

## Symbolist and Decadent Elements in Early Twentieth-Century Hungarian Drama\*

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### I

In his first major work of literary criticism, an ambitious history of modern drama, György Lukács devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of trends in the Hungarian theatre. Although he wrote this important, and still relatively little-known, synthesis originally in Hungarian (a rather inelegant, German-influenced Hungarian, one might add), Lukács does not hesitate to point out that Hungarian dramatists have not made an original contribution to Western dramatic literature, and what is more, predicts—in 1911—a rather bleak future for Hungarian drama.<sup>1</sup> As Lukács's other youthful works, this study of modern drama displays awesome erudition and keen insights into patterns of social and intellectual evolution implicit in literary development; yet the work's rigorously consistent theoretical framework is distressingly rigid, often betraying Lukács's cardinal and all-too-familiar weakness as a literary critic: his indifference to purely literary values.

In the *History of the Development of Modern Drama*, Friedrich Hebbel is seen as the father of modern drama and the Hebellian notion of the necessary coincidence of personal and historical tragedy as the only legitimate source of drama.<sup>2</sup> Lukács was not yet a Marxist when he wrote his treatise, but he had already been influenced by the modern sociological theories of Max Weber and Georg Simmel, which in turn incorporated some of the conclusions reached by students of *Geistesgeschichte*, the approach to intellectual history just then coming into its own.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in examining nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western drama, Lukács considers only those works dramatically valid that offer grand syntheses: characters that embody the spirit of the age, particularized conflicts that intimate larger upheavals — in short,

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dramas that impress us with a strong sense of historical inevitability. In view of Lukács's early intellectual commitment and consequent opposition to pure aestheticism in literature, it is interesting that he was nevertheless among the first to discuss under the same heading such dramatists as Maeterlinck, Hofmannstahl, Hauptmann, Yeats, Wilde and D'Annunzio, and indeed may have been the first to deal critically with Symbolist drama.<sup>4</sup> Lukács prefers "decorative stylization" to Symbolism and associates the term primarily with Maeterlinck's theatre which he greatly admires but which he must ultimately reject because it does not offer the kind of synthesis he looks for in modern drama. Maeterlinck's attempt to create mood, to dramatize states of mind and nameless terrors, results in breathtakingly beautiful theatrical moments, according to Lukács. "The essence of these beautiful moments is the strongly symbolic fusion of psychological, lyric, musical and pictorial elements in a given scene which expresses definitively and unforgettably the emotion underlying the scene."<sup>5</sup> Lukács is also quick to discern the philosophical and spiritual implications of Maeterlinck's dramas: "Maeterlinck's only aim is to express feelings—man's feelings toward the infinite, the eternally unknown, and those ultimate internal and external forces which can not be further analyzed but whose irresistible and immanent power we all sense." Yet for all his praise, Lukács would not consider Maeterlinck's plays truly dramatic. They are "merely" decorative, elliptical, ballad-like; in none of them is there an "all-encompassing sense of inevitability and universality."<sup>7</sup>

After rejecting, ruefully, it seems, even the most radical dramatic experiments of his time as timid and limited, it is hardly surprising that Lukács speaks disparagingly of Hungarian drama which in the second half of the nineteenth century remained largely unaffected by the new European literary trends, or absorbed only the extrinsic features of certain foreign models. Interestingly enough, the only nineteenth century Hungarian drama Lukács does think highly of—Mihály Vörösmarty's charming fairy play, *Csongor és Tünde* [Csongor and Tünde]—is one which, according to Lukács, is close in spirit not only to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but to some of the late nineteenth century Symbolist dramatic attempts. "The stylistic peculiarities of *Csongor und Tünde* have not lost their relevance," writes Lukács in his chapter on Hungarian drama; "on the contrary, they never seemed so modern as today when there is a trend in drama everywhere toward fantastic, anti-Platonic, anti-tragic fairy plays which, in order to render perceptible their ethereal content, draw on the spirit of the folktale (Hauptmann, Yeats, Synge)."<sup>8</sup> In relating what he considers the single

significant nineteenth century Hungarian play to a major current within the Symbolist theatre, Lukács once again reveals an affinity for a literary trend which he champions on aesthetic grounds but repudiates for ideological reasons.

Of course, Lukács may have admired Vörösmarty's *Csongor and Tünde* because it, too, is a kind of synthesis: a felicitous blend of "the fantastic and the real, the coarse and the magical, the sublime and the grotesque, the playful and the profound."<sup>9</sup> In being able to fuse disparate elements into a harmonious whole, Vörösmarty was indeed a lonely figure in Hungarian drama. Lukács as well as other Hungarian critics were well aware of the fact that the enormously popular playwrights of the early twentieth century (Ferenc Molnár, Menyhért Lengyel, etc.) were never able to assimilate successfully new dramatic techniques in their slick social dramas and easily exportable drawing room comedies. They tamed the more daring achievements of the Naturalist, Symbolist and, somewhat later, Expressionist theatre so that the innovative techniques became mere external adornments in their works. In discussing Ferenc Molnár's plays, the essayist Antal Szerb notes that "his [Molnár's] symbolism is Ibsen's, Maeterlinck's and Hofmannstahl's symbolism watered down to suit the tastes of his bright, though not too bright, public."<sup>10</sup>

## II

It is generally agreed that drama was the only genre not to undergo a process of rejuvenation during a ten-year span between 1900 and 1910 that proved to be a particularly productive period for Hungarian literature in general. Perhaps it is for this reason that György Lukács greeted the Symbolist-inspired dramas of Béla Balázs with such unwavering, and according to contemporaries quite unjustified, enthusiasm.<sup>11</sup> Balázs was a member of the intellectual circle that gathered around the young Lukács, and he also became a close personal friend of the philosopher-critic. This loose circle of young poets, sociologists and artists, which met regularly in Balázs's Budapest apartment during the mid 1910's and included such men of great future renown as Karl Mannheim and Arnold Hauser, was partially responsible for changing the course of Hungarian cultural life during the first two decades of the twentieth century, even though it was never part of the mainstream of the reformist-modernist movement (whose bastion was the periodical *Nyugat*), but was in fact often in opposition to that liberal, aesthetics-conscious mainstream.<sup>12</sup> Politically more radical, intellectually more

sophisticated than the writers of *Nyugat*, Lukács and his circle were students of German culture. They journeyed to Heidelberg and Berlin, while the poet Endre Ady and his followers, motivated perhaps by the traditional Hungarian antipathy for things German, turned to France for inspiration: to them the West meant Paris. Balázs's plays and poetry, as well as Lukács's literary theories, were on the whole too speculative, too abstract, too "German" for Hungarian tastes; and the fact that both of them came from a Jewish background and were perfectly bilingual — Lukács of course wrote most of his works in German — further alienated them from the leading modern poets of the day, who, despite their Western orientation, had a strong sense of ethnic identity.

The two groups' attitude towards Symbolism is a clear example of their dissimilar approach to literature. The so-called first generation of *Nyugat* poets were heavily influenced by French Symbolism, though most of them were attracted not so much to the philosophical implications of the movement as to the supple, sensuous, musical language created by Symbolist poets.<sup>13</sup> It is a curious, though by no means unexplainable, fact that Stephane Mallarmé's work, aside from some early sonnets, was not translated into Hungarian by the leading *Nyugat* poets who were otherwise enthusiastic translators of Baudelaire, Verlaine and a host of other Symbolists, including minor, now-forgotten poets. Mallarmé was of course recognized as the sage of the Symbolist *cénacle*, but his poetry was far too cerebral and metaphysical for a group of Eastern European modernists whose mysticism, irrationalism and decadence were tempered by a down-to-earth native tradition. However, it is precisely the philosophical and metaphysical aspects of Symbolism that interested men like Lukács and Balázs. They should have become familiar with Mallarmé, but because they were much closer to German literature, they approached Symbolism via Goethe, the German Romantics, Wagner and others who are known to have had a profound influence on the theorists of the movement. Thus, in expressing the notion that all things in the world are symbols, emblems of a higher reality, or in drawing attention to the incantatory nature of poetic language, Béla Balázs is echoing Novalis, E.T.A. Hoffman and the Schlegels rather than Baudelaire or the later Symbolists. Even when Balázs's point of departure is a writer who has little to do with Symbolism, his conclusions are strikingly close to theories enunciated by poets and dramatists associated with the movement. For example, in an essay entitled "Friedrich Hebbel and the German Romantics' Meta-

physical Theory of Tragedy" Balázs comes close to defining Symbolist drama:

We may speak of the symbolic impact of sensory impressions that supersede the power of words, or of the ability of drama to express ultimate things with the techniques of concealment and silence. . . . The Germans, the greatest masters and theoreticians of modern drama, who also have the best feeling for metaphysics in modern culture, have recognized this, as well as the fact that a drama must be symbolic in both content and form.<sup>14</sup>

Balázs was primarily a poet and playwright, and not a systematic thinker à la Lukács. Unlike Lukács, he was just as interested in Symbolist poetry as in Symbolist poetics. In 1908, four years before the publication of his *Misztériumok* (Mysteries), a collection of three one-act plays closest to the Symbolist spirit, Balázs wrote an essay on Maeterlinck, which contains a number of highly impressionistic and subjective observations on the aesthetics of the Symbolist theatre—observations which are nevertheless more illuminating at times, and more to the point, than Lukács's densely theoretical discussions. Alluding to such plays as *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles*, Balázs states:

The true hero of Maeterlinck's dramas is an invisible, all-powerful mystery. In the languid silence nothing seems to happen, yet an invisible force takes over and represses life. The static drama depicts the advent of this force, and of the great enigma that embraces us like a dark forest. The most visible and dramatic manifestation of this force is death. Death is the ancestor of all of these dramas, though it appears not as a terrifying tragic end, not in the guise of graves and skeletons, but as a dark, lurking secret — a symbol of the great mystery. Death is an invisible but live figure that walks among people, caresses them, sits at their table — an uninvited guest. Nothing happens in these plays. Life happens.<sup>15</sup>

Balázs is convinced that Maeterlinck revolutionized drama, and the essay makes it clear that its author has become an advocate of this new, plotless, often voiceless theatre of mood, nuance and effect. "I am forever envious of musicians who do not have to speak," Balázs confesses, "and forever in love with drama that does not speak."<sup>16</sup> Despite his tendency to view Symbolism in terms of German Romantic poetry and philosophy, Balázs is aware of course of the vast difference between German Romanticism and Maeterlinck's Symbolism: "His [Maeterlinck's] probe is not intellectual. His profundity is not akin to Goethe's or Hebbel's. He wants to capture 'unthought' thoughts, which is not a German profession."<sup>17</sup>

### III

In view of Balázs's admiration for Maeterlinck and the Symbolist theatre, it is perhaps not surprising that his three one-acters, whose collective title, *Misztériumok*, inevitably brings to mind Mallarmé's use of the term *mystère* in connection with drama,<sup>18</sup> contains significant Symbolist elements. By far the best-known of the three one-act plays (mainly because it served as the basis for Béla Bartók's opera, about which we will speak presently) is *A Kékszakállú herceg vára* (Bluebeard's Castle), a stark two-character drama. In choosing the legend of Bluebeard as the subject of his play, Balázs was in all probability influenced by Maeterlinck's three-act fairy play, *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, which he called, in his 1908 essay, Maeterlinck's "most profound" drama.<sup>19</sup> The legend of Bluebeard (whose historical model is usually said to be Gilles de Rais, a cultivated fifteenth century French nobleman turned sex-fiend) is allusive and violent enough to serve as the subject matter of a Symbolist play. Earlier literary treatments of the legend emphasized the horrific aspects of the story of the depraved woman-chaser. Maeterlinck and Balázs, however, tried to humanize the main protagonists, and used the legend as a metaphor for human predicaments and longings. As in so many Symbolist poems and plays, the setting in Balázs's drama is an exteriorization of a state of mind. Balázs himself makes this clear in his preface to the German text of the play: "Bluebeard's castle is not a real stone castle. The castle is his soul — a dark, mysterious, locked-up castle."<sup>20</sup> (In the original version of the play the castle is listed as one of the *dramatis personae*.) The minstrel introducing the drama also has this idea in mind when he asks:

Szemünk pillás függőnye fent:

Hol a színpad: kint vagy bent,

Urak, asszonyságok?

[Our eye-lash curtain is raised

But where is the stage, out there or in here,

Lords and ladies?]<sup>21</sup>

Balázs's Bluebeard is not a perverse Don Juan but a sullen, troubled man; and his latest bride, Judith, senses the enormity of his sins and the extent of his spiritual disquietude, and expresses her fears in terms that suggest an awareness of the symbolic character of the setting. Touching the damp wall of the castle Judith cries out: "Sír a várad, sír a várad!" [Your castle cries, your castle cries.] When she hears the wind whistling through the dark passages of the castle, she says: "Oh a várad felsóhajtott!" [Your castle has sighed.] And when the first door is opened,

revealing Bluebeard's instruments of torture, Judith exclaims in horror:

A te várad fala véres!

A te várad vérzik!

[There is blood on your castle wall;

Your castle is bleeding!]<sup>22</sup>

One by one the doors of Bluebeard's castle fly open, exposing weapons, treasures, vast lands — the possessions of a powerful and proud male. From behind the seventh door the former wives emerge, beautiful, sad creatures, resplendent in their wedding gowns. Though her curiosity is satisfied, Judith is more terrified than ever, and Bluebeard, after realizing that baring his soul had not relieved his anguish, bids her to join the other women, which Judith stoically does, weighed down by her new crown and robe.

There is disagreement among critics as to the precise extent of Balázs's indebtedness to Maeterlinck. According to literary historian Miklós Szabolcsi, for instance, Balázs paid closer attention to Charles Perrault's famous fairy tale on the subject than to Maeterlinck's version of the legend.<sup>23</sup> However, György Kroó in his lengthy account of the history of the Bluebeard legend concludes that *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* "is, in a sense, the source" of *Bluebeard's Castle*.<sup>24</sup> A comparison of the two works reveals that Balázs did borrow some of Maeterlinck's dramatic devices — for example, the motif of the seven locked doors. To be sure, the Hungarian dramatist changed the images behind the doors: in Maeterlinck's play the first six doors lead to rooms filled with jewels, in *Bluebeard's Castle* only one of the locked doors contains dazzling precious stones; but the seventh door in both plays conceals Bluebeard's former wives who have been imprisoned, not killed. The two dramas are also similar in their rather obviously symbolic use of lighting. In both plays the stage is shrouded in darkness, and the opened doors emit blinding shafts of light. It is of course Ariane and Judith who are associated with light — they both radiate love. Ariane reacts ecstatically to the dazzle of diamonds pouring out of the sixth chamber:

Immortelle rosée de lumière! Ruissellez sur mes mains, illuminez mes bras, éblouissez ma chair! Vous êtes purs, infatigables et ne dormez jamais, et ce qui s'agit en vous feux, comme un peuple d'esprits qui sème des étoiles, c'est la passion de la clarté qui a tout pénétré, ne se repose pas, et n'a plus rien à vaincre qu'elle même! . . . Pleuvez, pleuvez encore, entrailles de l'été, exploits de la lumière et conscience innombrable des flames! vous blesserez mes yeux sans lasser mes regards!<sup>25</sup>

Judith also yearns for light; she would like to deliver Bluebeard from the darkness by illuminating his murky soul:

Lesz fény, szegény, Kékszakállú  
Megnyitjuk a falat ketten.  
Szél bejárjon, nap besüssön  
Tündököljön a te várad!

[There shall be light, poor Bluebeard  
We shall throw open these walls.  
Let the wind blow, the sun shine;  
Let your castle glitter.]<sup>26</sup>

There is even a similarity between the animism of the two castles. As we said, Judith talks about Bluebeard's abode as though it were a living thing. In Maeterlinck's play, Ariane's Nurse exclaims as she is about to open the first door:

Prenez garde! — Fuyez! Les deux battants s'animent et glissent comme un voile.<sup>27</sup>

We should also note that the dissimilarities between Maeterlinck's and Balázs's plays are as striking as the similarities. *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, a far less mysterious, indeed a less Symbolist, play than Maeterlinck's early one-acters, is really only about Ariane who is the prototype of the liberated woman. At the end of the play, after enraged peasants capture Bluebeard, Ariane asks them not to harm him. She herself leaves when realizing that she can be of no help either to Bluebeard or to his former wives who are too submissive to opt for freedom. Ariane is "the light-bringer in Maeterlinck's drama," according to Bettina Knapp, author of a recent monograph on Maeterlinck; "she has attempted to illuminate what was living in perpetual darkness and confusion — the other wives. She has the courage to venture forth alone in forbidden, and, therefore, terrifying realms, which is the fate of many light-bringers."<sup>28</sup> Balázs's play, on the other hand, is almost completely devoid of external action and its ending is not nearly as unambiguous as that of *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*. Next to Maeterlinck's eventful play, *Bluebeard's Castle* is a static drama in which — as one of its unsympathetic critics put it — "two people clamor on stage for an hour and nothing happens."<sup>29</sup>

Even though it was performed as a play, Béla Balázs's *Bluebeard's Castle* was made famous by Béla Bartók who used a somewhat shortened version of the Balázs play as the libretto for his one-act opera by the same title (first performed in 1918). Because Bartók's dark-toned, somber, chillingly dissonant music is as atmospheric as it is dramatic,



we might conclude that it is the perfect complement to a Symbolist play — just as Debussy's and Richard Strauss's scores are ideal musical counterparts to plays by Maeterlinck and Hofmannstahl. However, there are music critics who argue that the combination of Balázs's words and Bartók's music produces a far different effect than the music dramas of Debussy. According to György Kroó only Maeterlinck's and Debussy's world can be said to be subtly, intimately suggestive; Bartók's opera is elementally symbolic.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, if we view the castle as having straightforwardly allegorical rather than suggestively symbolic significance; if we read the drama as an internalized psychological confrontation between tragically incompatible Man and Woman, we have less and less reason to believe that *Bluebeard's Castle* is a Symbolist play. And if we accept the interpretation that Bluebeard represents the eager and insatiable adolescent who "with each kiss experiences the joy of liberation as well as the desire for even sweeter kisses,"<sup>31</sup> then we are further removed from Symbolism and are edging closer to allegorical drama. Yet, even if we concede that *Bluebeard's Castle* is preoccupied with clear-cut psychological conflict and is therefore not Symbolist in theme, its language, staging and atmosphere remain essentially Symbolist. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that one of the most significant changes the Symbolist movement underwent in Eastern Europe has been its "folklorization."<sup>32</sup> Béla Balázs's *Bluebeard's Castle* is an almost perfect example of this process since Balázs's — and Bartók's — avowed purpose was "to portray the modern soul with the unmixed, primeval colors of the folk ballad. We believed that the very new must be transplanted from the very old, but in such a way that the original material survive the process of our spiritualization and not evaporate between our fingers."<sup>33</sup> It is above all the terse, elliptical, strategically stylized and repetitive language of Balázs's drama that gives it its Symbolist flavor. Balázs was aware of the existence of Hungarian folk ballad versions of the Bluebeard legend and wanted to transfer to the stage the dramatic spirit of these ballads.<sup>34</sup> In Béla Bartók Balázs found an ideal collaborator, for at the time he wrote his opera Bartók had already begun his investigation of Eastern European folk music.

In order to fully appreciate the significance of the Symbolist use of the ballad form, we must again refer to Lukács's *History of the Development of Modern Drama* which, we could safely assume, had a profound effect on members of Lukács's circle, and especially on someone like Balázs who considered himself primarily a dramatist. In his chapter on Maeterlinck Lukács defines the Symbolist theatre in terms of the ballad. He is aware of course of the narrative nature of the ballad form,

yet he believes that "Maeterlinck's dramas are ballads. They are expressions of a tragic sense stripped of all extraneous detail, though the feeling itself is expressed simply, naturally."<sup>35</sup> Lukács does not consider the ballad an adequately dramatic form; nevertheless he ascribes much of the power and tension of Symbolist drama to its ballad-like qualities. Maeterlinck's dramas, like the ballad, "depict states, not relationships, human traits, not human characters, moods, not worlds."<sup>36</sup> According to Lukács, Maeterlinck reduced the realism of the ballad as much as possible. "First he wanted to eliminate all external action so as not to disturb the internal happenings. Then he dispensed with those human traits and features that did not have a direct bearing on his characters' fate. Finally he did away with verisimilitude with regard to time and place."<sup>37</sup>

It is precisely these reductive techniques that we encounter in Balázs's *Bluebeard's Castle*. Yet to reduce the drama to simple allegory would be an unjust oversimplification. We could, as has been suggested, conclude that *Bluebeard's Castle* is about the tragic irreconcilability of the male and female ego; but we could also concentrate on Judith's curiosity, on her relentless search for the unknown. The opening of the doors could be seen as a lifting of the veil which is a frequent and powerful image in Symbolist literature. Even the familiar—and richly allusive—motif of the forbidden chamber, as well as the theme of the redemptive secret turned fatal, adds to the polyvalent character of the drama. For every critic who detects non-Symbolist elements in Balázs's drama, there is another who would classify it as a Symbolist play. For example, József Ujfalussy, in his book on Bartók, places the drama in the mainstream of the Symbolist tradition.<sup>38</sup> He sees a clear thematic connection between the Tristan legend, *Pelléas and Melisande* and Balázs's *Bluebeard's Castle*, and relates Golaud's dark and bleak castle to Bluebeard's domicile. According to Ujfalussy, "if we call Melisande the 'white woman of the castle,' she leads us to Ady's poem; if we name her Judith, she reappears in Balázs's play."<sup>39</sup>

The two other plays in the trilogy — *A tündér* (The Fairy) and *A szent szűz vére* (The Blood of the Holy Virgin) — are far less evocative than *Bluebeard's Castle*. In these dramas the attempt to poeticize and spiritualize basic psychological conflicts becomes much too self-conscious and contrived. *The Fairy* has a story-book Germanic setting, and *The Blood of the Holy Virgin* is medieval in decor. Despite the more concrete locale, however, the author does not aim for a sense of realism in these dramas. His objective rather is to take characters quite modern in sensibility and place them in a hazy, pseudo-historical setting. The conflict in

*The Fairy* is between a young woman, her fiancé, and her old love who after a long absence mysteriously reappears and raises some fundamental questions about love, thereby shattering the serenity of the young couple. *The Blood of the Holy Virgin* is also about a triangle: two knights who have vowed eternal friendship during a crusade meet again in the castle of one of the comrades who in the meantime has taken a wife. A classic conflict develops between friend and wife, with the anguished husband standing in the middle. The antagonists stab themselves to prove their love but are revived by the Holy Virgin whose statue comes alive. At the end of the play the wife goes off to a convent and the two friends join another crusade.<sup>40</sup> As we can see, the irreconcilability of friendship and love, as well as, in a larger sense, the eternal strife between man and woman is the leitmotif running through all three *Mysteries*.<sup>41</sup> But the stylized decor and language lend even these two plays a Symbolist aura. Moreover, the sense of foreboding and troubled expectation present in both plays is highly reminiscent of Maeterlinck's "théâtre de l'attente."<sup>42</sup> For example, Oliver, the old sweetheart in *The Fairy* is associated with the ill-omened wind, and with a fairy that, according to local legend, hides out in the nearby woods. Like the castle in Balázs's first one-act, the wind is listed as a character in *The Fairy*. It blows frequently and ever more menacingly throughout the play. The character of Oliver is also interesting because he is a wanderer, a figure often encountered in Symbolist literature, in search of the undefinable, the unattainable. "Nem, nem vagyok én soha egyedül," he tells his former love. [No, I am never alone.]

Velem van minden még nem élt napom,  
Ezer nyitott ajtóval áll körül  
És néz és vár és hív és integet.  
Velem van minden, ami nincsen itt,  
Velem van minden, ami még lehetne  
S kiált utánam: jer értem, jere!

[I have with me my still unspent days;  
They open a thousand doors for me,  
And look and wait and beckon and wave.  
I have with me all that is not here,  
All that could still be,  
Calling out: Come, come after me.]

#### IV

Balázs's Symbolist—or perhaps semi-Symbolist—attempts appear to be the only example, in Hungary, of this type of theatre. While

Symbolism triumphed in Hungarian poetry, in drama it seems to have made even less of a dent than elsewhere in Europe. Yet if we examine the history of early twentieth century Hungarian drama, we discover that there were sporadic attempts, sometimes by the popular dramatists of the age, to exploit the atmospheric, pictorial and poetic potentials of the theatre, and downplay conventional plot and character development. Many of these playwrights were responding to the spirit of Art Nouveau and Secession, which were themselves offshoots of Symbolism. Secession, a term widely used only in the Germanic world and Eastern Europe, refers to a movement in art that stressed the ideals of aestheticism developed by the pre-Raphaelites and the French Symbolists, and favored subjectively stylized, lush, sinuous formal elements, as well as the fusion of the primitive and the modern. It is this last feature that characterizes Hungarian Secession at its best. The incorporation of folk motifs in turn-of-the-century "modernist" architecture, the search in the early poems of Endre Ady for the primitive, pagan Magyar spirit, the utilization of folk-ballads in Balázs's poetry and plays are all examples of Hungarian Secession which, as an artistic trend, was rather short-lived. Its heyday was between 1895 and 1905, and it never developed into a full-fledged culture movement.<sup>45</sup> Secessionist techniques were widely imitated, vulgarized, and the term itself soon became a pejorative, associated with kitsch. In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in Secession, and historians of literature and art have shown that its influence has been more pervasive, and in some cases more positive, than previously believed.<sup>46</sup>

The language of the theatre was also influenced by the ornate secessionist style. Two dramatists in particular—Ernő Szép and Dezső Szomory—were partial to this style which in large measure defined their artistic sensibility, labelled Decadent by most of their critics. But as Pál Réz points out in his essay on Ernő Szép, Decadence in the Hungarian context doesn't signify the ennui of an overripe, overrefined civilization, or a waning life force in conflict with an intensified zest for life, but rather a quiet aestheticism, an inward-turning, asocial stance, a deliberate cultivation of certain easily recognizable mannerisms and a morbid fascination with death.<sup>47</sup> Like Paul Verlaine, Ernő Szép was a consciously naive poet. All of his writings exude a childlike innocence and charm, as well as a wise understanding of the vicissitudes of life. He mixes poetic and prosaic subjects,<sup>48</sup> and the "simplicity of folk tales with the most up-to-date French stylistic trends."<sup>49</sup> It is in this connection that we find *Az egyszeri királyfi* (The Prince of Yore), one of his lesser-known plays, significant. Like Vörösmarty's *Csongor and Tünde*, men-

tioned earlier in this essay, *The Prince of Yore* is a fairy play, an everyman tale in peasant garb, which draws on practically all the popular elements of Hungarian folklore. However, as Dezső Kosztolányi pointed out in his review of the play, first performed in 1913, Ernő Szép combines the charm of primitive folk art with the techniques of a Beardsley drawing.<sup>50</sup> *The Prince of Yore* has nothing to do with the sentimental native-populist theatre still very popular in Hungary at this time, or with populist literature in general; it is not even so much a play as a series of tableaux, set pieces, incorporating the favorite characters and conventions of Hungarian folktales. A peasant prince is pursued by Death who is also depicted as a simple, rather good-natured Hungarian peasant. The young prince, however, is an atypical fairy tale character in that he is listless and world-weary. Whereas Balázs was attracted to the simplicity of Szekler (székely) folk ballads, Szép crowds into his play a whole gallery of folk characters, a thesaurus of poems, proverbs, jingles, rhymes, wordplays, etc. We are faced with an abundance of riches which often seems excessive. However, the Decadent character of the play stems not only from its self-conscious primitivism, but also from its preoccupation with death. The final speech made by Death is a lyrical celebration of the eternal rest, a seductive appeal to the death wish:

Félsz lemenni a földbe, kedves kis cselédem? Ó, te balga, nem látod, hogy lefelé kívánczik minden a világon, az anyaföld felé? Nem látod a szomorúfűz ágát, hogy borul lefelé, nem nézted meg a daru tollát, hogy lankad a földnek, a búza boldog kalásza hogy hajlik lejjebb, lejjebb, meg a szép őszi falevél milyen édesdeden száll, száll a fáról a földre. A friss égi harmat, a fehér hó is a földre jön az égből, a fényes esti csillag megunja a magosságot, lefelé szalad a föld felé, a dicső nap is lefelé ballag alkonyattal, minden a földet keresi, minden a földbe vágyakozik. . . Ó, be áldott is a lágy anyaföld, be drága, be ékes, be jóságos, be kíváncsatos, be gyönyörűség.

[You are afraid to go into the ground, my pet, aren't you? But don't you see, you little fool, that everything in the world moves downwards, toward mother earth? Haven't you noticed the drooping branches of the weeping willow, or the crane's flagging feather? The happy wheat-stalks bend low, and the autumn leaves fall gently from the tree onto the ground. Fresh morning dew and white snow also fall from the sky, as does the bright evening star when it tires of its lofty perch. At dusk even the glorious sun sinks low — all things long for, reach for, the good earth. . . Oh, blessed mother earth, how dear and precious you are, how kind and tempting and beautiful.]<sup>51</sup>

Dezső Szomory epitomized for many Hungarians the dandified literary gentleman. He spent seventeen years in Paris, between 1890 and 1907; and although these were still crucial years for the Symbolist movement, he seems to have known little more about it than what was reported in newspapers and popular magazines.<sup>52</sup> He was considered a modernist in Hungary, yet his taste was rather conservative: Stendhal, Balzac, Renan were his favorites, and he was proud of having been a regular in Alphonse Daudet's salon in Paris. Szomory wrote short stories and some poetry, but he was a born dramatist, if only because he knew how to create pathos on stage with overpowering words, and how to deflate it with devastatingly pedestrian words. A late-Romantic, Szomory outdid the Romantics with his overembellished, sonorous, interminable, and ultimately self-mocking tirades which became his signature. Alluding to Wagner, he often expressed the desire to create a language that would be a kind of synthesis, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* based on the word.<sup>53</sup> Szomory would also have agreed with Oscar Wilde, according to whom "a mask tells us more than the face."<sup>54</sup> In his personal life Szomory eagerly cultivated the image of a Des Esseintes-like decadent and narcissist; his poses and eccentricities, his carefully stage-managed affairs, scandals, sufferings made him a celebrated and controversial literary figure. A cult of beauty informed all of Szomory's works and shaped his lifestyle; the aestheticization of pain and death became an especially conspicuous feature of his work. During the First World War, he wrote a series of fictitious eyewitness reports from the Western front. In one of them he exclaims: "These stiff-bodied young soldiers stretched out in pools of blood over the black wreaths of crows make a beautiful, oh, God, forgive me, an incredibly beautiful sight."<sup>55</sup> Szomory wrote a number of plays — "tumultuous spectacles," he called them — about Habsburg kings, as well as social dramas in which the accent is always on passionate, if ill-fated, love affairs. But the play we are concerned with here — *Sába királynője* (The Queen of Sheba) — was never performed; we do not even know for sure when it was written. The manuscript was believed lost and only recently rediscovered among the author's papers by his biographer, Pál Réz, who speculates that it was composed in the early twenties. In his notes on the forgotten play, Pál Réz discounts Szomory's claim that *The Queen of Sheba* is his chef d'oeuvre. Réz believes "it is merely a libretto, waiting for an inspired composer. . . [In it the author] tries to revive the antiquated and unrenewable dramatic tradition of Maeterlinck and D'Annunzio."<sup>56</sup> Yet the

importance of *The Queen of Sheba* as a Symbolist play should not be underestimated. In his essay on the Symbolist theatre, Hartmut Köhler points out that in addition to myth, legend and fairy tale, "the voluptuous paganism of antiquity" can be a rich source for a Symbolist play. (Interestingly enough, Köhler mentions in this connection the Portuguese Eugénio de Castro's *La reine de Saba*.)<sup>57</sup> What attracted Szomory to the Biblical story was clearly its decorative aspects. His *Queen of Sheba* is more of a pageant than a play. The actual story of the relationship of Solomon and Belkiss—the psychological aspects of the romance or the historical background—is of little importance to the author. The scenes containing narrative interest (the one in which Belkiss tries out her riddles on Solomon, for example) are the weakest in the play. The emphasis is on spectacle, verbal and emotional crescendos, aria-like tirades, climactic theatrical moments — Belkiss' triumphant entry to Jerusalem, her equally dramatic leavetaking, etc.

What is especially interesting about the play from a Symbolist point of view is that Szomory's exotic, opulent decor includes a profusion of birds and flowers which not only echo the details of the legend of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, but are clearly Symbolist in inspiration. Solomon sends his favorite bird, a hoopoe, as a messenger to Sheba, and with it a whole flock of birds take off, darkening the sky and forming a "winged cloud."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Belkiss is surrounded by, and is identified with, rare and beautiful flowers.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the unreal luxuriant, hothouse atmosphere of the play is quite reminiscent of the rarified ambience of much Symbolist poetry. What is more, Belkiss resembles a figure favored by the Symbolists: Salomé. The prophet Jossué in the play warns Solomon of the terrible consequences of his involvement with the Queen. Like Jokanaan in Wilde's *Salomé* he is — quite literally — a prophet of doom. At the end, Belkiss watches with satisfaction as Solomon, intoxicated by love, is about to have the prophet put to death.

We could cite further Symbolist traits in *The Queen of Sheba*, but before going too far in spotting resemblances and parallels, we might do well to recall that Symbolist drama, in Hungary as elsewhere, is an imposed critical category. It is unlikely that Szomory was consciously adapting Symbolist devices in his drama. If nothing else his ever-present irony and merciless self-parody; his embracement of "l'esprit cruel et le rire impure" separate him from "true" Symbolists. We should also keep in mind that a major problem in dealing with Szomory's Symbolism, indeed with Hungarian Symbolism in general, is that the term is very loosely used by Hungarian critics and writers. The dividing line between

Symbolism, Neo-Romanticism, Impressionism, Decadence, Art Nouveau, Secession is often blurred and the labels are used interchangeably. (For example, in an essay on Dezső Szomory, Kálmán Vargha talks about Szomory's "symbolist-secessionist period."<sup>60</sup> We must remember, too, that Lukács's term "decorative stylization" encompassed both Symbolism and the artistic impulses covered by the term Secession.)

## VI

In this essay we attempted to isolate certain thematic and stylistic traits in early twentieth century Hungarian drama, which reflect an awareness of the Mallarméan-Maeterlinckian notion of an internalized, "detheatricalized," evocative theatre. We also tried to examine Decadent features in certain Hungarian plays. We define Decadence as an aspect of Symbolism, which in its Middle European incarnation manifested itself in an overrefined aesthetic sensibility, an excessive preoccupation with death and a predilection for heavily stylized and overcharged forms of expression. Our choice of plays was to a certain extent subjective; it is conceivable that similar elements could be found in other Hungarian plays of this period.<sup>61</sup> Béla Balázs's *Mysteries*, Ernő Szép's fairy play and Dezső Szomory's Biblical drama may be considered examples of experimental theatre, not wholly successful, but significant nevertheless from both a literary and dramatic point of view. These unconventional attempts did not have much of an impact on the development of modern Hungarian drama which has been generally unresponsive to new dramatic theories and practices, and is to this day heavily representational.<sup>62</sup> It should be noted, though, that while Béla Balázs's plays (with the exception of the operatic version of *Bluebeard's Castle*) have not been staged in fifty years, Szomory's dramas — the more conventional ones, to be sure — are again in vogue in Hungary. There is hope at least that audiences attuned to the subtleties of language, mood, feeling in the theatre might learn to appreciate these static, "unstageworthy," Symbolist-inspired Hungarian dramas.

## NOTES

1. György Lukács, *A modern dráma fejlődésének története* (Budapest: Franklin Társulat, 1911), vol. 2, pp. 494-531.
2. Lukács, *A modern dráma*, vol. 1, pp. 351-393. After he became a Marxist, Lukács scorned most of the Symbolist playwrights. In a 1966 interview he declared that Maeterlinck's works had become "unreadable." See Theo Pinkus,



- ed., *Gespräche mit Georg Lukács* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1967), p. 26. Understandably, Lukács retained his great admiration for Hebbel. See for example "Hebbel és a modern tragédia megalapozása" in Lukács, *Világirodalom* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 332–366. For a more objective appraisal of Hebbel and the modern theatre, see Ronald Peacock, *Poet in the Theatre* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1946), pp. 64–76.
3. See Lukács's preface to an anthology of his theoretical writings on literature, *Művészet és társadalom* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1969), pp. 5–6.
  4. Lukács, *A modern dráma*, vol. 2, pp. 240–290. Lukács was also among the first to note the similarities between Symbolism and Naturalism. He points out that in eliminating contrived plots, in suggesting an all-powerful force behind human action, in searching for the *tragique quotidien*: "the reflection of a sense of fatality in everyday things," Symbolist drama is strikingly close to Naturalism. Lukács's conclusions are echoed by modern critics. For example, Anna Balakian in her *The Symbolist Movement* (New York: Random House, 1967) states: "Naturalism and symbolism are both nurtured by fatalistic philosophies in which the human will is subordinated to outer influences and pressures." (p. 138) John Gassner in *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1956) defines Symbolism as "naturalist playwrighting with its teeth drawn." (p. 106.)
  5. Lukács, *A modern dráma*, vol. 2, p. 279.
  6. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
  7. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
  8. *Ibid.*, p. 503.
  9. Pál Pándi (ed.), *A magyar irodalom története* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1965), vol. 3, p. 453.
  10. Antal Szerb, *Magyar irodalomtörténet* (Budapest: Révai, 1943), p. 492.
  11. See György Lukács's collection of essays on Béla Balázs's work: *Balázs Béla és akinek nem kell* (Gyoma: Kner Izidor, 1918). These essays illustrate Lukács's polemical zeal as well as his blindness to Balázs's limitations as an artist. For a recent view of Balázs, Lukács and their circle, see Ferenc Fehér's introductory essay in Béla Balázs, *Az álmok köntöse* (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1973), pp. 5–24. For an appraisal, in English, of Balázs the writer and thinker, see Lee Congdon, "The Making of a Hungarian Revolutionary: The Unpublished Diary of Béla Balázs," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 8, No. 3 (1973), pp. 57–74.
  12. See Kristóf Nyíri's interview with Arnold Hauser, in which Hauser reminisces about Lukács, Balázs and others, in *Kritika*, Nos. 4 & 5 (1976), pp. 5–9; 16–18. It is often pointed out that an important reason why Lukács and his circle did not have a more decisive role in shaping Hungarian culture in the 1920's and 1930's is that after 1919 almost the entire group left the country. Lukács and Balázs became Communist émigrés, staying first in Austria and then moving on to Russia. By the time they returned to their native country in 1945, a whole generation had grown up who hardly knew of their existence.
  13. In his definitive study on the influence of French Symbolism on Hungarian poetry, André Karátson points out that "les Hongrois de l'époque, sauf Béla Balázs et Dezső Kosztolányi, y pensaient peu, préoccupés qu'ils étaient de révéler leur moi intime et de transformer les rapports entre la poésie et la vie nationale." *Le symbolisme en Hongrie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969), p. 442.
  14. Béla Balázs, "A tragédiának metafizikus teóriája a német romantikában és Hebbel Frigyes," *Nyugat* I (1908), 89. We might add here that some of Lukács's

- formulations also coincide with Symbolist perceptions. In one of his essays on Balázs, Lukács reaches the conclusion that Shakespeare was a great symbolist since his symbols "mean everything and nothing in particular; they are musical and non-intellectual" (Lukács, *Balázs Béla*, p. 63.). Mallarmé reached a somewhat similar conclusion. Haskell Block points out in his *Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963) that according to the French poet Shakespeare's "cosmic symbolization" makes him "the great precursor of the symbolist drama." (p. 91)
15. Béla Balázs, "Maeterlinck," *Nyugat* 1 (1908), p. 448.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 450.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 452.
  18. Like Mallarmé, Balázs was deeply aware of the mystery inherent in theatre; and although the title *Misztériumok*, according to some critics, simply refers to the parabolic aspects of the plays, quasi-religious, ritualistic elements are very much present, especially in the third drama, *A szent szűz vére* (The Blood of the Holy Virgin).
  19. Balázs, "Maeterlinck," p. 449. It should be noted that Lukács believed *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* to be "an insignificant" play. (*A modern dráma*, vol. 2, p. 287.), and in general considered Maeterlinck's late work too explicitly philosophical and therefore not Symbolist, indeed not at all dramatic. The wise man, Lukács maintained, is by definition "not tragic" (*A modern dráma*, vol. 2, 286.). In a sense Balázs's other youthful literary works — his many fables, fairy tales and parables — could be related to Maeterlinck's later writings since both writers moved away from Symbolism in the direction of didacticism and philosophy. Balázs also wrote non-symbolist social dramas which are rather abstract illustrations of Lukács's and others' dramatic theories. However, while in exile in Russia and Germany Balázs made a name for himself as a film theorist and critic and his preoccupation with the visual medium could perhaps be related to his early interest in Symbolism.
  20. Béla Balázs, *Válogatott cikkek és tanulmányok*, ed. by Magda K. Nagy (Budapest: Kossuth, 1968), p. 35. There is an interesting resemblance between the castle image in Balázs's play and Endre Ady's poem "A vár fehér asszonya" [The White Woman of the Castle] whose opening line is: A lelkem ódon, babonás vár/Mohos, gőgös és elhagyott (My soul is an ancient bewitched castle/Mouldering, haughty and abandoned.) See Karátson, *Symbolisme en Hongrie*, p. 122.
  21. Béla Balázs, *Az álmodok köntöse*, p. 197.
  22. *Ibid.*, pp. 203–206.
  23. Miklós Szabolcsi *et al.*, *A magyar irodalom története* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1966), vol. 6, p. 247.
  24. György Kroó, *Bartók színpadi művei* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1962), p. 25. György Lukács, on the other hand, rejected any attempt to link Balázs's *Bluebeard's Castle* with Maeterlinck's *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, and went as far as claiming that while Maeterlinck's images are "abstract," Balázs's dramas are "terse, precise and richly sensuous expressions of the inner life of a dramatic here." (*Balázs Béla*, p. 58.) In this particular essay Lukács was responding to an article by Mihály Babits in which Babits criticized Balázs's dramas for their lack of poetry and imagination. See *Nyugat*, 6 (1913), pp. 166–169. Other critics have also questioned Balázs's Symbolism. In his essay on Balázs's dramatic theories, Ferenc Fehér notes that while "Maeterlinck was a conscious Symbolist, Balázs was one only accidentally and momentarily." Ferenc Fehér, "Narcisszusos drámái és teóriái," in Béla Balázs, *Halálos fiatalság* (Budapest:

- Magyar Helikon, 1974), p. 21. On the other hand, Miklós Szabolcsi maintains that Balázs's theatre is closely related to Maeterlinck's Symbolist dramaturgy. *A magyar irodalom története*, vol. 6, p. 247.
25. Maurice Maeterlinck, *Théâtres* (Brussels: P. Lacomblez, 1912), vol. 3, pp. 142–143.
  26. Balázs, *Az álmok köntöse*, p. 202.
  27. Maeterlinck, *Théâtres*, vol. 3, p. 138.
  28. Bettina Knapp, *Maurice Maeterlinck* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), p. 99.
  29. Emil Haraszti, *Bartók Béla élete és művei*. Quoted by Kroó in *Bartók színpadi művei*, p. 29.
  30. Kroó, *Bartók színpadi művei*, pp. 105–106.
  31. See László Bóka's essay on Balázs's play in a special illustrated edition of *A kékszakállú herceg vára* (Budapest: Helikon, 1961), p. 62. A contemporary critic—George Steiner—sees the castle and Judith's curiosity as a symbol of modern man's search for ultimate and devastating truth about his culture. See Steiner's *In Bluebeard's Castle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).
  32. See for example Vilmos Voigt, "Folklore in Symbolism," MS, to be published in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literatures of European Languages*, under the aegis of the International Comparative Literature Association.
  33. *Bécsi Magyar Újság*, May 21, 1922. Quoted by Kroó, p. 35.
  34. See "Molnár Anna balladája" in *Új guzsalyam mellett* (Bukarest: Kriterion, 1973), pp. 26–27. In this version of the legend, the Bluebeard figure hangs his victims on a tree.
  35. Lukács, *A modern dráma*, vol. 2, p. 251.
  36. *Ibid.*
  37. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
  38. József Ujfalussy, *Bartók* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1965), 2 vols.
  39. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 169. See also footnote 20.
  40. *The Blood of the Holy Virgin* is the least satisfying of the three *Mysteries*, and its symbolism is the most literal. For instance, the rich tapestry we see hanging over the grim walls of a Norman castle clearly suggests the changes made by Blanka, the lovely wife. In a climactic moment her husband's comrade expresses his jealousy by angrily tearing off the wall hangings.
  41. This conflict was rooted in Balázs's personal life. Two fictionalized accounts of his friendship with Lukács and with members of Lukács's circle — Balázs's own *Lehetetlen emberek* [Impossible People] and Anna Lesznai's *Kezdetben volt a kert* [In the Beginning was the Garden] — reveal some of the dilemmas highlighted in the *Mysteries*.
  42. See Guy Michaud, *Message poétique du symbolisme* (Paris: Nizet, 1966), pp. 445–448.
  43. Significantly, the title of Balázs's first volume of poetry is *A vándor énekel* [The Wanderer Sings]. According to Lukács the wanderer is a highly ambiguous symbol: he symbolizes those moments "when everything becomes symbolic." (Lukács, *Balázs Béla*, p. 65.)
  44. Balázs, *Az álmok köntöse*, p. 247.
  45. See Aladár Komlós, "A magyar art nouveau vagy a nemzeti és európai elv összeolvadása," in his *Vereckétől Dévényig* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972), pp. 99–156.
  46. For a brief overview of recent research on this subject, see Lajos Pók, "Szecesszió és nosztalgia," *Nagyvilág*, 21, No. 5 (1976), pp. 758–762.
  47. See Pál Réz's introductory essay in Ernő Szép, *Úriemberek vagyunk* (Budapest: Magvető, 1957), pp. 5–17.

48. André Karátsón in his chapter on Szép lists some of these themes: "De quoi s'entretient-on avec Szép? De choses éminemment poétiques: des fées, des princesses, des nuages, des cygnes, des roses, mais aussi de choses éminemment prosaïques: des lits de faits, des visages mal rasés, des godillots de soldat, de la toux et du cri du ventre." *Le symbolisme en Hongrie*, p. 345.
49. Ernő Szép, *Üriemberek vagyunk*, p. 17.
50. Quoted by Pál Réz in Ernő Szép, *Színház* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1975), p. 123.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
52. In *Levelek egy barátnőmhöz*, a series of fictitious letters to a lady friend, Szomory speaks rather disparagingly of Jean Moreas, one of the "activists" of the movement, and gives a sampling of his own unabashedly imitative Symbolist verse (Budapest: Atheneum, 1927), pp. 164–165.
53. See Pál Réz, *Szomory Dezső* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1971), pp. 17, 83.
54. See Oscar Wilde, "The Truth of Masks," in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1948), pp. 1060–1078. Compare Wilde's statements in this essay, as well as his famous Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, with some of Szomory's observations in his *A párizsi regény* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1969): "The power of appearance, of all artifice, is always greater than the power of reality." (p. 19.) "Beauty is never of any use. The useful goes hand in hand with the ugly." (p. 34.)
55. Szomory, *Harry Russel-Dorsan a francia hadszíntérről*. Quoted by Réz in *Szomory*, p. 154.
56. Dezső Szomory, *Színház* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1973), p. 285.
57. Hartmut Köhler, "Symbolist Techniques in the Theatre Arts," MS, to be published in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literatures of European Languages* under the aegis of the International Comparative Literature Association.
58. Szomory, *Színház*, pp. 760–765.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 769.
60. Kálmán Vargha, "A novellista Szomory," in Dezső Szomory, *Az irgalom hegyén* (Budapest: Magvető, 1964), pp. 20–21. For a discussion of the problems of defining Symbolism, see René Wellek's "The Term and Concept of Symbolism in Literary History" in his *Discriminations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 90–121.
61. László Bóka calls our attention to Mihály Babits's symbolic fairy play, *A második ének*, which, in 1911, also bucked the Naturalist trend, and sought to project an *état d'ame* on the stage. See Bóka's essay in Balázs, *A Kékszakkálú herceg vára* (Budapest: Helikon, 1961), pp. 59–75.
62. One of the many possible reasons why Symbolism in the theatre did not have a stronger effect in Hungary is that it arrived almost at the same time as Naturalism which clearly overshadowed it. In 1904, when Lukács and others established Thália, Hungary's first *théâtre libre*, Naturalism was still considered the latest word in drama. Thália staged such masterpieces of Naturalist theatre as Gorki's *The Lower Depths* and Strindberg's *The Father*. No play by Maeterlinck was performed during Thália's four years of existence between 1904 and 1908, though works by Hauptmann and D'Annunzio were staged.

## The Hungarian Image of Benjamin Franklin

Anna Katona

"The impact of this new American man upon Europe," commented Henry Bamford Parkes on Franklin, "was of the greatest importance."<sup>1</sup> The Philadelphia printer, son of a Boston tallow-chandler, acted as the agent of the Pennsylvania Assembly in London during 1757-1762 and resided in Paris during 1776-1785. Between 1778 and 1784 he served as the rebellious American colonies' minister plenipotentiary at the French court. Because of his prolonged stay in Europe, Franklin became a symbol for all ideas and ideals associated with America. "If eighteenth-century America borrowed its theories from Europe," said Parkes, "it more than repaid the debt by the encouragement it offered, by its mere existence, to European liberalism."<sup>2</sup> His long sojourn in London and Paris made Franklin the most accessible representative of the Founding Fathers to Europeans. Besides his political role, his invention of the lightning conductor, this epochal discovery in the field of electricity, contributed to Franklin's early fame in Europe, and brought him honors in all parts of the continent.<sup>3</sup> Franklin, the scientist and politician, was soon to capture the attention of Hungarians.

His European presence accounted for Franklin's early recognition in Hungary as an American patriot. Colonel Mihály Kováts (who was to die in the defence of Charleston, S.C. in 1779), volunteered to serve the American cause in a letter to Franklin in January 1777.<sup>4</sup> János Zinner (later a professor of philosophy and mathematics in Kassa), "prefect of the Imperial and Royal Academy of Buda," as he signed his letter to Franklin of October 26, 1778,<sup>5</sup> asked Franklin for material for two books he was planning to write in Latin on the American Revolution. In a second letter, dated September 23, 1783,<sup>6</sup> Zinner offered his *Notitia Historica de Coloniis Federatis in America* to the thirteen states. Since the Latin works have not been found, it is believed that the results of those researches had been incorporated in his other writings.<sup>7</sup> His German *Merkwürdige Briefe und Schriften der berühmtesten Generäle in America* [Noteworthy Letters and Writings of the Most Famous Generals in America] (1782),<sup>8</sup> is a survey of the American Revolution's