

## The America of World's Fairs and Expositions Through Hungarian Eyes 1876–1939

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Even today, America is known to many only from travel books, and this was particularly the case in the past. A travel book is a store of experiences, a source of information, which offers an opportunity of comparing foreign lands with what we have in our own country; a chance to self-reflect as a nation.<sup>1</sup> Travel books were very much in vogue worldwide; in particular, in the late 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries when travel opportunities were limited. This was especially true of distant lands such as the United States, which a surprisingly large number of Hungarian travelogues were written about already in the 19th century.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tibor Frank: “‘Through the Looking Glass’: A Century of Self-Reflecting Hungarian Images of the United States (1834–1941).” Lehel Vadon (ed.), *Multicultural Challenge in American Culture—Hemingway Centennial* (Eger: Eszterházy Károly Teacher Training College, 1999a), 21–36.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. András Vári: „Fenyegetések földje. Amerika a 19. század második felében—magyar szemmel” [Land of Threats. America in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century—Through Hungarian Eyes], *Korall* 7, 26. November 2006, 153–184; Tibor Glant, „Magyar nyelvű amerikai utazási irodalom a XIX. század második felében: bibliográfiai áttekintés.” [19th Century American Travelogues in Hungarian: A Bibliographical Survey]. In: Zoltán Abádi Nagy–Judit Ágnes Kádár–András Tarnóc (eds): *A szavak szépsége, avagy a bibliográfus igazsága. Tisztelgés Vadon Lehel 70. születésnapján* [The Beauty of Words or, the Justice of the Bibliographer. Honoring Lehel Vadon on His 70th Birthday] (Eger: Eszterházy Károly Főiskola, 2012), 630.

## Aurél Kecskeméthy at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876

The first official world exhibition took place in America in the city of Philadelphia in 1876 which was held in honor of the centenary of the independence of the United States. Aurél Kecskeméthy travelled to this event on behalf of the “High Ministry” in order “to make specific inquiries into the Philadelphia exhibition and the phenomena concerning our homeland’s best economic interests on the occasion of my travel to America, and to make a thorough report on my observations there [...]” (Kecskeméthy 253).

Aurél Kecskeméthy (Buda, 1827—Budapest, 1877), journalist and writer, studied law and obtained a solicitor’s degree. After the Hungarian war of independence he left for Vienna in 1849, and became a correspondent for the newspaper *Magyar Hírlap* in 1850. He worked in the press office of the Ministry of the Interior from 1854 on; he performed the duties of a censor in the capacity of a police commissioner (while some claimed he was an agent and informer). As of 1857, he was part of Count István Széchenyi’s Döbling circle, and he, too, found himself a suspect of the Habsburg police on account of the publication of Széchenyi’s political pamphlet *Ein Blick* in 1859. He was charged in 1860, but the case was dropped after the *Oktoberdiplom* of 1860. He was the editor of the Government’s official journal, *Sürgöny*, after 1860, and of *Magyar Híradó*—a newspaper favoring the Austrian Government—as of 1866. He worked as the editor of *Magyar Politika* and became a supporter of the conservative wing of the Deák Party after 1867 (Kenyeres I, 883–4). He was a colleague of Miksa Falk; they were both staunchly attacked for their loyalty to the Habsburg government. Dávid Angyal published their confiscated correspondence in 1925.<sup>3</sup> Aurél Kecskeméthy was one of the most controversial journalists of his time.

Kecskeméthy decided to insert his account of the “centennial exhibition” before his review of “North-America’s political and social conditions” (Kecskeméthy 253).<sup>4</sup> He reflected on the *Weltausstellung 1873 Wien* which was a large world exposition held in 1873 in the Austro–Hungarian capital Vienna. He concluded that

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<sup>3</sup> Dávid Angyal (ed.), *Falk Miksa és Kecskeméthy Aurél elkobzott levelezése* [The Confiscated Correspondence of Miksa Falk and Aurél Kecskeméthy] (Budapest: Pesti Lloyd-Társulat–Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1925); reviewed by Ottó B. Kelényi. *Magyar Könyvszemle*, 1926, III–IV. 393–399.

world exhibitions follow one another in such quick succession that most industrialists find it hard to cope with the costs of the expositions; [...] as the number of expositions increases, so declines the likelihood of recovering these expenses directly—that is, by virtue of sales or the acquisition of new markets. Further, [...] a period of two to three years is insufficient for any momentum of development to have reached a stable position. Not even the latest machines or new procedures had reached the stage of completed experiments. Finally, the wider public—on the participation of which depends the financial success of a corporation—have also grown somewhat indifferent and weary in consequence of the quick succession of world exhibitions. (Kecskeméthy 255).

Similar to Zsigmond Falk, Jr.'s later views, Kecskeméthy had an unfavorable impression of the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876. Kecskeméthy observed that

the installation [...], general appearance and size of the Philadelphia exposition fell short of the last Paris [1867] or Vienna [1873] exposition. The installation of the exhibits on display did not in the least reflect either the widely reported practicality of the Americans; or the fact that they may have learnt something at the exhibitions in Europe. [...] we had more reason to conclude about the Philadelphia exhibition than about any of its predecessors that it was nothing more than a big rag-fair. (254)

He later repeatedly emphasized the “undeniable inferiority” of the Philadelphia exhibition to those held in Paris and Vienna (265). Kecskeméthy regarded the architectural style of the exposition as impractical and lacking in quality. Exhibitors were disappointed when they hoped to be able to sell their products on display or intended for sale. He crushingly remarked that “as regards the financial outcome of the Philadelphia exhibition, it appears to be an utter failure” (265). It is much to Kecskeméthy's credit that he provided a thoroughly detailed account of the contribution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and in particular, of Hungary, to the exposition—and in a highly critical tone, too. The Monarchy exhibited 454 items in total, with Hungary's share amounting to a mere 22, including Herend china, bitter waters, tartar wine stone, prunes, wheat, malt, slivovitz, washed cotton, vinegars—agricultural products in the vast majority (260–2). The Monarchy exhibited far fewer items here than it did in 1851, on the occasion of the “Great Exhibition” in London where Austria showcased some 746 objects, including 34 from

Hungary and 21 from Transylvania.<sup>4</sup> This was Kecskeméthy's last work; he returned ill from the United States and died a year later. His book is regarded today as one of his era's best Hungarian travelogues.<sup>5</sup>

### **Dr. Zsigmond Falk, Jr.**

Zsigmond Falk, Jr.'s travel book *From Budapest to San Francisco* (Falk), which lived to see at least four editions, is highly interesting. Dr. Zsigmond Falk, Jr. was the son of a prominent Pest family. His father, Zsigmond Falk, Sr. [Sigmund Ritter von Falk] (Pest, April 27, 1831—Budapest, March 11, 1913), the owner of a printing press, was the brother of noted journalist and politician Miksa Falk,<sup>6</sup> a young national guard in the war of independence of 1848–49. “He made his way up from printer's apprentice to printing press director, and became the director of the Pesti Könyvnyomda Rt. (The Book Printing Co. of Pest), in 1868. In that capacity, he did a great deal for the development of the local printing industry, and additionally made his name known as a philanthropist. He was the Vice-President of the National Federation of Industrialists, knighted and given the title of Royal Counsellor.”

([http://www.zsikipedia.hu/index.php/Falk\\_Zsigmond](http://www.zsikipedia.hu/index.php/Falk_Zsigmond); *Lovag Falk Zsigmond*; Ujvári, 256).

The establishment of the sheet music printing press under the auspices of the Pesti Könyvnyomda Rt. company during these years was a useful, gap-fill venture. He readily embraced his son young Zsigmond's then novel concept in Hungary, and Falk, Jr. became the founding father of music engraving and sheet music printing in Hungary, and by so doing, the father helped to create another fruitful industry (*Lovag Falk Zsigmond*—“*Ujabb alapítások—Jubileum* [Latest Foundations—Jubilee]” sub-chapter).

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<sup>4</sup> *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations, 1851*. Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue, Vol. III. London: Spicer Brothers; W. Clowes and Sons, 1851. (1005–1044).

<sup>5</sup> [http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kecskeméthy\\_Aurél](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kecskeméthy_Aurél). — Downloaded June 6, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Miksa Falk presented himself as a candidate at the parliamentary elections of 1869 competing with his childhood friend Mór Wahrmann in the Leopoldstadt district of the city of Pest. Wahrmann prevailed. This happened just a year before Miksa's nephew Zsigmond Jr. was born. Welker in Frank (2006), 111–153.

Zsigmond Falk, Jr. (Pest, March 30, 1870—Budapest, February 15, 1935) studied law in Budapest. He joined his father's business, *Pesti Könyvnyomda Rt.*, where he mastered the trade of printing. Falk, Jr. gradually climbed the company hierarchy, and finally became President and Director General. He visited a number of countries in Europe as well as the United States. He introduced the typesetter in Hungary. He was a trained musician and wrote music reviews. He established and edited the musical journal *Magyar Dal* [Hungarian Song] for ten years. He was also the editor of the weekly *Ország-Világ* [Country and World] as of 1894. He wrote a number of books, from professional treatises (*A sokszorosító ipar Magyarországon* [The Printing Industry in Hungary], 1896), through short stories (*Sok mindenről* [On Many Things], 1902; *Mindennapi történetek* [Everyday Stories], 1903; *Mozgó fényképek* [Motion Pictures], 1904; *A énekesnő* [The Singer], 1905; *Repülünk* [We Are Flying], 1910; *Levelesláda* [Letter Box], no date; *Paula gondjai* [Paula's Troubles], no date), to novels (*A söntéstől a rivaldáig* [From the Bar to the Limelight], 1912) and other travel books (*Budapesttől Lisszabonig. Uti rajzok* [From Budapest to Lisbon. Travel Sketches], 1902) (Kenyeres I, 460; [hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falk\\_Zsigmond](http://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falk_Zsigmond)). He was a wide-ranging commentator of Hungary at the turn of the century with good writing skills and an individual voice.

### **Arrival in America, 1893**

Dr. Zsigmond Falk, Jr.'s study trip to America was connected to the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. While it is obvious that he was sent to the United States to study this event, as well as Chicago, his book makes mention of a number of other cities and regions which Dr. Falk—23 years of age at the time—visited. He arrived in New York on board the German steamer *Bismarck*, “perhaps, the world's most beautiful ocean liner” (Falk 11). It took him eight days on board this “phenomenal seven-storey vessel” (19) to get from Cuxhaven—then part of Hamburg—in Germany to the port of New York (Falk 11, 19). He was as impressed and overwhelmed by the enormous ocean liner as he was repulsed by New York City and, as we shall see, almost everything else that he saw in the United States. It is this almost all-inclusive negative attitude that places Falk's book above, and more interesting than, other similar reports which typically and generally tended to pay tribute to the United States.

Upon arriving in New York, I was overwhelmed by such an unpleasant and repulsive sensation which told me that it would be much more desirable and practical to turn back and go home straight away. Already in the port, as we were leaving our boat, the riff-raff and rabble in the hundreds of thousands that came to meet us and offered to carry our suitcases—naturally, in order for us never to see them again —, the repulsive baseness, meanness and evil incarnate that pervaded the faces of these people: we found this alone so disgusting that we would have been quite happy to give up on the glory of seeing the new world. It was only later that we realised that the bright light comes with dark shade. Now, however, the only notion we had was to get away, as far as we can. (Falk 23)

Zsigmond Falk, Jr. was aware that, before his arrival, it was his own dreams that brightened the colors of the mental picture he had of America, an idealized image of the United States. “New people, new air, new customs, new life” (21). Based on his original feelings, and even conviction, America “was the ideal notion of a Paradise on Earth” “where, based on what I have heard so far, it is easier to bear the burden of life; where, based on what I have read so far, everything has reached the highest degree of perfection” (21). His description of his original expectations faithfully reflected contemporary notions of the promised land. He was, however, bound to be disappointed. “We thought—naïve as we were—that we shall find a world where we were only to extend our hand and, lo and behold, it was filled with gold; we were only to open our mouth, and lo and behold, it was filled with delicious food. We thought: people were different there; their customs were different from those we had here, in old Europe.” (21) He believed that in a place where there was and there is no feudal oppression or social hierarchy, “in the absence of any notion of a superior power, where all human feelings are allowed to roam free, ideas may emerge and institutions may come into being which are far superior to ours and reach a degree of ideal perfection which we all covet” (21). He believed freedom to be the New World’s leading notion:

As they are all equal here, why would anyone hurt anyone else? As there is no one above them, why would one wish to seek favour with the other? We are free! As free as our imagination allows; as free as even poets have never experienced; as free as those who have always only lived by themselves and only for themselves. (Falk 22)

Juxtaposed with these initial notions, Falk’s travel report was the alphabet of disappointment in America. He believed that “the books which recorded observations on America were of a completely different

kind from those by my humble self. But no one can expect me to conceal or even garble that which I experienced—what’s more, I suffered—just to bring my notes in concord with other books concerned with similar topics.” (26) The author even tolerated American cuisine badly, and is obviously “homesick for home cooking”.

Bearing in mind our own tastes, customs and needs, I must say that nowhere in the world have I found such badly cooked, such shoddily prepared and such ill-chosen fare and lunch as I did in America. Comprised of brews and concoctions, vegetable stews and all other dishes which are not at all nutritional but are all the more heavy on the stomach; in a single lunch, you’d find fifteen of these out of twenty plates. And as for meat, there is hardly any; the piece of meat that we were served at lunch and dinner would not even fill the smallest female fist. (Falk, 26)

The young man’s spirits were not even raised by the fact that, on travelling roundtrip from New York to New York, he had the chance to visit Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Saint Louis, Kansas City, Colorado Springs, Manitou, Leadville, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and Niagara Falls. He finds New York with its traffic on an enormous scale crushing: “People everywhere, carriages in a solid line; they hustle and jostle one another as if the happiness of eternal life were dependent upon the speed of this race” (27). Falk is perplexed and shocked by the flood of advertisements he sees everywhere: “The trickery, the thorough care extending to every facet, and the attention with which these advertisements are not only edited but are prepared in appearance are indeed unsurpassable” (28). At the very end of his book, Falk returned to the overwhelming impact of advertising which “was able to create something big, powerful and earth shattering out of nothing—and to present this creation before the eyes of the people as if it actually existed in real life, and to thereby achieve goals which would be nowhere near attainable without the advertizing” (196).

However, he immediately added his concern to the words of appreciation: “But no one should even consider coming here who has an enervated nervous system to the slightest degree; because such a nervous system would most certainly be destroyed. Neither the eye, nor man himself finds any peace or quiet at all.” (Falk 196) Other European visitors, immigrants and refugees, too, complained about and suffered from the destructive effect of the American lifestyle on the nerves (Frank 1999b, 197–207; Frank 2009, 234–241). It greatly contributed to Falk’s initial negative impression of New York that the letters of

recommendation he brought with him from Europe did not yield the result he had hoped for, and obtained the worst possible impressions upon their presentation.

[...] I then succeeded in making the acquaintance of an American in his own utmost coldness, his own prodigious reserve, and succeeded in seeing selfishness in its own ideal incarnation, the uppermost cause of which I could not, however, seek in anything other than the simple fact that living is extremely hard, time is expensive, and every man is so occupied with his own affairs, minutest attention to work and keen competition taken to the extreme that no one has time here to be welcoming and friendly. (Falk 30)

Unexpectedly, Zsigmond Falk, Jr. took a particular liking to the capital city, Washington, D.C.

[...] walking down the streets of the city, we may indeed believe that we are in Europe because, in New York as well as in Philadelphia, the filth in the streets makes such a terrifying impression that you would almost like to give advice, or even active assistance, with relieving the streets of the unpleasant dust and dirt that is also bad for the health. (38)

He found asphalt surfacing on the streets, and “the buildings, too, are—more in line with the moderate European taste—not fifteen—to twenty-storey-tall but remain within the normal height of three to four storeys.” (Falk 38) As may be observed in the case of the vast majority of European travelers, Falk therefore measured everything by European standards; the way things were done by the Europeans constituted his point of reference, and Europe represented his taste, yardstick and home territory.

### **Hungarians meeting American Presidents**

Zsigmond Falk, Jr.’s account of his visit paid to the President of the United States is edifying in itself but is particularly interesting as it compares well with that of Sándor Bölöni Farkas. In 1831, Bölöni Farkas was able to see President Jackson in the company of just one other person, at one day’s prior notice. Falk gained admission to the White House in the company of some 200 to 300 people at 1.00 p.m. on June 28,



1893. His visit paid to President Cleveland<sup>7</sup> was a source of disappointment for the Hungarian visitor. “[...] here, too, we failed to find that which we had presumed to see in the person of the President of the United States. It is a long-standing experience that reality never quite matches your imagination. The President creates in us the impression of a robust Józsefváros<sup>8</sup> petty bourgeois merchant.” (Falk 40) The Hungarian witness’s description of President Cleveland continues like this: “His kindly face reflects anything but a statesman’s erudition and the virtue it takes to lead a country of 65 million inhabitants, which he may very well possess but appears not to flaunt in the least; at least not on the outside.” (40) Visitors greet the President one by one with these words: “I am very pleased, Mr. President, to find you in good health”. These words could be spoken in English as well as in German as Cleveland also spoke the latter (40).

We know of at least five Hungarians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century who had the occasion to speak to a President of the United States: Sándor Bölöni Farkas in 1831, Lajos Kossuth in 1851, General Julius H. Stahel (born Gyula Számwald) in 1863, Aurél Kecskeméthy in 1876, and Zsigmond Falk, Jr. in 1893.

In contrast to the disappointed Falk, Sándor Bölöni Farkas even had the chance to conduct a half-an-hour interview with President Jackson,<sup>9</sup> whose “direct statements and polite manners quickly made us forget we conversed with the first elected servant of thirteen million people” (Bölöni Farkas 189). Bölöni Farkas left President Jackson touched and overwhelmed: “I will never forget how happy I felt when we left, knowing I met and talked to this famous man. His handshake made me prouder than any honor in this world, it enriched my memory with a treasure I will forever cherish.” (190)

Lajos Kossuth was introduced to President Fillmore<sup>10</sup> on December 31, 1851; on this occasion, Kossuth expressed his gratitude in an eloquent address for his rescue from the Ottoman Empire and the protest directed

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<sup>7</sup> Grover Cleveland (1837–1908), U.S. President 1885–1889, 1893–1897. *The World Almanac 2012*, 503.

<sup>8</sup> ”Josephtown”: A somewhat shady, commercial district of Budapest with a mixed reputation, named after the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II in 1777.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Jackson (1767–1845), U.S. President 1829–1837. *The World Almanac 2012*, 500.

<sup>10</sup> Millard Fillmore (1800–1874), U.S. President 1850–1853. *The World Almanac 2012*, 501.

against his country's oppression. Fillmore reassured the former Hungarian Governor-President in a cautious answer of his personal sympathy with which he warmly looked upon Kossuth's "brave struggle for the independence and freedom of [his] native land" (Headley 282–5, quote 284), but promised no political assistance to Hungary. Fillmore was careful to ensure that the Hapsburg Monarchy should not misconstrue his words. Half a year later, Kossuth left the United States, bitterly disappointed (Frank 2002, 97).

We have some information on the personal relations of General Stahel and Lincoln<sup>11</sup> from 1863 when the General of Hungarian origin commanded the saluting troops on the occasion of Lincoln's Gettysburg address (Vida 83–8). President Grant<sup>12</sup> received Aurél Kecsskeméthy in 1876, and while the interview was arranged immediately, it was a disappointment on account of the President's clichéd questions (Kecsskeméthy 63–5).

### **Appreciation and disappointment: The World's Columbian Exposition 1893**

Zsigmond Falk's book renders an account of a series of further disappointments. "In America, not only is the air different, not only are the institutions and the people different, but habits are different, too, in that they are even more perverse than in our country." (Falk 49) His book is heavily imbued with comparisons and analogies with the Hungarian affairs, mentality and customs. He concluded a distinction between individual heroism and collective glory from the fact that July 4 was celebrated year after year as the day of liberty, rather than as George Washington's personal commemoration: "It is on this day that we may have observed most directly the unbridgeable gap that exists as yet between the peoples of the new and the old worlds." (63)

For Falk in 1893, the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as the Chicago World's Fair itself was the greatest disappointment though it had more than 300,000 visitors but only on a single day:

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<sup>11</sup> Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), U.S. President 1861–1865. *The World Almanac 2012*, 501.

<sup>12</sup> Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885), U.S. President 1869–1877. *The World Almanac 2012*, 502.

the only day on which there were as many visitors as the organisers of the fair hoped to have every day. It is thanks to these exaggerated calculations that the exposition ended with a deficit of 36 million because [...] the daily number of visitors barely reached one hundred thousand, and therefore the organisers were 200,000 times 5 cents short of covering the costs every day, not even mentioning any profit!! (66)

The World's Fair was a terrible experience for Falk.

The heat of 97° Fahrenheit, the dreadful dust created by the incessant shuffling of the large masses of people and other minor and major inconveniences all contributed to the desire surfacing ever more loudly in our hearts that we wish we had joined those who used the present day for going on a little walk in the countryside, thereby avoiding the numerous trials that we unknowingly exposed ourselves to. (69)

The author listed the causes of his dissatisfaction at length. The enormous, over-sized exhibition halls echoed with emptiness, and the highly publicized, famous American inventions and ideas were nowhere to be found. "This exposition brought to light trite, commonplace objects that we may find in excessive numbers at any other exhibition." (56) Falk criticized the American organizers that their ambitious plans had come to nothing, and that which was on display "did not even teach me to marvel further at the American genius" (57). "We did not find a single nice place where we could have recovered our strength in comfort and with pleasure after the day's toil. There are the same dry, measured, cold American habits, the same old dollar chase everywhere you go, which eventually fills you with disgust." (58) Also somewhat symbolically, there were no trees to provide shade on the premises of the fair.

Upon leaving the exposition, Falk observed with pleasure the populous groups of people opting for a day's excursion instead of the fair, and took the opportunity to comment on relations between men and women. Here, too, he could only see the dark side: "We have no idea of the subordinated relationship with which men approach women in America. There is indeed no more commendable feature than chivalry and courtesy; however, if it goes so far as to become reduced to servitude, it is then terrible". (70) He then continued like this:

Every American woman is born a princess who looks upon her husband as her servant. The explanation should, I believe, be sought in the simple fact that there were initially few women in America, and women were therefore given all possible privileges such as e.g. the law is on the woman's side under any circumstances—whatever the state of affairs

may be—and punishes the man and protects only the woman in such disputes even if the woman is clearly guilty. While there are now women in large enough numbers, their privileges continue to survive. (73)

While this observation may have formed part (and may have persisted in minor gestures for a long time) of the American customs and social culture of the middle classes, as regarded the constitutional structure and legal system of the United States, it was a mistaken claim as women were only given equal rights by virtue of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, and the franchise much later, by the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1919 (*Women's Rights*, 1–2).

After Chicago, Dr. Falk thoroughly explored the whole of the United States but only had a good time during his entire stay in America in the romantic areas of Manitou near Colorado Springs and in San Francisco (Falk 91). As he remarked, there were conditions in San Francisco not so long before “which Europe was already unfamiliar with three hundred years ago” (140). But in the city “the situation changed dramatically,” and therefore “we leave San Francisco, this end point of our journey, with a sensation which fills us only with fond memories and kindly thoughts” (140–1). In the context of San Francisco, Falk came to a valuable conclusion in connection with European immigrants: “San Francisco is one of the few American cities where even a European may feel comfortable, and due to this circumstance, immigrants who only intended to settle down here for a short while for the purpose of digging for gold and finding treasure decided to stay here definitively without thinking of going back home” (141).

Dr. Falk chose the steamer ‘Columbia’ for his voyage home. He heard his fellow-travelers mainly complain.

Everyone that I spoke to on board left America light-heartedly; a world in which people are heartless, which is inhabited by creatures who lost all human feeling and only have some sense left for money and the value inherent therein. Everyone was glad to leave America which we found to be a country where science and arts are in a complete state of stagnation and where, other than trade and industry—the only source of happiness in their opinion –, people do not care about anything else at all. (196)

Yet, all the passengers were happy to have been to America. Falk offered an explanation for the desire of immigration when he concluded: everyone “was nonetheless happy to have acquainted themselves with the

America on which they laid their final hopes in their utmost desperation [...]” (196).

### **Iván Ottlik contradicting**

Not all Hungarian visitors to the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair agreed with the devastating opinion of Dr. Falk, Jr. The agrarian politician Iván Ottlik travelled to America in July 1893 on an assignment commissioned by Minister of Agriculture Count András Bethlen “[...] for the purpose of studying the American economic conditions which are vital for us [...] in so many respects” (Ottlik 1). Iván Ottlik (1858–1940) was Prime Minister Menyhért Lónyay’s private secretary at the beginning of his career, and worked in the Ministry of Agriculture since 1881, first as a ministerial counsel from 1901 and then as State Secretary as of 1908. He was one of the supervisors of the agrarian policy initiated by Ignác Darányi, and became a member of the Upper House as of 1915. He was for decades a Board member of the National Central Credit Cooperative (*Országos Központi Hitelszövetkezet*) and the Anglo–Hungarian Bank Co. (*Angol–Magyar Bank Rt.*) (Kenyeres II, 330).

The 35-year-old Ottlik saw the Chicago World’s Fair in a different light from that described by Falk. “The Chicago fair was indeed the very height of events of a similar nature. Any nation would find it hard to outbid any time soon that which America created here, in Jackson Park, and to devise something that is in any respect bigger, better, more splendid or grandiose, however great the sacrifice.” (Ottlik 23) Just as did Falk, Jr., Ottlik also made mention of the financial failure of the fair but bowed his head before “the shining moral success achieved” which America and its people “may proudly boast as an unparalleled achievement in this department” (23). Ottlik visited the entire fair and concluded that “the other State of our Monarchy organized [in 1873] an indeed beautifully executed display; and the Americans cited Austria as one of their guests in a tone of well-deserved appreciation” (25). Falk, too, visited the ‘Old Vienna’ exhibition in Chicago as the only suitable place for “comfort and pleasure” (Falk 58). Ottlik was, however, dissatisfied with, and critical of, the Hungarian exhibition pavilion when he reflected on the American reaction to immigration from Hungary: “many people here have absolutely no idea about Hungary, and most of them know it at best as the country of cheap »hungarian« [sic]—meaning

Slovak—day-labourers that even compete with the Chinese—and are as such hateful to the Americans” (Ottlik 25). Ottlik provided a highly detailed and appreciative description of practically all the exhibition spaces, and did not only render an account of the pavilions one by one, but also made mention of the most interesting objects on display.

During his trip to the United States, Ottlik travelled to some of the places visited by Zsigmond Falk, but he also went to see Milwaukee, St. Paul and Minneapolis. Ottlik was greatly appreciative of the beauty of the American scenery and of America’s famous natural wonders. He visited and reported thoroughly on the Yellowstone National Park and Grand Canyon. His journey in America terminated in Santa Fé, New Mexico. His 87-page study is one of the most thorough and most appreciative descriptions of the United States of the time.

### ***Back Home Again from the New York World’s Fair, 1939***

From among female travel writers also concerned with world expositions in America, a book by Mrs. [Dr.] Ferenc Völgyesi entitled *Ujra otthon* (Back Home Again) (Völgyesiné 1939) deserves special attention. It is all the more interesting because female travelers and travel accounts dating from that period are rare and also because the author’s book does not place the emphasis in the title on the journey itself but on her return home. The female frame of mind and the choice of title may be connected.

Ferenc Völgyesi (1895–1967) was one of Hungary’s best-known psychiatrists from the 1920s all the way through the sixties; he made a reputation primarily as a practising hypnotist and a major contributor, recognized even today, to the scientific study of hypnosis (Völgyesi 8–9, 233–47). Mrs. Völgyesi travelled around America in her husband’s company in 1939, at the outset of World War II, and recorded her memories in a captivating travelogue. It was during this trip that she visited the 1939–40 New York World’s Fair, in the context of which she first made mention of its enormous dimensions, staggering cost and the anticipated number of visitors. However, it was not the sheer numbers that captured her, but the messages of the fair. The New York World’s Fair focused on the city of the future and, also, life in the future. One of its symbols was the *Perisphere*, a seventy-meter-tall steel sphere, and the *Trylon*, a pylon towering next to it. “The Perisphere with its enclosed

shape represents the spheres already grasped by human knowledge, the information acquired to date, while the Trylon stands for man's aspiration towards perfection, towards Infinity. The two together, as "Building the World of Tomorrow" symbolise the power of mankind." (Völgyesiné 66) The author perceived and grasped the message and vision of the exhibition, the representation of an attractive future, and this future did not even lie in the far distance but in 1960, which the exhibition brought within reach. "[...] lit-up aircraft and Zeppelins flitting under the starry sky, the light beams of airports below, searchlight signals on mountain tops, or boats gliding on the "ocean" below, aircraft hangar islands built over the sea, and dream fragments of other similar minute details have left their impression on our memories," she remembered. (67) The exhibits of the main building were arranged to symbolize the concept of "Visiting Tomorrow" — meaning 1960. The Fair also accommodated "the 'Futurama' exhibit in GM's 'Highways and Horizons' pavilion at the World's Fair, which looks ahead to the »wonder world of 1960«" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cRoapLvQx0>),

where there are no fewer than 35,000 squares and roads, some half a million free-standing little play houses spread around them, interspersed with a million small trees and more than fifty thousand rushing automobiles. What is truly interesting about this electric toy—the largest in the world—is that everything is in motion here; what's more, everything rushes about to highly accurate and complicated plans. It unfolds to us an "ideal" plan of the future's transport by rail, water, air, and road. The commotion of the "happier" future generation is rushing to the future world of semaphores, moveable bridges and hyper-modern roads. (Völgyesiné, 69)

Cars would no longer crash in America in 1960 because they would pass on separate levels, the Futurama exhibit suggested, and each level will only lead in a single direction. It is a shame, the author wrote, that this would only be accomplished in Europe by 2000. Mrs. Völgyesi introduced several national pavilions as well, including the Russian (Soviet) one where "every exhibit served propaganda purposes" (70). She made mention of Germany's absence for obvious political reasons (65), and was highly critical of the Hungarian pavilion: "We must admit with all sincerity that it did not particularly serve to enhance our reputation. We did it all with very poor imagination; in spite of the fact that we would have been able to present much—even without a major outlay of

expenditure—that would have enabled our Homeland to reap the extreme propaganda benefits inherent in the fair.” (71)

This travelogue presented the New York World’s Fair most intelligently as a vision of the future: this was no longer a mere fair of sample merchandise, this was not an industrial, agricultural or commercial race course, or a historical illustration but a vision of the American future. We are only two years away from Henry Luce’s famous visionary article and prophecy, “The American Century” which was published as an editorial in *Life* magazine on February 17, 1941 and hailed the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or even more as the century of American domination. The vision of the New York World’s Fair is also Henry Luce’s vision (cf. Brinkley 267–73).

### **World’s Fairs and travelogue**

When comparing Falk, Jr.’s book with Ottlik’s extensive series of articles published in a magazine and with Kecskeméthy’s and Mrs. Völgyesi’s travelogues, the most striking conclusion is that travel description is a highly subjective genre: we may find vastly different accounts of the same country, same event or same period, depending on the traveler’s gender, nature, habits, disposition, mood, social background, and frame of mind. A travelogue is not in itself a reliable historical source; it may only provide relative points of reference to form an objective evaluation. A travelogue is, of course, no different from a private letter, a diary, a memoir, each of which may contribute to devising a historical image. Despite all appearances, the travelogue is a highly subjective genre, and offers limited usability. Its value is determined not only by the person of the author but also by the circumstances in which the writing itself was conceived, the factors with an impact on its writing, the person who commissioned it if any, the source of the funding of the journey, the traveler’s age and gender, and the persons of any fellow-travelers. It is therefore desirable and reasonable to look into parallel travelogues whose different criteria may, when compared and combined, offer a relatively objective account of a given event, city or region. The description of world fairs is a worthy and informative focus of the American travelogue literature, a topos that lends itself well to both national and international comparison.



The view and perception of world's fairs in Hungarian travelogues reinforce, once again, my thesis<sup>13</sup> that engagements with the United States are in fact “self-perception from a distance,” serving national agendas. Talking about world's fairs in the United States the authors of these travelogues are, in fact, addressing domestic issues, comparing contrasting, and critiquing their own country, whether it be Hungary or the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, in the light of the outside world.<sup>14</sup> Most of the time they speak of the U.S. as if they have something important to say about their homeland.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Tibor Frank: “‘Through the Looking Glass’, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Mario Del Pero, Tibor Frank, Martin Klimke, Helle Porsdam and Stephen Tuck, “American History and European Identity,” AHR Roundtable, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 119, No. 3 June 2014, 780–790. Cp. Sven Beckert’s appreciative Comment, “The Travails of Doing History from Abroad,” AHR Roundtable, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 119, No. 3 June 2014, 818.

<sup>15</sup> This article is largely based on Tibor Frank, „Világkiállítások Amerikája — magyar útirajzokban 1876–1939” [The America of World’s Fairs—As Seen by Hungarian Travelogues 1876–1939]. In: Vera Benczik–Tibor Frank–Ildikó Geiger (eds), *Tanulmányok Bollobás Enikő 60. születésnapjára* [Studies in Honor of the 60th Birthday of Enikő Bollobás] (Budapest: ELTE BTK Angol–Amerikai Intézet, 2012), 199–210.

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