did an ongoing sense of Jewishness survive and even thrive across several generations of assimilating Hungarian Jews?

Gluck finds the answers to these questions in the rich cultural tapestry of Budapest Jewry, the largest, most progressive, most diverse, and most Hungarian of Jewish communities. Drawing on careful and nuanced reading of literary and journalistic sources, she uncovers an "invisible Jewishness" of urban culture that, ironically, is not really that invisible. She interrogates relentlessly the Jewishness

of the contributions to high and popular culture by Jewish writers without settling merely for the easier question, “Why is this Jewish?” Yet this crucial query radiates subtly on virtually every page. She deftly avoids the pitfall of compiling a laundry list of Jewish contributions to Western Civilization; but also steers clear of condemning the lack of a self-consciously articulated Jewish pride as self-hatred.

Instead, she situates several generations of cultural creativity in the cauldron of an urban culture teeming with ambivalence and diversity. She challenges her readers to set aside pre-conceived notions by insisting from the outset that only by recognizing the absence of clearly delineated boundaries and categories is it possible to comprehend the comprehend and appreciate this cultural universe. As the author notes at the outset: “Amorphous in the extreme, it lacked stable definition. Its fragmented codes were inscribed in the city’s coffeehouses, music halls, editorial offices, and boulevards, which embodied the dynamic spirit of the age.” (p. 4) This is not always easy, given how firmly entrenched taxonomy and typology are in the writing of nineteenth and twentieth century Jewish history.

The book is well suited for readers with or without a deep understanding of the mentality and history of Budapest and its Jewish community. Those who are less familiar will find one of the best cultural history of Budapest since John Lukacs’s seminal *Budapest 1900*. Gluck leads us through the streets, squares, coffeehouses, and theaters of Terézváros and Lipótváros, Budapest’s two main Jewish neighborhoods; and vividly recreates key events in the history of the city and its Jewish community: the career of Mor Wahrman, an active ongoing Jewish engagement with Győző Istoczy and Hungarian Anti-semitism, and public debates over the Jewish Question. Those who are more familiar with the city and its history will find the book no less replete with new insights on familiar topics and personalities — from Adolf Agai’s humor magazine *Borsszem Jankó* and the phenomenon of *Judenwitz* to the popular cultural emanating from Budapest’s Orpheum Theater.

Indeed, with respect to these cultural institutions, the author presents a dynamic cultural world that responds to broader political and social developments in Budapest and beyond. The heart of soul of the *Borsszem Janko’s Judenwitz* was its most popular and prevalent literary character, Itzig Spitzig. This character, the author notes, represented “the imperative to affirm rather than deny Jewish difference... based on the cultural codes and social interactions of every-

day life in society.” (p. 121). A lesser book would have merely presented this character as a reflection of popular Jewish culture. Gluck probes further, setting Itzig Spitzig in the ebb and flow of liberalism, thereby blurring Hannah Arendt sharp boundary between politics and culture. As Gluck demonstrates, the highpoint of this literary character was a means for Jews to denounce Anti-Semitic upstarts like Istoczy. The cartoon of Itzig Spitzig taming Istoczy, one of the many wonderful images that Gluck includes in this book, speaks volumes for the complexity of Jewish humor’s engagement with liberalism and its discontents. Eventually, as Liberalism began to recede, especially in the aftermath of the Tiszaeszlár Blood Libel of 1882, Itzig Spitzig disappeared from the world of Jewish humor.

Along similar lines, the discussion of the Jewish-dominated popular theatre culture centered around the Orpheum. Here the author notes not only the city of Budapest challenging Vienna as the most vibrant center of culture in Central Europe, but also the contrast between older Viennese culture and a new vibrant Budapest culture. Budapest, Gluck notes, “had a brash entrepreneurial spirit that caused contemporary observers to remark — not necessarily in a complimentary spirit — that the city resembled a American rather than Central European metropolis.” (p. 141). This perceived American-ness and Jewishness of this popular culture bred excitement among some but powerful ambivalence among others. The uncertainty toward Jews and their cultural creativity, reflected a broader ambivalence toward the city of rapidly expanding and increasingly culturally vibrant city of Budapest.

At this point, I suppose the author could have fleshed out the tantalizing comparison between Budapest and American cities like New York. After all, the Jewish role in Budapest popular culture anticipated a similar Jewish role in a generation or two later in New York City. Rather than see this as a flaw, I would suggest instead that Gluck has laid out a template for a more comprehensive study of the role of Jews and Jewish culture in the development of urban culture, and, more broadly, of the complex interchange between Jewish and urban identity.

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Robert Nemes, *Another Hungary: The Nineteenth-Century Provinces in Eight Lives*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. 292 pages. ISBN 9780804795913

Spanning the long nineteenth century, Robert Nemes's remarkable book, *Another Hungary: The Nineteenth-Century Provinces in Eight Lives*, charts the lived experiences and diverse perspectives of eight different people (six men and two women) from the northeastern region of the former Kingdom of Hungary. Having chosen an aristocrat, a merchant, an engineer, a teacher, a journalist, a rabbi, a tobacconist, and a writer as his subjects, Nemes introduces his readers to individuals whose lives intersected in complex and revealing ways with the social, political, economic, cultural, and even environmental history of a peripheral region of Central Europe that has often been dismissed as backward or otherwise unexceptional and unimportant by scholars. Avoiding mere biography, Nemes leads his readers on an edifying journey through this provincial region of nineteenth-century Hungary, one that connects the lives of its towns, villages, and people to broader historical developments not just in Hungary and the Habsburg Empire, but also in Europe and the rest of the world. Focusing as much on the spaces and places of this region as he does on its people, Nemes contends that the villages and towns of the northeast "were not just a dull reflection of the capital city or of western Europe, but [were] interesting and important in their own right." Significant in economic, cultural, and political terms, their history, he states, "demands our attention" as much as the individual lives of his human subjects (2).

Throughout the book, Nemes makes good on his assertion that a detailed and very close study of the biographies of his eight subjects can breath new life into Hungary's often-overlooked provinces. Key to each of his chapters, in fact, is a careful and always sensitive presentation of the "mental maps" and "imagined geographies" that emerge from the autobiographical writings and personal reflections of the individuals that Nemes has chosen to study. Woven into the biographies he presents are wonderfully rich and vivid snapshots of the region's physical and the human geography. The "soggy fields" and "surrounding oak forests" (46) of Zemplén County come to life in Chapter 2, for example, while the "steep" and

“forbidding” mountains of Máramos County, with their “unforgiving and unpredictable climate,” are brought into sharp focus in Chapters 3 and 6. Elsewhere in the book the reader becomes acquainted with the “plunging waterfalls, ruined castles, craggy peaks, and lonesome streams” of the Apuseni mountain range southeast of Oradea (132), as well as with the rich agricultural spaces of Szatmár County with its lowland wheat fields and its “vineyards, pastures, and chestnut forests” that “blanketed the hills” (182). As Nemes clearly illustrates in his opening chapter on “the Aristocrat” Count József Gvadányi, this diverse landscape was also home to a diverse population, and to people whose lives were shaped as much by local geographical realities as they were by broader historical developments. Because he organizes his biographies chronologically, the reader is made aware of the major forces that shaped the region during this period, such as the migratory flows that transformed multiple communities over the course of the nineteenth century, as well as the slow and almost imperceptible material changes that gradually altered the northeastern counties as improved transportation and communication networks began to integrate the Hungarian periphery into expanding national, imperial, and global networks.

Though few of the book’s subjects actually stayed in the northeast for their entire lives, Nemes argues that the towns and villages of the region, no less than the natural landscapes and the people, exerted a distinct pull on the individuals he examines, and even on “the Writer” Margit Kaffka, who was perhaps the most critical and unforgiving of the eight. Despite the relative underdevelopment and isolation of the northeastern counties, each of Nemes’s subjects sees potential in the region, and though the liberal structures and practices of the nineteenth century may not have penetrated the provinces as deeply as they would have liked, there was still hope that the region’s historical diversity would become its future strength, and that a rational plan for resource development would transform this northeastern corner of the Kingdom of Hungary into a valuable and more meaningfully integrated economic hinterland. Though their respective visions and experiences of course varied greatly, the collective lives of these eight men and women suggest that the outlook of the people living outside of Budapest in the nineteenth century was much less provincial, and in some circles perhaps even more cosmopolitan, than we have been led to believe. By listening attentively to the voices of “locals,” Nemes shows quite vividly just

how complex and also dynamic the region was, and by extension how limiting it has been to view the provinces and its people through the one-dimensional and ultimately reductionist lens of “backwardness.”

Of course, being the careful historian he is, Nemes clearly recognizes the pitfalls of a revisionist narrative like his that seeks to challenge and on a nuanced level even significantly rewrite what we know about the history of the Hungarian provinces in the nineteenth century. Though he makes a very convincing case that the history of this region “matters,” and that by investigating it on its own terms a much richer and more dynamic history is revealed, Nemes nevertheless avoids romanticizing the northeast, and in fact does as much to expose the intolerance and retrograde nature of provincial thinking and practices as he does to tease out the progressive and even cosmopolitan characteristics of at least some of its people and urban centers. One of the key achievements of his book, in fact, is the way in which he is able to trace the outlines of a complex and relatively liberal civil society that was “more vibrant and viable than often assumed” (113) while simultaneously reminding us that, despite the legacy of ethnic cooperation in the region and the promises embodied in the emancipation of peasants, Jews, and women in the Habsburg Empire more generally, northeastern Hungary failed in the final analysis to overcome many of the aspects that have rendered it “backwards” in the eyes of so many. Wary of what he calls “the myth of the provinces,” Nemes resists painting an idealized image of the nineteenth century, and reminds his readers that feudal structures and practices persisted into the second half of the nineteenth century (and beyond), and that opportunities for marginalized groups were limited, while ethnic and sectarian divides were often wide and ultimately unbridgeable.

One aspect of this history that obviously prevents against an overly optimistic or sentimentalized reassessment of northeastern Hungary in the century leading up to World War I was the expansion and intensification of antisemitism within the region. Reflective of developments elsewhere in the Habsburg Empire and indeed the rest of Europe, antisemitism in the Hungarian provinces was pervasive and often vicious, especially by century’s end. Nemes points to the deportation of 83 Jewish families (approximately 360 people) from Zemplén county in 1807, for example, as evidence that, though it was possible for certain Jews (like “the Merchant” Ráfáel Kästenbaum) to prosper, and though certain Jewish communities had otherwise “good”

relationships with county nobility, the existence of Jews was ultimately precarious, and their fortunes “could change overnight” (52). Often regarded as “unwelcome outsiders,” Jews remained vulnerable, and were “easy targets of violence” in the provinces (54). Moreover, despite the liberal reforms and thinking that on some level defined this era in Hungarian history, the nineteenth century ended with what Nemes rightly identifies as an “upsurge of antisemitism and sectarian strife,” and with the growth of nationalist tensions more broadly (153). The complex situation exerted great pressure on Hungarian Jews, and especially on Jewish leaders who found themselves having to navigate an increasingly hostile anti-Jewish public sphere while simultaneously dealing with a new constellation of demands from members of their own communities. As his chapter on “the Rabbi” Ármin Schnitzer clearly illustrates, Jewish attempts to negotiate rising antisemitism at the end of the century were complicated by pronounced social, political, and ideological divisions within the Jewish community itself, divides that were emblematic of fault lines that were emerging and deepening within modern society at large.

The question of modernization, in fact, is a theme that runs through Nemes’s book, and is one that he uses profitably in order to temper idealized notions of the provinces as idyllic if otherwise economically “backward” spaces that, if left untouched, might somehow have served as models of toleration and alternative paths to modernity. In his story of “the Engineer” Pál Vásárhelyi, for example, or in his account of the lives of “the Teacher” Klára Lövei or “the Tobacconist” Vilmos Dároczi, Nemes foregrounds the collective desire of these erstwhile locals to transform the northeast by transcending and even erasing the regressive aspects of the region. Whether it was in respect to the region’s untamed waterways, its unenlightened educational system, or its out-of-date agricultural practices, these would-be reformers embraced the civilizational mission of the Hungarian elite, and viewed the present state of the provinces as something to be overcome. Like Dároczi “the Tobacconist” who characterized the northeast as a region perched on the edge of modernity, all three saw untapped potential in the provinces, and believed that the people there were capable of great things if only proper, state-directed reforms were enacted.

One of the greatest strengths of Nemes’s book, and thus also one of its most important scholarly contributions, is the voice he gives

to each of his eight subjects, individuals who, with the possible exception of Kaffka and perhaps also Vásárheyli and Gvadányi, are not widely known by students of Hungarian history. Though Nemes's presence as a historian and as the author of the text is obvious on every page, he nevertheless resists the temptation to editorialize or pass overt judgment on any of the eight personalities, and instead allows them to speak as freely and as openly as possible. The end result of Nemes's fine touch is a provocative study that is not only rich in broad historical context and meticulously researched biographical detail, but also rooted in the complex worldviews and lived experiences of eight very different people. If there was one possible "weakness" to the book it is that there are not more voices included, and especially more voices of women, and of "non-Hungarians" such as "the Journalist" Iosif Vulcan, a "tireless Romanian nationalist" from Oradea (Nagyvárad/ Grosswardein), or "the Merchant" Ráfáel Kästenbaum, a Jewish immigrant from Galicia who migrated to Hungary in about 1760, and who settled and spent most of his life in Zemplén county. The inclusion of additional voices such as these would no doubt serve to enrich the picture that Nemes has so deftly painted in the book as it is, and would contribute even more evidence to support one of his main points, namely that there is much more to the provinces than many historians have previously assumed, and that it is worth digging around in little-known provincial archives and long-forgotten memoirs in order to uncover and appreciate the complex regional dynamics that "have too often been obscured" (10).

Of course, Nemes recognizes the need for more scholarship in this vein, and is very aware of the limitations of his own study. More can and should be done to breath new life into the existing scholarship on nineteenth-century Hungary, and into regions that have long been underestimated and misunderstood as a result of sometimes crass, one-dimensional historical generalizations. As he suggests at the end of his conclusion, the book is not an ending but rather a beginning, "an invitation to look at other provincial lives, and to look for the unexamined and unexpected in unlikely places" (242). One can only hope that future scholars will take up his invitation, and follow the example that he provides. With *Another Hungary*, Nemes has set the scholarly bar very high. This book is an impressive achievement, and makes a valuable contribution to Hungarian history and the history of Central and Eastern Europe more generally. Given its impressive scope and novel approach, I have no doubt that *Another Hungary* will

be required reading in numerous fields for a long time.

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Agatha Schwartz and Helga Thorson, eds. *Shaking the Empire, Shaking Patriarchy: The Growth of a Feminist Consciousness Across the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy*. Ariadne Press, paperback edition, 2015. 320 pages. ISBN 13 978-1-57241-187-6.

By combining critical and detailed literary analysis with twenty-five carefully selected, thematically organized excerpts from primary materials, this concise collection smartly accomplishes a complex feat. The first 100 pages offer ethnicity-by-ethnicity chronological analysis of the emergence of women's organizing and their literary accomplishments in a time that is now often looked upon nostalgically: the period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918). The following 190 pages thematically organizes select texts of literary quality from women writers and female activists on their diverse interpretations of education and career paths, the double standard on sexuality, and especially suffrage — the central international question for the women's movement at the time. This collection offers the first English-language appearance of some of the original literary texts, showcasing the diverse genres and styles and highlighting their until now forgotten importance.

Shaking the Empire, Shaking Patriarchy: The Growth of a Feminist Consciousness Across the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy significantly enhances the existing scholarship on women's activism during this period by revealing a significant venue for expressing feminist voices in literature. The two authors are authoritative observers of women's literary accomplishments during the Monarchy, having collaborated earlier in the volume *Gender and Modernity in Central Europe: The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its Legacy* (University of Ottawa Press, 2010). Schwartz' scholarship includes *Shifting Voices: Feminist Thought and Women's Writing in Fin-de-Siècle Austria and Hungary* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008). The two authors' analysis and their edited collection of primary materials deepens previous research on this period conducted by Judit

Acsády, Sibelan Forrester, Judit Szapor, Andrea Petó, and Nora Weber, among others.

Revealing this treasure trove of concrete historical examples of the first wave of women's activism in the Monarchy carries exceptional political weight and importance both immediately after the 1989 regime change and even now, twenty-five years later. In the early 1990s nascent feminist groups across the post-communist region faced ardent criticism accusing them of being mere lackeys of the neocolonial West. The criticism of being a "foreign import" against contemporary feminist groups and activities has not ceased, but has only become stronger with feminist critics of neoliberalism, such as Kristen Ghodsee and her followers arguing that "cultural feminism" caused immense harm in Central and Eastern Europe. The century-old proposals that the Monarchy-era activists present appear to challenge these charges of being a foreign import, because their language, cultural connections, and claims appear entirely home-grown. For example, a considerable majority of the era's women writers promote the abolition of the Austrian system of state-regulated prostitution and address the various forms of social and cultural gender inequality. These themes and proposed solutions carry considerable currency today as well.

One of the major accomplishments of the introductory analytical review is that it treats nationalism with much care and astuteness. The authors describe how in each ethnic context the necessity to improve the level of women's education became increasingly linked with nation-building and thus the image of "mothers of the nation" has emerged as the dominant discourse in arguing for national sovereignty — a rationale whose consequences we are still grappling with. Nationalism became the central political argument against the Monarchy and ethnicity plays an especially powerful role in the self-proclaimed positionality of women writers and activists.

While the first 100 pages follow the ethnicity-based organization, this arrangement is far from doctrinaire. The authors repeatedly point out that many of the writers and activists were not only multi-lingual (in some occasions, speaking and writing in as many as nine languages), but also multi-ethnic. Embracing such multi-dimensional diversity continues to be lacking in the historiography of the period and today especially as some of the contemporary successor states of the Monarchy imagine and increasingly assert homogeneous ethnicity as a basis of sovereignty. In the welcome complex kaleidoscope of

ethnicities presented in this volume only one national description appears unclear, that is the evolution of calling Ruthenians and Rusyns as Ukrainians (p. 55). Rusyns form a distinct group who did not accept the ethnonym Ukrainian since the beginning of the 20th century.

Less prominently than ethnicity is class distinctions, which also appear as important descriptors of the female writers and activists included in this volume. Although the authors disavow the term “bourgeoisie” as ideological and misleading (p. 21), most of the women writers whose texts appear in this book hail from urban middle class background, with a few exceptions of lower nobility, such as in Poland and in the case of Hungarian Countess Teleki (née Juliska Kölcsei Kende), using a pseudonym Szikra (Spark) to publish and present at public venues. The intersection of ethnicity and class is especially apparent in Habsburg-controlled Galicia, where the female Polish lower nobility activists would not cooperate with their mostly middle class Ukrainian counterparts, and neither would reach out to their Jewish compatriots whom they both derided (p. 48).

The authors carefully note that they wanted to, but could not include a segment on Jewish women’s writing and activism in Galicia except when in support of Zionism and traditional gender roles in the family (p. 46). The explanation for this apparent absence may be the preventive self-defense, often observed within oppressed (ethnic, religious, or sexual) minorities whose members often internalize and thus successfully control critiques and outreach. It is the more assimilated Jewish women who appear in this collection as they raise feminist arguments in literary and activist contexts. Especially in larger urban centers, Jewish women could become national and international actors, such as Róza Bédy-Schwimmer, who was elected vice-president in 1916 of the (currently still strong functioning) Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom which has consultative status at the UN Bédy-Schwimmer was appointed as Hungarian ambassador to Switzerland in 1918, and she is credited as one of the early initiators of the International Criminal Court.

Discussing the emergence of what becomes Yugoslavia, the authors skillfully note how yet one more facet of intersectionality, i.e., religious affiliation informs but does not fully define ethnic belonging. Political ideology could have emerged as another important angle of further intersectional analysis. The catapulting ideologies of the time: socialism and communism only make a stunted appearance in this collection as an anti-feminist trend that opposed suffrage (p.16),

although women already worked not only in agriculture, but in many urban services (as maids, for example) and the emerging industries, such as textile factories.

While we can safely describe the female writers' and activists' approach as feminism, this political stance/ideology remains an undefined concept in support of women's education and participation in social and political life. Given the considerable variety of feminist orientations that the women writers and activists of the Monarchy promoted, it would have been inviting to include a discussion on what conservative and radical feminist views were at the time when the term feminism had not yet appeared. Change has become a defining element of this region: not only states such as the Monarchy disappeared, but old states re-emerged such as Poland and Hungary, and new states appeared such as Slovenia and Slovakia to disappear yet again in the form of federations. Similar changes affect feminism and woman activists/authors. For example, previously radical female activists in support of women's advancement, such as Elena Pop Hossu-Longin in Romanian-majority Transylvania (p. 63) and Isidora Sekulić in Vojvodina, the highest ethnically complex region of the Monarchy (p.73), later criticized others who wished to carry the torch further toward suffrage and political representation, and thus they have become seemingly more conservative when their ethnic communities reached the stage of national statehood.

The second most notable achievement of this volume is that it includes an impressive variety of responses of women writers and activists to the many challenges of the era. However, the timing and themes of women's activism overlap but also considerably differ in territories that later become Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and parts of Italy, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine. For a comparativist, it is inviting to speculate whether and if so, how the 1867 Ausgleich/Compromised division of Cisleithania (the areas administered from Vienna) and Transleithania (the territories under the Hungarian crown) continue to matter.

It is puzzling why some parts of the Monarchy developed women's literary contributions and activism much later (such as Croatia) than others. The selection of agenda items is also intriguing: Why did some ethnicities focus on some parts of the agenda of the emerging international women's movement that others tended to avoid? The main foci of activism seem to reappear in the Monarchy

and internationally with some predictable patterns and regularity. Without fail, the first wave of women's activism tended to focus on charity, often according to religious affiliations. The second and still relevant theme is women's access to all branches and levels of education and professions. This second theme of activism strongly relied on often foreign-educated women's literary involvement as a form of convincing others of the worthiness of education. Rejecting the age-old prejudice that women cannot produce intellectual work, women's education led to demands of suffrage—but not even leading female activists agreed in this aspect during the time of the Monarchy. With a ban on women's political organizations in Cisleithenia, women had to use the available institutional frameworks, such as charity outreach, education, and professional groups and creatively expand them to gain the support for women's vote among political decision-makers. The analysis and collection of primary materials in this book offers a timely reminder of the centenary of the suffragist movement and the first, if short-lived attempt for women to gain the vote in 1918 in the successor states of the Monarchy.

The collection, *Shaking the Empire, Shaking Patriarchy* offers a highly illustrative view of the past whose message is highly applicable to the present. It offers a much needed view of an overlooked but central and constitutive feature of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy — a compelling, lucid, and timely analysis of women's literary, social, and political contributions that combines deft insights with fascinating literary contributions and ethnographic details. It is a highly recommended reading for all interested in the history and the literary accomplishments of the various women's movements internationally and specially following the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy's complex binds in ethnic, religious, political, and gender affiliations.

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Steven Renner. *Broken Wings. The Hungarian Air Force, 1918-45*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. Pp. 300, Hardcover (with dust jacket).

Steven Renner's *Broken Wings, The Hungarian Air Force, 1918-45* makes a significant contribution to the history of modern Hungary and

to Great War and World War II aviation history. Renner engages in broad discussion of the administrative, technological and military history of the Hungarian Air Force, but goes far beyond the limitations usually found in studies of armed services and was careful to demonstrate links between air power development, international relations and Hungarian foreign policy. From the theoretical point of view, the book uses Hungarian civil and military aviation and its role in forming Hungarian patriotism and nationalism, to explain Hungary's complex and calamitous history in the period, and as such stands in sharp contrast to works which attempt to view military history outside the purview of political concepts. Renner achieved a genuine equality between the military and nonmilitary dimensions of Hungarian history in the period, and was more attentive to the political ramifications of military policy (and vice versa) than most other authors.

The work is meticulously researched, drawing mostly from Hungarian military and state archives, as well as on English and Hungarian language secondary sources, making some of the latter available to English language readers for the first time. Engaging many relevant sources (not least from the papers of Horthy's office, which have been overlooked even by the most recent Horthy biography) in a strong narrative Renner brought his vast experience, professional expertise and historical knowledge to bear in balanced judgments. The author took issue with standard Cold War clichés, which did nothing but blame the tragedy of Hungary in World War II on Horthy and its regime. While evidently sympathetic towards the Regent, especially because of his quick realisation of the military significance of air power, the argument carefully places itself above judging the political and military performance of interwar and World War II Hungary, and instead strictly concentrates on empirical analysis.

Renner places a great deal of emphasis on the domestic and international factors that brought about changes in Hungarian aviation theory, tactics and technology. It deals also with politics within the Hungarian military elite, and civil-military dynamics. Through this lens the author explains the factors that led to the Hungarian General Staff sliding increasingly towards a full-fledged German alliance from the mid-1930s. This tendency, as the author demonstrates, became responsible for the gradual adaptation to German air-combat tactics and technology in the Hungarian Air Force, and eventually led to the

service becoming the auxiliary force of the Luftwaffe by the end of the war.

The central thesis of the book is that small states with weak military, regardless of their Air Force's honor and gallantry were at the mercy of great power politics and military developments on the world stage. While the Hungarian Air Force had some influence on determining the theory and tactics of air power in its own military doctrine, the application of these were difficult in practice. Whether it was unwanted military camaraderie with Austria in the Great War, the financial and military control of the League of Nations in the interwar period, or the political, economic and military domination of Nazi Germany, the Hungarian Air Force was unable to assert itself fully as an independent power that could serve the Hungarian nation's interests.

For a book that carries the timeframe 1918-45 in its title one expects an argument designed to primarily focus on World War II, to which the preceding period serves only as a background. Renner does not follow this deceiving tendency often found in recent works. Instead, he handled the task of sketching the history of the Hungarian Air Force in widely divergent eras and governments with considerable balance and deftness, regardless of the Great War era, the 1918-19 revolutions, the interwar period and World War II requiring very different research questions and approaches.

Arguably, the most valuable part of the book is Chapter 2: *Upheaval, 1918-19*. Offering a crisp, analytical narrative Renner contributes significantly to the historiography of Austro-Hungarian military cooperation (and Hungarian tendencies to organize independent military services – including air force), and to the military history of the Great War. This section, which accurately demonstrates Hungarian glorification of its newly founded air force as a source of national grandeur stands in contrast to later periods, when for example from 1919 the service was truncated, and existed in a precarious limbo between prohibition and clandestine innovation and expansion.

Moreover, the argument complements our understanding of interwar Hungarian revisionism, which scholars so far have approached from the perspective of Hungarian efforts to overturn the territorial mutilations of Trianon, and the minority complaint Hungary filed internationally against the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy. Renner adds army development, military innovation and aviation to this concept, and explains that Hungary aimed for regional

rearmament equality just as much as for territorial adjustments.

Despite the excellence of Renner's book, some of the secondary literature it uses about international relations, and Hungary's relationship with great powers and countries in the region, are dated. Also, while Renner arguably aimed to de-focus from World War II, the fighting on Hungarian soil between 1944 and 1945 unduly received limited attention. Also, the reader occasionally feels an unjustified inward-looking Hungarian perspective. While military relationship with Germany has been discussed extensively, German official or personal testimonies about the mentality and performance of the Hungarian Air Force (especially in chapters about the wars) would have provided a broader context. Despite these minor constraints, Renner produced a very noteworthy history of the Hungarian Air Force and has advanced the field of modern Hungarian history and aviation.

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Vörösmarty, Mihály. *Csongor and Tünde*; bilingual edition with English translation by Peter Zollman. Winnetka, IL: John Sarkett & Associates, Inc. 2017. 79 pp.

John Sarkett's passion for Hungarian literature — and his particular passion for *Csongor és Tünde*, Mihály Vörösmarty's 1830 opus — led him to search assiduously for a translation that he could present to Anglophone readers. His persistence enabled him to locate the late Peter Zollman's translation, secure the reprint rights, and shepherd it into a new, bilingual edition.

The Merlin International Theatre in Budapest had commissioned Zollman to translate a performing version for a production run during Hungary's millicentennial year of 1996. It is this text which has been reprinted.

Csongor and Tünde is termed both a fairytale drama and a dramatic poem — and there's the rub: the two designations allow radically different treatments of the text. The text of a poem is generally treated as integral and inviolable. By contrast, a play script is considered the starting point for a given production, subject to cuts, rearrangements, and sometimes even additions or alterations by someone other than the author. This tradition is ancient: consider the

divergences in Shakespeare's theatrical texts between the various quarto and folio editions. The complete, composite text of *Hamlet*, requiring about four and a half hours in performance, almost never makes it to the stage intact.

The present translation, having been commissioned for a specific stage production, adheres to the latter treatment, as Peter Zollman's introduction makes clear: approximately one third of the original's lines have been cut. Although he does not mention it, one character, Dimitri the Serb (*Rác*) shopkeeper, disappears entirely along with the scene in which he appears, and the scenes of Act III are reordered (and one of them is also cut *in toto*).

Cuts, of course, affect how the work is perceived, in keeping with a given director's vision. The effect of cuts is particularly noticeable in *Csongor and Tünde* because Vörösmarty uses two main verse forms in specific ways. Trochaic tetrameter, often rhyming, springs from Hungarian folk narrative and is used for much of the fairytale narrative as well as the comic (often slapstick) scenes, such as those involving the imps (*ördögfiak*). It forms the bulk of the text. Vörösmarty employs blank verse to present more abstract, philosophical thoughts and to express his own characteristic Romantic pessimism. (Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Schikaneder's *Magic Flute* are often cited among the influences on *Csongor and Tünde*. While they inspire much of the content in tetrameter, it may be another Shakespeare play, *The Tempest*, that — among other forebears, to be sure — lies behind the darker concerns and visions of the passages in blank verse.)

Passages in blank verse represent a small fraction of the overall text, but their impact is outsized. In Act II, our questing hero, Csongor, encounters a Merchant, a Prince and a Scholar, each offering his own vision of purpose and endeavor, and each in turn inviting Csongor to join him and abandon his own quest. These figures return in Act V, each utterly disillusioned with the fruits of his endeavors — thereby validating Csongor's quest for Tünde's love as the only truly worthwhile pursuit amid the grim pointlessness of existence. The 379 lines of these two sets of encounters have been truncated to 233: a 39% loss that significantly changes the balance of the work. To oversimplify, it has the effect of emphasizing Schikaneder over Shakespeare, or perhaps the *Midsummer* mechanicals over Prospero. Although many more lines were cut from the passages in tetrameter, the proportion of lost lines is less, and the impact of those cuts is

mostly to speed the play along.

There is one other passage in blank verse: Night's great soliloquy. It is no accident that Zollman's eloquent translation of this soliloquy was chosen to represent the play in Ádám Makkai's monumental anthology of Hungarian verse, *In Quest of the Miracle Stag, Vol. 1*. It is also no accident that the Merlin production left this soliloquy intact.

Peter Zollman's translation superbly renders the original's trochaic tetrameter and iambic pentameter in English and deftly handles the occasional song-like interludes in other meters. It also conveys variations in tone effectively. Zollman makes the play accessible to Anglophone readers (or audiences), beginning with his decision to keep the Hungarian names only of Csongor, Tünde, and her servant Ilma, while finding witty monikers for the other characters. Take the witch: her name in Hungarian, Mirigy, sounds menacing but not entirely serious, but it doesn't play well in English. Zollman's solution is the delightful Suckbane: a veritably Shakespearean name for a comic witch.

Of course, no translation is perfect, and there are a few places where this reviewer itched to go to work with an editor's blue pencil (something he also does when rereading his own translations). Such instances do not detract significantly from the overall pleasure. One recurring lapse, however, requires attention. Consider the following line and a half from the original: "*Bocsássatok, / Vagy hernyóvá változtatlak*". Zollman renders it as "You set me free, / or I turn you into maggots." In Hungarian, the two verbs, one expressing a demand and the other a threat, are both in the present tense, though the threat is understood to follow the demand's possible lack of fulfillment. English idiom, however, places the second verb in the future: "Do this or I *will* do that to you." Each of the eighteen times a similar construction arises in the text, the unidiomatic English jolts the reader right out of the fairytale. The solution is simple enough: in the example cited, "You set me free, / or I'll turn you into maggots."

Set against this one recurring defect are a myriad of happy inspirations; indeed, in places, Zollman's English more than matches wits with Vörösmarty's original. In the very first scene, Mirigy/Suckbane tries to cover for having inadvertently let slip an indiscretion: "*Vén ajak, tudod csevegni / Jobb' szeret mint enni-inni.*" Zollman renders it, brilliantly, as: "Aged lips prefer to chatter, / — chewing is a harder matter." Where Vörösmarty had to content himself

with an uncharacteristically feeble rhyme, Zollman manages an amusing, strong, polysyllabic rhyme without the slightest strain. Part of the joy of reading his translation is the discovery of such nuggets throughout the text.

John Sarkett deserves gratitude for making this translation widely available again. And if we regret that the truncated text serves Vörösmarty's play better than it does his dramatic poem, we may yet hope that other translators will take up the challenge of a complete translation. They will have their work cut out to match, let alone surpass, the quality of Zollman's text.

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Faragó, Imre. *Ber Bere Berény avagy helynévadás a Kárpát-térségben* [Ber Bere Berény or place-name giving in the Carpathian region]. Budapest: Frig Kiadó, 2016. ISBN: 978-963-9836-33-4. Paper, 340 pages.

Those Hungarians who believe that their ancestors have lived in the Carpathian Basin since time immemorial have a saying: We didn't come here from anywhere, we have always been here. There have been several highly-qualified students of the Hungarian past who, while they lived, belonged to this school of historiography — but there are very few now. There are more such people outside of Hungary but many of them are what might be called independent scholars: they have no university affiliation. In the author of this book we have a new member of this school and he is a *bona fide* Hungarian academic: Faragó teaches at Budapest's premier university Eötvös Loránd, also known by the acronym ELTE.

In his preface to the book, Faragó cites the opinion of "serious researchers" who claim that "the people who have been living in the heart of Europe for longer than any others are those that speak the Hungarian language." He goes on to say that in Hungary's schools it is taught that Hungarians are late-comers, intruders, in this part of Europe and yet it turns out now that they are a "handful, demographically constantly diminishing people who have lived here continuously for millennia...." Those who have lived here according to the school-texts, the Celts, Romans, Huns, Avars, Magyars, were elites that ruled over the Hungarians, one group replacing the next. It was

not the Carpathian region's peasant population that kept changing according to Faragó, but their "military masters." Why there is no record of this process he asks? Because the deeds of tillers of the soil were not newsworthy — only the conquests of military elites were noted by ancient reporters and medieval chroniclers. (pp. 12-13, 305)

Hungarian then is an ancient language and it has many unique features. One of these, according to Faragó, is the way it produces place names. Hungarian place names are different in their formation from the place names of neighbouring peoples. The book at hand is an extensive study of geographical names in the Carpathian Basin and in adjacent areas and it argues that most such names, even those that at first sight seem to be non-Hungarian, can be traced back to Hungarian roots. The evolution of place names is not only a reflection on Hungarian history, according to Faragó, it is also the story of the geographic constriction or diminution of the Hungarian nation: over the millennia Hungarians so-to-speak vacated large areas of Central Europe. They disappeared, went extinct, or became assimilated by neighbouring peoples — and their ancient lands are now populated by speakers of other tongues. Faragó identifies the regions outside the Carpathian Basin where he found evidence of Hungarian place-names and where, according to him Hungarian speakers lived, sometimes in isolated settlements, up to early or even in mid-medieval times. He lists these: the basin of the Danube and Morava rivers, the Graz Basin, the Zagreb Basin, the territory between the Drava and Sava Rivers, Moldova, and the southern slopes of the Transylvanian Alps. (p. 300) The best-known of such ancient Hungarian geographical names is of course Bécs, the Hungarian name for Vienna.

On the question when the Hungarian language appeared in the Carpathian Basin students of Hungarian history are divided into two sharply delineated schools of thought. The overwhelming majority of them argue that there were no Hungarian-speaking peoples there prior to the arrival of Prince Árpád and his nomadic warriors at the end of the 9th century. In the other school belong Faragó and his predecessors: a long list of scholars who thought otherwise and whose writings go back a century-and-a-half. The first of these we should mention was László Réthy (1851-1914), who was a staff member of Hungary's National Museum, and who suggested that the Hungarian language, in fact the Finno-Ugric languages had evolved in the Middle Danube Basin of Central Europe. Réthy's theory was adopted and elaborated on by Ármin Vámbéry (1831-1914), a member of the Hungarian

Academy of Sciences (MTA), who suggested that the Hungarian language emerged from its Ugric core and Turkic loan-words and developed in the Carpathian homeland — and that Prince Árpád's warriors were Turkic-speakers. Balázs Orbán (1830-1890), a prolific writer, ethnographer and member of the MTA who argued that the Székelys of Transylvania in that land had pre-dated the age of the Árpád dynasty. Then there was archaeologist Géza Nagy (1855-1915), another staff member of the National Museum, who contended that Hungarian-speakers began to settle in their present homeland in Avar times. Similar conclusions were arrived at by historian Gyula Pauler (1841-1903), the CEO of Hungary's National Archives. Writing in the 20th century, there was Gyula László (1910-96, a faculty member at ELTE) who, at the end of his life, argued that the ancestors of Hungarians arrived in their present homeland in late Avar times and that Prince Árpád's people were predominantly Turkic-speaking. Another, a younger ELTE scholar and administrator who expressed similar views was Pál Engel (1938-2001). Using evidence derived from physical anthropology still another ELTE professor, Pál Lipták (1814-2000) came to believe that the Hungarians' ancestors arrived in several waves or phases, starting possibly as early as the 5th century and ending in the 9th; and that Árpád's people were predominantly Turkic.

Writing mainly in the 21st century, Gábor Vékony (1944-2004, another ELTE faculty member) declared that Hungarians probably arrived in their present homeland in Avar times — but possibly as early as the 5th century — and that Prince Árpád's people might have been mainly Bashkirs. A few years later appeared a book by the veteran linguist-historian Péter Kiraly (1917-2015) of the College of Nyíregyháza, in which he placed the arrival of the first Hungarians in Central Europe to the last decade of the 6th century. Still more recently a history of medieval Székelyland was published by an institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in which the two main authors, Elek Benkő (a historian) and Erzsébet Fóthi (a paleo-anthropologist), contend that in Avar and possibly already in Roman times the Hungarian-speaking Székelys lived in western Transdanubia including the Danube-Morava Basin. But the theory Faragó's ideas resemble most closely, had been advanced by someone who lived two generations earlier: Lajos Kiss of Marjalak (1887-1972). He, through his study of geographical place names in the Middle Danube Basin, also came to the conclusion that Hungarians had

lived in the Carpathian region since time immemorial, and their language survived repeated conquests by other peoples, mostly nomadic warrior tribes including the Huns, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Gepids, Longobards, Avars *and* Prince Árpád's Magyars.

In today's Hungary, Lajos Kiss of Marjalak is a forgotten scholar. We wonder if Imre Faragó will also be one — and his book *Ber Bere Berény* will be consigned to oblivion by a nation that finds it difficult to live with the idea that its ancestors might have been tillers of the soil (and hunters and fishers) rather than marauding warriors who put the fear into the hearts of other Europeans.

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Csaba K. Zoltani, ed. *Transylvania Today: Diversity at Risk*. Budapest: Osiris Publishing, 2013. 392 pp. (cloth), \$25.00.

This book is an embracing study of contemporary Transylvania. It consists of five lengthy sections and of twenty-three chapters which are written by eminent scholars of this region. Numerous salient topics are explored: Transylvanian historical patterns, its minority group problems, and its social, cultural, and legal activities. The major themes that emerge from this fine study concern tensions among the ethnic and religious groups in Transylvania and conflict between Hungary and Romania to exercise control of this region. Tersely stated, contemporary Transylvania is suffering from irredentism — a pertinent historical feature of many lands in Eastern Europe.

In the first section there is a stimulating chapter about the region's history written by Géza Jeszenszky. He maintains that after the Battle of Mohács in 1526, Transylvania became part of Hungary. Jeszenszky's chapter also contains accounts about how Hungarians, Germans and other groups which had lived in Transylvania throughout the centuries had acquired collective rights. He explains that after the Great War, this region, with its many ethno-religious groups, was integrated into Romania, thus bringing about significant tensions between Hungary and Romania. Jeszenszky's chapter also outlines how the Romanians governed this region after World War I and how it was controlled by communist leaders from the end of World War II until their overthrow in 1989.

Also in the first section András Bereznay discusses the evolution of Transylvanian demography. He describes how cultural zones developed in this region, and he explains how and why conflicts had ensued among Romanians, Hungarians, and Germans in Transylvania. Other essays in this lengthy section concentrate on urban spaces, on monuments, and on cemeteries.

Significant minority groups are examined in the book's second section. Attila Gidó explores the world of Jews in Transylvania. He has a persuasive account regarding the devastating effects of the Holocaust, correctly claiming that only a few Transylvanian Jews who survived this experience did return to their former homes. He also discusses Romanian rule over the few Jews left in Transylvania during the communist era, arguing that they often suffered from anti-Semitic policies. Gidó claims that the Romanian Jewish Federation during the past fifteen years has tried to reduce anti-Semitic activities in Transylvania, but has met with limited success. He also reveals that Jewish assimilation in this region, for the most part, did not materialize.

The book's second section also has an essay by János Nagy dealing with Transylvania's Saxons; he emphasizes that many Saxons were well educated and became farmers. Nagy points out that many Transylvanian Saxons in the wake of World War II lost their property rights but that some were spared by Romania's communist regime. In another chapter Márta Józsa writes about the Roma in Transylvania. She shows that this group has suffered from discrimination and prejudice. Since the fall of the communist government in 1989, the Roma have been denied their political rights and have not been permitted to engage in commercial activities. Likewise, discrimination and prejudice are prevalent in the lives of the Csángó in Transylvania. As Andrew Ludanyi shows, this group consists of Catholics who during the communist era were denied their commercial and political rights. In the last chapter in this section about minorities Csaba Zoltani explains that Armenians in Transylvania contributed to agriculture and did much to foster cultural activities in the region's towns and villages.

The book's third section treats developments regarding state and church relations. László Bura examines matters regarding the Catholic Church in Transylvania since 1944. He maintains that communists leaders after World War II were anti-Catholic and shows that they took over church properties and exerted control over monastic orders. The Communists also nationalized Catholic high schools and colleges. In 1949 the government terminated relations

with the Vatican, thus exacerbating the status of Catholics in Transylvania. The author asserts that conferences between Romanian authorities and church leaders did little to ameliorate the church's status in the region. However, after the Communists lost power in 1989, the National Salvation Front surfaced in Transylvania; it declared religious freedom and reinstated the Catholic Church's organizational structure. Furthermore, new lyceums and schools were established to teach Catholic theology. As a result of a new Romanian educational law, Catholic leaders attempted to improve Transylvanian parochial schools, thus further enhancing religious education.

Vilmos Kolumbán treats matters regarding the Transylvanian Hungarian Reformed Church after 1945. He shows that this church promoted missionary work and Scripture studies. The Communist regime in 1948 enacted a law limiting the religious and educational activities of the Reformed Church. Following the fall of the communist government in 1989, this church was granted certain rights especially in the realm of schooling of future religious leaders.

Similar patterns characterized the Transylvanian Unitarian Church and the Romanian Greek Catholic Church. A stimulating chapter shows that under Romanian rule, the Unitarian Church experienced a curbing of its religious activities and was compelled to cede to the communist government many of its properties. Under communism, church leaders experienced repression. After 1989 Unitarians were entrusted with their rights, and its leaders, in various ways, acted to advance their religion. Likewise, Zsuzsa Hadházy lucidly explains that from the end of World War II until 1989, Romanian Greek Catholics were denied their rights. However, with the demise of the communist regime at the end of 1989, they were able to secure many of their religious liberties.

The book's fourth section is quite interesting and pertains to culture as a means of survival in Transylvania. János Péntek shows that Hungarians, Germans, and other nationalities were permitted to exercise their language rights in the 1990s. In 2011 the Romanians enacted an educational law to allow minority rights in Transylvania. The essay of Kinga Magdolna Mandel concerning the Hungarian-language education in Romania is quite revealing. Mandel contends that legislation has been passed to resolve the salient and contentious problem of the use of the Hungarian language in education. On the other hand Attila Ambrus describes how minority leaders in the Romanian press are unfairly depicted. The author concludes this essay

by maintaining that inflammatory (anti-Roma, anti-Semitic and anti-minority) language in Romania's mainstream press have not been reduced and have led to the heightening of minority group tensions in Transylvania and in the rest of Romania.

The book's last section is devoted to a discussion of legal issues. Csaba Zoltani's essay about private and communal property lucidly shows that after World War I, Romania acquired control of Transylvania and that this development was responsible for the confiscation of Hungarian properties. Detailed and incisive, this essay reveals how Romania during the 1920s seized Catholic, Reformed, and Unitarian church lands. Zoltani also outlines the discriminatory tactics, especially against the Hungarians, of the regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Since the first decade of this century, minority groups, especially in Cluj, have not been granted their property rights. Zoltani concludes his perceptive essay by claiming that the Romanian government, in which corruption is pervasive, has produced excessive social and economic tensions in contemporary Transylvania.

The book's last essay is Tihamér Czika's study about the struggle of Hungarians for autonomy in Transylvania. Czika explains that political and cultural autonomy had been extended to Hungarians to some extent after the end of the communist era. The author maintains that leaders of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (DAHR) opposed the 1991 Romanian constitution, which provided for a unitary state. Through the European Council's General Assembly, DAHR leaders tried but failed to achieve full autonomy. As Czika shows, Hungarian and other ethnic groups between 2004 and 2011 were consequently unable to achieve full autonomy. As a result contemporary Transylvania continues to suffer from political and ethnic tensions.

This book is a valuable study; it fills a void, for it consists of lucidly written chapters in English about pertinent groups and institutions in Transylvania. This well organized study also confirms the arguments regarding discrimination, tensions, and persecution in this East European entity. This book, which might have included a glossary, is well documented and contains a substantial bibliography at the end of each essay. Graduate students and East European scholars will find this volume to be informative.

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From 1997 to 2012 ZOLTÁN FEJŐS was the Director of Hungary's Museum of Ethnography. His researches and publications focused on themes such as the Hungarian immigrant communities of the United states, visual anthropology, material culture studies and museum affairs. He is the author of the ground-breaking monograph: *A chikagói magyarok két nemzedéke, 1890-1940* [Two Generations of the Hungarians of Chicago, 1890-1940] (Teleki László Institute, 1993). He has published shorter studies in *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica*, *The Hungarian Quarterly*, *Cahiers d'études hongroises*, the *Hungarian Studies Review* (see vol. 33 [2006]) as well as numerous Hungarian-language journals and museum catalogues.

(Our Contributors, continued)

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