

## Man's Biological Future in Hungarian Utopian Literature\*

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A fairly recent, unofficial report of the National Academy of Sciences concludes the survey of the present state of biology with this judgment:

"When one day man accepts responsibility for his acknowledged power to control his own genetic destiny, the choice between plans must be based on value judgments. When he begins to use the power to control his own evolution, man must clearly understand the values towards whose realization he is to strive."<sup>1</sup>

In other words: For what purpose life, present or future? For what purpose a new breed of man?

Right now, these still are uncomfortable questions. None of the existing social models should dare claim that it could serve as ideal for the future generations. The Nazis tried to shape genetics so that it corresponded to their ideology. Western scientists preferred to stay on grounds which they could long defend as purely speculative and non-political. A certain "scientist" named H.J. Muller, for instance, recommended freezing the sperms of famous males to be used by lucky females in the future.<sup>2</sup> In less future-oriented psycho-medical practice, like the changing of human behavior and world outlook by methods ranging from lobotomy to brain washing, our scientific age has produced more outstanding results than in planning for the future.

Though man's natural existence is inseparable from the social formations and technological conditions in which he lives, his physical constitution seems to have attracted the attention of utopian writers all through the ages. The unchangeability of nature has been a traditional commonplace in Western culture, yet experience, and later Darwinism, pointed out how man-created culture significantly influenced man's very natural essence too.

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The critical debate on Darwinism, especially, had scores of utopian implications, and the self-assigned prophets like Sumner and Ward, Engels and Thomas Huxley, all had some biological program for the future. Opponents of scientific philosophies also adhered occasionally to utopian ideas, as in the case of Nietzsche. Biological utopias (sometimes also called "anthropological utopias") entered late into Western European literatures, the finest and bitterest being Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and *Ape and Essence*.

It is remarkable how much importance Eastern European writers have assigned to the bio-future of man. Technological utopias of the scope of Jules Verne are scarce, perhaps because of the relatively late industrialization of the East-Central European countries. It was rather the changeability of the organism that most concerned the 19th and 20th century writers from these countries. This interest was primarily not scientific, however: the integrity of the human constitution, the mental freedom of thought and action, were of equal concern for these writers.

In this paper, four fantastic-utopian works, or parts of works, from Hungary will be analyzed as models of East-Central European writers' reactions to the development of biology, and particularly anthropology, neurology, and behavioral science. The works cover the period from 1860 to the eve of World War II.

"Model" is a term well known from general communication theory, still relatively little used in literary scholarship. Yet it seems to serve our purpose effectively. If we investigate the causes and functions underlying the Hungarian utopian imagination, we find more than isolated, individual "examples" in the four books analyzed. Changing as the historical conditions were, the four works nevertheless represent a consistent and continuous preoccupation with man's future in the perspective of his own knowledge and his created "second nature." In the summary, we shall see how the considered Hungarian utopian works correspond to a generalized definition of the model.

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Ten years after Austria and Russia defeated the Hungarian revolution of 1848-49, a patriot and playwright-nobleman, Imre Madách, sat down to summarize a dark decade in an allegorical work. The outcome was *The Tragedy of Man* (*Az ember tragédiája*), an extremely problematic cosmic drama which has since then been frequently and unjustly identified as a paraphrase of Goethe's *Faust*. Though much

less known abroad than is deserved or desirable, Madách's "*Tragedy*" still exists in over half a dozen different English translations.<sup>3</sup>

In the drama, Lucifer guides Adam through different periods of human history up to Madách's age and beyond. There are fifteen scenes in the tragedy, of which the twelfth is a utopian one. The age which the writer imagines will follow the 19th century knows no nations, the world is united under the rule of science and reason. Those species of organic nature which did not serve human needs have been extinguished, the rest tamed and exploited. Society is molded in phalanxes in which, similar to an ant-heap, individuals have no aspirations of their own, only socially assigned roles. Those who, like a new Luther, Plato, or Michelangelo, revolt against their slavery, must suffer humiliating punishment.

Madách's dramatic scene is clearly an early protest against the utopian socialist equalitarianism of Charles Fourier. Also, it has been customary to concentrate the attention on Madách's attitude toward the socio-political aspects of utopian or naive socialism. As early as 1862 the author of the "*Tragedy*" had to defend himself against the respected progressive critic János Erdélyi who reproached him for representing the socialist ideals unfairly. Since then, the political aspect of the phalanx-scene has been the focus of interest, and literary historians (including Georg Lukács in his Madách-essay of 1955)<sup>4</sup> speculate endlessly whether Madách was "reactionary" or "progressive" in his view of the future.

We suggest another approach to the utopian scene: an approach based on Madách's apparent view of the advance of biological sciences in the future. This critique of the advance and application of sciences appears mostly in a final and concentrated episode in which we witness the social interference with the spontaneous perpetuation of the human race and with the potential will of the individuals. Eve appears as young mother with her newborn baby. Scientists inspect this baby and another one, and decide that, judging from the shape of their skulls, one shall be raised to become a doctor, the other a shepherd. The babies are instantly separated from their mothers. Eve protests violently: however, she is pronounced ready for a new mate. Adam claims her, but the doctor of the phalanx is against the match: two unstable individuals like Adam and Eve would beget psychotic, hysterical descendants, who could not adjust themselves to a society of reason. When Adam hears that love is no longer a relevant factor, he becomes so outraged that only Lucifer's magic intervention can save him from bedlam.

What concerns us in Madách's utopian vision is not so much his view of socialization and mass-man (in which he shows some similarity to J.S. Mill's ideas), but rather, his critique of scientific marriage planning and professional counseling. He sees the real danger not in romantic love or natural child raising, but in a Lamarckian determinism which decides human fates by using comparative anthropological and genetic charts. Madách believes that man is to have the freedom to live in a certain way he chooses for himself because of, or even in spite of, his innate biological setup. Consequently, he cannot accept science as an antidote for the risks this freedom implies.

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Madách's time was transitory, however, and later decades of the 19th century witnessed a more positive view of science and technology among writers. The Hungarian Mór Jókai was a product of the period after 1864, when the constitutionalist-liberal middle class and nobility made peace with each other and with Austria. It was no longer a post-revolutionary pessimism, but rather a conformistic wish for cooperation with Big Brother Austria, that motivated his writings.

Jókai has always been extremely popular in his country. Also, he has been widely translated, especially in his lifetime and in the earlier decades of our century, even into quite esoteric and improbable languages (such as Armenian, Chinese, Estonian and Ruthenian). The enormous success of this skillful storyteller has made something of an idol of him. Jókai had a vivid imagination which often created fantastic or utopian figures, situations, or whole works. Notable of these is *A Novel About The Next Century* (*A jövő század regénye*, 1872-74). In this work, Jókai described the "Home State" of the future which, possessing the secret of aviation, forces the world into disarmament. When the secret is broken and the arch-enemy (NB: Russia!) also builds airplanes, a challenge of air war shows the absurdity of the armed race, and the "Home State" develops into a "Union of States", based on eternal peace and global cooperation.

*A Novel About The Next Century* is about a political and technical utopia, yet it discusses little of the anthropological aspects of rapid historical changes. Another later novel of Jókai, however, opened future vistas for changing and controlling the individual, using a contemporary motif for the kernel of its plot.

In 1889, Jókai published the notably inferior novel, *The Soul Shaper* (*A lélekidomár*). Though unsuccessful by any aesthetic standard, this work concerns us because of the description of its central

hero, a certain Lándory. This mysterious person was supposedly modelled after one of the police officers who played a key part in rolling up the widespread net or robbers and fences covering the Hungarian Flatlands a hundred years ago.

The exact identity of Lándory is impossible to verify. It has been customary to find analogies between him and a count Gedeon Ráday, the royal commissioner who led the campaign against the outlaws. Because of Ráday's status and social position, however, it might be suspected that rather one of his officers, for instance an obscure investigator called Laucsik, might have served as a more concrete example for Jókai than did the count.

In Jókai's characterization, this Lándory had an almost supernatural influence on the captured outlaws. Instead of the traditional physical pressure, he used his psychological capacities to make the suspect speak.

Jókai dwells on Lándory's interrogating methods only in one chapter of the book, but with full admiration. His hero plays on the hidden emotions and aspirations of the criminals. In some cases, Lándory succeeds in making the suspect list his crimes in order to prove that he has deserved his dreadful reputation. At other times, he confronts the murderer with his victim in some macabre form, so that the criminal's fear and conscience are awakened. His green eyes put the suspects in a semi-hypnotic state, from which they awake sweating, trembling, and crying. He frequently interrogates at night, and the faces of those arrested for examination are covered with masks, so that they don't recognize each other.

Aside from the obvious influence of the pseudo-psychologism of Victor Hugo and Sue, relevant parts of Jókai's novel are historically true and convincing records of early occurrences of policy techniques which we now call collectively "brainwashing." It is not so much Jókai's dangerously naive approach to such techniques as it is the fact that the writer reflected these phenomena at such an early stage of their development, that makes *The Soul Shaper* important to discuss as a preface to the world of *The Gulag Archipelago* and *A Clockwork Orange*.

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In the decadent-symbolistic atmosphere around the turn of the century, scientific fantasies and utopias were infrequent, both in Eastern and in Western European literatures. After the cataclysm of World War I, however, they re-appeared in ample numbers. Among

the Hungarian writers, it is Frigyes Karinthy's activity that is relevant to our topic.

Karinthy belongs to those not-yet-discovered geniuses of world literature whose fantasy products, unlike those of Verne and Jókai, were often too philosophical to be easily consumed. In two fantastic books, he continued Gulliver's travels in modern setting. In *Voyage to Faremido* (Utazás Faremidóba, 1916), Gulliver gets to the planet of intelligent and perfect self-programmed robots; in *Capillaria* (1921), he sinks to the bottom of the sea to find there a world of amazons who enslave, exploit and, indeed, devour the degenerate, dwarf-size males<sup>5</sup>. This latter novel, particularly, can be regarded as a congenial early literary contribution to Alister Hardy's hypothesis about the aquatic-feminine origin of mankind.<sup>6</sup>

Karinthy wrote a drama, *Tomorrow Morning* (Holnap reggel, 1916), and a documentary novel, *A Journey Around My Skull* (Utazás a koponyám körül, 1937) about the dimensions and perspectives of neurology. His drama is plainly bad by any standard; his novel, however, is a masterpiece, available also in English translation.<sup>7</sup>

The drama, *Tomorrow Morning*, centers around the private conflicts of a dangerous genius, an engineer who invented a winged remote-control rocket which can easily be used for military purposes. In order to prove to his estranged, eccentric, thrill-hunting wife that he has no fear, he must take the challenge of flying the rocket on its test-flight as a kind of kamikaze-pilot. His surviving the test-flight would mean, however, his failure as an engineer. Karinthy's attempt to make this nonsensical paradox believable is pathetically unconvincing. The point is, however, that the hero is afraid. For better or worse, he happens to run into a mysterious Finnish neurologist, a certain Irjö (=Yrjö?) Olson who has found the way to extinguish the fear of death in man through a simple operation. The engineer chooses to undergo this operation, flies the plane the next day only to discover that the explosive mechanism is faulty, and thus surviving the flight, he starts a new life free from his earlier obsessions with his wife and with fame.

Almost twenty years after the play was written, a much less mystical, indeed prosaic, still genuinely skillful Scandinavian medical wizard, Herbert Olivecrona carried out a long and complicated operation on Karinthy himself. He removed an egg-sized tumor from the writer's brain. The circumstances of this operation form the content of *A Journey Around My Skull*.

Karinthy as a writer deals with three possible levels of mental existence. One is the so-called "normal" state of the human mind. The

other is the short-circuited mind, implying the wide variety of mental illnesses. In-between the two is the physical deformation: brain tumor. Still comprehensible, visible, and operable, the tumor can nevertheless drive the individual to the verge of insanity. Karinthy does not go so far as to even mention the possibility of a *grand guignol* like a certain Danish playwright does, who describes how a man tortured by brain tumor kills and decapitates his wife.<sup>8</sup> Yet Karinthy too has pathological complaints, such as schizophrenic visual and hallucinative disorders, maddening headaches, giddiness and identity crises.

Both in the drama and in the documentary account, the medical scientist appears as a powerful manipulator of the physical organism of another individual. Doctor Olson compares the human body to a machine without instructions, and the history of medicine to thousands of years spent in trying to figure out how the machine works. In the novel, the author repeatedly looks at Olivecrona as one kind of a Wizard of Oz, in the process of detecting and fixing up a short-circuit in an endless system of wires (that is, neurons). In the dizziness of the operation, there is either an interaction between doctor and patient in the infrasensory sphere, or, alternately, a complete transposition of the consciousness of the writer to the doctor and vice versa. Karinthy has no doubts about Olivecrona; the doctor appears as healer. Yet the ethical responsibility of the manipulator is implicit: opening up the skull, connecting and disconnecting of nerves—for what purpose?

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Three writers from a small East-Central European country have stated their opinion on the possibilities of shaping or influencing man. What is common and what is different in these writers?

At the first sight, dissimilarities seem to dominate. Considering the value judgment our writers pass on the future, we find that Madách is more pessimistic than either Jókai or Karinthy. Also, it is only Madách's single dramatic scene which is undisputably put in the future; the other works take place in the (fantastic) present, but indicate that the unique events they describe will be more universal and accepted in the future. This tendency to tear down the barriers between present and future is itself characteristic of Thomas More's *Utopia*. Naturally, current scientific influences give a distinct feature to each of the works discussed. Madách might have known Malthus' idea of family planning, with its naive genetic implications. Hypnosis always fascinated Jókai, and the 18th century Mesmer was one of his

awful idols. Karinthy lived on the eve of the 20th century revolution in surgery when taboo organs (like the brain or the heart) became operational objects, and when transplanting gradually became a reality.

At least as important as the differences are the similarities among the works, however. All three writers regard the dividing lines between organic non-conscious and organic conscious nature as extremely shaky. They remind us to take good care of man's greatest property: his ethic feeling. The responsibility of professionals is consistently spelled out.

The general understanding of the predominantly biological (or anthropological) character of the Hungarian utopias would be difficult, however, with the application of conventional analytical techniques only. In the introduction it has been suggested that the four works might be used as models in one way or another. Let us take a look at the essential characteristics of any model as we know these from information theory.

Quantitatively on the structural level, the model is a copy of a system in corresponding proportions. Qualitatively (functionally) defined, the model is a constructed system which reacts to certain inputs in the same way as does the original system. Furthermore, the model has an experimental character. It serves one research hypothesis or another. Consequently, there are no unique models; the individual interests and perception of their builders define their character.

Looking at the four Hungarian utopian works as possible models, we find a strongly authoritarian feature of leadership. The biological character of the utopias discussed results in leadership that is not assigned, but acquired, through specialized (as in Madách) or exceptional (as in Jókai or Karinthy) skills or knowledge. It is intellect, and not physical strength, that distinguishes the biological leadership of the future.

The consequence of biological planning and intellectual refinement appears as a new authoritarian trend, however. Knowledge is never represented as socially shared, but as a respected controlling force. Consequently, it becomes the privilege of a new aristocratic cast which is similar to the one we find in Hesse's *Magister Ludi* (Das Glasperlenspiel.) The methods and decisions of the new mandarins are surprisingly undisputed, by the other heroes or the masses (as in Madách), or by the author (as in Jókai). It is only Karinthy who hints significantly in *Tomorrow Morning* that the unstable geniuses of skill can be "used" by a cold-headed political super-elite.



The role and responsibility of the utopian scientist in the interpretation of the three Hungarian writers is, understandably, analogous with the historical conditions, too. The authoritarian, oppressive character of a functionalized, materialistic social structure is spelled out most prominently by Madách, who was writing in an age of absolutism. In Jókai, only criminals (who “deserve it”) are forced to undergo a socially beneficial brainwashing process. Finally, in Karinthy, the paranoid genius accepts a similarly “corrective” and socially desirable process by free choice, yielding to the humane and logical arguments of Doctor Olson. (Also, Karinthy himself “chose” the risky operation by his own free will—though his freedom was considerably limited by the fact that his only alternative was a slow, painful death.) At any rate, the comparison of the three individual “models” shows a development from conditions in which individual freedom and responsibility appeared as hopelessly lost, to circumstances in which these became realistic to consider.

The “experiments” the three Hungarian writers were involved in depend precisely on these changes in the social structure. Madách seems to probe especially into science and its relevance for Hungary. The general relationship of this country to Austria was analogous with a well-known colonial pattern insofar as a larger nation, claiming a higher civilization, imposed its standards on a smaller one. Experience shows that the result of such relationship is often a nationalistic rejection of whatever progressive feature the colonizing nation may have. (This aspect of the utopian tradition, its connection with nationalism, has been regrettably neglected by researchers. Gandhi’s plans for a future India, Swift’s veiled reference to the Anglo-Irish relationship and Ibsen’s parody, “Gynthiana,” are just a few of the writings relevant to mention here.)

Madách focuses on science as a possible foundation for a better age, and condemns it. In order to understand his attitude, we must keep in mind that by condemning a Western ideal of some scientific-equalitarian “paradise,” he also passes judgment on Austria and thereby performs a patriotic action.

Thirty years later, Jókai is no longer bothered by Austrification. Instead, he speculates on an ambitious cosmopolitan level. Hungary had been a downtrodden, semi-colonized country for centuries. Could she regain her ancient, respected status in Europe by coping with her own internal problems (*The Soul Shaper*)? If so, this country might fulfill a glorious world mission in the more distant future (*A Novel About The Next Century*). This truly ambitious speculation carries

Jókai to extremes, yet his utopian novels show a clearly sequential pattern in their hypotheses of Hungary's present and future. How a sudden awakening to a nation's potentials produces a missionary zeal which is reflected in utopian literature is a phenomenon clearly recognizable in the wave of American and Soviet Russian science fiction utopias of our century.

Again, 30-50 years pass, and Karinthy witnesses the emergence of international belligerence. Technology is slipping out of the control of unstable geniuses, and becomes a threat in the hands of power-hungry politicians. But science can help mankind, states Karinthy. Lobotomy can save man from his self-destructive frustration (*Tomorrow Morning*.) The same human knowledge which produces the means of universal destruction is capable of producing the remedy at the same time. Karinthy's *A Journey Around My Skull* is actually a corroboration of this thesis in the form of a personal documentation, seemingly without any utopian reference. As in Jókai, we find a consistent development pattern in Karinthy's utopian works. It is beyond our aspiration, however, to make Karinthy's numerous other utopias (about Faremido, Capillaria, etc.) correspond to this pattern. As in Jókai, in Karinthy too the contribution of small nations to the technological-scientific scene is spelled out—the engineering genius is Hungarian, his healer a Finn, Olivecrona a Swede.

The involvement of the discussion of concrete historical and geographical determinants in the observation of particular utopian works does not exclude the possibility of looking at these works as being universally interesting and relevant. Nor does such method dim the main preoccupation, the biological perspective. Rather, the building of models should further explain on a genetic level both the changing value of science in a set of literary works and the potential supra-national appeal of these works.

The history of its utopian literature is an unwritten chapter of the culture of Hungary. (Nor have the utopian traditions of other East-Central European countries been ever studied—certainly not comparatively.) Consequently, the fairly well established classifications and terms generally used by Western critics of utopian literature are also missing in Hungary. To some, it might even seem ludicrous to think of this small, technologically long underdeveloped country in terms of the utopian tradition of world literature.

Yet, Hungarian literary history does not lack significant achievements in the utopias. György Bessenyei's satirical political utopia, *Tarimenes' Travel* (*Tarimenes utazása*, 1804) is an introduction to the

later 19th century production of Madách and Jókai. As for Karinthy, he was not alone in the 20th century with his utopian inclinations. Mihály Babits, one of the greatest modern Hungarian writers, himself wrote a utopian novel, *Pilot Elza, or The Perfect Society* (Elza pilóta vagy a tökéletes társadalom, 1933). The first volume of Sándor Szathmári's "Kazohiniatrilogy" came out in 1941, the last one in 1957. In the sixties, Tibor Déry's *Mr. G.A. in X.* (G.A. úr X-ben, 1964) raised eyebrows with its "controversial" contribution to the utopian tradition. (Incidentally, the astonishment at Déry's Kafkaesque-fantastic vision was understandable: Déry wrote the novel while serving a prison term for his activity in favor of the Nagy government during and after 1956.) Last but not least, the find of the seventies is the young Peter Lengyel whose novel *Ogg's Second Planet* (Ogg második bolygója, 1969) has become an international success.

Directing the attention of literary scholarship to yet undiscovered aspects of Hungarian literature seems to be a long needed effort. The Hungarian utopian tradition is just one of the hidden treasures in world literature. Besides establishing analogies between Western European and Hungarian literature, however, the specific situation of this latter, embedded in the motley East-Central European cultural context, should not be forgotten.

#### NOTES

1. *Biology and the Future of Man*, ed. Ph. Handler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 928.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 926.
3. The translations are by W.N. Loew (New York: Arcadia Press, 1908); Ch. H. Meltzer and P. Vajda (Budapest: Vajna and Co., 1933; New York: Macmillan, 1935); C.P. Sanger (London: Woolf, 1933; Sidney: Pannonia, 1953); J.C.W. Horne (Budapest: Corvina, 1963); J. Grosz (Portland, Ore., 1966); [adapted by] L.E. Roberts (n.p., n.d.).
4. "Madách tragédiája," in György Lukács, *Magyar irodalom—magyar kultúra: válogatott tanulmányok* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1970), pp. 560-73.
5. Trans. F. Karinthy, *Voyage to Faremido* [and] *Capillaria*, tr. P. Tabori (New York: Living Books, 1966).
6. Cf. A. Hardy, "Was Man More Aquatic in the Past?" *The New Scientist*, VII, 174 (March 17, 1960), pp. 642-45.
7. F. Karinthy, *A Journey Around My Skull*, tr. V.D. Barker (London: Faber and Faber, 1939).
8. C.E. Soya, "To Traade" (1943); in English: "Two Threads," tr. P.N. Furbank, in *Contemporary Danish Plays* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), pp. 173-250.



## **Praise the Lord!** **Albert Szenczi Molnár, 1574-1633**

Andrew Harsanyi

Molnár means miller in English and, in fact, Albert Szenczi Molnár's father was a well-to-do miller in the market town of Szenc (Szencz according to contemporary spelling) in north-western Hungary; hence his full Hungarian name: Szenczi Molnár Albert. He was born in Szenc in 1574 and died in 1633 in Kolozsvár, Transylvania; his gravestone still stands in the cemetery of Házsongárd.

Molnár spent more than 30 of his 59 years abroad as student, writer and scholar, beloved and respected; yet, after his return to his homeland in 1625, he was ignored and died forsaken in poverty. Still, no one in the history of the Reformed Church of Hungary had such a lasting impact upon its theology, piety and congregational life as Albert Molnár. Moreover, Albert Molnár had a decisive influence upon the development of Hungarian poetical forms and the Hungarian language in general.

Molnár lived in the period of Hungarian history when the country was divided among three powers. Its middle part was occupied by the Turkish empire, the East and Southeast, Transylvania, was an independent principality, while the northern and western sector was under the rule of the Habsburg king. In his youth, Albert Molnár witnessed first the consolidation of the Reformation, then the rising Counter-Reformation and the struggle for religious freedom championed by the princes of Transylvania: Stephen Bocskay and Gabriel Bethlen; in his later years the Thirty Years War raged all over Europe.

Albert Molnár began his studies at the age of 10. We know the story of his life quite accurately, for he kept a diary together with a kind of scrap-book with greetings of teachers and friends—among them such personalities as Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor in Geneva), the astronomer Johannes Kepler and Prince Gabriel Bethlen. These, together with hundreds of his letters, have been preserved and published. Other valuable biographical data can be distilled from the