

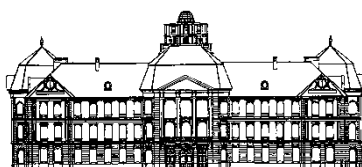
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ZSOLT KÁLMÁN VIRÁGOS

EDITOR: LEHEL VADON



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IN HONOR OF  
ZSOLT KÁLMÁN VIRÁGOS



*Arigón Gold*



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*EJAS*

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## **Zsolt Kálmán Virágos Is 70**

This special issue of Eger Journal of American Studies is dedicated to Zsolt Kálmán Virágos to congratulate him and to celebrate the distinguished professor, scholar, and highly honored teacher on his 70th birthday.

Zsolt Kálmán Virágos, professor of American Studies, head of the North American Department, director of the Institute of English and American Studies, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Humanity at the University of Debrecen, is a nationally and internationally acknowledged expert of American literary and cultural studies. His special fields of interest and research are: 19th- and 20th-century U.S. literature, literatures of American minorities, the iconography of American culture, prose literature of the American South, African–American literature and thought, ethnic and minority cultures in North America, myth and ideology in American culture and society, and a few more. He is a critic of myth criticism examining the usefulness of myth in today's literary theory and American social consciousness. His contribution to literary scholarship and culture laid down in 9 books, some edited volumes, and numerous studies and articles—3.250 printed pages—published in Hungary and abroad.

Besides being a scholar, an Americanist, Zsolt Kálmán Virágos is a teacher. Another area of his academic interest is methodology and language teaching. He was a teacher of English, a demonstration teacher for four years at Kossuth University's teacher training secondary school, and he taught methodology to students at the university. He co-authored four textbooks as a result of this. He was a successful and inspiring teacher in the secondary school, and he is a respected professor at the University of Debrecen. Generations of English- and American-major students studied under him and grow up on his books. He was a visiting professor and researcher at famous American and European universities.

His teaching and research are acknowledged and appreciated by his students, colleagues and Americanists in Hungary and beyond the border. He is an influential and leading scholar who made major professional contribution to American Studies in Hungary. He is the disciple of Professor László Országh, he began his scholarly career under his guidance. He is a dedicated representative of the “Országh school”.

On behalf of our faculty, I express my gratitude that he accepted my invitation and became a professor of the Department of American Studies at Eszterházy Károly College, Eger. His precious teaching and work are exemplary for both our teachers and students.

On his birthday colleagues, scholars, students, and friends, and all those who know and love him pay tribute to the outstanding lifework of the eminent scholar, teacher, master and mentor, and wish many happy returns, good health, and many more creative years of research, writing, teaching, and happiness with his family.

Lehel Vadon



**A Man Who Loved His Work:  
An Interview with  
Zsolt Kálmán Virágos**

Gabriella Varró

*This interview was prompted by the occasion of the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Professor Virágos, my teacher, academic advisor and mentor who I am proud to call my friend as well. Over the long afternoon we discussed issues that have always been of great concern for us both, such as memory, the process of remembering, various influences upon the creative work, such as traveling, inheritance, family background and books. The interview starts in medias res, and ends unfinished, reflecting on the experience we have always had in real life, namely that our conversations were endless and could continue infinitely.*

**VARRÓ:** *My first question pertains to your views on memory and the act of remembering, partly inspired by our mutual favorite Native American poet, Joy Harjo. How great a role does memory play in your life?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I have a great respect for this God-given faculty; I believe that it is largely due to our memory that we are human. Thus memory has an enormous significance in my everyday life. Indeed, I am firmly convinced that the sum total of my memories is more than 80% of what I know, thus what I (“me”) actually am. It is intriguing to think that certain episodes in our lives, in the private sphere, are stored in our memory, and they exist only there. In my case events and scenes are primarily stored in visual images. Besides, these images appear to be keyed to affective

reverberations. The mind is a great reservoir of mental images; indeed, sometimes I think a large part of my consciousness is a picture gallery, rather than a story book. However, our mind is not always a reliable guardian of its content and, more characteristically, when our memory ceases to exist, that particular scene or episode is bound to perish. Thus, for instance, a brief and intensive love affair is totally dependent on whether the parties involved continue to possess the capability of recall. The other side of the coin is that sometimes we human beings cannot get rid of our (unpleasant) memories. And *unlearning* can be a tough business.

These options are, needless to say, the great themes of literature. Recall, for instance, the American writer William Faulkner's obsessed characters who are troubled to an excessive degree by mentally sorting out and telling apart past and present, cause and effect, the preoccupation also with the intrusions of the past—as present—into the present, and how the “avatars” of a lived and imagined personal past come alive to haunt the individual as messengers from a former life.

**VARRÓ:** *I can see that you find it hard to avoid making literary references, right? It is a kind of occupational hazard, I believe. Still, could you say a little more about the process of remembering and how it works in your case?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Sometimes I get a great kick out of “secretly watching” myself, and observing how my own mental apparatus sometimes attempts to trick me and how occasionally I manage to summon a counter-offensive to thwart and block these very same impulses. What I have in mind is the inner debate: strategies of persuasion and coercion within the same individual, myself. I find it almost amusing to observe how resourceful the distinct powers of my psyche can turn out to “persuade” me of certain options. To an outside observer this may sound like a Freudian game. However, I must confess that I do not take great stock in the determinisms of 20<sup>th</sup>-century depth psychology. Again, I also find that while we have accumulated considerable expertise in the acquisition of knowledge, we are much less resourceful when it comes to *unlearning* something. Certain things are almost impossible to jettison. Read the short story “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” by the American author Katherine Anne Porter. She tells you the whole story; how all this is acted out in the human mind. Read it, for there is not much else to add.

**VARRÓ:** *In general how do you remember things of the past? Is it mostly through photos, videos, or through any other means?*

**VIRÁGOS:** As regards technicalities, photos, videos, or “any other means,” to me remembered real-life scenes are the winner. These you cannot lose. However, when I took video films of my three children for a period of half a dozen years, to be given to them as gifts of a very special sort when they reach adulthood, I found, much to my anguish that the tapes were gone. I missed out on the chance of giving them something really memorable and unrepeatable. This is what I would call an irreplaceable loss. Normally, mental residues are more safely guarded.

**VARRÓ:** *Is there a part of your childhood you especially like to recall, or that you frequently think back to? Why do you think this is your fondest memory?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I was born in Debrecen and I’ve been a city dweller in my hometown ever since. Except the half dozen or so years I spent abroad, mostly in the USA. Thus by a very loosely defined nomenclature I could be a *cívís*, that is, a wealthy burgher descended from the old Debrecen families that excelled in agricultural activities centuries ago. However, on closer scrutiny I am not really a *cívís*. No one can deny though that I am a Debrecener.

I was lucky enough to spend almost a dozen summers of my boyhood in rural environments: on three different farms in the environs of Debrecen, where I learnt a lot about farm living and agricultural activities; about animals and plants, and natural phenomena in general. I was one of the very few city boys who was capable of running barefoot in fields covered with stubble (that is, the stubs of grain stalks covering a field after the crop has been cut). I can also crack the whip; this I learnt by imitating the farm boys tending the herds. I also learnt a special Hungarian vocabulary and the language related to these. And I will never forget the smell and taste of bread freshly baked in the open-air ovens. I also realized why I should respect rural people, especially their unaffected kindness. And I cannot dislodge memories of the pain they had to endure when they were uprooted and forced into the newly established co-operatives. I often recall a scene in which an elderly farmer is hugging the neck of his favorite horse and weeping. . . Mind you, these were the late 1940s and the early 1950s.

My rural experience worked to my benefit later in my studies of the American literary culture. For instance, I had absolutely no difficulty anticipating a farm worker's chores or understanding Midwestern scenes including, for example, the iconography of Willa Cather's prairie novels, or a farmer's day-to-day responsibilities to meet the continual challenges of a New England environment as depicted in much of Robert Frost. Or, consider this sentence in chapter 43 of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* "about the strong coming through and the weak being winnowed out." I know exactly what "being winnowed out" means because, as a young boy, not only did I see but I also operated a winnowing machine.

**VARRÓ:** *Would you care to comment on your family background as a child?*

**VIRÁGOS:** My parents divorced before I was ten. All the children, me and my two sisters, stayed with my mother. However, we children also maintained close ties with our father. My parents violently disagreed about the causes of the breakup of the family. Let's face it, these two very intelligent—and very attractive—people were not made for each other. Later both of them re-married, had more children, yet apparently the scars failed to heal. This inevitably meant that throughout our adolescence we continually had to try to keep a mental and emotional—as well as moral—balance between rival versions of truth in the family sphere. In addition to the fact, let me add, that we children had to learn to handle rival interpretations of versions of reality that existed between what we were supposed to say at school and what we were exposed to in our homes. In the Socialist paradise of Hungary, this duality—generated by the unceasing barrage of contradictory messages—meant a condition of permanent alert for tens of thousands of school kids. Today I look at this as a continuous exercise in a special kind of epistemology—*doubletalk* is what we would call it today. These contrary impulses certainly contributed to my "loss of innocence" at a relatively early age.

**VARRÓ:** *Did you inherit anything from your parents that you believe had an important impact on the career you decided to pursue later?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Neither parent of mine had the blessings of higher education. The priorities at the time of my early childhood were different from what came later. We children were born during the time that World War Two was ravaging Europe. The country was in ruins, there was simply not enough money to go around. However, I always thought that

my mother, who died a few years ago at the age of 93, was created for “greater things.” I like to believe that I inherited much from her: the subtlety of her intellectual faculties, probably, and definitely her sense of humor. Not to mention her inexplicable “witchery.” I could often communicate with her without words. She just “knew” things. Sometimes I called her a witch on account of her unique gift of extrasensory perception.

**VARRÓ:** *Which would you say were the most significant formative factors in your youth?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Besides the parental influence and the rural vacations I was certainly influenced by the boy gangs in the neighborhood, as well as by the swim club which I joined in seventh grade. The gangs, as I see it today, were actually harmless efforts on our part to create a kind of show-offy, bravado exterior. The swim club made much more sense to me. There I became member of a community, under the helpful but demanding supervision of coach László Rentka, which makes me fondly remember my adolescent years. Apart from being a top swim coach, Mr. Rentka often involved us in challenging topics of conversation pertaining to books, art, etc. He knew that I was corresponding with a dozen or so pen pals all over the world, in English mainly, and he often asked me to show some of the letters and translate passages from the texts I had received. We even argued whether or not the use of a certain passive voice construction was justified. It was primarily through my role as a competition swimmer that I first had a chance to visit distant parts of the country, and places such as Győr, Zalaegerszeg, Szeged and, my favorite Hungarian city, Eger.

**VARRÓ:** *What was the most outstanding result of your career as a swimmer?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Well, being selected to be a member of the national swimming team, junior division. This happened in the junior and senior years of my high-school education. Then I became a university student and I had a horrendously tough schedule. I could no longer go to the workouts as often as the competitions would have demanded. Those having some experience in competition swimming will know that in swimming you cannot compete without the workouts. If you cannot maintain your stamina, it is bye-bye to you as a competition swimmer.

**VARRÓ:** *When exactly did you know what you wished to become, or were there many other career options you were considering initially?*

**VIRÁGOS:** In my young boyhood, I opted for “romantic” careers. The favorite threesome was: pilot, hussar, and cowherd. Ultimately none of these turned out to be winners, although the cowherd option was a strong favorite for some time: I was especially impressed with the rugged style and the ragged attire of this open-air person. Hussar was easily and early jettisoned as an option, probably because purchasing and tending a live horse, finding a stable, etc. were simply impracticable. I must have been about four when my mother bought me a rocking horse. I still remember how disappointed I was when I looked at the wooden animal. My mother asked me what the problem was. “It doesn’t move its eyes,” I confided. “Oh my god,” my mother exclaimed, “he wants a live horse!” That was the closest that I have come to owning a live horse of my own. The “pilot alternative” underwent fundamental metamorphoses, yet the dream of piloting an airplane—not to mention landing a jetfighter on an aircraft carrier—has stayed with me as an exciting alternative. Even today, flying never fails to attract and thrill me. I must have flown, that is, taken off and landed in commercial airplanes close to three hundred times. At airports I often find myself watching for hours planes land and take off. In the summer of 2011 I spent altogether a fortnight at the Côte d’Azur, where, while swimming in the sea, I was watching, at the Airport of Nice, the incoming planes land: about sixty arriving per average hour. I even forgot about the sharks that were swimming about a hundred meters below me.

In my high-school years this early threesome was dropped and I wanted to be either a forester or a chemist. But by the time I completed my second grade, the notion gradually crystallized in me that my adult job should have something to do with the two languages I studied at high school. What appealed to me in languages, although I was not able to conceptualize it at the time, were their communicative power and the combinatory possibilities of specific lexical items. Thus I became a student of English and Russian.

**VARRÓ:** *How exactly would you describe your passion for languages?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Looking back now at my younger self in those earlier years, there is no doubt about whether or not I had talent. Or was it simply a vague yet strong commitment? To put it very simply, I just loved

studying languages, and I was keenly aware of the difference between studying and learning. There were tell-tale indications of this commitment. When a child saves money to buy his first dictionary (this must have been the “little Ország”: László Ország’s small, 495-page Hungarian–English dictionary, which cost 26 forints, or Hadrovics–Gáldi’s smallest-size Russian–Hungarian dictionary) and spends long hours “reading” the dictionary, when the same child is dissatisfied with the speed and amount of teaching in school and launches his own “little projects” to teach himself, when he is absorbed in language study so much that he forgets about lunch, well, in these cases you can be sure that the child in question is talented. Or, at least, born motivated. I was the top student of my class both in English and Russian for most of the four years I attended Kossuth University’s Teacher Training Secondary Grammar School (Fazekas Mihály Gyakorló Gimnázium), where later I became a teacher of English myself. As a student, I took each and every exam with excellent results, and I was awarded an honorary diploma on graduation. Which means I did indeed put a lot of effort into studying. Regarding the grades, straight A’s for half a decade, it also means that I was also lucky.

**VARRÓ:** *Was it tough to get admitted to the university at the time?*

**VIRÁGOS:** “Tough” is an understatement. But you can easily see it for yourself if you look the mathematics of the matter. I am only talking about the English and Russian combination of majors relating to Kossuth University of Debrecen. In the year of my high school graduation 18 applicants sought admittance to the program. Three were admitted.

**VARRÓ:** *That, indeed, must have been very tough. But you made it!*

**VIRÁGOS:** Yes indeed, I did. And that is largely owing to my parents. They, however, were not in the position to advise me beyond the high school diploma. Nobody in my family, not even in my extended family, in the past three or four generations was a teacher, or any other type of educator. (In my wife’s family it was different because a grandfather was not only a teacher of chemistry there, but he was also the director of the School of Trade in Debrecen.) The decision and the responsibility had to be mine. Yet the role of my parents was enormous. When I came to a cross-roads in my career options at the age of 18 and I expressed my desire to go on to the university in Debrecen (Kossuth University) to major in English and Russian, I was talking about something for which there was no precedent in my family. Neither for the teaching career, nor

the double-language load. When confronted with the option that if I get admitted, I would be a salary-earning member of the family only half a decade later, they could have said no. But they didn't, and I feel grateful to them for their magnanimity and generosity. Subsequently I saw to it that the money and care they invested in my career should be paid back to them many times over.

**VARRÓ:** *As a student, you were majoring in English and Russian at Kossuth University. Why and how did you decide on that combination of majors?*

**VIRÁGOS:** As early as my second grade in high school, I was totally sold on the idea of becoming a student of languages. This was my decision; the rest was decided for me by external circumstances: the political winds, sheer chance, and a couple of other, unforeseen options. Russian was universally taught in the Hungarian school system at the time, so it was a given alternative. But how did English come into the picture? I began my high-school studies in September, 1956. In less than eight weeks Hungary found itself in the eye of the storm: in the midst of the turmoil known as “the Revolution of 1956.” One tangible and early result of the political changes was that we were granted the opportunity of studying a language other than Russian (in a few weeks “other than” became “in addition to”: in addition to Russian). At that point a unique and unprecedented thing happened. Dr. Anna Katona, our form-mistress—who subsequently became head of the Department of English at Kossuth and who died in the U.S.A. in 2005—walked into the classroom one day, and she made the following offer: “Besides Russian, in the future you can also study a second foreign language. You have the choice of four languages, all and any of them to be taught by me: English, French, German, and Italian. You have an hour to come to a decision.” We could not believe our ears. The offer was momentous and very generous at the same time. It was also unprecedented. Was there, after all, another secondary school in the whole country where a single teacher had the qualifications to teach five different languages? Five, because she was also a teacher of Russian. Anyway, after a heated debate of about 15 minutes we, first-graders in an all-boys “gimnázium,” picked English. What the actual reasons for this were are difficult to reconstruct. Perhaps because English seemed to be the most challenging, the most interesting, the most “exotic,” it may have offered the promise of the most freedom. I also argued for English, although at the time I did not know more than



five words of that language: *sport, pullover, football, corner, music*. But what would have happened if our choice had been any of the unchosen options? Say, Italian? Or, German? For the past few decades I often thought of the potential consequences of picking any of the possible other alternatives. What kind of career would I have sought and found? Along what path would I have traveled? I certainly would not have become a Professor of American Studies...

**VARRÓ:** *When did you start your studies, and how were those years different from the way university teaching goes today? What are some of the things that you would definitely bring back to today's education?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I started my half decade as a university student in the 1960s: this was a very dynamic age, even if the Hungarian incarnation was not necessarily a pyrotechnic one. We listened to Radio Luxembourg, Radio Free Europe, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and we also absorbed as much of the emerging counter culture as possible. Yet, much of the relevant information came to us through carefully controlled filters. Strange though it may appear, we heard about the execution of Imre Nagy many months after it was a *fait accompli*. The hangover of the failure of 1956 remained with us like a bitter aftertaste. This was part of our mixed legacy. Yet it would be misleading to deny the fact that being a student was a great and inspiring experience. I, personally, was full of ambition and enthusiasm. I was very much impressed with the campus, the academic environment, the world of books, our professors and I as good as vowed to repay my Fate for the series of Its favorable decisions with dedication and hard work. The student body was much smaller and definitely less cosmopolitan than it is today. This situation had unmistakable advantages. For instance, the relationship between students and instructors was much less impersonal; everybody was known by name. When we were freshmen, i.e., first-year students, Professor Országh made it a point to have a personal conversation with each and every student of English. We trusted our instructors and often turned to them for academic or even personal advice.

**VARRÓ:** *Many know the great charismatic figures who taught at the university while you were a student. Who do you regard as having had the greatest impact on your life? How would you describe the legacy you owe him/them?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Many professors of Kossuth University at the time had an international reputation. Today streets are named after them in Debrecen: János Barta, Béla Kálmán, Rezső Bognár, Imre Bán, etc., but the ones I have just identified—with the exception of Professor Barta—never taught or examined me. Obviously, we had much more exposure to the influence of professors at the English and Russian departments. In the Russian department I was especially impressed with Ferenc Papp and several others including József Dombrowszky, Endre Iglói and László Karancsy. But the greatest single influence came from Professor László Országh, head of the Department of English. Besides being a scholar and a teacher, Országh was a wise and trusted advisor, a patron, benefactor, mentor. Many people have changed their lives as a result of getting to know him. I first met him as an examiner at the entrance examination. He appealed to me as the embodiment of what I thought a gentleman would or should be like. He was in no hurry, he was elegant and kind and understanding, he appreciated every bit of effort we, frightened applicants were making. He asked questions pertaining to points of usage in English and about the general culture of the English-speaking countries. He was nodding in approval when I listed almost all the Nobel Prize-winners in English and US literatures. Then I was to read a short text and generate a kind of dialog with the examiner. Then we happened to talk about sports and soon we were talking about swimming. He asked me whether I ever tried playing water-polo. I said yes. Then he asked me whether I knew the English word for "the player whose special function is to prevent the ball from passing into the goal." "*Goalkeeper*," I said, "or, *goalie*." "Thank you," he promptly responded, "I have no more questions to ask." Later Országh became my teacher, lecturer, seminar instructor, the supervisor of my student thesis and doctoral dissertation, evaluator of my first monograph, my general academic advisor. I also became the member of the unofficial "Országh school," which became a synonym for high standards of scholarship and credibility. After his retirement, we often called at his home in Budapest, and we never left without inspiring and wise advice. At that time neither of us thought that one day we would be co-authors of the second and third editions (both in 1997) of his *Az amerikai irodalom története* ['History of American Literature'] (1967). He died in 1984, thus he had to accept me as a partner from beyond the grave. I fondly hope he has not regretted the partnership. Those who wish to find out more about the life and work of László Országh have several volumes of edited studies, essays and personal recollections to choose

from. If I were to sum up his influence, I would say that here is a man who made a difference. Without Országh the whole state of English and American Studies in Hungary would be different today. Perhaps we would have no departments of American Studies in the country today.

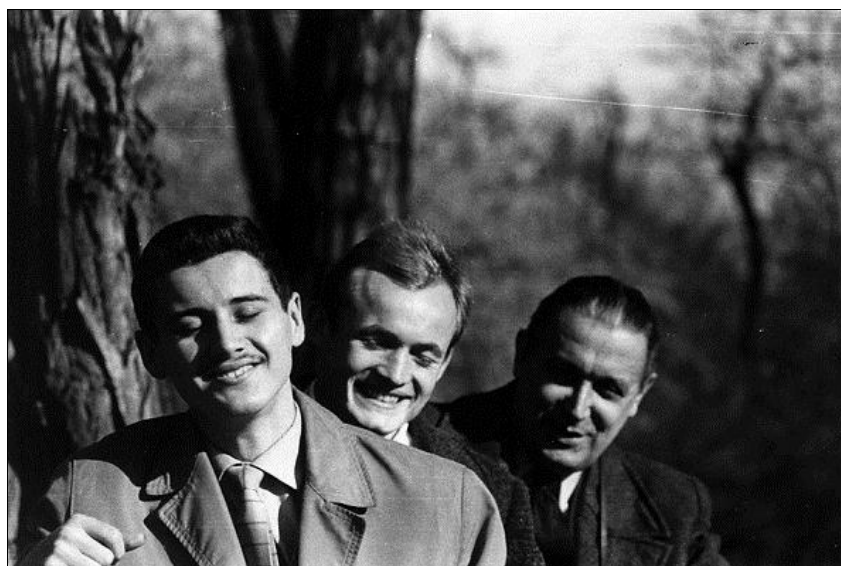
**VARRÓ:** *When exactly did you know that teaching was the thing for you?*

**VIRÁGOS:** To tell the truth, in the beginning it was not the teaching that appealed to me. Yet I got a teaching job even before I graduated. I began teaching and I was soon “infected”: one day I discovered that I was enjoying what I was doing. I might also add that my case was very special and exceptional: I was a teacher—a Teaching Associate—at an American university before I was teaching in the Hungarian school system.

**VARRÓ:** *How did it come about that they picked you as a teacher at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, virtually before you graduated?*

**VIRÁGOS:** In the month of April, 1965, two months before I graduated, I received a letter of invitation from the above-mentioned American institution of higher education to serve as a Teaching Associate in their program of Uralic and Altaic Studies. The invitation came from the Hungarian-born Denis Sinor. Professor Sinor needed a young male instructor who was fluent in English, well-trained in linguistics, and who could teach Hungarian descriptive grammar, Hungarian language, and some of the rudiments of present-day Hungarian culture. If you think László Országh had a hand in the invitation, you are right. Let me invite Denis Sinor himself to testify in the matter. In a retrospective article entitled “A Peaceful Interlude in the Cold War,” which was published in one of the 2005 issues of *Hungarian Studies* (19.2; 243–253), Professor Sinor made a relevant observation pertaining to the matter we are discussing: “In September 1963, to my great surprise, Professor László Országh of Debrecen University came to visit me at Indiana University. I had known him since my school days and during the difficult years of the 1950s and beyond we kept in touch in so far that I called on him whenever I was in Budapest. During the darkest years of the Rákosi era, when the teaching of English was suspended at the Hungarian universities, he worked at the Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy but now he could again teach his subject in Debrecen. He suggested sending one of his students to Bloomington to teach Hungarian

and, what from his point of view was more important, to improve his English and get acquainted with the United States and the American way of life. He was interested in grooming his successors. Of course I enthusiastically embraced the idea. By that time my credentials in Hungary were fairly well established, to the extent that the competent authorities would allow a young man to come to an American university—as long as it was Indiana University. There were difficulties both in Hungary and at my university; the first induced by the general reluctance of overcautious bureaucrats, the second by the internal power struggles within my university. Yet they were overcome, and the first Hungarian teaching associate Tamás Doszkocs arrived in the fall of 1964. He was followed, again on Országh's recommendation, by Zsolt Virágos" (245–246).



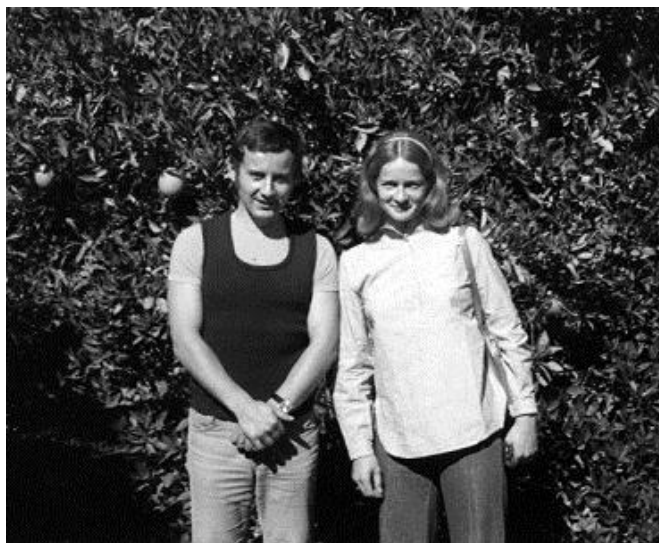
A rare photographic document, which was taken sometime in the mid-1960s, showing Professor László Országh (on the right) with two of his favorite students, Tamás Doszkocs (in the middle) and Zsolt Virágos (on the left).

**VARRÓ:** *Back at Kossuth, your plan to go to the States must have been big news!*

**VIRÁGOS:** You bet. It was big news all right! Of course, I formally and personally accepted the invitation, but accepting was child's play in comparison with what followed. Predictably, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the police, and, I guess, the intelligence people were not very

enthusiastic about my planned American “adventure.” They thought that if they allowed an unmarried, childless male like myself to go to America for an extended period he would never come back. And defection would reflect unfavorably on the bright and polished image of Socialism. The police also involved Professor Országh in the matter. After all, Országh was my academic advisor and spiritual guide and, in addition, he knew Professor Sinor personally from the 1930s, when they both were students in Hungary. He was even summoned by the proper authorities and asked in no uncertain terms to “assume responsibility” for me, hereby suggesting that he could put pressure on me not to defect. This was crazy! Országh, getting somewhat impatient with the pointless haggle, said: “The only person I will ‘assume responsibility’ for is László Országh and nobody else.” Finally and miraculously, two weeks after the fall semester began at Indiana University, I could start my work on the IU campus. I was scheduled to teach for two university semesters, that is, for ten months, but my contract was extended for yet another academic year. All in all, I stayed away from Hungary for two years on that first occasion.

**VARRÓ:** *You had further chances to visit, do research, travel and teach in the U.S.A.*



In Southern California “I lived within sight of orange trees.”

**VIRÁGOS:** In the 1970s I returned to the United States for a whole calendar year as an ACLS (*American Council of Learned Societies*)

Research Fellow For this scholarship my host institution was the English Department of the University of California at Riverside (UCR). Riverside is in Southern California, approximately 60 miles east of Los Angeles. It is the center of the California citrus industry and it has a population of about 310 thousand. For a year I lived within sight of orange trees. There were orange groves everywhere, and I'll never forget the urge, on the first day of my stay there, to pick and taste an orange from one of the trees lining the city streets. If you bought oranges directly from the growers, in the field, you could get a whole boxful for one buck. Needless to say, I missed out a winter in Riverside. This Southern Californian city was an ideal place for a researcher at least in two senses: one, UCR has always had a large and strong English department which, during my scholarship year included an excellent academic advisor, John B. Vickery, one of the best known myth critics in the USA and to whom I am very grateful for the many valuable professional hints and discussions. Despite the fact, let me add, that we had developed very different views and perspectives on myth. It was because of Professor Vickery that I picked UCR as a host institution. Second, far from the hustle and bustle of big city life, research was unaffected by the usual urban temptations.

Then, in the early 1990s I again left Hungary for two years. The first year I was a Fulbright scholar associated with the Department of English of the University of Minnesota. This again was a research scholarship. I worked primarily on the cultural implications of myth, especially as this is manifested in the American social consciousness. Then, because I received an invitation to stay on and teach at the Department of English there as a Fulbright Visiting Professor, I taught American students courses of American literature (e.g. "Literatures of American Minorities") and culture (e.g. two of my three "American myth" courses). I taught at the U of Minnesota on all possible levels; thus I also taught a PhD course devoted solely to the literary output of William Faulkner.

**VARRÓ:** *What was the best part of teaching/researching in the States, and how was that experience different from doing the same in Hungary?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I spent altogether half a dozen years in the United States, and half of these I was teaching. When it comes to considering my teaching practice back home on a comparative basis, I like to think that my professional experiences have had an enriching and enduring influence on me as a teacher. Exact correspondences are difficult to pinpoint, because the power of persons and things to produce effects can

be not only subtle and indirect but also imperceptible. Yet these are there. For instance, in the credit present in a lived memory or the credibility and trustworthiness emanating from the statement that “I have been there.” Or, influences of this kind can be present in the confidence with which you address people, students.



My short-term stays of about one month each were in the service of special themes and commitments, such as a study of university management in the U.S., negotiating student exchange programs (for instance, between the University of Debrecen and the U of Missouri in St. Louis, then an unforgettable and efficiently organized USIA-sponsored “multicultural and ethnic tour of the United States.” In this venture I was the member of an international group of 14 persons traveling for a month all over the U.S. including places such as Oxford, Miss.; New Orleans, La.; Minneapolis, Minn.; San Antonio, Tex.; Berkeley, Cal.; Lowell, Mass., Boston, and finally, Washington, D.C. I also traveled to Canada on two occasions: in 1991 I got an invitation from the Northrop Frye Center of the U of Toronto to lecture and do research in the Centre.

**VARRÓ:** *Was this the time you were to meet Northrop Frye himself?*

**VIRÁGOS:** A meeting was arranged with Frye. I had lunch with his secretary the day before, and everything was sorted out for a dialogue. Mr. Frye had been feeling weak, so he requested that I should visit him in his home, which, of course, I was happy to comply with. However, an untoward thing happened. On the morning of the appointed day I noticed that the flags on campus were at half-mast: Professor Frye died the previous night. He died while I was waiting to meet him.

**VARRÓ:** *That, indeed, must have been a blow. Would you care to comment on other short-term research options in North America? And where did you go to “recharge your professional batteries” in Europe?*

**VIRÁGOS:** In Europe, I did research at the U of East Anglia, the U of Oslo and, above all, in the excellent (North) American Studies collection of the John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien in Berlin, which used to be West Berlin at the time. The Kennedy-Institut I visited for one-month periods at least half a dozen times. In all these places my work was helped by dozens of supportive Americanist friends, colleagues in the profession, and knowledgeable librarians.

**VARRÓ:** *Which of the university campuses and teaching/research opportunities did you like best?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Well, I will never forget my first—total and dramatic—immersion in American culture in the Midwest and exposure to university life on the Indiana University campus. I was young, barely over 23, eager to learn, full of ambition, ready to absorb the language, the culture. Indeed, I felt overwhelmed by the cavalcade of new experience with which I was bombarded. Besides, I was a “free agent,” meaning that I was not yet married. I lived in the GRC (Graduate Residence Center), with about five hundred graduate students, and never before in my life had I had so many new friends (including two nuns). Besides being a TA I was also a student in the sense that I took some Am. Lit./Am. Civ. courses for credit to see how this was done in a large Midwestern university such as IU. I also did a lot of traveling.

**VARRÓ:** *Where did you go?*



**VIRÁGOS:** During those two years I visited 37 states out of the fifty. Then a few more were added later. I can safely claim that I visited—or at least was physically present in—well over forty states.

**VARRÓ:** *If you could go back now to any of those places in the U.S. you had seen before, which place would you return to and why? Or, if you were to pick a college or university that is new to you, which college/university campus would you prefer?*

**VIRÁGOS:** On two campuses in the Midwest I have spent altogether four years. In the course of time I have revisited both; the IU campus twice, first in 1977, then in 1995. The other one, the U of Minnesota campus I would be happy to see once more. Minnesota to me will always be a locus of pleasant memories, both professional and personal. Minnesota has always impressed me as a state that is both scenic and highly cultured. Minnesotans have an excellent school system, which worked for our benefit when my three children went to school there. I can also say the best about their top museums. Again, in the whole United States only New York City has more theaters than Minneapolis. It's too bad the winters there are forbiddingly cold. Any veteran of a Minnesota winter could tell you about what "wind-chill factor" means. One Christmas it was so cold that the sole of my shoe broke while I was walking in the street. If I were given the chance to stay on a campus I have not seen, I would choose a region in North Carolina, preferably the so-called Research Triangle anchored by North Carolina State University, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**VARRÓ:** *I happen to know that traveling plays a great role in your life, and that in the past years you explored a great portion of the European continent. Is there a place still that you left out so far, and you really long to go to?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I certainly like to do as much traveling as possible. Some places I go back to several times, such as ski-camps in Slovakia and Austria, or places where I taught for several years, such as the University of Nagyvárad. Talking about purely touristy opportunities, I was, in the beginning, drawn to "roughing it," which was primarily manifested in camping and hitchhiking. But then, as a young teacher, I had my own car and that also brought a different style of traveling. As it should be obvious from what I have earlier said about this, I did a lot of traveling outside Europe, in places like Turkey and Tunisia, but especially in North

America. However, surprisingly, I have never been physically present in Mexico, despite the fact that I had glimpses of the southern neighbor of the U.S. at Tijuana, California, and El Paso, Texas. Should I ever get the opportunity to return to the USA once more, I would definitely want to combine that trip with a sojourn in Mexico. As my publications show, my professional interest in things Mexican and Chicano is relatively recent. Increasingly, I find Mexican culture ever more fascinating. I have done a lot of exploratory, preliminary work for that hypothetical Mexican trip in Spain, Mexico's mother country, which I have visited four times, each time focusing on a selected region: Madrid (with side trips to Toledo and El Escorial), Catalonia, Andalucia (Malaga, Granada, Cordoba, Sevilla, etc.), and the Murcia coast. Apart from scenes of natural beauty the high point of my visit in Madrid was the Museo de América with artifacts brought from the Americas between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But you should not think that I visited only high-brow institutions. I also went to see Estadio Santiago Bernabeu owned by Real Madrid and Camp Nou, the largest football stadium in Europe and home to FC Barcelona.

**VARRÓ:** *Do you find the European scenery very different from the American landscapes you are familiar with?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Well, it depends what particular landscapes you compare. The rugged beauty of New England, the sublime peaks of Colorado, or much of the Pacific coast speak for themselves. Yes, there are geographical environments in the U.S. that are too rugged and alienating for average human convenience. But why don't we invite one of the many authors to testify? Jack London on Alaska scenes, Steinbeck on California's coastal range, Ole Rølvaag on winter scenes in the Midwest, Edith Wharton on frozen and barren rural New England. Or Willa Cather, who in her excellent historical novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) set in the American Southwest has this to say about the experiences of the early missionaries: "A European could scarcely imagine such hardships. The old countries were worn to the shape of human life, made into an investiture, a sort of second body, for man. There the wild herbs and the wild fruits and the forest fungi were edible. The streams were sweet water, the trees afforded shade and shelter. But in the alkali deserts [in the American Southwest] the water holes were poisonous, the vegetation offered nothing to a starving man. Everything was dry, prickly, sharp; Spanish bayonet, juniper, greasewood, cactus; the lizard, the rattlesnake,—and man made cruel by a cruel life. Those early

missionaries threw themselves naked upon the hard heart of a country that was calculated to try the endurance of giants. They thirsted in its deserts, starved among its rocks, climbed up and down its terrible canyons on stone-bruised feet, broke long fasts by unclean and repugnant food.”

**VARRÓ:** *Do you, as Cather does, prefer Europe to the New World?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I tend to be cautious about final judgments in this matter. Yet I am positive European destinations still have much to offer. Indeed, my journeys in the next few years are designed to be a kind of (re)discovery of Europe.

**VARRÓ:** *So which is the next European country for you to visit? Provided, of course, there are some you haven't seen.*

**VIRÁGOS:** Not too many are left. Two or three. However, one of them is, surprisingly, Ireland. So if you predict that Ireland is my next destination, you may be right.

**VARRÓ:** *You held many important offices both in the Institute of English and American Studies, the former English Department (as head of the institute and the department), and the School of Arts and Humanities (as Deputy Dean). How do you look back to those positions and the important public offices you held? Were you personally involved in the crucial process of restructuring and retooling?*

**VIRÁGOS:** This is what you call service. Serving the university. I was Director of the Institute of Western Languages and Literatures, which was made up of the English, French and German departments, for three years (1987–1990). I had to oversee the gestation of a totally novel academic enterprise which brought lots of new challenges and hitherto unforeseen complexities emanating from the triggering effect of the political changes at the end of the late 1980s. All of a sudden there was a dramatic increase in student enrollment at the Institute: soon we had six hundred, then seven hundred, finally more than 800 students in the three Western languages departments. Thus finally I decided it was necessary to split. The English Department became the Institute of English and American Studies, which in turn split, in 1991, into three departments: Department of British Studies, North American Department, and Department of English Language and Linguistics. Then, in 1996, a fourth department was established: the Department of English Language Learning and Teaching. These were radical changes. Perhaps the most crucial one was that for the

first time in Kossuth University's academic history, an American (later North-American) Department was established; the first such department among universities in Hungary. Of course, there was a scarcity of teaching material, of books, textbooks, library space, virtually of everything. The Institute had to be built up rapidly, on a massive scale. We had to solve the (would you believe, politically sensitive) problems of copying on a large scale. In those "heroic" times, the Institute had one computer. In one decade each member of the teaching staff, and each secretary, had their own word-processor. However, the greatest problem was recruiting, at a very short notice, a dozen or so quality teaching faculty. A number of visiting professors from the United States also came to help. I personally initiated and arranged the transfer of well over a dozen teachers of English to the Institute. This immediately created problems regarding office space. Luckily, we got substantial help from the university and faculty management (thanks are due especially to Dean László Imre for his good will, understanding and flexibility) and the respective diplomatic services stationed in Hungary, with the U.S. Embassy, USIA, USIS, the Soros Foundation taking leading role. These were heady times! We were aware of the historic changes and we also felt that it made sense to work for meaningful objectives. I am proud I could contribute, well into the 1990s and beyond, to the changes we achieved. In September, 1990, I went to the United States for two years of teaching and research. While I was away, growth in the Institute in every possible way continued, and the work of restructuring, especially in terms of study options, professional specializations, international ties, exchange problems, administrative and library personnel, library holdings, continued. On my return, I continued in my capacity as Director of the Institute.

**VARRÓ:** *Were there still many tasks awaiting you on your return in the fall of 1992?*

**VIRÁGOS:** You bet. We had our hands full. For instance, this was the time when we moved to new premises, which finally solved the problem of office space. We solved the task of allocation of available space to general satisfaction. Finally each colleague had a decent working environment. But tasks and projects never end. Some of these were very mundane, shall I say "pedestrian," matters to sort out. Thus, for instance, I had to persuade the instructors of the Institute of a few rudimentary improvements of the kind that, for instance, there would be no cancelled

classes, that no teacher would be allowed to teach without a written program. So each instructor mastered the art of designing courses, of calculating available time, of the logistics of midterm and end-term examinations, etc. I also introduced the system of course description catalogues. This time I only served as director for one academic year, because I became Deputy Dean. But before I left, we also launched a newsletter of the Institute, jointly edited by students and myself. You certainly remember *The Bridge*, because that was the title of the newsletter. This monthly publication was kept alive while we could find funding in the system.

**VARRÓ:** *Were your duties and obligations as Deputy Dean even more challenging?*



Session of the Faculty Doctoral Committee, of which Professor Zsolt Virágos was co-chair.

**VIRÁGOS:** As one of the two deputy deans, I was responsible for the budget, scholarship and international programs of the School of Arts and Humanities. I served in this capacity for two years. When this period expired, I resolved to do some thinking about my future options. I realized I had to prioritize. I had to realize that I was, first and foremost, a teacher. This was what I was trained and qualified for. I did not want to

be a bureaucrat. So I said no when the offer came for a more highly positioned rank.

**VARRÓ:** *The literary history of the U.S.A. is a profound part of your research and teaching expertise. You wrote three monograph-length studies, a large number of lexicon entries and essays dedicated to the field. English-major students around the country literarily grow up on studying those books. I think it would be interesting for everyone to learn whether the author of these literary histories himself has a favorite period within American literature.*

**VIRÁGOS:** Favorite periods? *Ex officio* I have to like them all. But if I am obliged to pick one, my choice at the moment would be the American Enlightenment and the Age of Modernism. But talking about my work as primarily that of a literary historian would be misleading. I would not mind being referred to as a historian of American literature if I had significantly contributed to the theory of literary history. But, to tell the truth, I did not have the kind of professional enthusiasm for this area of academic interest as I did, for instance, for the “Black Aesthetic,” myth-and-literature studies in general, or the iconography of American culture. Another thing I wish to add is that, chronologically, my first large and comprehensive area of academic interest was language teaching. I was a language teacher for several years, including the four years I spent at Kossuth University’s teacher training secondary grammar school as a demonstration teacher of English. At the time I was also responsible for the instruction of methodology to fifth-year students. As my list of publications shows, I co-authored four textbooks of English as a result of this first professional preoccupation.

**VARRÓ:** *I believe that many from my generation were inspired by your unique methodology of teaching literature and culture. I would describe it, simplifying things a bit, as a special attention to literary detail, identifying culture-specific icons, and highlighting correlations between historical facts and literary utterance. Would you add or modify anything on this list while describing your trademark methodology?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I did not know I had a trademark methodology. However, I am firmly convinced that the best method is an eclectic one. In which you show your students, without courting dogmatism, the enriching approach of showing possible points of entry. One of these has to be

iconography for the simple reason that this is an indispensable way of teaching your students the method of “reading” the literary culture.

**VARRÓ:** *Would you care to identify by title some of the classes you’ve taught?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Certainly. The lectures were most often histories of 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. literature offered to all the freshmen and sophomore students (e.g. “Literary History of the United States: the 19<sup>th</sup> Century”). These were followed up by more or less standardized multi-genre seminars (Am. Lit.1, Am. Lit.2, and Am. Lit.3). In the 1990s I was also responsible for lecture courses specifically devoted to cultural study: “American Civilization” and “Introduction to the Culture of the United States.” A more recent lecture course was “Landmarks and Representative Voices in pre-1900 American Literature” and “Portraits and Landmarks in Twentieth-Century U.S. Literature Before World War Two.” As regards advanced seminars offered to junior and senior students, there was much more leeway. I am going to list some belonging in this last category. Here we go: “Myth in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Literature”; “Literatures of American Minorities”; “Twentieth-Century Prose Literature of the American South: White and African–American Voices”; “The Iconography of American Culture”; “Myth and Ideology in American Culture and Society”; “The Politics of Representation in American Culture and Society”; “African–American Literature and Thought”; “Representative Texts in the Literary Culture from Colonial Times to the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century”; “Ethnic and Minority Voices in American Expressiveness: Aspects of Culture and Ideology”; “Ethnic and Minority Cultures in North America, and a few more.

**VARRÓ:** *Your research has often been geared towards minority literatures in the U.S. Can you define exactly where this orientation derives from? In other words how did you become interested in the topic of race and stereotyping? How fashionable a topic was this when you started to deal with it in the 1970s?*

**VIRÁGOS:** It was László Országh who called my attention to things African American. In a letter I received from him at Indiana University he pointed out that African American Studies in Hungarian philology was virtually unknown and regarded as a blank spot. He also hinted that a potential future Americanist in Hungary—he never exactly spelt out who—might want to do some pioneering work in the field. Then one

thing led to the other. As a student of black culture it was inevitable that I should scrutinize phenomena like racialized manifestations, ethnicity, stereotyped character portrayal and conceptually related satellites. It was both interesting and intriguing to find that I arrived at roughly the same destination through substantially different paths: as a result of my myth studies I came to confront the same manifestations from a different angle. For instance, what was seen earlier as an aesthetic problem was now looked at as an ideologically attuned incarnation.

**VARRÓ:** *You are known today in Hungary among the Americanists as a myth critic, indeed a true rarity. How would you define this label (do you regard it as appropriate), and could you specify the usefulness of it to today's literary theory?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Actually I am not a genuine myth critic. Claiming that I am a critic of myth criticism would be closer to the truth. Most of my publications pertain to this infinitely large and complex area. However, it is useful to consider that the true terrain of myth criticism is myth as M1, that is, when we are talking about ancient myth. Myth that has paradigmatic, archetypal, ennobling, universalizing, transcendental—and a host of other related, centrifugal—potentials. But I am also interested in myth as a component of the social consciousness (which inevitably connects this area with ideology, politics, literary criticism, art, ethics, science, even law and philosophy), as myth becomes part of literature (myth *in* literature and myth *as* literature). However, much of my research concerns areas that are extraliterary. The usefulness of myth in today's literary theory? Whether we like it or not, myth will always be an eternal alibi of literary and critical scholarship. We human beings are like fish swimming in a huge reservoir of myth. The fact that most of us proprietors are not aware of myth as a choice property, does not mean that we do not own and consume it.

**VARRÓ:** *What is the work that you are most proud of out of your scholarly work and why?*

**VIRÁGOS:** My first monograph on African American culture and literature. This came out when I was 33. The scholarly and public acclaim of that 392-page book surprised me. Not unpleasantly, to tell the truth.

**VARRÓ:** *As some of our readers might recall, we were also working on a book together. The one we casually refer to as "The Jim Crow book"*



*between ourselves. Would you care to comment on the part of that project which you liked most?*

**VIRÁGOS:** In a professional and personal sense, this partnership was a classic “master and disciple,” “teacher and student” enterprise. The master—that is, myself—had served as the academic advisor of the disciple—that is, you—and helped the student become an Americanist capable of generating new knowledge in a chosen area of research and academic interest. What actually happened was that the joint partnership in the end resulted in a sizeable monograph, which, in turn, brought together two different yet related areas of research within an African American Studies frame of reference: the many aspects of black portraiture and the amazing outgrowth of the blackface minstrel tradition. It was exciting to see how these two areas evolved in direction and conceptuality, as well as in a causal relationship to be finally merged as a unified product.

**VARRÓ:** *Is there a major project you are currently working on that you can talk about in detail?*

**VIRÁGOS:** I plan to publish a book-size study summarizing my extensive previous research on the many selected aspects of myth. I do not yet have a definitive title, but I know that the word *myth* and reference to the *American social consciousness* will be included in it. This is expected to come out both in English and Hungarian. Another pet project is the iconography of American culture, a field of research some essential aspects of which I have tested in actual teaching and discussions with students. And don’t forget that I am “learning Chicano.” A few weeks ago I published a study entitled “Chicano Dilemmas” and I may extend my research to related matters. Before doing so, however, I am supposed to study Spanish. Busy times!

**VARRÓ:** *It is not a secret that we are making this interview at the apropos of your birthday, and although it is a commonplace I have to say that you certainly do not look or act as most people of your age group. How does your age make you feel?*

**VIRÁGOS:** As to my “looks,” you must ask other people. I hope you do not want to hint that I am immature or infantile. Frankly, I do not feel I am such an old person. As to my health, I am fine, thank you. I have just

come back from a ski-camp in Austria. I have the (mistaken?) idea that I can still improve my performance in downhill skiing.

**VARRÓ:** *This is usually the time to summarize achievements and to cast an account, but I know that you are not the type. So instead I wish to ask you two things that I think have to do with summaries a bit, but are also different from plain accounts: [1] What is it that you believe in, that you have always believed in through your life? Is there a single thing or idea like that? (Is there like a motto that you regard as true for your life?); [2] Is there anything that you are truly afraid of?*

**VIRÁGOS:** When it comes to taking inventories of a lifetime, I cannot help remembering the dozens—actually hundreds—of literary examples in which people “[strut] and [fret] [their] hour upon the stage,” justify their former existence. Indeed, we are talking about one of the most dominant thematic preoccupations of literary expressiveness. However, strange though it may appear, on such occasions I keep recalling a scene that never fails to move me and which involves the old Indian chief in Thomas Berger’s novel *Little Big Man* (1964). At the end of Chapter 30 the old Cheyenne chief, Old Lodge Skins, walks to the top of a high promontory to die. He is praying to the Everywhere Spirit in a “stentorian voice, never sniveling but bold and free.” And he says, “Thank you for making me a Human Being! Thank you for helping me become a warrior! Thank you for all my victories and for all my defeats. Thank you for my vision, and for the blindness in which I saw further. I have killed many men and loved many women and eaten much meat. I have also been hungry, and I thank you for that and for the added sweetness that food has when you receive it after such a time. . . . I am going to die now, unless Death wants to fight first, and I ask you for the last time to grant me my old power to make things happen!” He needed his “old power” to stage his death. In a few minutes Old Lodge Skins was dead. If I, a resident of Debrecen, were to respond in a similar situation, I would say this: “Thank you, God, for creating me and letting me be part of this beautiful—as well as fragile and dangerous—world.” And I hope God will never accuse me of not using the talent I was born with.

Brief answers to the numbered items: [1] This may sound corny, but I believe in *work*. [2] Anything that I am truly afraid of? If I told you the truth, claiming that I am afraid of nothing, you would never believe it. This does not mean I am insensitive to certain turnoffs. I can certainly be turned off by stupidity. And phoney behavior.

**VARRÓ:** *What do you regard as your greatest strength and weakness as a person? Do you see any of these traits as coming from your own family?*

**VIRÁGOS:** Now, isn't this a leading question? How can one avoid subjectivized answers to questions like these? Let's face it, in a career like mine, one needs a certain amount of talent. Now, you either have it or you don't. It's like playing jazz or singing an opera solo. Or, like high-quality simultaneous interpretation: some people are capable of doing it, some are not. You can, of course, improve your performance somewhat through hard work, assiduity, and determination. But ultimately it is like bringing up a child: it is tempting to accept views claiming that the things which determine what a child grows up into largely depend on what he or she carries in their genes. Thus a parent might as well sit back and wait it out. You can bring about essential change in about two percent out of a hundred. And again, if you do not "have it" in you and you still pretend that you possess the mental apparatus that is objectively required for it, you are simply deceiving yourself. My greatest strength? If you want a very short answer, then my answer is a single word: empathy. This, as I indicated above, I must have inherited from my mother. She took a good look at someone she had never seen before and she could "read" that person off-hand. Sometimes she did not even have to look. To empathy you can add the lack of *hubris*: I like to believe that I do not get carried away by the "feathers in my cap." I know everything is relative. And short-lived. My shortcomings? There are quite a few of these: sometimes I get impatient with slow people. I am usually put off by pompous and phoney people. Occasionally I fail to package what I want to say. I do not always maintain order either in a spatial or temporal sense. Orderliness is not a virtue I can feel proud of. Yet another drawback is procrastination. Sometimes I tend to procrastinate. Thus, you see, in my next life I have got to better myself and improve my performance.

**VARRÓ:** *Do you have any regrets about the past that you certainly would do differently now that you are looking back to it from a distance?*

**VIRÁGOS:** You mean would I change the video recording of my life if I could? I wouldn't. Because I couldn't. On the whole I am satisfied with my life. Sometimes I think of it as a series of good luck. Ever since my father saved me from drowning when I was a baby.

**VARRÓ:** *If there were a program on TV, titled, “The Secret Life of...” What would that series’ chapter dedicated to your life be about? That is, besides culture studies and literature is there any other great passion in your life that you could let us know about?*

**VIRÁGOS:** If I dismiss those things that I do not wish to share, there is not much left. A few harmless things, perhaps. But even these appear to be contradictory. For instance, I can hardly be accused of gluttony, yet I like good food. I am not a drunkard, yet I know the taste of good wine. In a job like mine one needs a lot of privacy, thus I often felt I had to disappear to have the right to face people again. Which could easily put the label of “hermit” on me. Yet I like good company. I like to have long conversations with knowledgeable people. I cannot resist certain brands of humor. And I am very much concerned about talent lost.

**VARRÓ:** *Linking up to this idea, many of us working in the field of American Studies feel that we came out of the school you started. Were you ever conscious of this responsibility and that you also do have a legacy?*

**VIRÁGOS:** In forty or so years I have left many traces. I have influenced a large number of students who were enthusiastic about the eye-opening topics we discussed in advanced seminars. One of my committed students once made this remark at the end of a semester: “We could hardly wait for these seminars to begin.” To me this evaluation was worth more than a formal award. I have taught thousands of schoolchildren and students in four different countries. Some of my books have reached thousands of people. Some of my colleagues have been my students. Thus, in a sense, there are gains to be counted. I think it would be easy to prove that I did make a difference. Yet I have never thought of my work, my “achievements” in terms of a formal legacy, or something that would come close to establishing a school. Whether or not I have created a legacy will depend on the impact my writings—3,250 printed pages so far—make. One thing is certain: I have received a large amount of personal satisfaction from my work. In a way this is a matter of sheer luck: I happened to work with themes and subjects that I liked and was intrigued by. It is simple as that.

I see that we are running out of time. Yet I would like to add a sentence or two by way of conclusion. We, that is, those who work in the profession, should be sensitized to the fact that what we do is a serious

matter. Serious in an existential, cultural, and moral sense. If you make errors, these are promptly multiplied a dozen times, three dozen times. Yet, do not overdo the seriousness. And, especially, do not take yourself too seriously. Some playfulness can do wonders. And don't fail to remember that humor can be a great asset.

***VARRÓ:** What a wonderful note, indeed, on which to conclude this interview. Dear Zsolt, many happy returns, and may our talks continue...*



## Photos from the Life of Zsolt Kálmán Virágos

Lehel Vadon



The wedding photo of the parents



His mother, Ilona Horváth



His father, Mihály Virágos



Zsolt Virágos, 2-months old,  
with his mother



Zsolt Virágos 3-months old



As a 4-year-old child.



Past seven.





Form I at Fűvészkert Elementary School. Zsolt Virágos is fifth from left, upper row.



At a study circle in chemistry.



Zsolt Virágos, age 16.



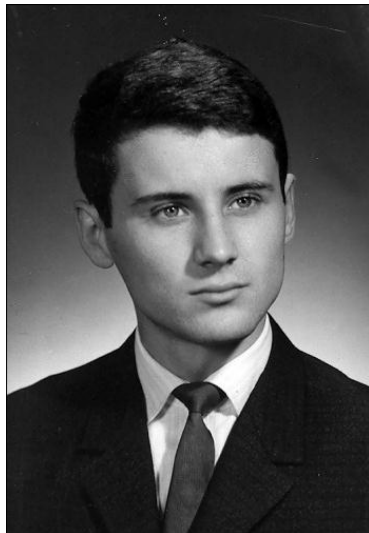
Zsolt Virágos, age 18.



High-school class in "Fazekas Mihály" Teacher Training School.  
Zsolt Virágos is sixth from left, second row.



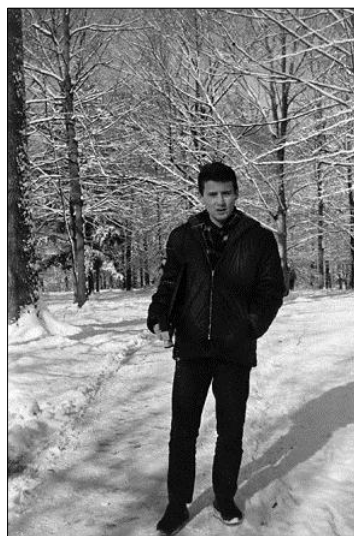
Zsolt Virágos sophomore year



Age 21



Age 22



Age 22



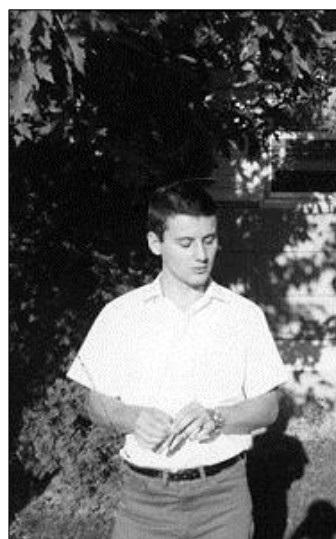
Zolt Virágos, on the Indiana University campus. Age 23.



In his Minneapolis home.



At Lake Lemon, Indiana.  
Age 24.



In Debrecen.  
Age 25.

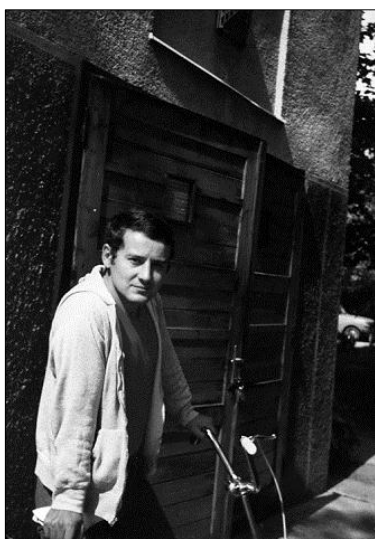




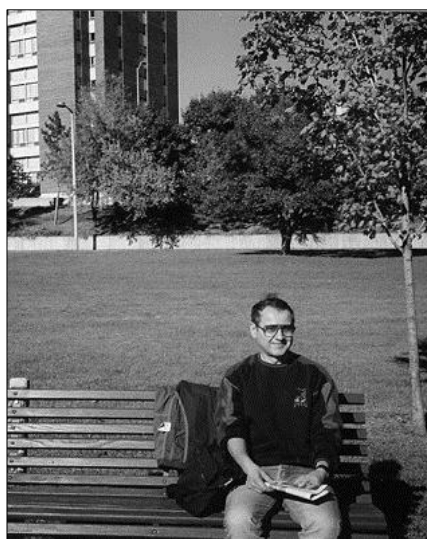
Zsolt Virágos in 1971.



On the University of Minneapolis campus, in 1991



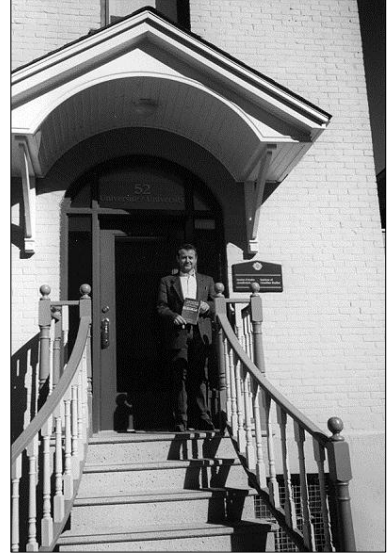
On a bicycle tour in Debrecen, in 1992.



On the University of Ottawa campus, in 2003



Visiting the Hortobágy in 1968



At the entrance of the Canadian Research Center at the University of Ottawa.



Receiving an award from the University of Debrecen, 2004



The Canadian Parliament in Ottawa



The secret wedding, 1969  
Márta Juhász and Zsolt Virágos



Husband and wife, Zsolt and Márta Virágos



The wind-blown summits of Southern California

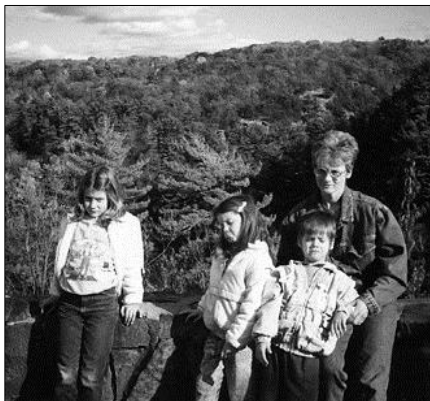


In the background: the White House.





Bringing the news to the nation's capital



The discoloration of the leaves in the  
state of Minnesota



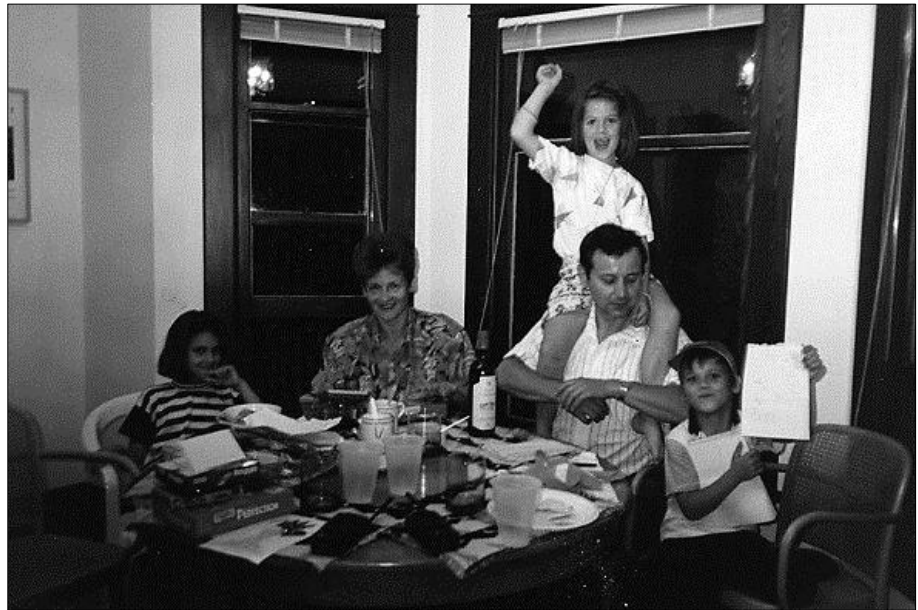
Márta at the beach



The backdoor porch was a favorite hideout.



Péter and Zsolt



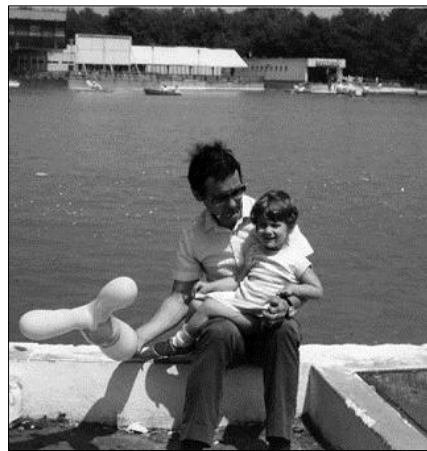
An active community



When my family arrived in Minneapolis, I rented a house.



The 3 children at the back garden in the family's Minneapolis home



At Lake Balaton with Eszter Virágos



Kissing around: a birthday greeting.



A birthday song from the children.



Everyone according to his needs.



Sleeping around.



Would you believe this is Lake Balaton?



This is an Indian canoe on the Saint-Croix River.



Professor Zsolt Kálmán Virágos told me that he was proud of the amount of knowledge accumulated in the braincells of the university's scholars and scientists.



Without him, much would have been different.



We have been specially favored and enormously lucky to have known Professor Országh as a man and a scholar.





The university is certainly one of the prides of Debrecen



There is always a hustle and bustle in front of the Main Building.



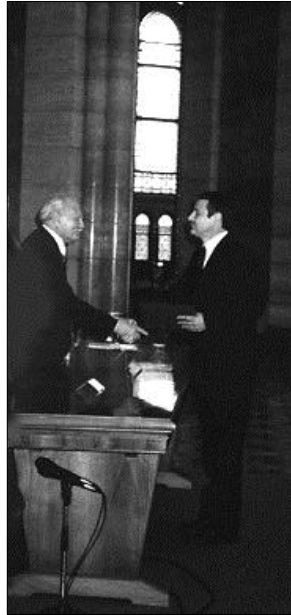
The splashes of the fountain can be heard all day long.



And the opponents kept asking questions...



And the defence kept responding to the queries...



This indeed was a privilege.



In the Parliament Building in 1995.



An afternoon in the library is followed by another afternoon. In the library.



Grading papers



The board convened as expected.



Addressing such a supreme audience is always an honor.



From Kathy to Bob.



An almost symmetrical arrangement.



"You'd better stop smoking".



Asking Nora's hand in marriage. In Scotland.



A pre-conference discussion



Historians...





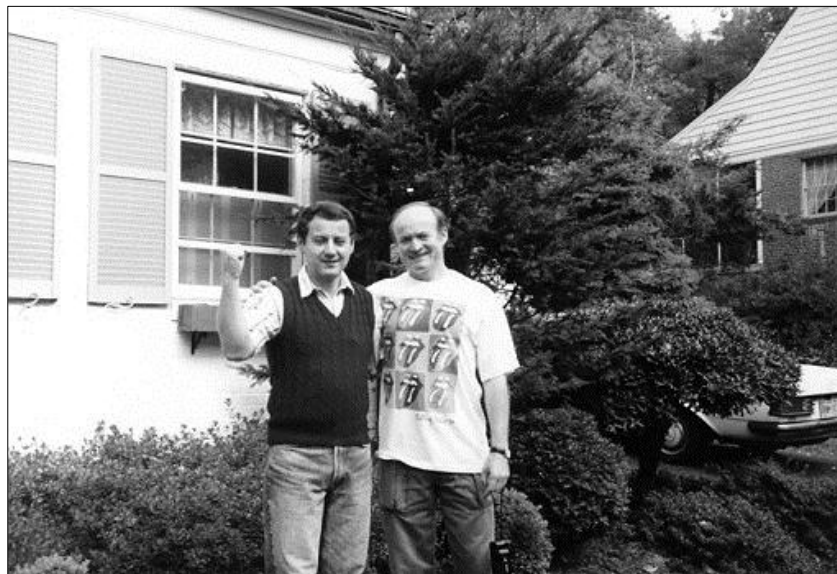
Here's to Annus Néli.



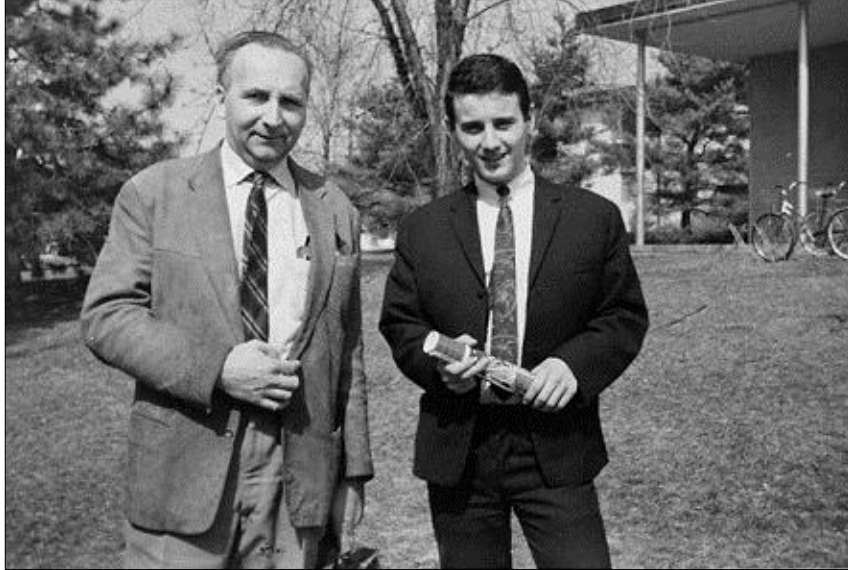
It was a good idea to come back to visit. Wasn't it?



The speech was a bit too long.



Tamás, you haven't changed any.



Professor Denis Sinor and Professor Zsolt Virágos



Professor Kent Bales and Professor Zsolt Virágos



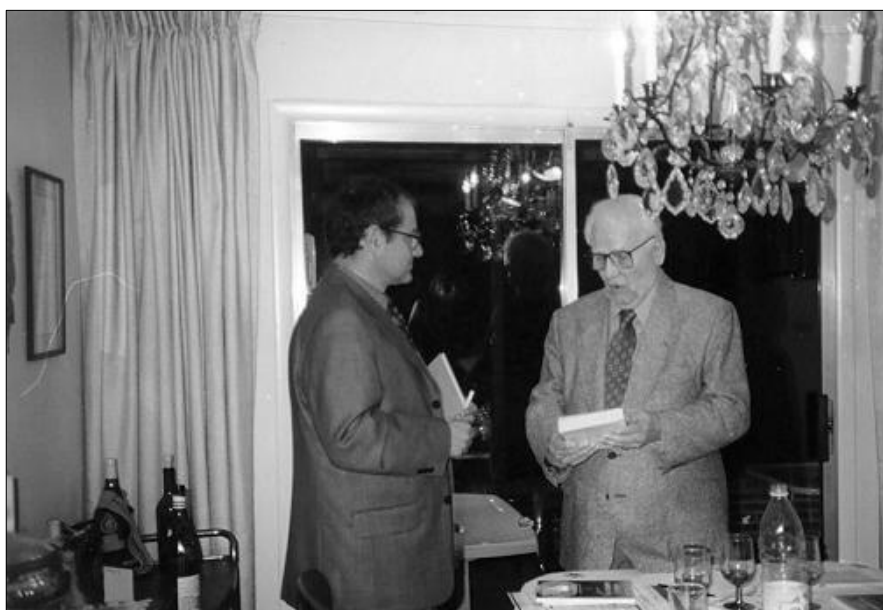
Reception given by the President of the University of Missouri – Saint Louis



Reception by the Dean of International Programs at Indiana U.



With the Dean of International Programs, University of Missouri



With Elemér Bakó in Silver Spring, Md. in 1999



Zita, you were a real lady.



Linda was also a born lady. And very smart.



Professor Joyce and his wife knew all about Native American lore.



Maria spoke better Hungarian 20 years later.





An international feeling.



Even more international feeling.





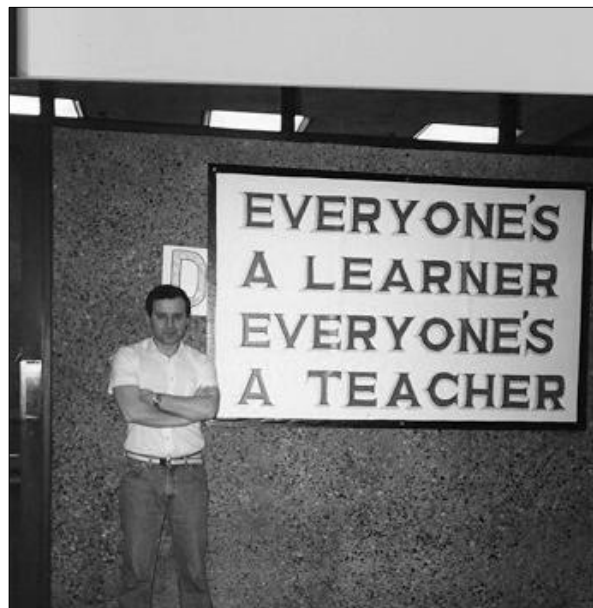
Joensun University managers



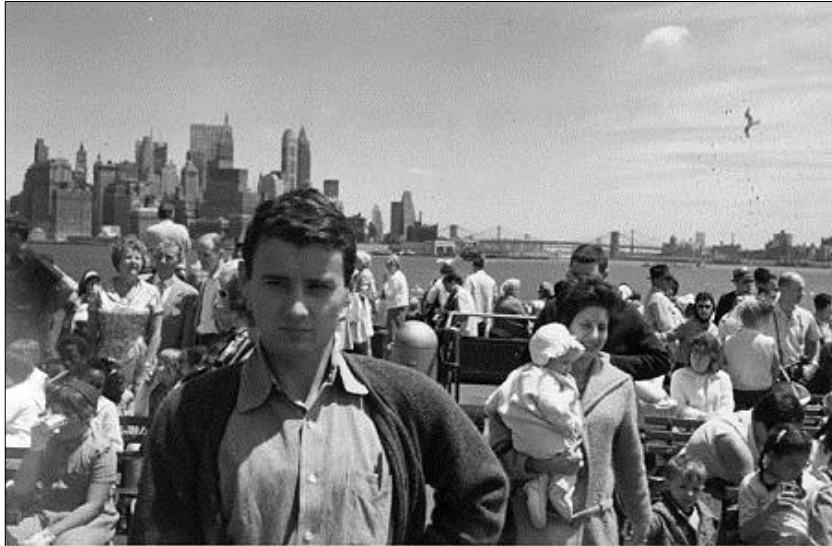
Joensun University students



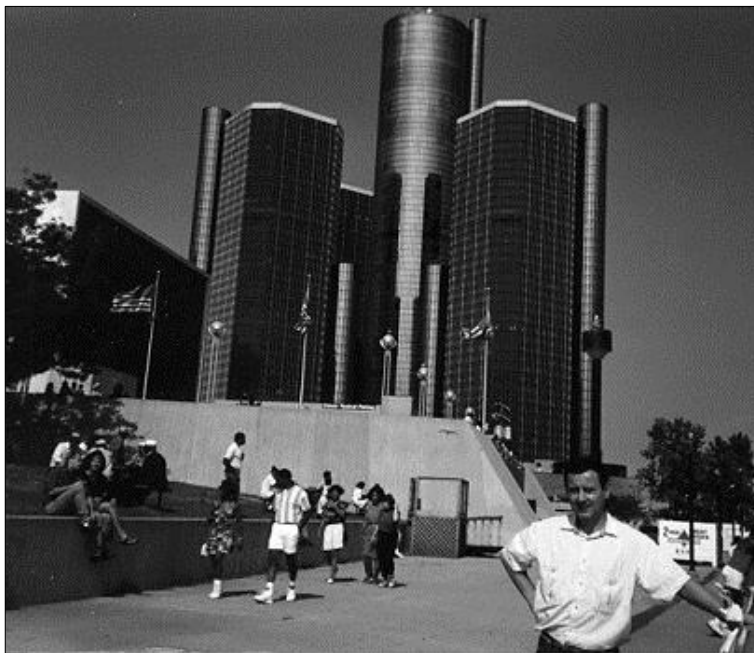
... just emerging government



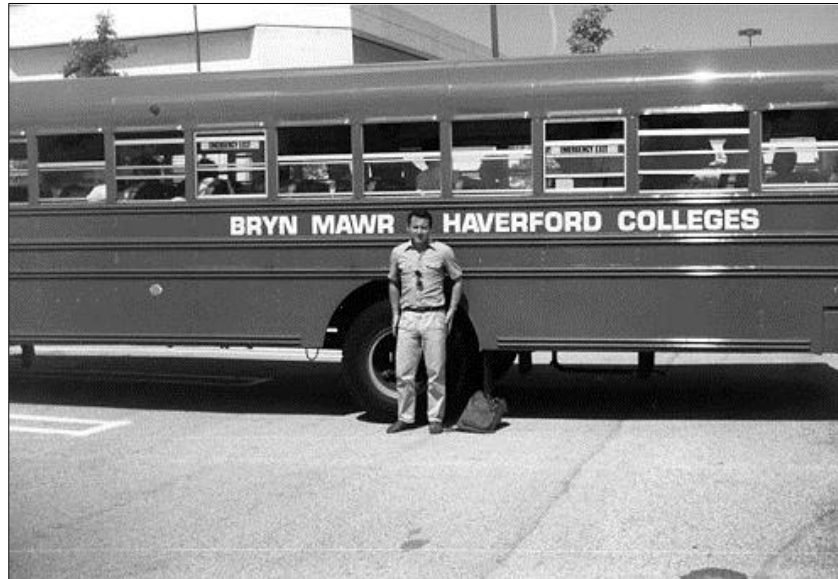
A fine lesson for the...



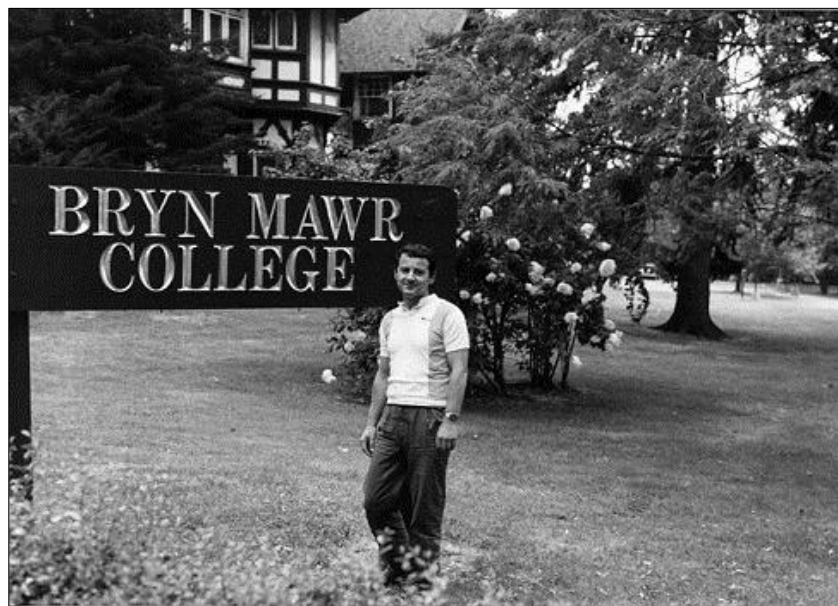
Rooming in the Big Apple



This is the Renaissance Center which has spawned partial rebirth



When they were the quests of Bryn Mawr College (1989)



Did you know that Bryn Mawr was romantically connected with the King of Prussia?



That day it was raining at Harvard



The multicultural team in Oxford, Miss. (1989)



Glimpsing ever larger horizons with Beatrice Camp, cultural attaché



Awards and awardees: Professor László Budai and Professor Tibor Frank.



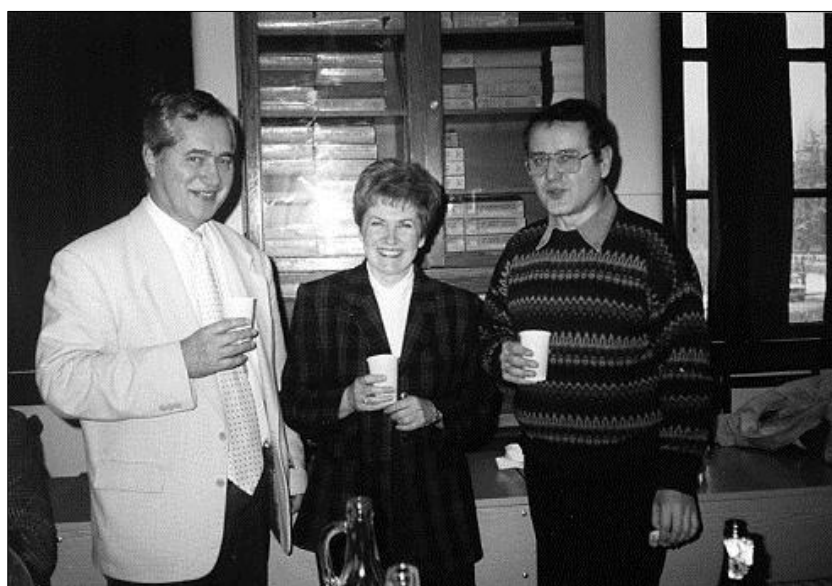
With friend and colleague Professzor David Staines at the University of Ottawa



With C. W. E. Bigsby (in middle) at the University of East Anglia



Celebrating a successful doctoral defense at the North American Department



After a successful doctoral defense (Lehel Vadon, Éva Kovács and Zsolt Virágos)





Theater performance by the instructors



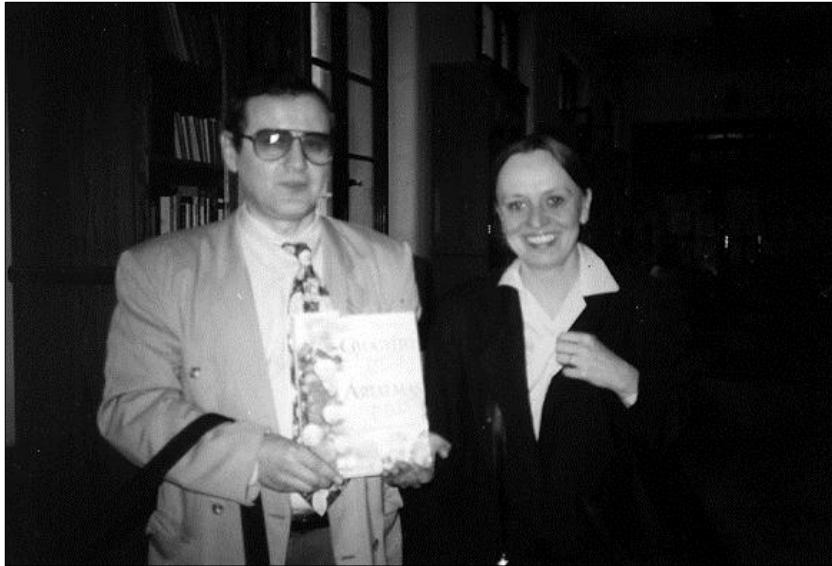
Presentation at the Salzburg Seminar, 1993



Gabriella Varró, Zsolt Virágos, Lenke Németh



Lehel Vadon, Zsolt Virágos



With Judit Molnár



With Olga Bársony



With Donald E. Morse in his Oakland, Mich  
residence in 1992



An Institute event



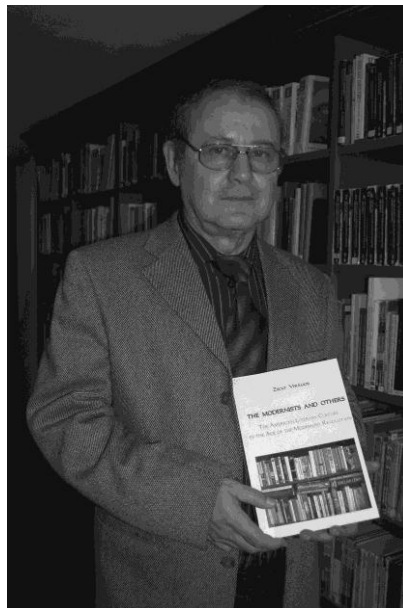
And now let's shake a leg



In front of the Lyceum in Eger



In the new library



Presentation of the book



In front of Building “B” with Professor Vadon



Professor Virágos in his office in Building “B”



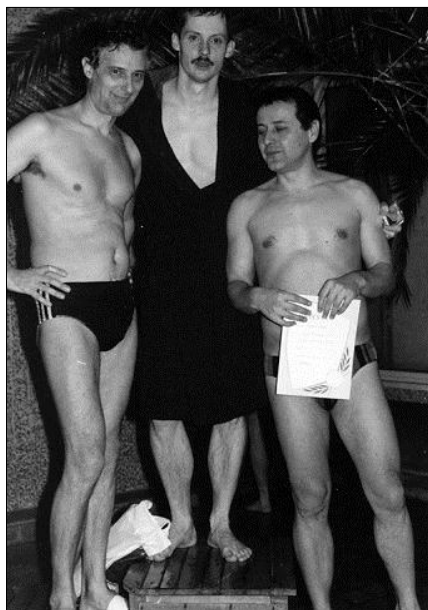
Once upon a time there was...



... a sixtieth birthday



Future champions as children



These three people cannot rest for rivalry



The swimmers never give up





The die-hard swimmers



Downhill skiing requires much attention



Accepting an award at the University of Debrecen, June, 2004.





A  
MAGYAR KÖZTÁRSASÁG  
OKTATÁSI ÉS KULTURÁLIS MINISZTERE

Dr. Virágos Zsolt

RÉSZÉRE

AZ

*Apáczai Csere János-díjat*

ADOMÁNYOZZA.

2008. január 22.  
B U D A P E S T



MINISZTER



A

Széchenyi Professzori Ösztöndíj Kuratóriumának  
döntése alapján

*dr. Virágos Zsolt*

S z é c h e n y i  
P r o f e s s z o r i  
Ö s z t ö n d í j a t

nyert el.

1997. április 5.

Dr. Magyar Bálint  
művelődési és közoktatási miniszter

Dr. Juhász-Nagy Sándor  
kuratóriumi elnök

Száma: 3.983

A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia  
Doktori Tanácsa

2001. szeptember 21-én hozott döntésével

*Virágos Zsolt*

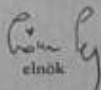
részére, aki 1942. június 16-án Debrecenben született,  
anyja neve: Horváth Ilona

tudományos munkásságának törvényes eljárásban elvégzett  
vizsgálata alapján

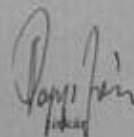
a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia doktora

tudományos címet adományozta.

Budapest, 2001. november 5.

  
elnök



  
titkár

## The Publications of Zsolt Kálmán Virágos 1969–2012

Lehel Vadon

### BOOKS

#### Monographs

1. *A négerség és az amerikai irodalom.* [Blacks in American Literature.] Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1975. 392 pp.
2. Ország László—Virágos Zsolt: *Az amerikai irodalom története.* [A History of American Literature.] Budapest: Eötvös József Könyvkiadó, 1997. 396 pp.
3. Virágos Zsolt—Varró Gabriella: *Jim Crow örökösei: mítosz és sztereotípa az amerikai társadalmi tudatban és kultúrában.* [The Legacy of Jim Crow. Myth and Stereotype in the American Social Consciousness and Culture.] Budapest: Eötvös József Könyvkiadó, 2002. 370 pp.
4. *Portraits and Landmarks: The American Literary Culture in the 19th Century.* Debrecen: University of Debrecen, Institute of English and American Studies, 2003 (2004, 2005). 361 pp. (2007: enlarged and revised edition, 386 pp.)
5. *The Modernists and Others: The American Literary Culture in the Age of the Modernist Revolution.* Debrecen: The University of

Debrecen, Institute of English and American Studies, 2006. 511 pp. (2008. revised edition, 540 pp.)

### **Textbooks**

1. *Angol nyelvkönyv a gimnáziumok szakosított tantervű III. osztálya számára.* [A Textbook for Junior Secondary Special Classes of English.] Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1971. (1972., 1976.) 359 pp. (Coauthor: Zoltán Abádi-Nagy.)
2. *Angol nyelvkönyv a gimnáziumok szakosított tantervű IV. osztálya számára.* [A Textbook for Senior Secondary Special Classes of English.] Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1972. (1975., 1978, 1982.) 339 pp. (Coauthor: Zoltán Abádi-Nagy.)
3. *Esztétika. Angol nyelvkönyv és szöveggyűjtemény.* [Aesthetics. A Textbook and Chrestomathy of English.] Budapest: TIT, 1976. 187 pp. (Coauthor: Zoltán Abádi-Nagy.)
4. *A Textbook for Advanced Students of English.* Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1980, 365 pp. (Coauthor: Béla Hollósy.)

### **Book editing**

1. Virágos Zsolt (ed.): *Ország László válogatott írásai.* [Selected Writings of László Ország.] Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, Orbis Litterarum 16. 2007. 585 pp.
2. Virágos Zsolt (ed.): *Hungarian—American Ties: Essays and Studies in Intercultural Links and Contacts.* Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2011.



**STUDIES, ESSAYS, AND ARTICLES IN AMERICAN  
STUDIES IN PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS AND BOOKS  
IN HUNGARY AND ABROAD**

1. "Négerség és amerikai irodalom." [Blacks and American Literature.] *Tudományos Magazin* 2 (1975): 50–54.
2. "Az elveszett üzenet." [The Lost Message.] *Literatura* 3–4 (1977): 202–216.
3. "James Baldwin: Stereotype versus Counterstereotype." *Hungarian Studies in English* 11 (1977): 131–141.
4. "Ralph Ellison and the Dilemma of Artistic Synthesis." *Acta Litteraria* 20.1–2 (1978): 155–164.
5. "Myth: The Dilemma of the American Novelist." *Hungarian Studies in English* 12 (1979): 107–119.
6. "Utószó James Baldwin *Ha a néger utca beszélni tudna és Giovanni szobája* című regényeihez." [Afterword to James Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Giovanni's Room*.] Budapest: Európa, 1980. 383–396.
7. "Cultural Myths 'Made in USA'." *The Origins and Originality of American Culture*. Ed. Tibor Frank. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980. 573–581.
8. "Adalékok az Egyesült Államok kultúrmítoszainak tanulmányozásához." [Contributions to the Study of the Cultural Myths of the United States.] *Filológiai Közöny* 27.1–2 (1981): 133–139.
9. "A mítoszkritika, avagy a mélystruktúra mítosza." [Myth Criticism; or, The Myth of the Deep Structure.] *Acta Germanica et Acta Romanica* (1981): 130–141.
10. "John O'Hara in Hungary." *John O'Hara Journal* 5.1–2 (1982–83): 38–42.
11. "The Black Aesthetic and the Domino Principle." *John O'Hara Journal* 5.1–2 (1982–83): 123–131.

12. "A 'fekete esztétikáról'." [On the Black Aesthetic.] *Filológiai Közlöny* 29.1–3 (1983): 110–125.
13. "Some Theoretical Dilemmas of the 'Black Aesthetic'." *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* 33 (1984): 361–365.
14. "Versions of Myth in American Culture and Literature." *Hungarian Studies in English* 17 (1984): 49–84.
15. "Myth and Ideology: Some Observations on the American Civil Religion." *Studies in English and American Culture*. Ed. Lehel Vadon. Eger: Eszterházy Károly Tanárképző Főiskola, 1989. 155–164.
16. "Myth, Ideology, and the American Writer." *Hungarian Studies in English* 11 (1990): 29–44.
17. "Egy 'amerikai' Párizsban: Thomas Paine és a francia forradalom".[An "American" in Paris: Thomas Paine and the French Revolution.] *A francia forradalom*. Ed. István Rácz. Debrecen: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, 1991. 41–49.
18. "The Hazards of Interpretive Overkill: The Myths of Gatsby" *Hungarian Studies in English* 22 (1991): 49–69.
19. "Mítosz és műértelmezés: a lágy fókusz problémája." [Myth and Artistic Interpretation: The Problem of the Soft Focus.] *Emlékkönyv Országh László tiszteletére*. Ed. Lehel Vadon. Eger: Eszterházy Károly Tanárképző Főiskola, 1993. 393–405.
20. "Some Observations on Myth and 'Practical' Pragmatism in American Culture." *Eger Journal of American Studies* 1 (1993): 137–145.
21. "Amerikai Egyesült Államok: Irodalom." [United States of America: Literature.] *Magyar nagylexikon* Editor-in-chief László Élesztős. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993. 751–756.
22. "F. Scott Fitzgerald: A nagy Gatsby". [F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*.] *Huszonöt fontos angol regény*. Ed. Júlia Kada. Budapest: Maecenas–Lord, 1996. 175–187.

23. "Diagnosing American Culture: Centrifugality Versus Centripetality; Or, The Myth of a Core America." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 2.1 (1996): 15–34.
24. "'Presentitis' as a Dilemma in American Cultural History." *Studii de Limbi si Literaturi Moderne*. Studii de anglistika si amerikanistika. Timisoara, 1996. 89–95.
25. "The American Brand of the Myth of Apocalypse." *Eger Journal of American Studies* 3 (1996): 115–138.
26. "The Short Story as Intertextual Satellite: The Case of William Faulkner." *Eger Journal of American Studies* 4 (1997): 93–120.
27. "The Life and Work of László Országh (1907-1984): A Round Table." Convened, moderated and edited by Zsolt K. Virágos. *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 4.1/2 (1998): 367–406.
28. "Permutations of the Self and of the Other: The Mythicized Foundations of Ideologically Attuned Stereotypy in American Culture." *Happy Returns: Essays for Professor István Pálffy*. Ed. Péter Szaffkó and Tamás Bényei. Debrecen: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, Institute of English and American Studies. 1999. 110–151.
29. "From Melting Pot to Boiling Pot: Observations on the American Multicultural Scene." *Multicultural Challenge in American Culture*. Ed. Lehel Vadon. Eger: Eszterházy Károly Tanárképző Főiskola, 1999. 5–20.
30. "Perspectives on Myth: Dilemmas of Definition." *Papp Ferenc akadémikus 70. születésnapjára*. Ed. István T. Molnár and Kinga Klaudy. Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2000. 38–45.
31. "J. D. Salinger: Zabhegyező." [J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*.] *Kortárs gyerekkönyvek. Műelemzések és műismertetések*. Ed. Sándor Borbély and Gabriella Komáromi. Budapest: Ciceró Könyvkiadó, 2001. 41–53.
32. "The Twilight Zone of Myth-and-Literature Studies: Analogy, Anomaly, and Intertextuality." *Eger Journal of American Studies* 8 (2002): 277–289.

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Lehel Vadon

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## **America, the Earthly Paradise: Early Depictions**

Irén Annus

An understanding of America as a unique and exceptional place—both within and outside its borders—has long been studied and debated. In his seminal book, Seymour Lipset surveys the various parts of American exceptionalism, arguing that they have all been shaped by the values he defines as segments of the American Creed: “liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire” (1996, 19). While it may be argued that the US was founded on this Creed, it was still necessary to invent and create a distinct American nation and culture. Within this complex process, (a) a commitment to values and principles was guaranteed through fundamental political documents and a basic political structure; (b) cultural homogenization was accomplished through cultural production and institutionalization as well as through vernacular language use, which was ensured by the development of print culture and public education; and (c) authentication was achieved through a series of invented traditions and historical, religious, and other types of meta-narratives, which also created national sentiments and drives and shaped the reality of an otherwise imagined community.

Zsolt Virágos calls attention to the significance of myths as they constitute a fundamental cultural realm in the US and are thus “essential to an understanding of its cultural values, collective self-image, value-impregnated beliefs, as well as those intellectual and emotional shaping factors which integrate culture” (1984, 573). He distinguishes between three types of myths, of which he explores one, the so-called “M-2 type public myths,” in one of his most recent essays (2011). He defines an M-2

type of myth as “a self-justifying intellectual construct that is capable of neutralizing epistemological contradictions, thus of claiming truth” (2011). He argues that this type of myth functions as a powerful tool “in the constitution of identities and underlying ideologies” (2011). Virágos also lists a number of M-2 type myths that have characterized American cultural constructions in various waves and forms, including the myth of paradise. It is the manifestations of this myth in the period of discovery and exploration that the present paper investigates through a selection of examples.

In a study of the various ways in which America has been imagined and described in literary works of art, Peter Conrad states: “Before America could be discovered, it had to be imagined” (1980, 3). He argues that “Columbus knew what he hoped to find before he left Europe. Geographically, America was imagined in advance of its discovery as an arboreal paradise, Europe’s dream of verdurous luxury” (Conrad 1980, 3). The myth of paradise as it appears in the North American context derives from the sacred narrative of Christianity: it is a “universal myth” (Virágos 2011) that has been transformed to appear in particular forms and meanings in the service of different ideologies and power structures in various historical periods.

The earliest depictions of the newly discovered land portrayed America as Paradise on Earth, the way Eden was captured in the European imagination in the 15th and 16th centuries. Forms of representation at the time, argues Myers, echoed the Western convention of epistemological understanding and knowledge production of the age between the 9th and 17th centuries: “the recognition of resemblance” (1993, 61) or, as Michel Foucault describes it, “the sovereignty of the like” (2002, 48). Myers defines this epistemological condition as one in which “consciousness was the consciousness of resemblance, and growth in knowledge was experienced as the recognition of hitherto unrecognized resemblances” (Myers 1993, 61). Therefore, early descriptions of the New World as Paradise reflected the way in which this heavenly place was captured in the contemporary Western imagination: a beautiful, harmonious Virgilian site with a superb resemblance to places familiar to the describer.

The depiction of America as Paradise in Christopher Columbus’ “Letter to King Ferdinand of Spain” (1493) demonstrates these points quite well. He characterizes the new land in superlative terms, such as “marvelous,” “beyond comparison,” “most beautiful,” “of a thousand kinds,” “a wonder to behold,” “lovely,” “rich,” “cannot be believed to



exist,” etc. His letter paints a picture of a land of splendor, natural variety, unlimited wealth and complete harmony. Columbus describes the inhabitants of this Eden-like place in a similar vein, as people as yet unspoiled, who “believe that power and good are in the heavens” and possess “a very acute intelligence” and thus are able to “navigate all those seas,” being “amazing” observers and describers of the world around them.

Conveying an Eden-like state of natural existence, the letter is often sprinkled with comparisons to Christendom and Spain and thus illustrates that the fashion within which the image of the New World was constructed was the mental framework of resemblance. The description also reflects classical and biblical conventions of characterizing a pleasant place, or as Myers identifies it, a *locus amoenus* (1993, 59), which was depicted through pastoral, gentle Arcadian landscape scenes by artists such as Claude Lorrain.

Columbus’ letter was extremely significant as it offered the first report of the New World that also constructed a distinct identity for the newly discovered place from a European perspective. This identity reflected both the way America had been imagined before it was discovered and the particular ways in which a recognition of resemblance shaped practices of knowledge production. However, the text also allows for mapping certain ideological assumptions and positionings, based on which the colonial appropriation of the place could be justified. The name “Española” given to the new land, for example, is not only meaningful in terms of formalizing the identity of the place; it also signifies that it is under Spanish control.

The mythical description, for example, also lists various possibilities and offers projections for the future framed as realistic prospects for a successful colonizing effort. The following section illustrates the potential future imagined by Columbus for the New Land, ultimately also retrospectively justifying the expenses of Columbus’ trip and subsequent explorations as a worthwhile investment that would fulfill and validate Spanish imperial ambitions.

Española is a marvel. The sierras and the mountains, the plains, the champaigns, are so lovely and so rich for planting and sowing, for breeding cattle of every kind, for building towns and villages. The harbours of the sea here are such as cannot be believed to exist unless they have been seen, and so with the rivers, many and great, and of good water, the majority of which contain gold. (Columbus, 1493) While Columbus describes the place as filled with potential for the development

of a booming civilization, a prosperous colony of the Spanish empire, he also hints at the possibility of quick wealth by mentioning gold as being readily available in abundance.

Sixteenth-century visual depictions of the New World and its inhabitants also reflect the mental framework of the recognition of resemblance. This is especially well-illustrated in the images of the Flemish engraver Theodor de Bry. While he published a series of books on America by different authors, his very first undertaking was the publication of Thomas Harriot's description of the New World entitled *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* in 1590. Harriot was an astronomer and a mathematician who had traveled to Roanoke Island and the coastline of North Carolina as part of Sir Ralph Lane's expedition in 1585, along with John White, an English painter, who painted watercolors during the trip. These watercolors, however, became widely known as a result of Bry's copper reproductions when he published them as illustrations to Harriot's volume.

White was commissioned to portray the flora and fauna of the areas visited during the expedition as well as to capture scenes of the life of the Natives they encountered. Some of his paintings are aerial views of specific sites, such as the "Indian Village of Secoton." White's image is the depiction of a simple village, with a main path or road cutting the settlement down the middle, with scattered houses along it. It shows three cultivated areas used for agricultural production on the right side of the road with a forest located on the left. A large clearing observable at the lower end is the site of prayer, where some of the natives are performing a ritual. In the middle of the path, a wide mat is placed on the ground, replete with plates and bowls full of food: this is the spot for village meals. Some people are seen there, either bringing food or eating, while others further down the road are engaged in other activities, such as setting off for the hunt armed with bows.

If we compare this image with Bry's illustration, which was based on this painting and published five years later, we can spot a series of modifications. While the basic structure and outline of the image remains unchanged, Bry shows a village with land that is more prosperous, more regulated, and more in line with the mental image of cultivated, orderly, carefully tended and thriving farmland than with White's. The corn and other products are bigger, healthier and fuller, and he shows a wider range of other plants growing as well. On the other side of the road, the forest is represented as rich in foliage: one can see many more trees and shrubs, of

various kinds, sizes and textures. It is an idealized pastoral scene, with clearly outlined structural units and paths, a number of huts added to the woodland, and more people integrated into the scene.

Another area of difference regards the portrayal of the indigenous people. In White's paintings, Natives appear as people of darker complexion, with brownish skin and straight black hair, often cut short or tied up in a twisted ponytail. Usually White focused on the portrait and thus painted no setting or environment; he focused only on the figures. His manner of representation, argues Sloan (2008), reflected contemporary artistic conventions of staging people being painted. As a result, she concludes, White's paintings, despite their shortcomings and imperfections, provided the "theater of the New World" (2008) for Englishmen in Elizabethan England.

These images, however, were popularized by Bry's copper engravings, which were published in various editions in German and Latin as well, making him one of the most powerful publishers all over Europe. Changes Bry introduced in his reproductions are probably most apparent in his depictions of female figures. White's "Indian woman of Secoton" represents a masculine, dark-skinned woman with her black hair tied up and her face and upper arm adorned with body tattoos. She is wearing a headband, a bead necklace, and an apron in front.

Bry's corrective intervention into White's picture resulted in the Native woman appearing rather in the fashion of the Italian Renaissance: Bry created a double portrait so that she could be seen from the front and the back. She is like a milky white-skinned amazon, with longer, wavy blond hair hanging down at the back, full-figured with curvy bodylines. Her face is Europeanized, although Bry retains the body tattoos as a sign of the exotic. Other images illustrating indigenous women portrayed like Botticelli's Venus include "How they till the soul and plough" and "How they treat their sick".

Another obvious difference in the individual portraits is that while White only focuses on the human body, Bry always places these figures in the local landscape as he imagined it. The Indian woman is painted on the bank of a river, with other figures in the background, fishing and canoeing in the water. He envisioned gently sloping mountains on the other side of the river, covered with thick forests, while a man hunting for deer is seen in the meadow on the other bank. Bry integrated the portrait into a daily scene as if offering an anthropological depiction of the people along with their lifestyle and common daily activities.

These early depictions of the New World can be understood as representations of the land as Paradise within Western epistemological conditions and artistic practices. They served a number of purposes. Tucker finds that these illustrations were significant assets in drumming up “support for a colony among British investors” (2008), something that White himself also became engaged in as he served as the second governor of Roanoke Island. Tucker regards White’s images “as a kind of pictorial menu” to lure settlers to a land of abundance. In this sense, these images may be considered as part of a greater propaganda (Zogry 2011, 12), a literature aimed at advertising the colonies among both potential settlers and investors. Sloan considers these “highly ramified visual images” that lent the project of colonization and settlement a particular national flavor (2008; cf. Zogry 2011, 12). Mignily finds that visual depictions of Native scenes and peoples introduced the “imperial gaze and rules” (2011, 176) to the European mindset in relation to the New World, contributing to the “colonial matrix of power, a complex structure of control and management, that emerged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century” (2011, 176). Indeed, Bry’s illustrations were also framed by contemporary artistic conventions and personal aesthetic as well as his desire for commercial success (Mignily 2011, 176).

These depictions that promoted the myth of America as Paradise during the first century following its discovery were thus produced to target a European audience. It was therefore constructed in accordance with the imagination of the age, defined by the consciousness of resemblance and determined by the ideological underpinning of religious beliefs and associated political ideologies and national drives with undercurrents of imperialistic desires for colonization.

Virágos argues that the American myth of Paradise functioned in defining America in terms of “patterns of dichotomization” (2011) between the Old World of Europe and the New World, America. In the early period of explorations, however, this dichotomy was not rooted in understanding differences in terms of oppositions. The depictions explored in this paper imply that these differences were presented with regard to similarities. This manner of consciousness and resultant forms of representation, then, capture the ways in which the new land can be regarded as a unique extension of the European countries involved in the explorations. This mode of representation, therefore, also naturalized a particular power’s claim to the land they were discovering and provided a concealed ideological underpinning and context for their colonization.

Practices and narratives about “civilizing” Natives and “cultivating” the land as of the early colonial period may be interpreted as a natural continuation of this understanding of the new land, as these in fact represented efforts to remake the colonized lands and people not only in the likeness of the colonizing country, but also into something that would be to the colonizer’s liking, two sides of an overall project of appropriation and colonization.

Emphasizing similarity in difference was also an essential strategy in enhancing the process of colonization. A degree of likeness in the newly discovered land was necessary to lure possible settlers to the New World and to convince investors to support the expansionist undertaking. At the same time, the myth of paradise was meaningless for the Native population on the American land. It was imported there later, transplanted gradually through various waves of European colonizers, such as the Plymouth Puritans.

In the course of this process, the meaning and use value of the myth had been transformed, emerging to mark a unique, specifically American condition and identity, constituting America as different from the mother country and continent. This took a firm ground in the mainstream American consciousness during the late 18th and first half of the 19th centuries, as part of the invention and constitution of a distinct nation and culture that marked the newly created political entity: the United States. For the Europeans of the late 15th and 16th centuries, however, the myth of America as Paradise was presented “as recorded memory” (Virágos 2011) of past travels that “concealed future-oriented political ideology” (Virágos 2011) that aided in initiating and justifying upcoming colonizing efforts.

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## **Antipodean Encounters: Socratic Conversation and Ironic Redescription as Complementary Rhetorical Strategies in Richard Rorty's Metaphilosophy**

Péter Csató

“Conversation” and “irony” are central notions of Richard Rorty’s philosophy. Through the metaphors of “conversation,” Rorty stresses the desirability of unbounded communication both among academic disciplines and in political practice. Moreover, Rorty conceives of philosophy itself as an ongoing conversation, in which the philosopher’s role is that of a “Socratic intermediary” (*Mirror* 317), a public intellectual conversant with several kinds of language games, practicing a kind of interdisciplinary cultural criticism. Thus, the conversational model comes to serve as the paradigm of antifoundationalist discourse, as conversations proceed without theoretical grounding or the control of a formalized discipline, while they require that ideas and arguments be formulated in terms intelligible to all participating interlocutors.

“Irony,” on the other hand, argues for the value of idiosyncratic redescription, relating to such key conceptions of Rorty’s philosophy as “abnormal discourse” or “strong poetry,” which function both as vehicles of cultural progress and as quasi-poetic means of private self-fashioning. Irony—in its specifically Rortyan sense—requires a capacity to invent novel metaphors, formulate hitherto unimaginable patterns of thought, reveal or establish unforeseen relations. These “idiosyncrasies” can either be enlisted for the purpose of the social, cultural, political or scientific advancement of a community, or be so thoroughly “privatized” that they remain valueless or unintelligible to anyone but their inventor. In short, while conversation calls for the ability and willingness to come to an agreement on the rules of the language game being played, redescription in idiosyncratic terms aims to be incommensurate with all extant language games.

What my argument below aims to demonstrate is that “conversation” and “irony” are by no means mutually exclusive terms in Rorty’s metaphilosophical discourse. Indeed, they can be looked upon as complementary notions in the service of a radically antiessentialist agenda, whereby they denote rhetorical strategies, rather than individual tropes, deployed for the purpose of maintaining the discursive authority of Rorty’s neopragmatist idiom.

### **The Antipodeans: conversation and redescription**

In his seminal *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Rorty devises a short science fiction tale to illustrate his argument against dualism in the philosophy of mind.<sup>1</sup> The Antipodeans, Rorty tells us, are “beings, much like ourselves—featherless bipeds, who built houses and bombs, and wrote poems and computer programs” (*Mirror* 70). They have a definite notion of what it means to be a person, as opposed to a robot or a pet, but they do not “explain the difference between persons and non-persons by such notions as ‘mind,’ ‘consciousness,’ or anything of the sort” (70). They also believe in immortality which, however, does not “involve the notion of a ‘soul’ which separated from the body,” but is, rather, a “straightforward matter of bodily resurrection” (70). Underlying these seemingly minor differences between their culture and ours is the fact that for the Antipodeans neurology and biochemistry were the “first disciplines in which technological breakthroughs had been achieved,” and so “a large part of the conversation of these people concerned the state of their nerves” (71).

In other words, it does not take any professional expertise for the Antipodeans to be able to express their sensations, perceptions, or any experience in the language of neurology, for “their knowledge of physiology was such that each well-formed sentence in the language which anybody bothered to form could easily be correlated with a readily identifiable neural state” (71). Thus, the Antipodeans can describe pain on account of burning by reporting that their C-fibers are being stimulated,

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<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that I use the Antipodean-tale as a cogent demonstration of the specific problems I focus on below, without assessing the first-order philosophical issues it raises about the mind. For a detailed discussion of the tale, see Kenneth T. Gallagher’s “Rorty’s Antipodeans: An Impossible Illustration,” in which he discusses the self-referential tensions of Rorty’s example.



the perception of an aesthetically pleasing red rectangle by saying that it “makes neuron bundle G-14 quiver,” or feeling thirsty by claiming to be “in state S-296” (71). They cannot, however, make sense of the notion that the various neural states signify “peculiar and distinct sort[s]” of “*mental* states” (70). Apparently, these imaginary extraterrestrials are perfectly capable of functioning without positing an extra faculty (mind, “the mental,” etc.) beyond the boundaries of material explicability. They seem to have no need for any distinct conception (philosophical or otherwise) of what we, Earthlings, call “mind” to account for any nonmaterial aspect of their experience.

A dramatic turn of events sets in with a team of various experts from Earth landing on the Antipodeans’ planet sometime in the twenty-first century. The team comprises philosophers of both Continental and analytic persuasion, who give very different interpretations of the Antipodean predicament. The former sort holds the quasi-Heideggerian view that “there was no real problem about whether the Antipodeans had minds [...], for what was important in understanding other beings was a grasp of their mode of being-in-the-world” (73). Philosophers of the latter sort are designated by Rorty as “tough-minded,” who found “much more straightforward and clean-cut question[s] to discuss” (73). While the neurologists and biochemists from Earth are elated to find the extraterrestrials amazingly knowledgeable in their fields, the *analytic* philosophers on the expedition are all the more baffled by the apparent absence of the conception of mind from the Antipodeans’ philosophical vocabulary. “Though-minded” as they are, however, these philosophers “did not care what the Antipodeans thought about themselves, but rather focused on the question: Do they in fact have minds?” (73–74). Nevertheless, the questions by means of which they could determine whether the Antipodeans *really* have minds can only be formulated in the vocabulary of analytic philosophy, which cannot be separated from the assumptions that incite them to pose those questions in the first place. The Antipodeans, however, are unable to make sense of such individual vocabulary items as “raw feel,” cannot conceive of pain as different from stimulated C-fibers, nor can they tell the difference between “conceptual truth” and “empirical generalization” when reporting a sensation. Not sharing the terms and concepts whose mastery would be essential in order for the interlocutors to come to an even temporary agreement on what they are supposed to be conferring about, the attempt to answer the “straightforward question” of whether or not the outer space creatures

have minds inevitably results in a communicational impasse and the utter frustration of the analytic philosophers.

Although Rorty's primary purpose with this tale is to question some basic assumptions in analytic philosophy, it can also be read as thematizing three interrelated insights, which determine Rorty's metaphilosophical position throughout his oeuvre: (1) philosophical problems and vocabularies are linguistic constructions, shaped by contingent historical, cultural, socio-political, and institutional factors, so it is misleading to believe that these problems are perennial "topics of concern to any reflective mind at any era and in any society" (Rorty, "Analytic" 125); (2) philosophical problems are not "natural explananda" which "arise as soon as one reflects" (Rorty, *Mirror* 3), but, rather, optional ways of interrogating issues which fall outside the realm of "expert cultures" (such as the natural sciences or specialized politics); (3) it is always possible to break free from a certain philosophical vocabulary and create a new one through the dialectical practice of offering alternative descriptions of the problems at hand so that they cease to seem relevant or problematic.

In Rorty's tale, it is not a disagreement between the two parties involved that leads to their failure to engage one another in meaningful communication. Instead, they come to a standstill because neither can have recourse to apodictic means of demonstration whereby to provide unfailing proof of the validity of their position. One can conceive of no demonstration or rational argument that could ultimately convince the Antipodeans that they *have* minds, or the analytic philosophers that they have encountered humanoids living *without* minds.

In one of his recent writings, Rorty envisions an analogous problematic,<sup>2</sup> relying on Wittgenstein's "beetle in a box"<sup>3</sup> for demonstration, and infers that "a descriptive term [cannot] have a sense if its application is regulated by no public criteria" ("Cultural" 11). Drawing on

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<sup>2</sup> This time, Rorty's example involves human beings with "consciousness" and "zombies" who "behave just like normal people, but have no inner life" ("Cultural" 11).

<sup>3</sup> "Suppose everyone had a box with a beetle in it: we call it 'beetle.' No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. – Here it would be possible for everyone to have something different in his box. [...] But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language? – If so, it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as *something*: for the box might even be empty" (*Investigations* I.273).

the analogy, we can explain the communicational impasse in which Antipodeans and Earthlings find themselves by saying that they see different beetles (mind and neurons) in the same box (the human[oid] body). Nevertheless, this is not how the two interlocutors are likely to describe each other: from the vantage point of the extraterrestrials, the box seems to have no beetle in it, while the Earthlings blame it on the philosophical myopia of the Antipodeans that they cannot see even their own beetle.

The tale itself is a metareflection, demonstrating that no vocabulary is ever safe from being displaced by another, no description can ever be the right and only description. This is why the vocabularies of neurology and biochemistry are capable of being substituted for that of the philosophy of mind, inasmuch as they provide more feasible descriptions of human experience without positing an invidious mind/body dichotomy. Nonetheless, abandoning a certain philosophical vocabulary or shifting from one description to another is not as innocent and unproblematic a process as Rorty appears to suggest. What he does not seem to take into consideration is that by giving up the intuition that the Antipodeans possess minds and have mental states, the analytic philosophers would eliminate a distinctive and constitutive element of their own philosophical vocabulary, thus jeopardizing the validity of *any* philosophical claim they might make both prospectively and retrospectively. For the same reason, the philosophers cannot afford to declare the operative terms of their vocabulary mere rhetorical configurations, without running the risk of putting in question the theoretical foundations of their philosophy, thus undermining its disciplinary status. Rorty champions conversational philosophy on account of his conviction that such cases of first-order stalemating can be resolved through moving the problems one level up, as it were, to a meta-level, at which one compares whole vocabularies rather than individual claims and arguments formulated in vocabulary-specific ways. This is precisely the kind of move that appears to clash most forcefully with his endorsement of the idiosyncratic discourses of the ironist. Nevertheless, as I will argue below, irony can be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy essential for the mode of operation of metadiscourses.

### The (Socratic) ironist as “meta-metaphilosopher”

The ironist, as Rorty tells us in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, is a staunch antimetaphysician, who thinks “nothing has an intrinsic nature, a real essence,” and defies the metaphysician’s assumption that “the presence of a term in his [the metaphysician’s] own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which *has* a real essence” (74). The ironist “has radical doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses,” and “she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than any others” (73). Furthermore, ironists are “nominalist and historicist” by conviction, so they “see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary, nor by an attempt to fight their way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old” (73–74). Ironists also realize that “anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed” (73). They come to occupy a “metastable” position (Sartre’s term)<sup>4</sup>, in that they are “never quite able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves” (73–74).

The ironist’s predicament is described in mostly negative terms as characterized by self-doubt and the inability to take herself or any vocabulary seriously. The ironist, however, does not seem to differ much from the Socratic intermediary, who is capable of mediating between various discourses and language games because s/he does not belong to any of them. To this extent, we may talk about a “Socratic ironist,” who might just be pretending to entertain self-doubt and a sense of rootlessness. In fact, just as Plato’s Socrates, s/he might engage in conversations, where s/he phrases his/her questions in such a way that each corresponding answer should strengthen his/her position, leaving him/her, at the end of the dialogue, in full possession of his/her discursive powers. One of the ways in which this feat can be accomplished is for the ironist to turn him/herself into a metaphilosopher, much like Rorty has.

Nevertheless, self-evident as it may seem to view Rorty as an ironist, it seems all the more problematic to regard him as a meta-

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<sup>4</sup> Sartre defines “metastable” as pertaining to a “hybrid state”: it is “unstable and transitory [...] neither entirely perceptive nor entirely imaginative, that would be worth describing for its own sake” (qtd. in Cumming 214).

philosopher. The slight transcendentalist tinge of “meta” arguably conjures up the image of the Platonic “philosopher king,” contemplating his domain from a regal distance. Habermas duly reads Rorty’s “Metaphilosophical Difficulties” (his famous introduction to the *Linguistic Turn* [1968]) as marking a “break in the history of analytic thought” (“Rorty’s Pragmatic Turn” 32), and sees Rorty’s metaphilosophical proclivity as part and parcel of his historicist outlook: “the metaphilosophical distance from which the editor [Rorty] comments on the texts [collected in the volume],” Habermas goes on to contend, “betrays the Hegelian message that every manifestation of Spirit that achieves maturity is condemned to decline” (“Pragmatic Turn” 32). Indeed, the ironist’s distance manifests itself not only in Rorty’s apparent unwillingness ever to adopt the rules of a language game other than his own, but also in his reluctance to take an atomistic view of the object of his analysis. In most of his work, he prefers to talk of historical epochs, rather than specific historical events, communities, rather than subjects, and vocabularies, rather than individual sentences (Contingency 5). This may contribute to the appearance that he acts as the philosopher king, whose reign he seeks to overthrow.

His apologia rests on a pragmatic basis: “[w]hen we turn from individual sentences to vocabularies and theories,” he contends, “[the] critical terminology [we deploy] naturally shifts from metaphors of isomorphism, symbolism, and mapping to talk of utility, convenience, and likelihood of getting what we want” (“Pragmatism, Relativism” 163). This, however, does not exempt him from the semblance that he is reclaiming the authority he urges philosophers to relinquish. He may talk about “utility” instead of “accurate representation,” “hermeneutics” instead of “epistemology,” but he still seems to assume the role of the *theorist* who oversees philosophical culture from far enough to be able to judge which vocabulary promises to be of more utility than others.

Even sympathetic commentators seem to be well aware of this tension, which they try to alleviate by palliating Rorty’s role as a *metaphilosopher*. Alan Malachowski suggests discarding the term “metaphilosophy” altogether in reference to Rorty’s work, contending that he does not “mak[e] claims *about* philosophical claims,” but rather, “*at them*” (Rorty 19). The “meta-philosophical level,” Malachowski adds, “is not an incommensurable platform,” which means that claims “made there can still be engaged by moves that belong within traditional [philosophical] debates” (Rorty 19). As opposed to this, the level at which Rorty’s discourse works, Malachowski concludes, “is a sort of *extra-*

*philosophical, performative* level, a place outside philosophy from which words are issued to change what is going on there” (19–20).

János Boros also cautions against the use of “metaphilosophy”: he points out that precisely because Rorty claims that criteria of vocabulary-choice cannot be formulated by reference to a neutral and universal metavocabulary, viewing him as practicing metaphilosophy might create the misleading semblance that he is tacitly engaged in the kind of transcendentalist project he explicitly denounces (Boros 144). Since there is no conceivable place *beyond* or *outside* vocabularies (philosophical or otherwise), Boros contends, it would be less misleading to use “intervocularity” in place of “metaphilosophy,” which argues for the ability to switch from one vocabulary to the other (144). This ability presupposes willingness to pick up the interlocutor’s vocabulary, rather than translating it into one’s own terms,<sup>5</sup> or into those of a putative metavocabulary in the name of a universal understanding (Boros 144).

Rorty himself, however, seems to be quite content to be called a metaphilosopher, or more precisely, a “meta-metaphilosopher.” Very early in his career, in 1961, he published an essay, which is lesser-known today, bearing the laconic title “Recent Metaphilosophy.” Although still in his “analytic phase,” Rorty clearly prefigures his subsequent pragmatist turn. It is in this early essay that Rorty most explicitly argues for the inseparability of interdiscursive communication (conversation) and metaphilosophy. Moreover, he identifies pragmatist metaphilosophers (which he was shortly to turn into) as “meta-metaphilosophers,” and contends in the tone of *Mirror* and his subsequent work: “[m]eta-metaphilosophy makes possible communication among metaphilosophers,” adding that “since communication is the goal, rather than truth (or even agreement), the prospective infinite series is a progress rather than a regress: it becomes a moral duty to keep the series going, lest communication cease” (301–2).

It is notable that even though Rorty’s philosophical outlook may have undergone a number of Gestalt-switches, much of his later work might be interpreted as so many ways of shoring up this early thesis. This assumption seems to be corroborated by the fact that even in one of his last essays, he echoes his younger self claiming that first-order argumentation

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<sup>5</sup> See also *Mirror* (318), where Rorty defines the hermeneutics of conversation in these exact terms.

and second-order metareflection are indissoluble constituents of philosophical discourses:

The question of whether philosophy should think of itself as a science, like that of whether it can be assimilated to intellectual history, might seem discussable without reference to substantive philosophical doctrines. But in fact metaphilosophical issues—issues about what, if anything philosophy is good for and about how it is best pursued—are inseparable from [first-order] issues about the nature of knowledge, truth, and meaning. (“Analytic” 122)

It seems that insofar as he wishes to maintain the consistency of his philosophical antiessentialism, metaphilosophy becomes the most adaptable mode of discursive operation for him.

Nonetheless, the double “meta”-prefix certainly cannot be overlooked. What it suggests is that Rorty sees the pragmatist philosopher’s task as consisting in the formulation of not even second-, but *third*-order reflections, as it were, adjudicating the extant metaphilosophical vocabularies. Rorty does not elaborate on what enables the *pragmatist* metaphilosopher to occupy this position and where s/he is located in relation to second-order metaphilosophy. It seems, however, that the further the given discourse gets in terms of metalevels, the less appropriate it may be to call it “philosophy.” It is unlikely that Rorty, even as early as 1961, could have posited a sovereign discursive level three removes from actual first-order philosophical practice. Since he associates meta-metaphilosophy with communication, however, there is good reason to believe that the designation prefigures what he was later to call conversational philosophy, and the pragmatist meta-metaphilosopher anticipates the Socratic intermediary.

Furthermore, the urge to occupy a meta-metaposition may seem like an attempt to escape the confines of first-order debates, and in this sense it can also be looked upon as a rhetorical defense mechanism, since it enables one to opt out of a given discursive predicament by appealing to second- or third-order considerations. Rorty might have developed this defense strategy in response to the immense amount of criticism he has received during his long and prolific writing career. Indeed, most of his commentators focus on Rorty’s *philosophical* output, apparently operating under the assumption that professional philosophy is the most appropriate interpretive framework for his arguments to be explicated. Many of the philosophical analyses of his work are formulated as first-order arguments, oftentimes aiming to criticize his pragmatic stance in

relation to a host of philosophical problems (such as truth, meaning, reference, representation, epistemic justification, etc.) claiming that his understanding of these problems is partly or totally flawed.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the time, Rorty fails to meet his critics on their own ground, and defends himself by arguing that the assumptions on which the diatribes are predicated lose their relevance when viewed from a pragmatist perspective. In other words, he resorts to his ironist strategies and opts out of the conversation. There is, however, another strategy, which is closer to the Socratic method. It consists in bringing round the interlocutor to his own position in a *performative* fashion, so that s/he cannot help but reaffirm *his* position. In what follows, I will focus on two such communicative situations.

### **Socratic conversations: Rorty vs. Hilary Putnam and Barry Allen**

The debates between Rorty and his fellow-philosophers constitute a testing ground for his conversational philosophy. Refusing to abandon the philosophical/theoretical premises constitutive of their discourse, Rorty's critics often point out either that, despite his endeavor to the contrary, he still operates under epistemological assumptions, or that the notion of conversation is too vague to have any explicative value in accounting for human knowledge. Malachowski delineates these two types of criticism by saying that there are detractors who interpret Rorty's work as just another version of "*arguing a case* against philosophy-as-epistemology" (much like analytic philosophers do), and those who assume "that Rorty is not even trying to 'make a case' of *any* kind, that he has completely forsaken philosophy's 'normal discourse' of 'rational argumentation' and is merely indulging in 'rhetoric.' Their verdict is usually equally complacent: Rorty's rhetoric can be ignored—so it is carry on as usual as far as philosophy-as-epistemology is concerned" (*Rorty* 64).

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<sup>6</sup> The examples are all too numerous to be itemized here, but the tendency is clearly observable in several critical essays collected in various volumes, where the predominance of philosophical subjects delimits the critics' understanding of Rorty (see Malachowski ed. *Reading Rorty*; Herman J. Saatkamp ed. *Rorty and Pragmatism*; Robert Brandom ed. *Rorty and His Critics*; Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley ed. *Richard Rorty*). Hilary Putnam (especially in *Realism with a Human Face*) and Roy Bhaskar (esp. in *Philosophy and the Idea of Freedom*) figure prominently among the philosophers who criticize Rorty, in the name of philosophical realism, for his "frivolous" attitude towards epistemic justification, and his nominalist understanding of truth.



The critical reflections on Rorty's work by two of his fellow philosophers, Hilary Putnam and Barry Allen, are cases in point. Rorty's conversational philosophy proves successful in that it does indeed—as befits a Socratic intermediary—"lure" these philosophers out of their "self-enclosed" discursive practices. The desired conversation, however, cannot come to full fruition in accordance with the democratizing principles he valorizes. The reason for this is that Rorty's critics, by (temporarily) forsaking their own discursive practices—performatively and not at the level of argumentation—do not find themselves in a neutral interdiscursive space, but in a metadiscursive one, where Rorty's "meta-metarules" prevail. Putnam and Allen cannot help but play along.

Putnam, in his critique of Rorty, points out a classical self-referential paradox to the effect that despite his pronounced antiepistemological endeavor, Rorty still persists in operating under epistemological assumptions.<sup>7</sup> He contends:

But notice that the very person who strongly denies that there is any such property as truth, and who waves his picture at us to call our attention to its various attractions, as, for instance, Richard Rorty does in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*—notice that this very philosopher does not recognize that his picture is only a picture, but believes that in some deep pretheoretic sense his picture is the way the world is. (*Realism* 32)

Addressing the problem of self-referentiality in a more substantive manner, he observes: "It seems [...] likely to me that [...] Rorty really thinks that metaphysical realism [inclusive of the representational view of knowledge] is *wrong*. [...] [B]ut this, of course, is something he cannot admit he really thinks. I think, in short, that the attempt to say that *from a God's-Eye View there is no God's-Eye View* is still there, under all that wrapping" (*Realism* 25).

According to Putnam, Rorty errs twice: once by rejecting the contemplative moment of theoretical reflection, thus renouncing the privileged insight reserved for philosophers, and, second time, by being blind to his own tacit theoretical assumptions. Rorty, in Putnam's

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<sup>7</sup> See also Charles Taylor's criticism of Rorty along similar lines. Taylor, while agreeing with Rorty's critique of foundationalist epistemology, criticizes him in the name of an "uncompromising realism" which, he thinks, would lend substance to his antiepistemological arguments. Taylor holds that Rorty's "non-realism is itself one of the recurrently generated *aporiae* of the [epistemological] tradition," and sees him "as still very much a prisoner of the epistemological world-view" ("Epistemological Tradition" 258).

interpretation, cannot admit he thinks *any* view to be wrong, otherwise he would betray his own conception of rightness and wrongness as functions of social practices. This assumption sits well with Putnam's criticism of Rorty for what he takes to be his "cultural relativist" outlook (*Realism* 18-26, 125).

The real burden of Putnam's criticism, however, is the claim that Rorty's denouncement of metaphysical realism can only issue from a "God's-Eye View," which, in turn, is identified as the *essence* of Rortyan thought concealed, as it were, "under all that [pragmatist/anti-foundationalist] wrapping." Thus, according to Putnam, he remains captive of the philosophical preconceptions<sup>8</sup> he seeks to swing free from, thus being incapable of a plausible defense of his "antiphilosophical" claims without running the risk of self-contradiction. Putnam's argument thus precludes the possibility of an open conversation between philosophical and nonphilosophical discourses by implicitly pronouncing professional philosophy a sealed vocabulary, incarcerating those who once get involved in any kind of philosophical discussion, and Rorty is no exemption.

The case being made by Putnam is comparable to what Alexander Nehamas calls the "Protreptic Dilemma" (396), by which he refers to the fragment from Aristotle's exhortation to "the love of philosophy," which features a rather playful defense of the need to philosophize. On Aristotle's account, philosophy is inescapable even if one self-consciously chooses *not* to philosophize, for in that case "we are obliged to inquire how it is possible for there to be no Philosophy; and in inquiring, we philosophize, for inquiry is the cause of Philosophy" (qtd. in Nehamas 396).<sup>9</sup> As

<sup>8</sup> As a specific example, Putnam mentions that Rorty's "analytic past shows up" in his rejection of philosophical controversies which he thinks revolve around "pseudo-problems," such as those between realism and antirealism or emotive and cognitive content. According to Putnam, Rorty "*scorns* controversy" in a "Carnapian tone of voice" (*Realism* 20). In his response to Putnam, Rorty admits to the "tone of Carnapian scorn" in *Mirror*, saying, "I should not speak, as sometimes I have of 'pseudo-problems,' but rather of problematics and vocabularies which might have proven to be of value but in fact did not" ("Relativist Menace" 45). This rhetorical ruse is typical of Rorty's discursive strategies: he concedes the validity of the case his interlocutor makes against him, but rephrases his earlier statement in such a way that it should only minimally modify the position for which he is brought to task.

<sup>9</sup> The fragment, as quoted by Nehamas, reads in full: "If one must philosophize, then one must philosophize; and if one must not philosophize, then one must philosophize; in any case, therefore, one must philosophize. For if one must, then, given that Philosoph

Nehamas comments, the “argument depends on taking philosophy to be flexible enough to include as its own proper parts even attempts to show that it is an impossible or worthless endeavor” (396).

From a Rortyan vantage point, the Protreptic Dilemma can be read in one of two ways. It can be interpreted as celebrating the discursive power of philosophy, in that the kind of “flexibility” the fragment argues for is, in fact, a way of empowering a discourse—indeed, an academic faculty—by proclaiming its quasi-oppressive ubiquity. In this sense, the Protreptic Dilemma reaffirms the very notion against which Rorty defines his antifoundationalism: that philosophical reflection (at least for someone even loosely affiliated with the discipline) is an inevitable exigency, being enforced by the nature of the “explananda” that arise.

It can also be read, however, as advancing the notion that once we have appropriated the insight that philosophy is an *optional* social/discursive practice (which entails that we *can* stop playing the philosophical language game if we choose to), we must assess both the defense and the criticism of philosophy as emerging *from within* the practice,<sup>10</sup> rather than emanating from a transcendental source beyond discourse. The defense of philosophy is no less in need of second-order deliberations than its critique, for specialized, first-order philosophical reasoning can neither plausibly defend nor voluntarily criticize the very discourse from which it derives its legitimacy. Thus, while the Protreptic Dilemma conceives of philosophy as an ever-extendible interior space, which cannot transcend itself even by self-reflectively accounting for its own practices, it makes a philosophically ingrained statement *about* philosophy, whereby, performatively, it turns itself into a meta-philosophical reflection. It is certainly not a metareflection in the sense that it goes *beyond* its own discursive limits to occupy a transcendental standpoint from which philosophy can be evaluated in critical or eulogistic terms. Rather, the reflection is more akin to the rhetorical gambit Douglas Hofstadter dubs “going meta,” which is a self-reflective move whereby discussion is taken to a different (“higher”) level (22). In

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hy exists, we are in every way obliged to philosophize. And if one must not, in this case too we are obliged to inquire how it is possible for there to be no Philosophy; and in inquiring we philosophize, for inquiry is the cause of Philosophy” (395-96).

<sup>10</sup> Richard J. Bernstein convincingly advances this notion when he asserts that we must shun the danger of “reifying the very idea of social practice and failing to appreciate that our very criticisms and arguments [formulated within the vocabulary of a discourse] [...] are constitutive of traditions and social practices” (“Philosophy” 773).

the case of the Aristotle-fragment, however, it is not so much an intended gambit as a performative corollary of the self-reference.

This kind of metareflection is observable in Putnam's argument as well, insofar as he seems to be provoked by Rorty's "deprofessionalized" rhetoric to enter the metaphilosophical arena in defense of philosophy. Some of the statements Putnam makes are metaphilosophical in the Rortyan sense of the word, in that they are potential answers to the question of "what, if anything philosophy is good for and about how it is best pursued" (Rorty, "Analytic" 122). In keeping with Rorty's view about metaphilosophical reflection being inseparable from first-order philosophical issues ("Analytic" 122), Putnam prefaces his more substantive claims about realism, relativism, "warrant," communal agreement, and social justification (*Realism* 18-29) by reflections on the nature and tasks of philosophy: "there is a sense," he contends, "in which the task of philosophy is to overcome metaphysics and a sense in which its task is to continue metaphysical discussion" (19). At another point, he reflects: "I hope philosophical reflection may be of some real cultural value; but I do not think it has been the pedestal on which the culture rested, and I do not think our reaction to the failure of a philosophical project [...] should be to abandon ways of talking and thinking which have practical and spiritual weight" (20). Moreover, he makes it explicit that his reflections have been inspired by "a very fruitful ongoing exchange with Richard Rorty" (19). Rorty, thus, "charms" a "hermetic thinker" out of his "self-enclosed practices" by setting what Janet Horne calls a "baited rhetorical hook" (255). Rorty does not simply provoke conversation, but generates a discursive predicament in which his interlocutor is compelled to retort in accordance with *his* (Rorty's) conversational strategies, that is, leaving first-order philosophical considerations behind and take the discussion to a metalevel.

Barry Allen's attack on Rorty's discursive view of knowledge illustrates the second type of criticism Malachowski adduces (one which accuses Rorty of being "merely" rhetorical rather than substantively philosophical). Allen impugns the conversational model of knowledge for its failure to answer the Socratic-Platonic question (familiar from Plato's *Theaetetus*) of why knowledge is preferable to mere belief or opinion (230). Allen agrees with Rorty that representationalist accounts of knowledge are to be abandoned, but disputes that devising such accounts is the only alternative to Rorty's suggestion of giving up altogether on epistemology:

But isn't that the real question—whether ruling out the epistemology of mirrors as good as proves the pragmatism of conversation? Have we an exclusive choice to make between metaphysics and sociology, mimesis and conversation, Platonism and Pragmatism? [...] The oppositions Rorty presents are not logically exclusive, so no objection against one side favors the other, and *no* argument can prove the negative proposition that there is no understanding of knowledge apart from the antithetical ones Rorty considers. [...] The question is not “how else?” [i.e., how else understanding knowledge is possible other than on a conversational basis]. It is why saying *no* to the epistemology of privileged representations is supposed to be as good as saying *yes* to Rorty's pragmatism? (225)

Allen suggests an alternative epistemology, one that is built around “artifacts [objects produced by our technological civilization], whose use is as social as conversation though there need be nothing linguistic or conversational about it” (226). His proposal that our adjudication of knowledge claims should be based on something “harder” than “mere” linguistic configurations is reminiscent of the Parmenidian skepticism about language and the Platonic contempt for rhetoric: Allen warns that knowledge is not to be confused with “prestigious talk,” that is, with the “communicative skills by which someone makes a case and persuades others” (228–29). The consequence of Rorty's championing language over artifacts is that he “banalizes technical or artifactual practice by redescribing it in his relentlessly linguistifying terms,” so the “superiority” of one knowledge claim over another “becomes essentially rhetorical,” whereas “the knowledge mostly responsible for present-day technological civilization does not have this rhetorical, linguistic character” (231). Allen seems intent on avoiding idealist fallacies, so he insists that it is artifacts, the world of objects, that generates language, and not vice versa: “[w]e learned a new way of talking as a result of living with Maillart's concrete bridges, but to confuse a new language-game with the artifactual innovation that gives it a point and material reference is to confuse a parasite with its host and make a mystery of both language and technics” (231).

Rorty's response to Allen is typical of his argumentative strategies in the face of criticism. He concedes Allen's antirepresentationalist and nonidealist stance, but reflects that there is no point in making a sharp differentiation between artifacts and language, for “sentences, skills, and disciplines [...] can all be treated as artifacts” (Brandom 238). With this move, he has achieved that the debate goes on to proceed by the rules of *his* language game. He has appropriated Allen's position and, thereby,

defused the critical force of his argument, which was predicated on positing the privileged status of artifacts as opposed to language and discourse. It is also characteristic of Rorty's argumentation that he does not insist on the unconditional primacy of the discursive—as opposed to the “artifactual”—nature of knowledge, thus avoiding the mistake of setting up impermeable positions by positing immovable binaries. Instead, he advances the pragmatic notion that “it is hard to have the leisure for language-building if you lack non-linguistic artifacts with which to defend yourself against the climate and the predators. One can see why the two kinds of artifacts are likely to have been produced around the same time, and to have developed in tandem” (Brandom 239). Evidently, Rorty is ready to pick up his interlocutor's vocabulary and refer to language (and discourse at large) as “artifact” without having to worry about giving up his position, since all this talk about language and artifacts remains implicated in discourse.

Allen thus falls victim to performative self-contradiction when, negating Rorty's claim, he asserts that

[t]he important thing is the quality of the performance that puts knowledge into practice [rather than the conversations in which knowledge is supposed to be discursively formulated]. Such performances are at most occasionally dialogical, and are usually evaluated not by conversational consensus but artifactual reliability—not by anybody's *agreeing* that a work is reliable or well done, but by its *being* so. [...] Conversation [therefore] is not the context in which it is ultimately decided what is knowledge. (232–33)

The contradiction, at the most basic level, stems from the fact that Allen's definitive statements about what knowledge is (and about what it is not) are actually formulated within the discursive confines of a *conversation*. Furthermore, “artifactual reliability” is not a free-floating value: at the very least, its recognition requires a set of in-place cultural practices which enable one to identify specific purposes that an artifact can reliably serve as opposed to other purposes for which it is utterly unsuitable. Allen's distinction between an artifact being *agreed* to be reliable and its *being* reliable would make sense only if there were a transparent relation of correspondence between the purposes to be served and the artifacts available or yet to be made. This would be possible if the purposes were “given” in an essentialistic sense: not only presenting themselves in a self-authenticating fashion, but also marking out the artifacts most suitable to serve them. Nevertheless, there are no

indisputable criteria available in reference to which one could decide whose position contains more “prestigious talk” as opposed to philosophical substance.

Furthermore, Allen’s criticism certainly misses the mark insofar as Rorty does not want to decide *what* knowledge is: “it will work better,” he replies to Allen, “just to drop knowledge as a topic rather than to say that I, and other critics, [...] have gotten knowledge wrong” (Brandom 237). Rorty’s “Socratic ironism” is very much in evidence in this statement: if the desperate attempts to define the notion of knowledge result in more confusion than what they clarify, we are at liberty to eliminate the whole topic, that is, to change the subject when the ideal goal of continuing the conversation is jeopardized.

### **Conversation and discursive authority (in lieu of a conclusion)**

Ironically enough, the Antipodean-tale, by depicting a paradigmatic case of a failed conversation, becomes an illustration of how communicational impasse occurs in an attempted conversation where one interlocutor tries to redescribe the other in the terms of his/her vocabulary, being convinced of its discursive supremacy. Besides being an imaginative jibe at some of the basic tenets of analytic philosophy, this illustration, on a more general reading, also points up questions about the interrelatedness of communication, ethics, and authority. It seems that despite Rorty’s professed anti-authoritarian persuasion and overtly emancipatory endeavors, we can read his texts as *performatively* evincing certain rhetorical strategies which appear to aim at maintaining the discursive authority of his own radically antiessentialist idiom.

In contrast to received critical opinion,<sup>11</sup> we can view these two rhetorical elements as functioning in a complementary fashion in his discourse, constituting a consistent metaphilosophical and political standpoint. According to this logic, Rorty’s concept of irony is an entailment of the latent authoritative purport of his conversational trope,

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<sup>11</sup> Rorty’s critics—for instance, Nancy Fraser, Jo Burrows, Thomas McCarthy, Frank Lehticchia, and Norman Geras—object that the notion of conversation is all too vague to have any substantial consequence to philosophical discourse or political practice, and that his championing of private idiosyncrasy potentially propagates a kind of dissenting irrationality, which not only blots out the ideal of conversation, but is also incompatible with his professed commitment to liberal democratic values.

thus Rortyan “ironism” can be viewed as a rhetorical means of discursive control, which serves to keep the conversational space safe for the normalcy of conversations. There are two senses in which the notion of irony, on Rorty’s hands, can function as a means of control: it can denote (1) his radical nominalism (linguistic antiessentialism), which enables his discursive operation to be kept at a constant metalevel; and (2) an entirely privatized way of self-fashioning, which, by the same token, keeps the “private ironist” barred from entering “public” forums of cultural/political conversation. In the first sense, irony acquires traits reminiscent of the Socratic method. “Private irony,” in its turn, can be interpreted as marking out the limits of public acceptability for a discourse, and as such part and parcel of Rorty’s normalizing intent. In this sense, the operative term is “private,” rather than “irony,” which can be applied to any discourse or utterance that harbors potential dangers to the given conversation.

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# **The Past is Present—Off Canonical Interpretations of History in American Life Narratives<sup>1</sup>**

Mónika Fodor

## **Introduction**

“My father and I would go there, just the two of us on occasion. But it was like a transition to a different time and culture, because in South Bend they [Peter’s paternal relatives] lived at that time in a primarily Hungarian neighborhood ...” (Peter Hevesi<sup>2</sup>). Travelling from Michigan to Indiana for Peter meant being recast in space as well as time, an encounter neither unusual nor imaginary for his ancestors. As a second- or third generation ethnic American, he is only one or two generations away from the relocation experience frequently narrativized while visiting with South Bend relatives. During these trips the past blends with the present and the stories of migration envisage the process of leaving behind a space that is encircled with well-known boundaries in a historical, geographical, linguistic, cultural, psychological, and anthropological sense. These life histories often connect to larger historical trajectories which play an essential role in ethno-cultural identity construction. In this paper I discuss personal narratives elicited in 28 qualitative interviews with ten second- and third-generation Hungarian-Americans<sup>3</sup> regarding the meanings of history in their

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Hevesi is one of the ten second- and third-generation Hungarian Americans I interviewed about their ethno-cultural identity in 2001 and 2005. I talked to him in April, 2001. At the time of the interviews, Peter Hevesi worked at the University of Iowa as head of the human resources department. He did not know whether his father had been born in Hungary or in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> All participants signed a statement of consent to avoid any violation of personal rights and to clarify the overall goals and conditions of the data collection procedures. Nine o

ethnicity. The stories that my conversational partners told about American, Hungarian and in some cases world history illustrate how the historical elements and icons of the individual's culture create a unique ethno-cultural identity and community. Besides personal history most immigrants cherish, tell and attempt to hand down the wider historical circumstances and events that influenced them in their decision to relocate. Narratives shift the focus of history from texts to interpreters and historical culture thus becomes a story created by participants rather than something read or viewed by them. Stories about historical events create and maintain communities as well as ethno-cultural identities in specific ways that allow several interpretations and recontextualizations. Applying methods of narrative and conversational analysis the paper explores the narratives about major historical events and seeks to unfold the double narrative structure that support ethno-cultural identity construction.

### **Assimilation, history and narrative**

In a classic functionalist approach assimilation embraces the expectation that "minority groups would inevitably want to shed their own cultures as if these were old skins no longer possessing any vital force and wrap themselves in the mantle of Anglo-American culture" (Alba and Nee 3). Such approach posits the orthodoxy of ethnicity as static and "fixed by categorical ascriptions based in assumed homogeneous national and cultural experience and membership" (Drzewiecka and Nakayama 21). This overwhelming image assumed an unproblematic division of ethnic groups by national borders which immigration broke and left rupture and disjunction in its wake. Ethnicity within the context of discourse, narrative, and language triggers an understanding of assimilation that "does not require the disappearance of ethnicity; and the individuals undergoing it still bear a number of ethnic markers" (Alba and Nee 11). Accordingly, there is no final stage of the process of incorporation into American society, as the description of ethnic shift resists the single continuum model. Society not only tolerates but also encourages the various ethno-cultural formations that appear; none of which is elevated into normative position (Alba and Nee 11; Barkan 10–11). Individuals do not have to disclaim their cultural values or give up their ancestral ethnic

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f them indicated that they wanted their real names used in any published material based on the interviews. One person who refused consent is referred to by a pseudonym.

identities, thus their ethno-cultural identification becomes bidirectional (Pham and Harris 280).

Multiple discourses on the universality of narrative have become paradigmatic (Abbott; Bruner, *Actual*; Ryan). In Roland Barthes's frequently cited nonetheless still intensely influential words: "It begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. ... Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (251–52). Thus, the genre frame it offers makes narrative an optimal tool to examine the discursive construction of ethno-cultural identity. It encapsulates individual experiences into which the personal and cultural environments are deeply ingrained linguistically, rhetorically and with regard to content. Conversational narratives shift the focus of the story from texts to interpreters, who are the storytellers in this case. Historical culture becomes a story, based on cultural memory, created by participants rather than something read or viewed by them, often with the purpose to bring forth a highly notable point of reference on the cultural landscape. Cultural memory has its sources in traditions, shared stories, and written texts (Assmann 6–8), and goes back to the roots of the group, encodes the most important events into narratives, and preserves them in this form. Traditions, Assmann holds, are a special case of communication in which knowledge is exchanged vertically from one generation to the other rather than reciprocally or horizontally (8). In this process symbol and memory are in continuous interaction, which plays out on every level. Characters of these stories are real-life people who assimilate to the canonical norms and values of a particular ethnic culture through narratives, while narratives themselves make ethno-cultural values normative. Each ethno-culturally distinguishable community has its historically crystallized stories, which the individual may tell and interpret from distinct viewpoints. Individuals may create different stories regarding the same event, yet the common culture hosts potential narrative frames. Narrative is a contextualized way of presenting memory sites, which by means of its specific handling of time, space and authorship also contextualizes the individuals as members of the community. Cultural memory is shaped and personalized in individual stories, and once the group approves these stories, the narratives carry cultural memory. Thus, historical-cultural memory and its narratives help frame ethno-cultural identity of both the individual and the group.

Besides personal history, many immigrants carry, tell and attempt to hand down the wider historical circumstances and events that influenced them in their decision to relocate. Narratives shift the focus of history from texts to interpreters, and historical culture becomes a story created by participants rather than something read or viewed by them. Stories about historical events create and maintain communities and thus ethno-cultural identities (Assmann 1–12; Rosenzweig and Thelen 199). Immigrants decide to leave behind a group of people with a widely acclaimed archive of historico-cultural narratives and create a new community based on selected items from that archive. As the particular incidents are reinterpreted, and recontextualized in narratives the new group will have its own interpretations of the history. For newcomers in a distinct geographical, political, historical and cultural arena, acculturation opens up a new archive of historical-cultural narratives. Thus, the experience of liminality refers to an access to two distinctive archives of narratives, which help construct the changing ethno-cultural identity.

The individual ethnic experiences of liminality connect ethnocultural identity to historical time and emphasize its spatiality. The storied experience of immigrant parents and grandparents about their involvement in major historical events in the ancestral homeland brings about a specific archive of historical narratives, in which characters often also stage archetypal images. Second- and third-generation descendants construct a sense of history by narrating and sometimes investigating those episodes, unpack and pass on the meaning of archetypes. In this context, the ethnically demarcated status of liminality creates and maintains individual interpretations as well as the canonical portrayal of historical events regarding the ancestral homeland. Knowing history provides an understanding of the ancestor group's existence in time and space; it constructs the descendant group in meta-narratives, which unfold from the personal stories. In the interviews, analyzed in this paper, World War II and the 1956 revolution in Hungary recurred most often and helped set the historical story frame for interviewees to explain the concept of liminality in their ethno-cultural identity.

The stories that are analyzed in this part of the paper were collected in 2001–2005 in the USA and Hungary, in personal interviews with second- and third-generation Hungarian-Americans. The interviews are qualitative, without any preset list of questions, mostly focusing on the life story of the conversational partners. To look at narratively constructed meanings of history I considered only the stories that narrative analysis

classifies as Labovian prototypical narratives. A functional prerequisite of narrative in this approach is that it is “one of constructing narrative units which match the temporal sequence of [an] experience” (Labov and Waletzky 3). I looked at how these stories of individual participants connected along themes, linguistic and rhetorical devices to create a wider meta-narrative frame of being American and ethnic. In this paper I argue that the meta-narrative frame of ethno-cultural identity construction operates within the principles of chaos and complexity theory, which not only allows for bidirectional acculturation and makes assimilation nonfinite but also explains how ethnic shift can be a two-way process regardless of the number of generations from the once immigrating ancestors.

Rather than inserting them in artificially established categories, narrative accounts negotiate identities. Their dynamic and context-based nature is best discussed within a chaos/complexity perspective. Complex systems are dynamic and nonlinear, proceeding temporarily and spatially (Larsen-Freeman 33–38; Smith; Waldrop). The chaos and complexity approach interprets the interrelationship of the parts of the system to understand features that would not be revealed by studying the individual parts. For the narrative construction of liminality three key properties of chaos/complexity systems are significant. (1) Constituents interact with one another and function as a self-organizing system; this interrelationship characterizes all levels. Likewise, members of a group are authors and narrators of several stories regarding their liminality; these converge toward, and strengthen, a shared meta-narrative that emerges because of group cohesion. (2) Elements of a chaos/complexity system build networks which offer a framework to interpret membership sustainability in loosely structured ethnic communities. The narrative liminality of participants is a set of dynamic and variable interactions that often lack temporal and spatial linearity. If the quantity of interactions is not optimal, the group cannot be held together. Thus, as the result of collective thinking, well-rounded, refined, and settled stories have a crucial role in regulating interactions on a community level. (3) Taking various narrative forms, complex systems themselves exist in the state of liminality, a key element of ethno-cultural identity among second- and third-generation Hungarian-Americans.

### ***Hungary 101—meanings and uses of history***

In the case of narrating history that immigrating parents or grandparents experienced, a double narrative structure unfolds. The children or grandchildren recount the story of their parents and ancestors and the two narratives are built on one another. Narratives representing life in a culture also describe the particular culture (Bruner, *Life* 694; Hoffman 3). Reciprocity exists between the community creating narratives and the narratives maintaining and recreating the community. Thus, the life-stories of immigrants who participate in major historical events carry archetypal patterns as to the involvement of these people, and become meta-narratives of the particular episodes in history. These meta-narratives provide the structure of the stories that second-generation Hungarian-Americans told in relation to the role of their ancestors in Hungarian and world history. Individual and national histories intertwine in the experiences of second-generation Hungarian-Americans especially in the lives of those who had to leave Hungary due to some political event such as World War II or the abortive revolution of 1956.

Józsi Temesvári told a number of stories about his paternal grandparents, “sovány nagymama” and “sovány nagypapa” and their life during World War II. In the narrative I quote here Józsi tells about the role of his grandfather in World War II, and it becomes to exemplify a larger historical trajectory as well as the family’s involvement in it.

- 1 Grandfather never talked about it. My dad talked about it.  
He’s already seen what
- 2 his father went through. So he would explain things to us  
sometimes. Not all the
- 3 times. My father wouldn’t even talk about it sometimes.  
‘Cause he has seen the
- 4 concentration camps as a young child.[...]
- 5 There was a few here in Hungary, and he’s also seen the  
one in Austria, my
- 6 father. And my grandfather was also one of those  
individuals that tried to, was on
- 7 the plot that was trying to kill Hitler. The Germans were  
getting close to him.
- 8 You know this was all started to come out and the Russians  
were coming from



9 the other direction. So he had a decision to make. My  
grandfather didn't believe  
10 in killing innocent lives. You know Jewish people. He was  
against that from the  
11 first day. He did not understand why they would do that.  
And he himself said  
12 Hitler was Nazi, before he got really deep the way out in  
the left field. The  
13 generals were in that. All the generals Germans and  
Hungarians knew that. It was  
14 just a matter of time. Before the war would end and they  
were on the losing  
15 side. They knew that. They knew it was gonna be a losing  
battle 'cause he was,  
16 Hitler was in charge. It's something you wouldn't imagine  
people could do to  
17 other people. Yeah, even pictures don't tell. But to actually  
experience that, to  
18 live through it. That's something different. (Temesvári)

World War II is one of the biggest thrusts of history in the twentieth century if indeed not the biggest. Józsi's grandfather not only participated in the war, but served as a key military leader (line 13) and he was familiar with what happened at the front as well as outside the combat area (lines 1-2). He was one of the highest-ranking generals and had an important role in ending the war before it was too late. The coup against Hitler is canonical history (lines 6-7), as well as the Russian occupation of Hungary (lines 8-9). Consequently, the grandparents had no other choice but leave their native Hungary and gained the status of displaced persons. In the United States of America the family kept together and they spoke Hungarian amongst themselves, however, could not do much to continue with their former life.

This story tells the strong historical influence on the family, setting a value system that has not ebbed with the loss of immigrant status. The intimate presence of large-scale history makes it very hard for second- or even third-generation members of the family to become only children of their time; they remain actors and observers in canonical history. Lines 1-3 indicate that the experience was too powerful for the grandfather to be able to give firsthand account to his grandchildren, but even for the father

it was too hard to talk about it frequently. The phrase: “not all the times” (lines 2-3) show that family members, especially children would be hungrier for information about the grandfather’s involvement in the war; however, these facts were too heavy to become over-the-table sagas. Deciphering the meaning of the grandparents’ wartime involvement contextualizes family experiences historically and casts them in American society as first-generation Hungarian-Americans. Remembering is a strong aspect of liminal existence and forgetting is a strategy to personalize history to individual needs. Józsi finds this part of his heritage so excitingly enigmatic that he continues to try and find out what actually happened back then, so he does not only remember but aims at creating and reinterpreting by putting together the missing parts of the puzzle. The theme of participating in World War II recurs during the interviews and becomes a cultural icon (Rubin and Rubin 176-77) that evokes attitudes relative to core values and norms. Due to the grandparents’ involvement in World War II immigrant status and ethnicity become a source of pride and uniqueness that cannot be stepped over without an attempt to interpret and personalize. Family members circulate and hand down the stories thus maintaining a liminal position that Józsi identifies with in the narrative.

Taking a closer look at the language of the family experience reported speech seems a very important linguistic device that highlights the narrator’s evaluation of the events. The story opens with the description of the terrors of World War II, which are too much even to recount. Józsi shifts to reported speech as the peak of the story approaches (lines 11–12). Reported speech is a strategy of interpreting the particularities of the story world within the storytelling world since narrators are part of the latter within which they invoke the former (De Fina 95–96). It is also a technique that points to the dichotomy of the implied author v. the narrator (Virágos 107). The short and matter-of-fact report of how Józsi’s grandfather rejected Hitler and his war (lines 9–12) describes him as a strong and powerful person whose decisions are not questioned. The short sentences in which Józsi evokes the views and attitude of his “sovány nagypapa” [thin grandpa] also reflect his determination (Temesvári). The tension of the situation is best rendered through the dynamics of reporting some words of the grandfather (lines 11–12) instead of simply describing his life and choices. The shift from description to reporting fragments of the dialogue is the linguistic expression of the meta-narrative in Józsi’s story. The device allows the

archetypal story frame about World War II come to the surface and brings together the two narrative perspectives.

According to the history of Hungarian immigration in the U.S.A. the 1956 revolution in Hungary and the consequent Soviet military occupation triggered the third wave of migration. Participation in the revolution often brought about the must to leave Hungary to avoid imprisonment or vigilantic death penalty. Endre told the story of how his parents, then newly weds, left Hungary in 1956 as “they found no hope in staying” (Szentkirályi). Thus, he positions himself as part of the community that fifty-sixers or freedom fighters established upon emigration.

- 1 My father’s sister died in the fighting, she was a nurse. My father had spent
- 2 time in prison, thirteen months for organizing a strike in ’54, ’53 thereabouts,
- 3 and they just decided to go and left everything behind. Went across. My father
- 4 had been born in Győr, so he said he was going to visit his mother but, and she
- 5 was in Budapest so that was a lie but that was OK. And they walked across the
- 6 border and then got on a plane. (Szentkirályi)

The narrative appeared at the beginning of our first conversation. The 1956 revolution is the cause for relocation and Endre proves the fact that his parents had no other choice no matter how they felt towards their homeland. The opening lines describe the circumstances in which individual lives are taken without much afterthought. Klára Szentkirályi, Endre’s aunt is killed, and his father served more than a year in jail. Under such circumstances, even telling a lie is forgivable (line 5) as retaliation threatened the immediate life of Endre’s father. The story is told very simply, there are no extensive descriptions just mere facts chosen from a number of episodes, how young Ödön Szentkirályi participated actively (line 2) in the events that led to the revolutionary attempt to overthrow the totalitarian rule of the early 1950s Hungary. Such straightforward presentation of the facts shows that the story is a deeply engrained part of family psyche. It is iconic not only because 1956

is a historical-cultural icon for Hungarians but also because the events described construct individual history.

The opening scene is a matter-of-fact report of the death of the aunt (line 1), which justifies the decision to emigrate and save their lives rather than die or languish in jail. Description of the lie (line 5) is a turning point in the narrative, as telling a lie becomes a way of escaping from a corrupt regime yet its chronicling emphasizes the honesty of the protagonist. To describe this moment Endre switched to using reported speech (line 4–5). The device brings the story world into the storytelling world and Endre's father becomes involved in the narrative. This is the point when his original narrative, with the archetypal patterns of 1956 participation, unfolds. The historical event of the revolution is the event around which participants organize part of their life narrative. Expressions signifying the archetypal refugee, such as the freedom fighter, death in the family due to participation in the fighting, and having to escape the totalitarian regime construct the meta-narrative of 1956 among Hungarian-Americans.

These meta-narratives become a very powerful device of community building as well, which can be modeled with the concepts of nonlinearity and dynamic systems of the chaos and complexity theories. Reporting the words of the father emphasizes the act that he did not tell the truth but the historical circumstances justify him. The narrator has the opportunity to formulate his opinion and deflect responsibility (De Fina 96) based on a narrative experience. A profound understanding of 1956 absolves the lie and the fact of leaving one's homeland and provides an insight into the wider socio-cultural circumstances in which the episode of the narrative takes place.

Narrating parental participation in 1956 not only locates Endre as a Hungarian-American but it also becomes a source of empowerment (McAdams, *Coding Autobiographical* 7). The participation of Endre's father in the 1956 revolution makes him a figure of authority on 1956 and he is able to guide and assist his children in their development of Hungarian ethno-cultural identity. The story breaks the linear sequence of time and develops a specific temporal arrangement to create discourse that can articulate both strings of actions and events and their human contexts and meanings (Bruner, *Life* 691–93; Dauenhauer 10; Ricoeur, *Oneself* 147–48). Nonlinear narrative time starts with the death in 1956 (line 1), continues with the strike and imprisonment in 1953 or 1954 (lines 1–2), and ends with emigration in 1956 (lines 5–6). Death

disintegrates the family and emigration is a consequence because the members are stained as participants in the revolution. In order to avoid more deaths in the family emigration seems a necessary choice. Even though the basic narrative units recapitulate experience in an order slightly different from the original events, it does not disturb the narrative construct, since as a device it has an important meaning. Thus, fading real time into narrative time illustrates and justifies the decision to migrate.

Identity construction in narratives happens through negotiating personal and social roles that actors assume in the stories (De Fina 20). The protagonists are Endre's aunt and father, and Endre's role as a narrator is to remember and be able to report authentically and keep the memories alive and pass them on. In a later conversation, Endre switches back to the previous story and talks about how his background and experience of 1956 makes him more knowledgeable and well-rounded as a teacher thus, gives justification of fulfilling the role of the narrator. The story involves another person, Endre's grandfather who also faced hardships due to the emigration of his two sons.

- 1        Probably I have a better understanding, I don't have
- firsthand but second hand
- 2        understanding of Eastern European communism and
- totalitarianism in terms of I
- 3        can drop a comment you know like: "Yeah, my dad did
- time for organizing a
- 4        one-day strike." Or my grandfather was forced to go out of
- the city on every
- 5        national holiday or he did time because his two kids went
- to America. And his
- 6        daughter was killed in the Revolution. So he did about a
- year as well as time for that. (Szentkirályi)

A sense of history requires proper narration and Endre uses the knowledge of family history (line 3) contextualized into larger historical trajectories. A specific order of events sets a distinctive narrative time in this episode as well. Emigration of the boys, Ödön and András is told first, then the death of the daughter Klári. According to the narrative, Endre's grandfather was harassed more because of the leave of his sons than the death of his daughter. Such stories of his parents' escape provide

a solid background to a second-generation Hungarian-American and serves as a source of empowerment in the émigré community.

Second-hand understanding of totalitarian regimes, (lines 1–2) positions Endre as a survivor in the sense that their generation was born because their parents could escape death. Eszti Pigniczky resumed the feeling and meaning of being the second-generation survivors of 1956.

- 1      És hogy mi tulajdonképpen, ez az '56 égisze alatt nőttünk fel Amerikában.
- 2      Akármennyire hangoztatva volt vagy nem volt hangoztatva ez a téma. Mi annak
- 3      a gyerekei vagyunk, vagy annak a történelmi pillanatnak a gyerekei vagy
- 4      áldozatai. Mi azért születtünk ott, ahol születtünk, mert volt egy ötvenhat. (Pigniczky)

Eszti uses this argumentative narrative to persuade the hearer towards understanding the conclusion that the mere existence of the people born into freedom fighter families maintains a distinctive ethnic community (line 3–4). The prolonged existence of this community depends on ability of the members to narrate and pass on the experience as objectively as possible. Eszti tells her viewpoint in Hungarian to emphasize her belonging to this particular group. Children of 1956 immigrants, Endre, Eszti, as well as other conversational partners in the project, talked about the difficult and often adventurous escape of their parents or grandparents, which they unanimously find important to understand and know about. Eszti even told how she and her sister Réka<sup>4</sup> went out to investigate the paternal accounts of the Royal Szálló csoport in October 1956 to make a documentary film. They had the oral history and no concrete facts to support it. Eszti said, “the nicest part of it is realizing that the stories that he told were all real. [...] And then to find the concrete information about that story that he told was amazing” (Pigniczky). With this claim, Eszti assumes the social role of the investigator and narrator at the same time. Before she is able to tell the proper story, she has to go out and find out about the facts. Historical archives provide objective information, which appropriates her not only

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<sup>4</sup> Pignicky Réka, the director of two autobiographical documentary films, *Hazatérés* [*Homecoming*] and *Incubator*

as a knowledgeable person in the family but also as an authentic source of concrete historical understanding.

However, bringing the topic into public is often a source of misunderstandings.

- 1      És sokszor fáj is ez a téma, mert Magyarországnak
- 2      bizonyos rétege nem szereti a
- 3      külföldi magyarokat. És akkor mi mindig megkapjuk, hogy
- 4      hazajövünk. Akkor ez
- 3      úgy a rokonok között, mint baráti körben néha való, nehéz
- 4      témává válik, hogy na
- 4      ti elmentetek, mi meg itt maradtunk című. Ez a kettőnk
- közötti különbség. (Pigniczky)

The position is disputed and frequently attacked by those who chose and could stay in Hungary (lines 2–4). Even relatives feel that it was easier to leave Hungary than to stay and survive physically and morally (lines 3–4), which makes it harder to hear the true voices. Eszti describes the tension (line 3) that she feels palpable between Hungarians living abroad and in Hungary in the second half of the episode. Her attitude of being well-informed and knowledgeable helps bridge this gap as she talked about her relatives accepting their approach.

## Conclusion

The narratives I quoted give an account of personal involvement in major historical events in the ancestral homeland and the stories identify characters through positioning them relative to these experiences. The direct involvement of parents and grandparents creates a distinctive archive of historical narratives and their second- and third-generation descendants construct a sense of history through assuming the role of the narrator as well as investigator. Thus, the distinctive status of liminality or borderland existence refers to an active participation in creating and maintaining a strong sense of history regarding the ancestral homeland. Knowing history provides an understanding of the group's existence in time and proves the acceptance of existing meta-narratives, which are built into the personal stories. Such individual interpretations may be slightly different from the canonical portrayal of historical events due to

their nature as narratives, yet the primary goal of the narration is to be lifelike (Bruner, *Actual* 13), thus render the real life character of ethnicity.

The abstract perspective of chaos and complexity theory offers a wide interaction-based perspective on the dynamics of the narrative construction of ethno-cultural identity. Individual stories exhibit how immigrant—and descendant—tales connect without the authors necessarily knowing one another. The opinions and views they put forth about Hungarian and world history converge toward a meta-narrative that contains the discursive features of being Hungarian-American. Moving from individual narratives to a system of interactions between episodes and characterizations opens up and builds a broad dialogical framework that constructs and maintains this community. In what can be considered a negotiating process, seemingly random links relate single narratives and construct the meta-narrative. Because of their dynamics narratives always assume a certain audience that is invited to participate in the imaginary dialogue of constructing the nonfinite story of ethnic shifts. Thus, ethno-cultural duality is, according to Eszti Pignicky, “not something questioned, it’s part of your life.”

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# **Ninety Years of United States-Hungarian Relations<sup>1</sup>**

Tibor Glant

## **Introductory remarks**

There is something wrong with American-Hungarian relations today. Few countries in the world are more important for Hungary than the United States of America; and still, most anniversaries of our rich common history continue to pass unnoticed and the language of public diplomacy on both sides leaves a lot to be desired. Symbolic gestures abound from President Bush's visit to Hungary in 2006 to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1956 Revolution to the unveiling of a Reagan statue in Budapest last year. At the same time, Trianon at 90 was commemorated without mention of the United States, and the first ever exchange of ministers between the two countries in 1922 has largely escaped attention so far in 2012. There is no talk of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Civil War or the bicentennial of the War of 1812 in Hungary. In this paper I will explain major trends in 90 years of official United States-Hungarian relations and speculate about the causes of this selective neglect.

## **Prewar diplomatic interludes**

Although diplomatic relations were established between the United States and Hungary only after World War I, various diplomatic interludes had taken place before. The 1848–49 Hungarian revolution and War of

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Independence was the first such occasion. In December 1848 Kossuth approached the American minister to Vienna, William H. Stiles, to mediate between Hungary and Austria, but the initiative was met with all-out Austrian rejection. Kossuth then decided to send an official diplomatic representative to Washington, but Ede Damburghy arrived at his post only after the Hungarians had surrendered and was not allowed to present his credentials. Meanwhile, the State Department sent Dudley A. Mann to Europe on a secret mission to grant diplomatic recognition for independent Hungary if he saw fit. He did not, but after his return his correspondence with the State Department was published officially. The Austrian diplomatic representative in Washington, Johann von Hülseemann, sent an impolite letter to Secretary of State Daniel Webster and explained that if Mann's mission had been discovered, he would have been executed as a traitor. Webster's reply, generally known as the "Hülseemann letter," postulated that Mann's execution would have been treated as open aggression against the United States, and Washington would have retaliated by force.<sup>2</sup> War of words, of course, but it established a key Hungarian myth: the US would stand by Hungarians in times of need. The popular reception granted to Kossuth in the New World (1851–52) and the Smyrna incident involving former Honvéd Army officer Márton Koszta (1853)<sup>3</sup> all seemed to confirm this belief. The Revolution and Kossuth's subsequent visit to the United States, in turn, helped establish a key American stereotype: Hungary being a country of freedom fighters.<sup>4</sup>

Another, less known, but perhaps even more significant, diplomatic interlude took place between Count Albert Apponyi and President Theodore Roosevelt during the Hungarian constitutional crisis in the early

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<sup>2</sup> Jenő Pivány, *Magyar-amerikai történelmi kapcsolatok a Columbus előtti időktől az amerikai polgárháború befejezéséig* (Budapest: Magyar Királyi Egyetemi Nyomda, 1926) and in English: *Hungarian-American Historical Connections from the Pre-Columbian Times to the End of the Civil War* (1927).

<sup>3</sup> Andor Klay [Sziklay], *Daring Diplomacy. The Case of the First American Ultimatum* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957) and in Hungarian: *Vakmerő diplomácia: amerikai ultimátum egy magyar szabadságharcosért* (Budapest: Argumentum, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Tibor Frank, "Az emberiségnek közös sorsa van: Kossuth az Egyesült Államokban, 1851–52" *Rubicon* Vol. 6, Nos. 1–2 (1995), 42–44. Note that Debrecen Televízió is shooting a two-part documentary on Kossuth's trip. Part 1 will deal with the trip itself, while Part 2 with its memory.

1900s. The two politicians first met in 1904 and became good friends. In 1905-06, a political crisis emerged in Hungary, when the opposition (Apponyi among them) won the general elections and threatened not to renew the customs union between Vienna and Budapest. At that point Roosevelt intervened and argued eloquently for the survival of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with his Hungarian friend. He doubled his efforts through his ambassador to Vienna, Charles Spencer Francis, and advised his daughter, Alice, that if she and her husband were to travel to Vienna on their European honeymoon, they should also go to Budapest. The Roosevelt-Apponyi correspondence suggests that the American president had a calming effect on the Hungarian aristocrat, and the crisis was averted. The two politicians had an opportunity to discuss these events during Roosevelt's much publicized visit to Hungary in 1910.<sup>5</sup>

## After World War I

The United States of America entered the war in April 1917 and declared war on Austria-Hungary in December. Following the Flower Revolution in Budapest at the end of the Great War, Hungary restored her independence and full diplomatic relations with the United States became a possibility. As Hungary sank into civil war (1918–20), revolutionary leader Count Mihály Károlyi put all his faith in the American president, describing his policy as “Wilson, Wilson, and again Wilson.” As a result of half a dozen revolutions in key cities, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy fell apart, as did the old Kingdom of Hungary, which had enjoyed special privileges within the realm of the Habsburgs since the Compromise of 1867. The war in the Carpathian Basin began in earnest after the Great War had ended, as the would-be successor states launched military campaigns, often with open allied (mostly French) support, to occupy territories before the Paris Peace Conference would finalize the new boundaries. The political chaos in Hungary was settled by British intervention (the Clerk mission in late 1919), Admiral Miklós Horthy took control, occupying Rumanian troops were withdrawn from the country, and the Hungarian peace treaty was signed. Trianon became a “second Mohács” for Hungarians, and the revision of the peace treaty

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<sup>5</sup> Tibor Glant, “Roosevelt, Apponyi és a Habsburg Monarchia” *Századok* Vol. 131, No. 6 (1997), 1386–1401, and a short version in English: “American-Hungarian Relations, 1900–1918” *Hungarian Studies Review* Vol. 32, Nos. 1–2 (2005), 1–14.

that moved over three million ethnic Hungarians to the successor states became a cornerstone of Hungarian foreign policy in general and US-Hungarian relations in particular.<sup>6</sup>

In December 1919 Ulysses S. Grant-Smith, formerly working at the Vienna Embassy, returned to Hungary and assumed consular duties. He managed passports for people traveling both ways and protected American business interests in a volatile manner.<sup>7</sup> So much so, that he was repeatedly reminded that he was not officially a consul, and, on one occasion, was asked by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes to respond to accusations regarding his conduct: "Department informed you have REFUSED to GRANT VISAS to passengers not sailing steamers under American flag. Telegraph facts. HUGHES."<sup>8</sup> Grant-Smith's eventful semi-official consular work came to an end in February 1922, when he was replaced by Charge d'Affaires Eugene C. Shoecraft until the newly appointed minister, Judge Theodore Brentano, could occupy his post in May of the same year.

The resumption of *de facto* consular work by Grant-Smith marked the beginning of official bilateral relations more than two years before ministers were actually exchanged. In the two years he spent in Hungary in a diplomatically in-between position, he was responsible for settling three key issues: (1) negotiating a separate US-Hungarian peace treaty to terminate hostilities (signed in August 1921); (2) clarifying which prewar treaties would remain in effect, which would be terminated, and which would be renegotiated; and (3) clearing the new Hungarian minister to Washington (Count László Széchenyi, December 1921). Grant-Smith did a solid job at his old-new post and expected to be named US Minister to Hungary, but diplomatic complaints and domestic political considerations (the incoming Republican administration had its own preferences for overseas posts) prompted President Warren G. Harding to name Brentano.

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<sup>6</sup> The most recent treatise is Éva Mathey, *Chasing a Mirage: Hungarian Revisionist Search for US Support to Dismantle the Trianon Peace Treaty, 1920–1938*. Ph.D. diss. University of Debrecen, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (Archives II: College Park, MD): Record Group 84: Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State: 84.2 Records of Diplomatic Posts: Hungary 1920–35: 84 vols. Hereafter: NA RG 84.2 and volume number.

<sup>8</sup> NA RG 84.2: Volume 7: 1921: 863–892.3, under "Steamship Matters/Waterways," State to Grant-Smith, pink cable no. 331, October 11, 1921. Grant-Smith's explanation was accepted.

Still, Grant-Smith left an indelible mark on bilateral relations: his not necessarily unfounded impatience with the new Hungarian elite (especially corruption) and his open promotion of American business interests in postwar Hungary set the trend for two decades to come. He later served as American Minister to Albania (1922–25) and Uruguay (1925–29).

Bilateral diplomatic relations meant political, economic, and cultural ties. Political contacts were defined by thinly veiled Hungarian expectations that the US should live up to “Wilsonian ideals,” while Americans refused, or did their best to refuse, to even discuss Trianon. Such unwelcome Hungarian attempts to force the hand of the White House included the publication of newspapers and magazines (*The Commentator*, *The Hungarian Nation*, *Külföldi Magyarország*, and *Magyar Szemle*, the latter in Hungarian, English, and French), the 1928 Kossuth Pilgrimage to unveil a new statue of the Hungarian revolutionary on Riverside Drive in North Manhattan, and the *Justice for Hungary* flight of 1931.<sup>9</sup>

With Hungarians industriously celebrating July 4<sup>th</sup> in Budapest, diplomatic relations were cordial but remained uneventful. Still, the private and official correspondence of William R. Castle offers unique, and amusing, insights into the everyday life of the legation and into the private spheres of bilateral contacts. Castle was a career diplomat: he first served as Special Assistant to the State Department (1919–21), then as Chief of the Division of Western European Affairs (where the Hungarian desk belonged, 1921–27), and later as Assistant Secretary of State (1927) and Under-Secretary of State (1931–33).<sup>10</sup> His personal remarks on Grant-Smith and Brentano tell a story quite different from official diplomatic correspondence. A letter from May 1922, for example, indicates that the State Department “was annoyed at Grant-Smith’s action in instructing the Consul to give preference in visa matters to Americans sailing on American ships” and that the complaints came not from

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<sup>9</sup> For details see: Mathey, *Chasing a Mirage*. See also Mathey, “Official America and Hungarian Revisionism between the World Wars” *Eger Journal of American Studies* Vol. 12, Nos. 1–2 (2010), 427–45.

<sup>10</sup> William R. Castle, Jr., Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum (West Branch, IA): Countries Correspondence: Box 8: Hungary (bound volume). Hereafter: Castle Papers and document details.

Hungarians but from the British.<sup>11</sup> Castle was unhappy with the performance of the Budapest Legation and asked Secretary Charles B. Curtis in a private letter to provide regular, weekly and monthly reports.<sup>12</sup> In another letter to Curtis, dated May 6, 1925, Castle complained about Brentano's drinking habits and alleged romantic contacts "with some Jewish dancer from the opera." His dislike of Brentano was on display again on November 11 of the same year, when he mockingly informed Charge d'Affaires ad interim George A. Gordon that Brentano "is not a bad old fellow, but if he were not your Chief, I should have to admit that I consider him an awful ass. As he is your Chief, I shall say nothing about him except that he is immensely enthusiastic about you."<sup>13</sup> Hungarians added their fair share of comic interludes to the 1920s: in the fall of 1927 a California Hungarian, supposedly Archduke Leopold, insulted Minister Széchenyi, and challenged him to a saber duel. It took some effort on the part of the State Department to convince the diplomat and the aristocrat that sword fighting was not considered an appropriate means of settling such debates.<sup>14</sup> These stories show the light, relaxed side of official diplomatic affairs, and should be treated accordingly. The Castle papers are unique, because they reveal the uncensored private side of one of the key decision makers in the State Department during the "Republican 1920s." Brentano was replaced by Joshua Butler Wright in 1927, and in 1931 a familiar face from the hectic days of 1919, Nicholas Roosevelt, returned in an official capacity.

We know considerably less about economic contacts between the United States and Hungary, but the information available provides ample grounds for a basic outline. First and foremost, Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration provided food and medication for

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<sup>11</sup> Castle Papers: Castle to H. Dorsey Newson, 3rd Secretary of the Legation in Budapest, May 2, 1922.

<sup>12</sup> Castle Papers: Castle to Curtis, December 6, 1923: "One thing that troubles us about the work of the Legation is the thoroughly sloppy way in which the Department is kept informed."

<sup>13</sup> Gordon was standing in for Brentano, who was back in Washington, D. C. for a regular briefing. Castle tried to get rid of Brentano in 1925, after the presidential election of 1924, but had to wait until 1927.

<sup>14</sup> "Challenge to Duel Relieves Monotony: But Washington Believes Leopold Not Serious" *Boston Daily Globe*, July 19, 1927, and Castle Papers: American Minister to Hungary Joshua Butler Wright to Castle, October 28, 1927.



refugees and children until 1923, thus saving thousands of lives.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the war many American businessmen came to Hungary looking for new investment opportunities. According to the above cited consular records, shipping, government purchases of automobiles, and movie theater ownership were the main issues. Once the dust settled, Hungary seemed less inviting: hyperinflation, economic depression, refugees from the successor states, and political isolation added up to diminishing interest. Budapest asked for a League of Nations loan, and the international body responded by demanding financial stability first. To ensure this, an American financial supervisor, Jeremiah Smith, Jr., was dispatched to Hungary. Smith worked in Hungary between 1924 and 1926 and published monthly reports in the *Wall Street Journal*. In between, in 1925, a bilateral trade, consular, and cultural agreement was signed, and the two countries agreed upon the first Most Favored Nation (MFN) agreement for ten years.<sup>16</sup> It was repeatedly renewed until after World War II, when Hungary became a Soviet colony and any such cooperation with the United States was out of the question. The MFN agreement again opened up Hungary for American investment, for example in the oil industry.

Personal and cultural ties also emerged between the wars. Counts Albert Apponyi and Pál Teleki continued to cultivate their prewar contacts and visited the New World during the early 1920s. Both worked in close cooperation with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and its then president and later Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Nicholas Murray Butler, on evaluating the costs and consequences of the Great War.<sup>17</sup> Some of the iconic members of the Károlyi revolution

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<sup>15</sup> For details see: Tibor Glant, “Herbert Hoover and Hungary, 1918–1923” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall 2002), 95–109.

<sup>16</sup> Zoltán Peterecz, *Jeremiah Smith, Jr. and Hungary, 1924–1926: The United States, the League of Nations, and the Financial Reconstruction of Hungary*. Ph.D. diss. ELTE, Budapest, 2010. See also by Peterecz: “Picking the Right Man for the Job: Jeremiah Smith, Jr. and American Private Influence in the Financial Reconstruction of Hungary” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall 2009), 45–65. For a more specific study see: György Péteri, *Global Monetary Regime and National Central Banking. The Case of Hungary, 1921–1929* (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2002), East European Monographs No. 590, Hungarian Studies Series No. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Murray Butler Papers, Columbia University, NYC (Butler Library): Arranged Correspondence, Box 13 for Apponyi and Box 407 for Teleki. The

settled in the United States. Most notable among them was Oscar Jászi, who wrote a seminal work titled *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* in 1929. Academic exchanges began for both men and women, and Hungarians conducted lively discussions on American matters ranging from fauna to government and contemporary politics. As of 1927, Americans began to attend the Debrecen Summer School, a program that has contributed to the training of many a foreign diplomat in Hungary. The 1924 Reed-Johnson Immigration Restriction Act may have cut transatlantic migration off, but Hungarians continued to find their way into the United States, sometimes as above the quota admissions, sometimes even illegally, across the Canadian or Mexican borders.<sup>18</sup> Still, the most spectacular development took place in the cultural interaction between the two countries.

Hungarians have always been fascinated by film, and Hollywood became a dominant cultural force with strong Hungarian participation. Major movie icons like Dracula, Tarzan, or Mr. Moto were all played by actors born in Hungary, Michael Curtiz emerged as an all-important director, and Miklós Rózsa won three Oscars for his musical scores. Meanwhile, American film, music, and pulp fiction came to define the popular culture of interwar Hungary. Buffalo Bill, Nick Carter, Charlie Chan, and an infinite list of Western heroes shaped the cultural education of the first Trianon generation in Hungary. The golden age of Hungarian sound film (1930s) drew heavily upon the American experience.

## In World War II

During the interwar years nothing suggested the diplomatic break that would come in 1941 or the fact that Americans would bomb major Hungarian cities in still another world war. Even as Hungary began to gravitate towards the newly emerging Nazi Germany, Franklin D. Roosevelt's minister to Hungary, John F. Montgomery, continued to enjoy excellent personal relations with Hungarian head of state Governor

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Carnegie Endowment Papers are also held here. None of this Hungary-related material has ever been digested.

<sup>18</sup> For details see: Tibor Glant, "Amerikás könyvek és Amerika-kép a két világháború közti Magyarországon" in Tamás Magyarics and Miklós Lojkó, eds., *„Minden gondolatomra számtalan másik árnya hull...” Emlékkönyv Frank Tibor 60. születésnapjára.* (Budapest: Prima Rate Kft., 2008), 79–85.

Horthy.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, Minister László Széchenyi moved on to London (1933) and was replaced by his former deputy, János Pelényi.<sup>20</sup> When Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union attacked Poland from both sides and World War II began, the United States again declared her neutrality. The partial revision of the Treaty of Trianon took place, with German sponsorship, in the form of two Vienna Awards in 1938 and 1940. Hungary joined the German war against the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, and it was a matter of time before she would find herself at war with the United States. In fact, Hungary declared war on the United States in December 1941, a dubious claim to fame and the lowest ever point in bilateral relations.

Interestingly, World War II contributed to the positive image of Hungarians in the New World, through the efforts of Hungarian scientists (of Jewish stock) working for the Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb, then referred to as the “super weapon.” Ede Teller, Leó Szilárd, János Naumann, and Jenő Wigner were the key players, but Tódor Kármán also contributed. These people fled Hungary for Germany following the first European postwar anti-Semitic legislation, the Numerus Clausus Act of 1920. When Hitler rose to power, they moved to England, then on to the United States. They helped create the image of “clever Hungarians,” a supplement to the freedom fighter image.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, various wartime governments of Hungary participated in the Holocaust despite American warnings (including FDR’s proclamation of March 24, 1944), and many were executed as war criminals after the conflict had ended. Unlike in World War I, this time Hungary experienced war first-hand: western allies bombed many major cities, while the Soviet Union invaded her. The Soviet Army liberated Hungary from Nazi rule (including the puppet regime set up by Hitler under Ferenc

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<sup>19</sup> The Horthy-Montgomery connection has been thoroughly documented by Tibor Frank in both English and Hungarian: Frank, ed., *Discussing Hitler. Advisers of U.S. Diplomacy in Central Europe, 1934–1941* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2003) and *Roosevelt követe Budapesten: John F. Montgomery bizalmas politikai beszélgetései, 1934–1941* (Budapest: Corvina, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Pál Pritz, *Magyar diplomácia a két háború között. Tanulmányok* (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1995), 24, 26, 74, and 99–100.

<sup>21</sup> For details see: Tibor Frank, *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919–1945* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2009).

Szálas on October 15, 1944), but plundered and raped her, and continued to occupy the country until the early 1990s.

The Roosevelt administration weighed two options concerning the future of the Carpathian Basin: Habsburg restoration and spheres of influence. While the former was given serious consideration in the early phases of the war, it was the latter that materialized in the form of the “Four Policemen” idea in general and the Yalta agreements in particular. FDR agreed, in return for Moscow’s cooperation against Nazi Germany, to grant Stalin control over what they called a “buffer zone” along the western border of the territorially enlarged Soviet Union. From the Baltic States through Central Europe to parts of Yugoslavia and Germany, this was seen as a western sellout of the region, and Yalta became a bad word. Similarly to the territorial issues (Yalta), future economic and political cooperation (Bretton Woods agreements and the establishment of the United Nations) were also agreed upon before war’s end. VE-Day and VJ-Day simply terminated hostilities.<sup>22</sup> Still, the United States did not escape the war unscathed: she became the first, and to the present day only country ever to deploy an atomic bomb, incidentally on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

## **Transition after World War II**

The two and a half to three years between the end of the European war and communist takeovers by force in the region are generally seen as a period of transition. In February 1945, in Yalta, an agreement was made that coalition governments would be set up following the war, but months before, in November 1944, the timetable and methods of a communist takeover had also been agreed upon between Hungarian and Soviet communists in Moscow. In the postwar world of great power spheres of influence being on the winning or losing side did not matter: Czechoslovakia became a Soviet colony just as Hungary did. To add insult to injury, a second Trianon peace treaty (February 1947) restored the pre-1938 borders and granted additional concessions to Czechoslovakia, in return for direct Soviet entrance into Hungary where

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<sup>22</sup> On US-Hungarian relations in the Second World War see: Mark Imre Major, *American-Hungarian Relations, 1918–1944* (Astor, FL: Danubian Press, 1974), 216–46, and Mario D. Fenyo, *Hitler, Horthy, and Hungary. German-Hungarian Relations, 1941–1944* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972).

the Czechoslovak-Rumanian corridor once stood: in the southwestern tip of the Ukraine.<sup>23</sup>

The immediate postwar period saw two distinct groups of Hungarians seek entrance into the United States: the 45-ers and the 47-ers. The former were representatives of the interwar elite in Hungary: urban, upper-middle class professionals, mostly lawyers and soldiers. The latter represented the new elite of the coalition period: mostly Smallholders, who won election after election and seemed to provide the social-political backbone of postwar Hungary. It was under this Smallholder-led coalition that Hungary became a republic (1946) and negotiated the peace treaty. They were forced out of power by a thinly veiled, Soviet-sponsored coup in the summer of 1947. These two groups, collectively known as “dipik” (Displaced Persons, and as such, above the quota admissions), made up about 26,000 people. A third wave of refugees joined in 1956, numbering an estimated total of another 50,000 people.<sup>24</sup>

The United States found it increasingly difficult to handle the situation she herself had helped create with the Yalta deals. Attempts were made to secure cooperation on the part of various countries now under Soviet occupation, but these all failed. An invitation to join the Marshall Plan was rejected under Soviet duress, and the return of the gold and silver reserves of the Hungarian National Bank as well as the partial restitution of art treasures taken out of Hungary by the Nazis remained a unilateral gesture. On secret Hungarian insistence, Washington refused to return the Holy Crown of Hungary and the assorted coronation regalia delivered to the US Army in Austria by the Royal Hungarian Crown Guard in the dying days of the war. Hungarians felt betrayed by the West yet again, as Soviet control was becoming absolute and more open. This, in turn, led to the rise of anti-Americanism on a large scale for the first

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<sup>23</sup> On the communist takeover see Charles Gati, *The Bloc that Failed: Soviet-East European Relations in Transition* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), also in Hungarian: *Magyarország a Kreml árnyékában* (Budapest: Századvég, 1992). On the 1947 peace treaty: Ignác Romsics, *Az 1947-es párizsi békeszerződés* (Budapest: Osiris, 2006) and Mihály Fülöp, *The Unfinished Peace: The Council of Foreign Ministers and the Hungarian Peace Treaty of 1947* (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2011), East European Monographs No. 752, Hungarian Studies Series No. 22.

<sup>24</sup> Steven Bela Vardy [Béla Várdy], *The Hungarian-Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985), 113–50.

time ever in Hungary. Communists fed off this sentiment and the two countries began to expel each other's diplomats and businessmen. The Hungarian show trials (especially of Robert A. Vogeler and Cardinal Mindszenty) were followed with keen interest in the United States: by 1949 the Cold War was on.<sup>25</sup>

## The Cold War

The postwar transition was followed by three distinct phases in US-Hungarian relations during the Cold War: hostility (1947–69), normalization (1969–78), and the gradual disintegration of Soviet control (1979–89).<sup>26</sup> This period was as irrational as it could be, and saw both extremes: open confrontation with public hate speech during the 1950s as well as cordial relations in the 1980s, which made East-West conflicts seem redundant.

In the period of open hostility, Washington spoke of “slave nations” and “red Fascism,” while Budapest promoted the concept of “fascist American geopolitics” and accused the White House of conspiracy against the Hungarian people. The two parties continued to expel diplomats and placed restrictions on the free movement of the remaining staffs. Hungary settled financial claims with all western powers except the United States, and Washington kept Budapest out of the United Nations until December 1955. Relations hit rock bottom as result of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence. Hungarians believed American “liberation” and “roll-back” rhetoric and stood up to the Hungarian version of Stalinism. While the American public supported the Revolution, the White House had its doubts about Imre Nagy, who himself was a communist. Without permission, American-sponsored propaganda radios (Radio Free Europe and Voice of America) promised military support and urged Hungarians to fight. The November 4 Soviet

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<sup>25</sup> On the Holy Crown and show trials see: Martin Mevius, “A Crown for Rákosi: The Vogeler Case, the Holy Crown of St Stephen, and the (Inter)national Legitimacy of the Hungarian Communist Regime, 1945–1978” *The Slavonic and East European Review* Vol. 89, No. 1 (January 2011), 76–107, also in Hungarian: “Koronát Rákosinak! A Vogeler-ügy, a Szent Korona és a magyar szocialista rendszer nemzet(köz)i legitimációja, 1945–1978” *Múltunk* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2011), 145–74.

<sup>26</sup> The best survey of US-Hungarian relations in the Cold War is the editor's introduction to László Borhi, ed., *Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok, 1945–1989. Források* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 2009), 13–221.

invasion, Operation Whirlwind, ended in bloodbath. 200,000 Hungarians fled the country, tens of thousands were tried for treason, and several hundred, among them children under 18, were executed. Cardinal Mindszenty emerged from house arrest in the country, gave a much publicized speech demanding the restoration of the prewar order (which only very few supported), and then sought refuge in the American Legation. Diplomatic relations were reduced to the lowest possible level: temporary charge d'affaires.

It took ten years for the new Kádár regime to assert itself and win some international recognition. Kádár was admitted to the United States to attend a UN session as early as 1958. Partial amnesties (1961, 1962) were followed by a "general amnesty" in 1963 which still left hundreds of freedom fighters in jail. Following the reality check of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, "bridge building" began between East and West. In 1964 Hungary signed an agreement with the Holy See, and in 1966 US-Hungarian relations were raised from the lowest to the highest, ambassadorial, level. The Kádár regime sustained the myth of 1956 being a "CIA coup" to bring down the "democratic" government of Hungary, but toned down its rhetoric in English. This was partly due to the fact that the centrally controlled socialist economic system, which, against all common sense, superimposed political decisions over economic ones, turned out to be a disaster by 1968. Hungary needed western loans and was willing to change her tone to accommodate the spirit of détente created by West German Chancellor Willy Brandt.<sup>27</sup>

In 1968 Hungary announced economic reforms which amounted to an attempt at squaring the circle: the plan was to introduce elements of free market economy into the centrally controlled system that was kept afloat by Soviet assistance, and which was under direct Soviet supervision. This resulted in a culture of cheating and lies: a population that needed to survive in spite of the economic incompetence its inefficient political leadership began to operate a booming black market economy. Hungary also negotiated a deal to join the IMF, but Moscow prevented the move. Still, in the West this was seen as a major departure by Budapest. Incoming United States President Richard M. Nixon embraced the idea of détente and the "normalization" of bilateral relations began. In the summer of 1969 Budapest and Washington identified four

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<sup>27</sup> Tibor Glant, *A Szent Korona amerikai kalandja, 1945–1978* (Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 1997), 35–53.

issues to start with, including the potentially explosive matter of American pensioners in Hungary. Mindszenty left the Embassy in 1971, cultural exchanges were set up, financial claims were settled, and a consular agreement was hammered out. Kádár's Hungary became one of the favorite sons of Washington in a policy that can best be described as "divide and rule:" the Nixon White House tested each East European communist country to see how far they were willing to go on bilateral issues and to what degree they were ready to defy Moscow. For different reasons, Poland (some 6 million immigrants in the US), Rumania ("independent" foreign policy with no Soviet army inside the country), and Hungary ("liberal" domestic policies, the "happiest barracks") were favored over others. Hungary and Poland were invited to supervise the armistice in Vietnam (1973), and the Helsinki Accords (1975) seemed to have taken détente to its logical conclusion: if the Cold War is here to stay indefinitely, let us make it as cordial as possible. In 1978 the Coronation Regalia were returned to Hungary and a bilateral MFN agreement was signed against the expressed will of the Soviet Union. United States-Hungarian relations became as "normal" as possible between a Soviet colony and the leader of the Free World.<sup>28</sup>

Two events in 1979 shook the very foundations of the bipolar world order: the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan and an Islamic Revolution gained control of, and took American hostages in, Iran, which, up to that point, had been a key ally for Washington in the Middle East. Interestingly, the coming of the "second cold war" between Washington and Moscow had a positive effect on US-Hungarian relations, although, for example, Hungary decided to join the Soviet boycott of the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games. Hungary now was allowed to join the IMF and the World Bank, and took out western loans. Items on the COCOM-list were still off limits, but American cultural diplomacy was stepped up. Budapest proved supportive, and the Soros Foundation (which promoted an "open society") was granted permission to commence operations in Hungary. The diplomatic records of this period remain partly classified, but one is under the impression that by the early 1970s Hungary had managed to develop a new guard to conduct foreign affairs: people who spoke good English and were willing and able to

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<sup>28</sup> Glant, *Szent Korona*, 53–143. On Vietnam see: Zoltán Szőke, "Magyarország és a vietnami háború, 1962–1975" *Századok* Vol. 144, No. 1 (2010), 47–97, and Szőke, "Magyar békefenntartók Vietnamban" *Külpolitika* Vol. 5, Nos. 3–4 (1999), 149–75.



engage in meaningful interaction: Gyula Horn, János Fekete, and János Nagy are among the names that come to mind.

As of the early 1970s Hungary received loan after loan for structural reforms of the economy, but the money was spent on sustaining a high level of corruption and a standard of living which was not warranted by the performance of the economy. Economic incompetence navigated the country to the verge of bankruptcy again and again (1968, 1981, 1989, and later in 1995 and 2008), but for the United States political concessions mattered more than economic common sense. In 1989 the communist system collapsed, but it left behind an unmanageable economic crisis. Instead of a “new Marshall Plan,” western investors looked for cheap labor and new markets, which set Hungary (as well as the whole region) on the economic collision course she is still trying to get off of. The burial of Imre Nagy and his fellow revolutionaries on June 16, 1989 was a moment to remember. The officially promoted but privately rejected anti-Americanism of the latter communist period evaporated in a matter of weeks, not least because of the televised public speech of President George Bush at the Karl Marx University of Economics. In 1989 everything seemed possible, and most Hungarians entertained a surrealistically positive image of the United States and high hopes of things to come.

## **Since 1989**

The lands between Germany and Russia fell victim to Nazism first and then communism. Its peoples expected some genuine assistance from the West that repeatedly sold them out (Munich, 1938, Yalta, 1945, Trianon, 1947). The West, on the other hand, saw strategic possibilities and investment opportunities. The concept of an expanded European Community surfaced with promises of including the new democracies, and a Partnership for Peace program was launched to secure US military influence in the region. Hungary joined NATO in 1998, just in time to provide crucial air bases for the US bombing of Serbia as Yugoslavia was disintegrating in war. In fact, Hungarians demonstrated their desire to belong to the West in two referenda: on joining NATO (1997: 85% voting in favor) and the European Union (2003: 83% supporting).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.valasztas.hu/> (accessed: March, 23, 2012). For details see the links on the right-hand side of the page.

In the absence of reliable information, hindsight, and archival sources like the Castle papers discussed above, bilateral United States-Hungarian relations since 1989 are not easy to evaluate,<sup>30</sup> and the following discussion is based, in part, on personal impressions. On the surface, everything seems alright: the two countries are military allies for the first time, and Hungarians are fighting (and dying) in America's war on terror. Cultural relations are blossoming, economic ties are strong, and many Hungarians are choosing the United States as a tourist or professional destination. Americans have long been able to travel to Hungary without a visa, and finally Hungarian tourists can also avoid the long lines outside the Embassy in the heart of Budapest. Hungary provided diplomatic and consular services for United States citizens in Syria earlier this year, when Washington withdrew diplomats from Damascus on February 6, 2012. The two countries may formally be allies, but under the surface tensions sometimes still overflow. These alarming signs deserve attention.

For an informed Hungarian observer the two most disturbing elements are a clear political preference on the part of Washington for the former communist party and a marked turn in American cultural diplomacy. In the past 20 years the various American administrations, Republican and Democrat alike, have openly preferred the Hungarian Socialist Party over any other force in Hungarian politics. The fact that Washington prefers to deal with the very same people the White House has been dealing with since the 1970s<sup>31</sup> only partly explains this trend. Another reason must be the fear of Trianon and/or the status of Hungarian

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<sup>30</sup> A success story interpretation is projected by the State Department publication, *The United States and Hungary: Paths of Diplomacy, 1848–2006* (esp. 82-96). A more analytical evaluation was offered by Tamás Magyarics in one of a series of lectures on US-Hungarian relations, offered in Debrecen in the spring of 2010: "Jelenetek egy házasságból: a magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok a hidegháború után" (April 29, 2010). These lectures are available on YouTube.

<sup>31</sup> I explained in detail the emergence of this trend in my book on the 1956 Revolution in American memory, especially in the chapters on the press and diplomatic memoirs: Glant, *Remember Hungary 1956: Essays on the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in American Memory* (Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2007), and *Emlékezzünk Magyarországra 1956: Tanulmányok a magyar forradalom és szabadságharc amerikai emlékezetéről* (Budapest: Kiss József Könyvkiadó, 2008).

minorities in the neighboring countries being officially brought up under a more nationalist government.

A case in point is the period between 2002 and 2010, when a socialist government got away with driving the country to the verge of bankruptcy and faking economic data for both the Hungarian Parliament and the EU between 2005 and 2008, and thus wistfully misleading American businessmen in Hungary. The same administration appointed a KGB-trained senior officer, Sándor Laborc, as head of Hungarian national intelligence, thus risking sensitive NATO information.<sup>32</sup> Major human rights violations were committed by masked policemen without clearly visible identification on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1956 Revolution, and an opposition MP was beaten unconscious and had to be hospitalized. Although Prime Minister Gyurcsány's "Öszöd speech" displayed a major deficit in democratic principles,<sup>33</sup> his party still kept him in power for years; but no public American protests came on any of the above accounts. By 2010 most Hungarians agreed that the compromise of 1989 had failed and a total makeover was needed. The newly elected FIDESZ government received unprecedented mandate for change (68% of the seats in a single-chamber legislature) from the Hungarian people but barely receives the benefit of the doubt from Washington, although in the American system of elections there would be one single opposition MP out of the 386. Absurd accusations fly of a possible return to the fascist era of the 1930s and of the dismantling of democratic institutions, while American diplomatic correspondence is regularly leaked to *Népszabadság*, originally established in 1942 as *Szabad Nép*, the official organ of the communist party and a living reminder of the communist dictatorship that many of us fought against.<sup>34</sup> Most Hungarians find what they

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<sup>32</sup> "Nem mindneki tudott Laborc életrajzának pikáns részleteiről" on the *Index* news portal, dated February 7, 2008: <http://index.hu/kulfold/laborc9466/> (accessed: March 23, 2012). I have not been able to find any article raising this issue in the American press at the time. He is now under criminal investigation in Hungary for entrusting a supposedly Bulgarian (but probably Russian) security firm to review the security clearance of people working in Hungarian national intelligence.

<sup>33</sup> Although the full speech is not available in English, the partial BBC translation tells the whole story: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5359546.stm> (accessed: March 23, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> [http://nol.hu/kulfold/hillary\\_clinton\\_levele\\_orban\\_viktornak\\_-\\_itt\\_a\\_teljes\\_szoveg](http://nol.hu/kulfold/hillary_clinton_levele_orban_viktornak_-_itt_a_teljes_szoveg) (accessed: March 23, 2012). The page has the original in pdf. Much of the criticism is based on the arguments of the "independent" think-tank, *Haza és Haladás*, which is

consider double standards disturbing, and the 80% support for NATO and EU membership is slowly eroding. On January 21, 2012, a Woodstock-size crowd gathered in the Hungarian capital for a “March for Peace” to support the current administration: one key issue they raised was Secretary of State Clinton’s letter, in which she lectured the government of Hungary on democracy and raised such particular domestic issues that could only be brought up by the practically nonexistent, and politically badly discredited, domestic opposition.<sup>35</sup> The unconditional admiration most Hungarians felt for the United States in 1989 is vanishing.

American cultural diplomacy has also gone through major changes since the 1980s. Back then, American diplomats knew all American Studies professionals, and traveled extensively in the country.<sup>36</sup> The Hungarian Fulbright Commission was set up in 1992. Academic exchanges are flourishing, just like they did between the wars. However, during the Clinton years United States Information Agency and Service (USIA and USIS) were closed down and its libraries were given away to universities and research institutions. The establishment of American Corners in various cities around Hungary was a new and welcome initiative to restart cultural diplomacy in 2004-2006. In the 1990s the US helped fund Hungarian citizens studying at the Salzburg Seminar and American ambassadors opened American Studies conferences in person. In 1997 I worked in close cooperation with the Embassy not only on putting out a book on the return of the Holy Crown of Hungary but also on the anniversary celebrations, which were honored by Ambassador Peter Tufo within two weeks of his arrival. In contrast, a December 14, 2007 cable released by *wikileaks* proves that the then ambassador identified me, much to my surprise, as a “conservative political science professor” and not as the head of one of the very few American Studies departments in Hungary.<sup>37</sup> No ambassador has lent her personal support

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actually run by defeated Socialist Party premier Gordon Bajnai and his campaign chief, Viktor Szigetvári: [http://www.hazaeshaladas.hu/en/registration\\_information-1.html](http://www.hazaeshaladas.hu/en/registration_information-1.html) (accessed March 23, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> <http://hu-hu.facebook.com/pages/B%C3%A9kemenet-Magyarorsz%C3%A1g%C3%A9rt/328610253825746?sk=info> is the Facebook page of the event.

<sup>36</sup> A unique personal perspective on the era is offered by John J. Jablonski, “The Road Taken: Reflections of a Sometime Cultural Attaché” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall 2002), 153–65.

<sup>37</sup> <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/12/07BUDAPEST1956.html> (accessed March 23, 2012).

to any of the last four biennial conferences of the Hungarian Association of American Studies, which would be unthinkable in Austria or Germany. American preferences have understandably changed after the 9-11 terrorist attacks, but the traditional anti-American sentiment still so prevalent in Hungarian academic circles and rising anti-Americanism in the general population threaten the very existence of genuine discussion of American culture as well as the survival of American Studies in Hungary. Work needs to be done on the high school and university curricula, all the way down to language teaching, since symbolic gestures like the restoration of the Bandholtz statue to Szabadság tér<sup>38</sup> or President Bush's visit to Hungary on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1956 cannot mend the damage caused by the "if you don't talk about it, it does not exist" policy of communist brainwashing.

## Conclusions

The above survey of 90 years of bilateral relations indicates that the two foreign services tend to look at the partner country through the prism of their own culture and expectations. Ever since 1848–49 Hungarians have expected some vaguely defined "fair play" from the United States and felt betrayed when American interests prompted a course other than the one they had counted on. Such unrealistic expectations manifested themselves as early as the immediate post-World War I period and continued to surface during the 1956 Revolution and in 2006. This expected American support never came, mostly because Hungary is viewed in Washington as an unimportant country and a possible source of trouble on account of Trianon and two world wars fought against one another. Since 1922 Washington has not felt the urge to understand Hungary; consequently, her decisions are defined not by any informed policy, but by improvisation on the basis of the input of special interest

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<sup>38</sup> Harry Hill Bandholtz was the American member of the Allied Military Mission to Hungary following the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in early August 1919. He protected the Hungarian National Museum from looting Rumanian soldiers and was honored with a statue in the center of Budapest. This statue was removed by the communists after 1945, but it was restored in 1989. For details see: János Pótó, *Az emlékeztetés helyei. Emlékművek és politika* (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), 90–99. Because of official Hungarian protests, a reference to Bandholtz was scratched in the very last minute from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's speech on the occasion of the return of the Holy Crown in 1978: Glant, *Szent Korona*, 125–26.

groups or individuals. This is why American conduct sometimes appears condescending to Hungarians, which, in turn, feeds anti-American sentiments. Cultural studies calls this process “othering,” and it is on display in mutual stereotypes as much as in diplomatic conduct.

Hungarians have always looked upon the New World as an economic and political promised land. Whereas the economic dimension has immense staying power, the political dimension, as I have explained elsewhere, never took root. Most Hungarians admire the American constitutional tradition and appreciate the democratic advances American society continues to make in terms of race and gender relations, but when the time for decision comes the American model is systematically ignored. Anti-Americanism first emerged in the 1890s, and became official government policy during the Cold War.<sup>39</sup> Spontaneous anti-Americanism appeared in the transition period after World War II and returned after the millennium. On both occasions, it was triggered by American political action, or lack thereof.

Americans have always looked upon independent Hungary as an exotic country, and since World War I as a source of potential trouble. Trianon generated fears of political instability as American business interests were threatened, or believed to have been threatened, over and over again: after the Great War, in World War II, during communism, and more recently when Hungary chose Gripens over F-16 aircraft during the Clinton years. The cultural history of Hungary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows that the State Department has not been able to capitalize on the surrealistically positive bias Hungarians have always had for the New World. For reasons outlined above, Hungarians traditionally go out of their way to accommodate expressed and presumed American expectations. Hungarian governments lent full diplomatic and military support to American war efforts in 1992 (the first Gulf War), 1999 (bombing of Serbia), and more recently in Afghanistan. Most of the time, this takes place under a conservative government, but this is not reflected in American public diplomacy. It was the gap between American rhetoric and action that government-sponsored Cold War anti-Americanism was based upon, and it is responsible for rising anti-American sentiments today.

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<sup>39</sup> Glant, “Travel Writing as a Substitute for American Studies in Hungary” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* Vol. 16, Nos. 1–2 (2010), 171–84.

The balance sheet of 90 years of diplomatic relations clearly shows that political and economic diplomacy are not enough: they must be supplemented by active cultural diplomacy. Half a century of communist rule and brainwashing prevented the study, discussion, and dissemination of American culture, which cannot be made up for in a single generation. Hungarians are blatantly unaware of American history, not just our common past: there is no discussion of key historical events such as the Civil War or the War of 1812, and the various “history months” pass unnoticed over here. Consequently, American culture is misrepresented in the public discourse from gay rights through civil disobedience to checks and balances.<sup>40</sup> Informed discussion is thus replaced by finger pointing: when Americans make a point, legitimate or not, about Hungarian domestic politics, the gut reaction is a reference to the fate of Native Americans, slavery, Hiroshima, or Guantanamo. American presidents routinely issue statements and proclamations on the major anniversaries of key Hungarian events but rarely go beyond that the way Theodore Roosevelt had done in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Better cultural diplomacy and more genuine effort on both sides to understand the other are the keys to better relations in the new millennium.

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<sup>40</sup> This is the result of a mixture of genuine misunderstanding and wistful political manipulation, and would deserve a special study.





# Melancholy Ghosts of the Old South: Henry James's Adventures in the US

Ágnes Zsófia Kovács

## Introduction

When you haven't what you like  
you must perforce like, and above all  
misrepresent, what you have. (456–7)<sup>1</sup>

Henry James is well known for his overall interest in how the mind works, how consciousness comes into being through the process of understanding. He has worked out a model of how consciousness operates in his fictional productions, elements of which can be found in his literary essays, too. According to the Jamesian model of consciousness, facts exist in the form of impressions in the individual, and then impressions are transformed into the experience or the sense of the thing perceived.<sup>2</sup> Experience, in turn, is never limited or complete, it is an ongoing process which constitutes one's consciousness.

Apart from his literary output, James also produced several volumes of nonfiction where the model of understanding is present. My question in this essay centers around the problem of how we can find the Jamesian interest in the workings of the mind in his book *The American Scene* he wrote about his travels in the US after a 25 year absence. My reason for asking this is that his *The American Scene* is often considered today by Jamesians from the perspective of race, class, politics, public space i.e.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry James. *The American Scene*. Ed., Intr., Leon Edel (London: Rupert Hart Davis, 1968). Henceforward page numbers in parenthesis refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Jill M. Cress, *The Figure of Consciousness: William James, Henry James and Edith Wharton*. (NY: Routledge, 2002), 61–2.

from perspectives after the cultural turn and the spatial turn.<sup>3</sup> Yet the text itself also relies heavily on James's formally oriented rhetoric of understanding, an indication that it would provide ideal opportunity for integrating a contextually oriented critical agenda with an investigation of James's formally oriented critical rhetoric. My idea is that his model of understanding is at work in his descriptions of his travel impressions, and thus his model of understanding is being used to criticize contemporary US life in general at given specific contexts he calls scenes.

With his travels in the US, besides criticizing the present he also sets out to experience and formulate his sense of the American past. In the final part of the book his sense of a Southern past is also formulated, during his excursion to the South. I claim that James's experience-oriented reading of the US South spells out a criticism of the sense of "The Old South" that for James exists as a mere ghost of itself only. However, while formulating extremely critical statements about his sense of the US South and Old South, he repeatedly confronts anxieties concerning the relevance of his own cherished interpretive method to the material offered. My hypothesis is that James's whole analytical enterprise based on the model of understanding becomes questioned in the US context, i. e. on the final pages of *The American Scene* dedicated to an account of the US South.

This essay investigates the Southern segment of *The American Scene* from the perspective of the model of understanding and the sense of the South James constructs there in order to analyze the reasons why the Jamesian interpretive model seems to fall apart there. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part explores James's motivation to travel and how he defines his task in terms of experience to be gained. The second part looks into how the model actually works in his reworkings of impressions about the South. The third section focuses on difficulties James encounters whilst making sense of the American scene with the help of his model.

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<sup>3</sup> For the latest contributions, consider, the collection of articles edited by Tamara Follini and Philip Horne in *The Cambridge Quarterly* 37(2008):1, dedicated to the centenary of the publication both of the New York Edition and *The American Scene* in 2007.

## 1. The Student of Manners: The Analyst as Protagonist

James starts out on his tour of the US with great expectations, he aims at collecting material for a new book. Primarily, he is interested in the human aspect of the changes that had happened in the US since his last visit in 1883. His American journey starts at the end of August, 1904 with visiting relatives and friends in the Northeast. Boston and NYC are the most important locations for him because of the striking difference between the image of them he has from his childhood and the present picture they project in 1904–5. His accounts, therefore, are infused by criticism and nostalgia. In the winter he travels South, starting with his visit of Philadelphia and Baltimore in January and concluding with his stay in Florida in late February, 1905. Afterwards he returns North, first to Philadelphia, then NYC, finally Cambridge. The third section of his trip is centered around giving lectures. First, he goes South and West (St. Louis, Winnetka, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Portland, Seattle) and then returns to the east (Washington, Boston, New York, Atlantic City) giving lectures as he proceeds. Eventually, having revisited a circle of friends, he sails for England in July, 1905.<sup>4</sup> *The American Scene* relates his adventures till the end of the Southern trip. In this essay, I am concerned with the Southern leg of his journey that is discussed in the final chapters (9–14) of *The American Scene* and provides a most critical view of the South in particular and of the US in general from “the human side.” (436) I am concerned with what ‘the human side’ of the historical changes means for the narrator protagonist of *The American Scene*.

James the hero and narrator of *The American Scene* enacts a self-reflective performance and throughout the narrative he is at work defining and re-defining his task. The narrator refers to himself and his task when he consistently calls himself a restless analyst who is a student of manners. The analyst has a supreme sensibility (309) which is aimed at deciphering social scenes. His main problem with US social scenes is that they seem to work towards simplification, as in general social discrimination seems negligible in the US. (305) In other words, James’s task of social analysis is aimed against the trend not to analyze he perceives in the US. He turns this situation around by claiming that his

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<sup>4</sup> Leon Edel, “Notes” In James, Henry. *The American Scene*. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968), 467–8.

task in traveling is to use his faculty to analyze, “a circus ring for the exercise of one’s faculties, for one’s conscience.” (310) James, while at task, claims that there is “for the restless analyst, no such thing as an unrelated fact, no such thing as a break in the chain of relations,” (312) and his aim is to place scenes into chains of relations. James illustrates his sense of his position by describing himself as a visitor to a new place who is waiting, somewhat longer than he thought, for admission in the drawing room. He is at leisure to collect impressions about the host he is to get to know through the space and decorations in the room. (315)

For James the primary role of the analyst’s deciphering activity is to make things “interesting.” In Jamesian parlance creating an interest in things equals to making things communicable. (312) In TAS the most lively source of interest is the question of America, where, according to James, the American scene brings up material and handles it as part of a social experiment the outcome of which is incalculable. (357) So it is the likely outcome of that experiment that concerns James and this outcome should be imagined and made communicable. Yet, to James, in America there is, in general, little to say, as the American scene is just the opposite of the European excess of relations, where there is too much to comment. (357) With a surprising twist, however, James locates a task in the lack of possible commentary. Instead of accepting a lack of interest in things, he sets out to generate interest in them. As James puts this, “association reigns here” (360), in other words there is a quantity to be read into the American Scene to make it interesting. James even uses an analogy to explain what he means by associated interest in the American scene when he compares it to an actual scene, California. California before and after rain resembles the American scene before and after an associated downpour of interest in it, bare and luxuriant, respectively. The basic task of the restless analyst is to add interest to the seemingly bare American scene.

The restless analyst has a specific methodology, he brings interest into his readings of the American scene by associating an interior social aspect to the exterior fact. First, this is indicated by the synonyms of the term ‘analyst’ James uses when he refers to himself. Repeatedly, he also calls himself ‘student of manners’ and ‘student of social life.’ Also, when he seeks to explain he tries to find the net of relation a single “fact” may belong to, and the revelation of the relationality is called the social aspect. The associated social side of events emerges as part of the analyst’s work with them.

The analyst's task to associate can be translated into terms of a general model of understanding. The analyst proceeds with his associative task by transforming facts into impressions. The little hard facts, as James puts this, only gain their communicated importance when they become great soft facts as impressions. Impressions, however, are not easy to formulate: one needs to know how to look and see (366), and also how to separate and distinguish in order to generate them. (368) These impressions, in turn, form the basis of experience, which is the after-taste of impressions. For James, then, experience is read into phenomena through a processing of impressions. Also, experience and its process comes to the fore when one travels, "one needs to renew his appreciation of the mystery of experience" (395) then. James inserts a passage celebrating the mystery of experience in the American context at the beginning of his section on Charleston, meditating on the relative lack of interest generated in him during the journey up to then. This impression itself makes him think of the mechanics of experience in America: "The large negatives, in America, have, as well as other matters, their meaning and their truth: so what if my charged consciousness of the long way from Richmond were that of a negative modified by small discomforts?" (396) It is the meaning of the lack of interest that continues to concern James in the American context.

His account of his stay at Biltmore house near Asheville, North-Carolina testifies to his experience of the lack of interest. Biltmore was the estate of George Vanderbilt, constructed at enormous cost and attention to detail. James was invited as a guest of the Vanderbilts and he disliked the largest private house of the country enormously. Writing to Edith Wharton in 1905, he describes the house as vast, impenetrable, only few guests wandering in its vast cold space.<sup>5</sup> In *The American Scene*, James mentions Biltmore via allusion, as a modern miracle in the mountains of North Carolina, a splendid and vast demonstration of wealth, a "colossal French château"<sup>6</sup> 2500 feet in air. Somebody had managed to demonstrate large wealth and to indicate he cares for a fine cluster of ideas (396) – but for James this only enhances the fact that all this splendor exists in parenthesis, is an accident in the empty element of the beautiful North Carolina countryside. The demonstration is dreary

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Luria, "The Architecture of Manners: Henry James, Edith Wharton and The Mount" *American Quarterly* 49(1997): 2, 298–9.

<sup>6</sup> Edel, "Notes," 478.

(397) for James because of its lack of relations, because of its isolation, because nobody cares for it there. From the perspective of his task to construct an experience of America, the Biltmore house seems exemplary. It was built with the intention to arouse interest, impressions, social experience, but in practice the spatial and social isolation of the place serves to illustrate the emptiness of its element and makes the whole enterprise loathsome.

## 2. A Southern Impression

Faithful, experimentally, to desperate practice, I yet had to renounce here – in the main residential street – the subtle effort to “read” a sense into the senseless appearances about me. (392)

### *Particular application*

What scenes of the US South James would be interested in – the term ‘interest’ in comport with his focus on human understanding and relations? As the analyst of social scenes, he is interested in the human side of history and of the present. In the South, he cherishes a specific expectation for his excursion, he hopes to find out about the “social consequences of the prime democratic idea,” (324) the “democratic assimilation of greater dignities and majesties.” (360) Also, he is interested in the intense and tragic drama of the Civil War and how its spirit is kept alive in the South. (369)

James’s major concern throughout his journey is that he fails to find an interest in Southern facts. What he finds instead is a void without either life or memories wherever he looks. One can trace his itinerary and pinpoint the exact reason for his disappointment in each location he comments on. Baltimore, at the beginning of his journey, is declared a dead city dominated by the ghostly presence of the war (310), with everybody out of town, resulting in a simple sweetness that does not trigger the imagination of vice in the analyst at all. Washington, the city of conversation, and therefore of high social potential, only talks about herself. (343) Conversation in Washington does not match its outward view, i.e. the wonderful and rich palaces, monuments, plans and gardens intended to impress the voter. (353, 356) Richmond, the old Confederate capitol turns out a tragic ghost haunted city that shows no consciousness of anything (369–70) that is so passive it even challenges the analyst’s

perceptive resources. The social scene in Charleston is sordid, lost in the scale of space and mainly speaks of the number of things not cared for. (397) Eventually, Florida and its hotels house people who are not in their place, they are unrelated and “would only fall into their place were the social proposition completed.” (428)

From the perspective of his interest in the possibilities the new Democratic age has for the South, he has nothing to show. He admits squarely that he cannot tell what the Southern future will be like. (392) Although he tries to work out new alignments by desperate practice, in fact he has no material to use. As yet, there is no such thing as the new South, no new social order (382) to account for, although after the collapse of the (antebellum) old age, a social revolution (386) is supposed to have taken place. Yet James can only locate gaps, the lack of a new order and also a lack of the sense of the past.

As he travels, he is intent on collecting traces of the glorious past in Washington and in the ex-capital in the form of monuments, museums, buildings, persons but he only manages to see vulgar traces of a past not cared for at all. His account of his visit to the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond and Lee’s Monument next to it are telling examples of this impression about the lack of the sense of the past in the South. James is out to find legend of the South, make it accessible but only meets trivial elements of history. (383) He visits the Museum to find the spirit of the Southern legend descended “by reason of the very nudity and crudity, the historic, the pathetic poverty of the exhibition.” (384) The exhibits “spoke only of the absence of means and taste” and therefore again offered a chance for association, the “old trick” the hero employs again. He sees the little old lady in charge of the exhibit as the only interesting element of the exhibition, she only provides the contact with the past:

He felt himself up to his neck in a delightful, soothing, tepid medium, the social tone of the South that *had* been. It was but the matter of a step over – he was afloat on other waters, and had remounted the stream of Time. I said just now that nothing in the Museum had beauty; but the little old lady had it, with her thoroughly “sectional” good manners, and the punctuality and felicity, that inimitability, one must again say, of the South in her, in the patriotic unction of her reference to the sorry objects about. (384–5)

All in all, it appears interesting for James how the ugly and sorry objects ventilate a theory of eternal rancour, how “a flame colored idea has flowered out of the fact” and began to play its part as valuable,

enriching, romantic legend for the new generation after the war. (386) The Jamesian interest in this is “psychological,” and from the psychological perspective the need for legend indicates a moral and social gap. James’s interest focuses on the process of how the story of the four tragic years has been turned “epic” in answer to the needs of the starved Southern spirit. “It was impossible, from room to room, to imagine a community, of equal size, more disinherited of art or of letters. Those about one were the only echoes.” (386) The melancholy void one finds in the rooms can only be catered for psychologically by nursing the idea of a rich heroic fact that hides the ugly facts.

Lee’s monument in Richmond conveys a similar experience of social and moral want for the narrator. The monument is an equestrian statue of the general made in Paris after the latest fashion. It is located at the meeting point of three or four crossways, but there is no proper square formed around it as there are only groups of ugly new houses indicating a semi-circle. The space is both empty and ugly, James states. (393) For James, the exquisite artistic value and the actual desolate position of the statue carry an impression of something valuable lost. It is just right that the statue sits so high up above the ground, so that it can overlook its surroundings, ignore the traces of futility all around. (394) The statue’s perched and ignoring position symbolizes the historic poverty of Richmond – there are scant traces of the past only because the past to be remembered is scant also: “it is the poverty that is, exactly, historic: once take it for that and it takes on vividness.” (394) There is a wider significance to the scant past turned into a legend in the South, but what that significance may be is something James is only beginning to recognize.

Part of James’s failure to understand the Southern legend is connected to his overwhelmingly negative image of the local African-American population<sup>7</sup> he calls ‘darkies.’ Repeatedly, he tells about his impression of the “tatterdermalion” darkie (375) loitering at the station, doing nothing, standing for a type that carries the doom of the South. (ibid) In the same vein, in Florida, the black waiters are proclaimed useless because they have an ineptitude for alertness, although James would have thought their deficiency corrected as time passed. (423)

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<sup>7</sup> Leon Edel argues that “Negroes scarcely figure in this book” yet James perceives the central issue of their emancipation. See: Leon Edel, “Introduction” (op. cit.), xxii. To my mind, James perceives the difficulties of emancipation mainly.



Furthermore, an important reason why so many things are not cared for in the South is explained for him by the fact that in many places negroes are more numerous than the whites, and ‘darkies’ can not care, not even the few whites, he says, can care in such a context. (398) The case is that “Southerners are imprisoned by the legacy of the presence of the negro” today<sup>8</sup> the same way as they used to be. (375) As James looks out of the window of his Pullman car, he observes “(i)t was a monstrous thing, to sit there in a cushioned and kitchened Pullman and deny to so many groups of one’s fellow creatures a claim to a ‘personality’; but this was in truth what one was perpetually doing.” (398) In other words, there is indeed a basically negative discriminating attitude James adopts towards the local colored population in general, an attitude he is aware of but does not contain. Moreover, one needs to add that he extends this attitude to Southern whites, too, who are depressed, desolate, and care not about “personality” either. Southerners’ (white and black) lack of concern represents the social and moral void James is in the process of unveiling and making sense of.

As he keeps looking on, James locates a fallacy as the underlying principle of the general Southern lack of distinction. It is the Southern idea of a separate state based on the work of slaves that is severely questioned in the light of Jamesian experience. It was “a cause which could never have been gained” he says (394), as Lee’s lonely monument symbolizes. He elaborates this idea in connection with his Southern impression in Richmond. At a senseless street corner he enjoys a moment of understanding his feeling of intellectual bankruptcy as the lack of reference, but a “sad, large poorness” (371) that has its reason in the past, in the absurdity of the idea that forms the basis of its identity. Let me quote the whole passage because I find it central to the Jamesian understanding of the US South:

I was tasting, mystically, of the very essence of the old Southern idea – the hugest fallacy, as it hovered there to one’s backward, one’s ranging vision, for which hundreds of thousands of men had ever laid down their lives. I was tasting of the very bitterness of the immense, grotesque, defeated project—the project, extravagant, fantastic, and to-day pathetic

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<sup>8</sup> Sara Blair contends that James’s logic of race forms part of America’s nation building idiom at the turn of the century, yet at the same time posits an openness to racial exchange. See: Blair, “Documenting” (*THJR* 16(1995):3), 264. To me it seems the Southern descriptions of African Americans record more of his criticism than his openness.

in its folly, of a vast Slave State (as the old term ran) artfully, savingly isolated in the world that was to contain it and trade with it. This was what everything round me meant--that that absurdity had once flourished there; and nothing, immediately, could have been more interesting than the lesson that such may remain, for long years, the tell-tale face of things where such absurdities *have* flourished. (371)

For James his experience of understanding gives a warning, a need for establishing a new set of values instead of the Slave-scheme in the South before social life could begin to change.

#### *General application*

James's criticism of the idea of the Old South forms part of his criticism of the American Scene in general. The way he comments on the American family, the American woman and on the American hotel-spirit in the South has a relevance to his general critical view of the US that is being refined here.

Firstly, he dislikes the organization of the American Family as it appears in the South and the US. His impression from the Charleston country club forms the basis of the comment. The social relations in the country club show the principle of the US family at work. In the US the young family is a basic unit of society, it works in the horizontal sense, a lateral dimension that expresses itself by number rather than by name. The family extends through social space democratically, this sense of the family is "an eminent field of democratic demonstration." (325) As opposed to this, the European family works in the vertical sense, its time aspect and the questions of ascent and descent are of importance (324), it is designed aristocratically. In the US country club the whole social extension of the family is accepted, so no discrimination is made of young and old, male and female, husband and wife, providing a scene of "universal eligibility" (325) James dislikes heartily. He would prefer the European principle of perpendicular differentiations. This whole issue gains interest for James in its relation to the question of manners. In Europe, there are social differentiations and precautions that seem diverting for the American mind, but for James it is dreadful to think that without the artistocratic discriminations represented in the form of manners social differences would cease to exist. James sees the intensity and the continuity of the association in the US, and is certain that "experience" and "real taste" (327) could add countless advantages to this scene.

The question of American women haunts James all through his American journey in the form of comments but he finds the vulgar young American girl in Florida as a possible threat for the future. Women in general are of interest to him as “the woman is two-thirds of the apparent life -- which means that she is absolutely all of the social” (346), exactly the sphere he would be interested in. Yet the appearances American women construct are far from being satisfactory for him. The young American girls he watches from his window are bareheaded, assertive, loud, open, and above all reveal their intimate relations to men in public in a way that is shocking. (456) He puts this problem down to the problem of type: as with men, there are relatively few types in the US. In US hotels you find men to be of the business block, all successful, decent, sociable and have good humour. Their wives are also of one type, indulged ladies of such lords. They used to be the vulgar young girls who do not engage the imagination of the spectator. The neutral respectability of these types bothers James to the point of asking a rhetorical question: to what extent the type has invented the young girls in question is answered by the former description already.

James’s criticism of the South and the American Scene culminates in his description of Southern hotels and of the general American hotel-spirit they embody. He stays at hotels in Richmond and Charleston and finds the institution similar everywhere: it is great, shiny, and empty, as if they were signposts from the North scattered about the South. In Florida the hotel life takes on a sudden intensity, as hotels dominate the holiday resorts, and in the clean Florida air their effect is quite spectacular. James compares this impression to the one he had had of the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City not long before. The effect consists in the impression of the “perfect, the exquisite adjustability of the “national” life to the sublime hotel-spirit.” (439) Analyzing the relation of national life and the hotel spirit, James is content to make the hotel-spirit the stronger in the sense that it is full-blown and expert, and thus the national life can rely on it to help out its own undeveloped and passive social organization. The problem with the hotel-spirit for James is not only that it is unifying but also that while it pretends to meet the need of American ideals, it in fact creates new American ideals. It is not only educative but is also prescriptive, the great national ignorance is taken advantage of artfully by the hotel-spirit that defines relations. This is the revelation James encounters instead of a fulfilling meal at his Florida hotel He finds this

revelation troubling from the perspective of “the individual” or “the informed few” looking at “the crowd” or the “uninformed” (441) masses:

I seemed to see again ... the whole housed populace move as in mild and consenting suspicion of its captured and governed state, its having to consent to inordinate fusion as the price of what it seemed pleased to regard as inordinate luxury. Beguiled and caged, positively thankful, in its vast vacancy, for the sense and the definite horizon of a cage, were there yet not moments, in which it still dimly made out that its condition was the result of a compromise into the detail of which there might some day be an alarm in entering? (441)

It is James’s notion of individuality existing in differentiations, taste, manners that is captured by the hotel-spirit in America. The cumulative sum, the golden-mean as the universal ideal oppresses him as the quality that has no need for his kind of individual sensibility.

James makes out the Pullman car as the final symbol of the American spirit he would like to resist at the end of his travelogue. The car provides a vantage-point for his descriptions and observations, the car window as the aperture that gives the shape of his American impressions.<sup>9</sup> Yet, at the end of his journey he defies the vantage-point the Pullman provides. He describes the car as “the missionary Pullman” (465) that invites the spectator to admire its achievements even when there is nothing worthy of mentioning outside save traces of the erasure of native cultures. At this point the narrator would like to stage a break with its prefigured perspective and question the celebrated achievements of “the symbolic agent,” the Pullman.

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<sup>9</sup> James’s descriptions of metropolitan machineries of the Modern city that indicate his distance from the Modern spirit is analyzed in Wendy Graham’s “Notes.” Graham points out the critical potential of the architectural descriptions of NYC and Chicago – an observation that I think is valid in the smaller-scale Southern context, too. See esp. Wendy Graham “Notes on a Native Son: Henry James’s New York” (*American Literary History* 21(2009): 2), 247-8.

### 3. Desperate Practice: Lessons Learnt and Re-learnt

Of how grimly, meanwhile, under the annual rigour,  
the world, for the most part, waits to be less ugly  
again, less despoiled of interest, less abandoned to  
monotony, less forsaken of the presence that forms  
its only resource, of the one friend to whom it owns  
all it ever gets, of the pitying season that will save it  
from its great insignificance – of so much as this, no  
doubt, I sufficiently renewed my vision. (462)

Although James sets out with a very definite task for himself as the student of manners, the analyst of the American scene and of the sense of the South, eventually he ends up questioning his own critical enterprise. The overall lack of material to process indicates that his whole methodology of experience is without use in the American scene.

Self-questioning forms part of James's habits as a way to reflection, but now there is a new, desperate tinge to it that appears. Already at the very beginning of the section on the South he begins to ask himself the question if he is reading too much into things. (330) Let us remember that by this point he had also registered that in the face of the overall lack of reference and material the analyst needs to exercise his associative potential to the full and thereby make sense of the lack of sense. The question of reading too much into something, then, refers to the overall critical enterprise James had undertaken to carry out. It is the "old habit of supposition" (330) that makes him go on, although he is chilled by the feeling that "his feelers drop" that his "questions [are] arrested" (ibid.) whilst he is trying to entangle the mystery of Southern manners. At stake is survival, he points out later as James the narrator relates the opinion of James the protagonist: "if one has not at last learned to separate with due sharpness, pen in hand, the essential *from* the accessory, one has only, at best, to muffle one's head for shame and await deserved extinction." (368) So the project of making sense out of senselessness (*from* the accessory) is vital, is a legitimating activity on the part of the analyst. If it cannot be performed, the whole analytical enterprise and also its agent go bankrupt.

The threat of extinction is not the only motivating factor for the analyst to go on with reading. In Richmond he realizes that his expectation to find a Southern character was utterly false and reveals the understanding that it is the lack of reference that has to be reestablished in

its historic connections. Just before experiencing this understanding of the South, the analyst is lost seeing only the lack of any historical consciousness, and is baffled by the void he finds. His reaction is emotional "[o]ne could never consent merely to taking it for that: intolerable the discredit so cast on one's perceptive resources." (370) So it is not only that he faces extinction if he cannot pursue his task but also a sense of personal failure, shame, that makes him want to see "by desperate practice" (392) and read sense into senseless appearances even if nobody cares for the "communicated importance" (337) of the void.

Another self-reflection of his concerns the validity of his associations. There is a possibility that his impressions are wrong. How can it be that it is only him who has such a critical view of the hotel-spirit? Can his associations produce the wrong reading of the scene: "How, when people were like that, did any one trust anyone enough to survive? Wasn't it, however, at last, non the less, the sign of a fallacy somewhere in my impression that the peace was kept, precisely, while I so luxuriously wondered? – the consciousness of which presently led me round to something that was at the least a temporary, a working answer." (426) He cannot be sure, but he supposes he is on the right track and drifts on.

While drifting along, the analyst becomes aware of the fact that there will be no conclusion to reach with his travels. He set out to study the question of manners in the largest sense in the US (317), to see the "social consequences of the straight application of the prime democratic idea." (324) What are Southern manners like forty years after the process of democratization started? Is there such a thing as a democratic Southern character – these are the questions that are arrested by the experience of void: lack of character types, a lack of historical consciousness. Instead, he now lets things drift, and he focuses his attention on making the surface mean something. That is why he marvels at the mystery of experience again. (395) He only finds the ghost of the old Southern tradition, not the Southern tradition, and wonders if his sensibilities have been wasted here. He has identified a predominant social type he finds base and vulgar, a type he has encountered elsewhere in the world but now should make a central figure of his explorations. The question is not of the type but of its value: "why did it now usurp a value out of proportion to other values?" (425) Why is it that the analyst cannot pursue his task of making distinctions and finding out about manners due to the dominant vulgar type that excludes differentiations? The type is base

because it is unformed, undeveloped, unrelated. (428) In terms of the analyst's task, the social result of the democratic experiment in the South, there is no conclusion to make because it would be a devastating conclusion.

Instead of drawing conclusions, the analyst goes on associating by "sordid habit" as he knows no better. (425) His final associations bear relevance both to his experience of the South and to his task to produce experience. On the one hand, he associates the analogy of the Nile to his impression of Southern swamps and to his impression of the South. The scene, for him, is like the Nile before the culture of the Pharaohs, because Florida swamps are like the Nile flood region waiting for the annual water supply to come that would make it fertile – without the culture but with the potential to provide for such a culture. The scene is also similar to California because there the impression is that of "an unconscious and inexperienced Italy" (462) On the other hand, his image of the long awaited flood that renews the ugly world and "shall save it from its huge insignificance" (462) has a relevance to the process of making sense through impressions and experience. The way the analyst makes sense of barrenness in the South and in the US again and again is similar to the way the Nile saves the land from becoming a desert every year. Association makes a void of material have an importance, beautiful, varied, and thereby saves it from insignificance. It is a miracle to happen again and again however futile the repetition may seem – "[o]f so much as this, no doubt, I sufficiently renewed my vision" (462) James comments. Association must go on as it is the only source of value in a world without the values of importance, beauty, and difference.

## **Conclusion**

James the restless analyst of manners explores the US South intending to understand Southern character and the sense of the South before the war. He sets out to perform his task equipped with a notion of understanding that is largely associative: impressions will form a vision of the issues he is interested in. Yet, however hard he tries, he fails to find the traces of either Southern character or the sense of the South. Instead of character he finds a base and vulgar social type that predominates social spaces of the South, especially the hotel and its dining room. Instead of the sense of the Southern past he finds the ghost of the South and of

Southern tradition, the very idea of the Slave State a grotesque absurdity that cannot generate historical consciousness. He describes the “darkie” as an agent who plays an important role in the lack of character and in the lack of historical consciousness, because his intimate presence prevents the whites from developing these qualities, too. He is aware of the ghastliness of excluding many groups of people from the notion of ‘character’ able to appreciate discriminations but nevertheless does so even if he finds himself the only ‘character’ present, an open admittance of a racially biased attitude. Despite warning signals that his whole analytical enterprise focusing on the human side and social relations may be a fallacy, he goes on generating associations that, according to him, can save the world from insignificance.

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## **“A Twitter, a Coo, a Subdued Roar”: Animal Symbolism in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man***

Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka

The function and significance of animal symbolism is perhaps not among the most often discussed aspects of *Invisible Man* (1952), but this intricately layered system, partly informed by the cultural heritage of the African American protagonist of the novel, certainly contributes to the novel’s thematic complexity. As I argue, by highlighting the narrator’s otherwise not overtly stated point of view concerning characters, events, or ideas, animal imagery questions the racist stereotypes of the white-dominated society in which the protagonist struggles to find his identity.

I propose that the animals in *Invisible Man* can be arranged into two major categories. Most of the animals in the novel are birds and other airborne and quick-moving creatures evoking dignity and freedom, while other animals belong to the group of earth-bound, often physically strong mammals, such as cattle or bears, readily associated with unsophisticatedness or steadiness and stability. The animals in the first group are generally present when the narrator talks about white characters, while the other group is predominantly mentioned in relation to African Americans. Also, the latter category further diverges to incorporate two characters, the bear and the rabbit, of African and African American folklore. When either inter- or intracategorical merging occurs, a critique of the stereotypes associated with the categories emerges: in each instance, animal symbolism comments on the absurdity of the simplified views that white people seem to have about African Americans, and on the process by which African Americans internalize and cope with these views. It also illustrates the struggle of the protagonist to maneuver his way amidst the stereotypes that have been instilled in him by the dominant white society.

In the following, I will offer a classification of the references and allusions to animals appearing in the novel and discuss the ways in which animal imagery reflect on the issue of racial stereotypes in the US. I will introduce one striking example for each of the above-mentioned categories, and then will explore the overlaps that exist between the two major groups. The description of the overlaps of the two major categories follows the chronological order of the four major stations in the protagonist's life, because, as Susan Blake writes, "[e]ach stage in the protagonist's personal history corresponds to an era in the social history of black Americans": the time the narrator spends in college corresponds to the Reconstruction Era, his first few weeks in New York City reflect the hopeful Roaring Twenties, his membership in the Brotherhood resembles the Great Depression, and, finally, the riot he partakes in mirrors the Harlem Riot of 1943 (126–27). The way animal symbolism is used in the novel slightly changes with these four major stations of the protagonist's life depending on the stage of his quest for finding his identity. Finally, I will discuss the intracategorical merging that occurs within the category of earthbound animals on the basis of the hero's cultural heritage to further illustrate the difficulties faced by him during his inner journey.

Bird symbolism is predominantly connected to white people in the novel. Ellison's narrator uses one of his most significant animal-related figures of speech early in the novel in the "battle royal" scene in which the narrator experiences his first humiliation. After he prepares to give a speech full of pathos "at a gathering of the town's leading white citizens" (*Invisible Man* 18) and before he is manipulated into participating in a fistfight, he has to endure standing next to and looking at a "magnificent blonde," who is "stark naked" (20). He has to participate in a ritual that, according to Houston A. Baker, Jr., "is akin to a castration, excision, or lynching" (834). After the woman begins her erotic dance, designed to confuse and shame the unsuspecting teenagers around her and to entertain the above-mentioned white elite, the narrator remarks that "[s]he seemed like a fair bird-girl girdled in veils calling to me from the angry surface of some grey and threatening sea" (20). The veils created by cigar smoke (20) accentuate the bird metaphor by associating flight with the lightness of the smoke veil. The adjective "fair" also calls to mind clarity, purity and lightness.

Apart from being connected to whiteness, birds are also associated with Americanness as evidenced by the description of the dancer. Correspondingly, with her yellow hair, heavy make-up and firm breasts (20), the blonde is described as the stereotypical American beauty. Moreover, a “small American flag tattooed upon her belly” (20) reinforces her being a true American woman, an idol, and a symbol of the United States. The dancer, likened to a bird, represents white America not only through her fairness and bloneness, but through the miniature image of the country on the center of her body as well.

By contrast, the narrator associates mainly heavy, slow, pathos-free animals with African American people. In the prologue he identifies himself with a bear because of his lifestyle: “[c]all me Jack-the-Bear, for I am in a state of hibernation” (9). This metaphor is twofold in its implications: on the one hand, it may allude to bears in general as the invisible man lives in a basement, in “a hole in the ground” (9), evocative of a cave where a bear may lie dormant during the winter. On the other hand, just as the narrator describes the bird with a brief narrative—as calling from above a sea—he alludes to a story in connection with the bear as well. Also named Spring-heeled Jack (“Russian Jack”), this bizarre, demonic creature was known for his quick leaps and jumps startling pedestrians on London streets (Upton). Parallels between characteristic movements and acts of Jack-the-Bear and those of the narrator allow for naming himself after this creature.

When the narrator draws upon the image of the dormant bear, he may only refer to his individual circumstances underground, but when he fuses this image with that of a horrifying figure in an urban legend, the focus is not necessarily only on him anymore, but on his fellow African Americans suffering from stereotyping. At the beginning of his monologue the narrator recants the story of a fight he had with a white man when he decided to crawl out of his hole, saying that he “sprang” at the unsuspecting pedestrian (7). The day after this fight, a newspaper reports a street robbery (8), which suggests that from the white society’s point of view, the attacker is nothing more than a mugger—an obvious racial stereotype. Thus, the image of Jack-the-Bear signifies not only the narrator, but blacks in general, which is why it is a prime example of a figure of speech that connects bears with African Americans in the novel.

Arguably, attributes attached to the two main categories of airborne and earth-bound as described above overlap and merge. The bird-girl is

not so dainty and dignified, while the bear is not so earth-bound and crude after all. Although the physique and movement of the blonde dancer remind the narrator of a bird, the blue eyeshadow she uses prompts him to think of a far less sophisticated animal: "the eyes hollow and seared a cool blue, the colour of a baboon's butt" (20). The narrator does not only perceive the girl as a delicate, elegant lady, as an object of his desire, but also as the object of his hatred and the cause of his shame. She is a white woman degrading herself to become an object of men's gaze, moving powerlessly for the viewing pleasure of the audience. In this regard, she is similar to the black teenagers who are forced into battling each other so that they could entertain the white crowd. Amidst all the sexual urges and shame he feels, the narrator senses this link, and comments on it subtly by conflating white privilege and black rawness.

The bear metaphor at the beginning of the novel is also extended and connected to a metaphor that involves an airborne creature in order to indicate African American's desire to get closer to being white. The narrator hiding beneath the surface of the earth likens himself not only to a bear, but to a chicken about to be hatched, too: "remember, a bear retires to his hole for the winter and lives until spring; then he comes strolling out like the Easter chick breaking from its shell," he warns us (9). Living the life of a bear is temporary because the underground creature will soon transform itself into a spring chicken, full of promise and hope. Notwithstanding, his Easter resurrection is ironic since he is not supposed to turn into a "fair bird-girl," only into a chicken incapable of flying. Even so, this resurrection carries the hope of the invisible man of turning into a visible, active agent. As he says so himself: "[a] hibernation is a covert preparation for a more overt action" (15). As a consequence, again, white privilege and black rawness are combined thus underlying that it is desirable for a black man to be more like a white man, even if a somewhat handicapped white man; thus, a black, invisible man is better off having half the privileges of whites than none at all.

Apart from these two significant instances, there are several other occurrences where there is an overlap or at least a meeting point between the animals that represent blacks and whites in order to highlight the unsavory conduct of seemingly dignified white men. The audience of the battle royal consists of eminent white men who seem to give up any sense of decency while watching the naked dancer. One of them, "a certain merchant" is "drooling" at the sight (21), and he is dressed in an

obnoxious manner to show off his wealth: he wears “diamond studs in a shirtfront;” yet, he lacks dignity. As the invisible man recalls, the merchant’s clothing is set off by his big belly and bald hair, and his posture is “like that of an intoxicated panda” (21).

Other seemingly ordinary, descriptive metaphors debase the white crowd to the level of animals that are thought to lack dignity. Despite being dressed in their tuxedos, the “big shots” of the town are far from behaving gentlemanly as they are “wolfing down the buffet foods” in the ballroom (19) and they are “howling” after the dancer when they chase and touch her with their “beefy fingers” (21). Although “beefy” generally means only fleshy, that is, fat, here its connotation recalls beef, thus, cattle.

To sum it up, here the narrator uses the image of a bear and other earth-bound animals to comment on the character of the merchant and the other men, in order to contrast it with that of the boxing crew. The boys are clearly ashamed of their desire as one of them faints (20), another begins “to plead to go home” (21), and yet another uses his boxing gloves to try to conceal his erection (21). In contrast with their reactions, the “big shots” lack the sophistication that they are supposed to have: the merchant does nothing to conceal his excitement, and the rest of the audience only cares about satisfying their animalistic desires. Without specifically addressing this contrast, the narrator notices it, and deals with it on the level of figures of speech. Comparing a supposedly upper-class white man to a hypnotized panda bear and later calling him a “creature” (21), thus dehumanizing him, he confronts a stereotype: he acknowledges the discrepancy between what a distinguished member of white society is supposed to behave like and how he actually acts.

The images of both airborne and earthbound animals seem to be particularly frequent in the descriptions of the college, its surroundings, and its authority figures. The lush section of the school premises is bustling with free birds and bees, selling the illusion of carelessness and freedom, but the lifeless spot separated from this idyll is populated with animals whose nature is determined by their instincts. This nature then, as later hinted at by the narrator, mirrors the behavior of black students who are critiqued for their unthinking acceptance of the status quo. Parallel to this, the statue of the supposedly respected, trail-blazing and almost sacred Founder stands desecrated by the high-flying birds, which represents cynical white power.

The invisible man “many times” reminisces about the “beautiful” buildings of the school and the scenery that surrounds it, and the pages on which he introduces them abound with descriptions of the natural world (32–4). However, he separates this scenery into a colorful and a barren part. He remembers the colorful and rustic part with his eyes closed and mentions iconic signifiers of the South including romantic vines, tree logs, the scents of magnolia and wisteria, and also humming bees and singing mocking-birds (32). The narrator’s memories on the levels of emotions and sensuality inevitably link him with his own cultural heritage, with his own roots in the South. After a “sudden forking” of a road, he always opens his eyes and faces a section “barren of buildings, birds, or grass” (33), void of any natural majesty. Here, the road leads to a mental institution, which suggests that trespassing is forbidden for students and that the premises are not supposed to be visited by guests either. Therefore, the carefully crafted garden of the graceful, vine-covered school buildings and the chapel, complete with its lawn and roses, is the only place intended for students and visitors alike; it stands in stark contrast with the barren soil that is interrupted only by thistles, broken glass and stones and whose animals include only earth-bound rabbits and ants (33).

The tameness and instinctual pattern of behavior of the earth-bound animals of this desolate section highlight and condemn the automated behavior of the African American college students. The juxtaposition of the tameness of both the rabbits and the college students involves irony. The rabbits are “so tame through having never been hunted” (33), says the narrator. Later, he describes students about to enter the chapel as brainwashed automatons, which calls into mind the tame, playful, yet mellow rabbits. An ironic contrast emerges here: the rabbits may indeed be docile because fear of hunters or stronger animals is not ingrained in them, but the black student body should be aware of centuries of exploitation that their ancestors underwent. Instead, their “eyes are blind like those of robots” (33), and they are oblivious to the fact that they *have* been hunted.

The image of the ants invites associations similar to those of the rabbits. They are “moving nervously in single file” on the barren ground (33), suggesting that even though they are neither tame nor playful, they are disciplined enough not to break away from what they are supposed to do. Thus, ants are also similar to the numb students who spend their Sundays with their “uniforms pressed, shoes shined, minds laced up, eyes

blind” (33) to the injustice inherent in the *status quo*. Thus, through the use of rabbits and ants, the narrator points out that by being blind, the unthinking college students appropriate a racial stereotype akin to that of the “docile Negro.”

The next metaphor that involves birds comments on the unequal relationship between whites and blacks that stems in part from the fact that the former determine the course of the latter’s life through the power they possess, and in part from the above-mentioned docility.

While describing the premises of the college, the narrator recalls the “bronze statue of the college Founder,” which shows this oft-mentioned figure with his “hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic fold above the face of a kneeling slave” (33–34). The narrator muses over whether the Founder really does lift the veil or he just lowers it “more firmly in place” (34). The otherwise crucial motif of blindness and vision is rendered less important here because the statue is “bird-soiled”. The invisible man writes: “there is a rustle of wings and I see a flock of starlings fighting before me and, when I look again, the bronze face, whose empty eyes look upon a world I have never seen, runs with liquid chalk” (34). The “bird-soiled” statue implies that whatever intentions the Founder has, the fact that whites make some concessions and allow a black leader to establish a college is but a grand gesture that does not involve any real respect or understanding on their part.

The “Trueblood episode” in Chapter 2 is also replete with animal imagery. The presence of earth-bound oxen and delicate birds in this scene subtly suggests that neither the white nor the black population is a monolith: just as Norton shows interest in the African American college while being oblivious to a hungry white man, the narrator identifies with the white man instead of the “black mob” seen in old photographs. The scene with Jim Trueblood’s account of his incestuous relationship with his daughter contains similes and metaphors which either dehumanize African Americans or are associated with sexuality, suggesting that African American men have an animalistic nature, which they can transcend only with the freedom that sexuality, however transgressive, provides. This scene also subverts these very assumptions about African American men by hinting at the inappropriate feeling the white Norton might have about his daughter.

In the introduction of the Trueblood scene, that is, in the sequence where the narrator and Mr Norton drive around and off campus, the

narrator muses over photographs taken in the school's early days, showing black "men and women in wagons drawn by mule teams and oxen" (36). He remarks that members of this "black mob" with "blank faces" do not seem to have any individuality, therefore making it difficult for him to regard them as actual human beings (37). When the car passes a "team of oxen hitched to a broken-down wagon" (37) with a white driver (38), the narrator asks Norton whether he has seen "that" (37). Norton answers that he could not see it, and declines the offer to turn back to have a look (38).

The narrator's interest in the wagon can be explained by the fact that a white man with a "lean, hungry face" (38) drives it, reminding him that mules and oxen are not to be regarded as mere props in a photo taken in the previous century, but as working tools of a member of the most privileged race in the present. This incongruity creates fear in him (38), which he wants to share with Norton, whose indifference suggests that below his superficial interest in the campus and the life of the black college students, he disregards its everyday reality. In this regard, he is similar to the narrator, who is so enamored with the presence of this glamorous Northern millionaire that, instead of empathizing with his ancestors, he identifies "with the rich man reminiscing on the rear seat" (37). A further parallel between the protagonist and Norton is established when, moments after they pass the oxen, the narrator notices a "flock of birds" circling nearby in great harmony (38). The "invisible strings" with which the birds seem to be connected (38) stand in contrast with how disconnected the narrator and Norton are from their respective heritage and responsibilities.

The following scene, in which Norton meets Trueblood, the incestuous sharecropper, first establishes Trueblood's animality and crudeness and then modifies it with images of birds signifying freedom. When he is introduced to the reader, his animalistic nature is emphasized: formerly a "country blues singer" (Baker 829), Trueblood used to perform "'primitive spirituals'" that were enjoyed by white visitors but brought embarrassment to the students because of the "crude, high, plaintively animal sounds" he made (*Invisible Man* 43). His wife, seeing him raping their daughter, screams "like a woman who was watchin' a team of wild horses run down her baby chile" (54), and then she calls him a "low-down dog" (56).

Trueblood, the "magic storyteller" (Baker. 831), intersperses his narrative of the incestuous intercourse with sexually suggestive images,



such as “young juicy melons spilt wide open a’layin’ all spread out” (*Invisible Man* 50), going through doors and reaching the top of a hill (51). Among these images are “quail huntin’” and “the boss bird whistling,” coming toward him softly, almost seductively (50), and then a “flock of little white geese flies out of the bed” (52), followed by Trueblood himself almost flying and floating (53).

Sexuality, freedom, flying, and birds are all conflated in these images. As Susan Blake notes, flying, often expressed through bird imagery, is “a predominant motif in black-American folklore as well as in Western myth,” but while its meaning in Western traditions usually centers around potency or power, “in black-American folklore, it means freedom” (124). As Blake points out, “the mythic and sexual meanings of the metaphor [of flying] are of course implicit in the aspiration to freedom” (124), and, according to Baker, Trueblood’s “sexual prerogatives” stand in contrast with “other Afro-Americans in his area [who] are either so constrained or so battered by their encounters with society that they are incapable of a legitimate and productive sexuality” (832). Trueblood’s freedom gained through sexuality is illustrated even when, after his wife beats him, he indeed looks “just like a jaybird” (*Invisible Man* 56).

However, the idea that African American men are crude, animal-like taboo-breakers is subverted by hinting at a form of incest that Norton, a white man, commits. Norton feels “incestuous desires for his daughter” (Doane and Hodges 36) as evidenced by his monologue he delivers to the narrator. After eloquently describing her beauty, he says that he is reluctant to believe that she is his “own flesh and blood” (39). Zsolt Virágos calls this uncanny infatuation “spiritual (...) incest” (159). Thus, the stereotypical representation of Trueblood is modified to debunk another myth about African Americans.

The way the narrator describes the two black authority figures of the college, Bledsoe and the Founder, illustrates the ambivalence surrounding their intentions and legacy, and denies the preconception that is instilled into the college students about the powerful yet benevolent whites who selflessly support the poor and utterly subservient blacks. Dr Bledsoe, the African American president of the college, is often depicted as someone who wants to transcend his skin color. His first job, given to him by the Founder, was to feed hogs (98), and now, in his own description of himself, he feeds lies to white trustees (116), whom he respects and pleases only for their power and money (119). Arguably, in

his role as a feeder, he supplies the “hogs” with what they need. Meanwhile, he is two-faced and wants to emulate these “hogs” in his appearance as he wears a “swallow-tail coat” (96), just like the elegant white visitors of the school.

The connection that exists between birds and another authority figure, the Founder of the school, also disrupts the perceived dynamics between rich whites and wanting African Americans. The Founder leaves his (earth-bound) horse and buggy, that is, the everyday reality of his race, in the middle of a road upon being so instructed by a mysterious figure (102). Afterwards, he is surrounded by images of birds: his statue being bird-soiled indicates that whites do not necessarily take him seriously, but a singing mockingbird sitting on the same statue later (113) signifies that whites use him as a convenient pedestal from which they can make their voices heard.

After the narrator is forced to leave the college and moves to New York City, the same principle of earth-bound and airborne animals is maintained; that is, earth-bound animals evoke black characters, while airborne animals represent white characters. Within the city, however, a geographical division emerges to illustrate and criticize the uneven distribution of living space: in Harlem, the residents of which are predominantly African American, animal symbolism with bears and monkeys prevails, yet birds surround the protagonist just as often as white people do in other parts of New York City. On the streets of Harlem, thus, the narrator hears a street singer’s song about a woman who looks like a monkey, a frog (140), and a bulldog (141). The same hobo asks the invisible man whether he has the dog or the dog has him (142). Then he says that a bear has gotten hold of him as “this Harlem ain’t nothing than a bear’s den” (143), which in turn reminds the narrator of long-forgotten characters like Jack the Bear (also spelled Jack-the-Bear in the novel) and Jack the Rabbit (143). If a resident of Harlem ventures into other parts of the city, whites are polite toward him, but do not really see him: “they would have begged the pardon of Jack the Bear, never glancing his way if the bear happened to be walking along minding his business” (139).

Outside of Harlem, however, airborne animals prevail just as white people do. In Manhattan, near Wall Street, the narrator sees gulls soaring (136), while in Emerson’s office there are tropical birds (148), “their squawks [sounding] like screams in a nightmare” (157). However, Emerson Jr., who is the only white man to be honestly sympathetic

toward the narrator, has a connection to blacks as well: he is “a primitivist, who frequents Harlem nightclubs, collects African art, and reads *Totem and Taboo*” (Blake 127), so, correspondingly, his office features statues of both birds and horses. The statues of airborne birds connect him to his skin color, and the statues of earth-bound horses signify his empathy toward African Americans. References to birds abound after the narrator leaves Emerson’s office. On the street the protagonist hears a song about “poor Robin” who has been picked clean (158). Even the Long Island company that he works for, Liberty Paints, has a screaming eagle as its trademark (161), further illustrating the prevalence of white people in the area with images of airborne animals.

The neat geographical division that associates Harlem to earth-bound animals and the rest of New York City to airborne animals ceases to exist only during and after the electroshock treatment as it makes the deepest psychological processes of the protagonist come to the surface. Regardless of the precise physical location of the therapy, this section of the novel is “populated” with many animals ranging from mockingbirds through monkeys, whales, and alligators (191) to fish (195), illustrating the narrator’s chaotic mental state. Furthermore, the therapy is a watershed event that “erases all memory save for patterns of soul, song and mother wit” (Cartwright 62), making it possible for the narrator to identify with a folklore character.

The inclusion of the rabbit in this episode serves, among other things, as a chance for the narrator to critique the stereotype of the “infantile Negro.” The doctors administering the treatment have preconceptions evident in their questions about Buckeye the Rabbit and Brer Rabbit (197). They, among other things, expect a “matriarchal black family” (Cartwright 63), and “they are regarding folklore as the expression of a childish personality, safe and hence ‘normal’ in a black subject” (Blake 128). Thus, the scene denies the stereotype of the African American person with whom a white professional can interact only by condescending to his or her level.

A highly effective use of animal symbolism is present in the Brotherhood section as well as the chapters immediately following it, with a view to contest the idea that blacks constitute a homogeneously aggressive crowd when it comes to defending their rights. These episodes describe both the Brotherhood and its nemesis, Ras the Exhorter, in terms of earth-bound animals, but establish a contrast in their respective temperaments. While Brotherhood members are described with the help

of a European, quite timid animal—the dog—, Ras is first associated with energetic bulls, and later, with menacing African animals. This distinction between the portrayals of the organizations reflects the differences that exist between their ideologies and temperament. The Brotherhood strives to modify the existing system by giving elaborate speeches thus manipulating crowds, but Ras and his disciples intend to achieve radical changes by appealing to emotions and by action.

Curiously enough, Brother Jack, the cunning leader of the Brotherhood, is treated as a black man on the level of animal symbolism. Whether he is white or African American can be debated as his skin color is never explicitly stated in the novel. The fact that he reminds the narrator of a black-and-white dog (273) indicates that this ambiguity is purposeful. Yet, Alice Bloch reads him as a white character (1020). His red hair corroborates this theory, though it is not impossible for African Americans to have hair with a red tinge. Also, his devotion to the African American cause, as well as his insistence on being their brother and not their father or master (*Invisible Man* 380), insinuate that he is either black or has a strong desire to be treated as such.

Brother Jack is often likened to a dog, for example, he moves like a fyce (234) and looks “like a toy bull terrier” (273). He may seem quick on his feet, but upon closer inspection, he projects no real danger. Dogs appear in descriptions of other members of the Brotherhood as well: Brother Tarp escapes from captivity by befriending dogs and making them think he is one of them (312). When the narrator realizes that he is “dominated by the all-embracing idea of Brotherhood,” he sees clues to his future in “dog-luck fouled on the pavements” (308). Brother Wrestrum says he roots out his faults “like a man cauterizing a mad-dog bite” (317). This latter example is also ironic because by faults, Wrestrum means revengefulness and distrust that work against the Brotherhood (318), yet, these are the exact qualities that some Brotherhood members turn out to show toward the narrator. In fact, when he feels betrayed by them, a dog attacks him on the street (445).

On the other hand, Ras the Exhorter is often associated with bulls in order to emphasize his impulsiveness and strength. First, Brother Jack drags the invisible man into the Brotherhood, causing him to be aware of Ras, and he drags him into the El Toro Bar as well, where the disciple begins to understand the symbol of Ras. The bar is advertised by “a neon-lighted sign of a bull’s head” (287). Just as Jack disapproves of Ras’s tactics, he finds bullfights barbarian, and just as the narrator is captivated

by picture of a bull and a toreador, he is drawn to Ras himself (289). When fighting with Tod Clifton, Ras looks like a “drunken bull,” tries to “bull his way out” (298), and pants “bull-angry” (299).

The idea that the intellectual Brotherhood is embodied by but a dog, albeit a vicious one, in comparison with the passionate, raw members of the group organized around Ras the Exhorter, is further emphasized amidst the chaos of the riot when Ras is transformed into “Ras the Destroyer” (447). Although earlier Tod Clifton remarks that Ras “makes [his name] sound like the hood of a cobra fluttering” (304), it is only during the riot that he is likened to even more threatening animals. He wears “a cape made of the skin of some wild animals around his shoulders” (447), which later turns out to be a “lion skin” (453). Ras even “lets out a roar like a lion” (453). What is more, like white policemen, he sits on a horse (447), which signals that he is somehow above the Westernized African Americans: he treats horses, symbols of Westernized African Americans, in the same way white people do, that is, as mere vehicles.

As birds represent white people and their freedom coveted by African Americans in the earlier sections of the novel, flying and, more specifically, birds, can also be connected to Tod Clifton, suggesting that in spite of what happens to him, he is able to preserve his inner independence. When Clifton is still a member of the Brotherhood, he mocks Ras, saying that it would be fitting of Ras to “say something about ‘Ethiopia stretching forth her wings’” (304), imagining this country as a soaring bird. After abandoning the Brotherhood in search of a more authentic solution, Clifton seemingly succumbs to madness and begins selling Sambo dolls on the street (348). Christopher A. Shinn claims that Clifton and the doll “mirror each other as they reflect aspects of the minstrel tradition; Clifton becomes a puppet of the Brotherhood, manipulated and made to dance” (254). However, seconds before recognizing Tod, the narrator sees flying pigeons in the street (*Invisible Man* 350). The birds continue to circle and swing around Clifton, and they keep plummeting and diving when he is shot (351). Then, a policeman remarks that Clifton is nothing more now than a “cooked pigeon” (352), no longer representing freedom, but pigeons keep flying during and after his funeral (364-65), signifying that the policeman is wrong.

Animal symbolism plays an extremely important role in addressing the novel's underlying theme of sexuality and its transformative power that can disrupt the presumed, race-based boundaries between crude, earth-bound blacks and sophisticated, airborne whites. When Jim Trueblood commits incest, he transits from the realm of earth-bound animals into the realm of airborne ones, a process mirrored in the scene when the narrator gets a white woman drunk in order to spy on her prominent husband. The woman, Sybil, sees the narrator as "Brother Taboo-with-whom-all-things-are-possible" (416) and a "*domesticated* rapist" (419, emphasis added). Further references to animals abound in the scene, establishing her opinion that black men are animalistic. She enthusiastically tells the narrator that her friend has been insulted and raped by a huge "brute," a "buck" (417), and after the faux rape, she calls the narrator "a strong big brute" (422). Then the narrator himself begins to laugh as if he was roaring (422). The references to his animality culminate in Sybil's definition of him: "[a]nonymous brute 'n boo'ful buck" (425).

Meanwhile, images of birds are associated with Sybil, the white woman: she "pluck[s] at the corner of the pillow, drawing out a speckled feather and stripping the down from its shaft" (418). Also, when the narrator fantasizes about Rinehart's mistress, a "desirable" woman he could have seduced on account of his similarity to Rinehart, he imagines her as a "bright-eyed bird-girl" and "is afraid to frighten the bird away" (412). Lynn Veach Sadler claims that "[t]he White bird-girl of the smoker and White Sybil are thus tied to Rinehart's girl in the narrator's fantasy" (22), so these instances coupled with the blonde dancer's description as a bird-girl reinforce that the narrator links delicate birds to women about whom he fantasizes. However, when Sybil is worried whether she "put up a good fight" during the faux rape, the narrator flatters her by answering, "[l]ike a lioness defending her young" (422). Thus, in order to suit her fancy, he distances Sybil from her delicate femininity and moves her closer to the realm of the exotic and wild.

The subtlety and complexity of animal imagery is most evident in the Harlem riot scene where birds, representing whites as established in the novel, literally begin to chase the narrator into the heart of a riot. Ironically, this scene also makes the narrator's dream described in Chapter 1 come true in a literal sense. Before the protagonist attends college, he dreams about a series of envelopes stamped with the seal of

the state that lead him to a final envelope with a note in it: "Keep This Nigger Boy Running" (32). When the president of the college sends the narrator off with faux letters of recommendation that essentially keep him running from one prospective employer to another (156), the dream comes true in a figurative sense. Correspondingly, the narrator's running away "blindly, boiling with outrage" (430) from the birds implies his desperate attempt to escape from the whites. Meanwhile, in a matter of seconds, he notices a flock of birds and hears partly real, partly metaphorical animal sounds: "a twitter, a coo, a subdued roar" on the streets (429):

I looked above towards the sound, my mind forming an image of wings, as something struck my face and streaked, and I could smell the foul air now, and see the encrusted barrage, feeling it streak my jacket and raising my brief case above my head and running, hearing it splattering around, falling like rain. I ran the gauntlet, thinking, even the birds; even the pigeons and the sparrows and the gulls! I ran blindly, boiling with outrage and despair and harsh laughter. Running from birds, to what, I didn't know. I ran. (430)

Paradoxically, in this climactic moment, while trying to save his own life, the narrator still uses a white-male-defined object, his calfskin briefcase as a shield to guard himself from a white attack. Recognizing that neither white nor black ideology assists him in defining himself and finding space in society, he burns the documents in the briefcase (457) in his disillusionment, whereby the briefcase loses its significance.

Animal figures of the African American folklore tradition figure into the web of animal signification of the novel in a case of intracategorical merging, that is, one that occurs within the category of earth-bound animals. Pre-slavery, African tales morphed into the stories published by Joel Chandler Harris (1845–1908) whose work, considered authentic (Cartwright 129), has been known by generations of African Americans. In his essay "Ralph Ellison and the Dilemma of Artistic Synthesis," Virágos proposes a classification of animals in *Invisible Man* based on two major characters from these tales who are referenced in the novel as well, Brer Rabbit and Brer Bear. He argues that African American trickster characters resembling the shrewd and fast folklore character Brer Rabbit continue to play tricks upon the protagonist resembling the slow yet honest Brer Bear. The article also argues that as the invisible man is not only outwitted by his grandfather, Trueblood, Bledsoe, Lucius Brockway, and Brother Jack, but he even identifies with

the bear character—saying “call me Jack the Bear” and prompting the reader to “bear with [him]” (161–62).

Undoubtedly, the characteristics of the folktales’ rabbit are displayed in the characters enumerated by Virágos, and the parallel can even be applied in a wider sense than he proposes because, as Cartwright notes, “*Invisible Man* is probably the American novel most informed by Brer Rabbit’s modes of knowledge and power” (62). For example, the protagonist’s grandfather is not a trickster mainly because, as suggested by Virágos, he adds to the hero’s confusion (161), but because his strategy of “overcom[ing] them with yeses” (*Invisible Man* 17) is obviously subversive. Similarly, Trueblood can also be considered rabbit-like, but not because he, by rendering the story of his incest in front of a white trustee, he contributes to the invisible man’s losing his scholarship (Virágos 161), but because he revels in the white society’s tendency to romanticize black transgressions. Trueblood capitalizes on a phenomenon seemingly prevalent among wealthy, decent whites of the novel: they seem to find a perverse satisfaction when they see their worst preconceptions about the barbarity of blacks come true. Furthermore, he is similar to Brer Rabbit because the rabbit is also “ruled by lust and hunger” (Kerenyi qtd. in Ellison, “Change the Joke” 67), is “outside of human rules” (Cartwright 125) and he has “the capacity to survive and flourish in a world in which society can be and often is predatory” (Rubin qtd. in Cartwright 125).

However, the extent of the similarity between the protagonist and the figure of the slow-to-learn bear can be debated. While it is true that the protagonist seems inflexible and naïve when he, for example, is slow to recognize that Bledsoe and Brother Jack are dishonest with him, he progresses from his utter naivety to a more aware state during the course of the plot. In fact, during his electroshock treatment, he identifies with the rabbit figure remembered from his childhood, and this is the “first identity that the narrator steadfastly claims and answers to” because it has not been erased (Cartwright 63). Even if the narrator is unable to connect to his cultural heritage when in college, as evidenced by his already mentioned conversation with Norton on the campus, after finding an “old” self with which the narrator is “giddy” (*Invisible Man* 197) to identify, he changes: from this point on, he goes on to take a more active role in shaping his future, going as far as playing tricks on Sybil and Brother Jack, and also trying to pass for Rinehart. On the one hand, he identifies with a bear at the beginning of the novel, that is, at the end of



the narrative, which signals that he turns away from his developing trickster persona. On the other hand, he steals power (10), subverting the electricity company's capitalistic authority, thus playing a trick on them. He also says that his story is far from being over, suggesting that he is far from accepting the gullible nature of the bear figure.

The multifunctionality and complexity of animal symbolism as discussed in this paper proves to be powerful in providing additional layers to social and cultural commentary in *Invisible Man*. Numerous instances as presented above reveal stereotypical beliefs about the delicate, sophisticated animals associated with white people and the crude, pathos-free animals evoking African Americans. However, subtle animal imagery also debunks myths associated with expected white and black behaviors, among them the myth that both blacks and whites constitute an undifferentiated monolith, and that one is supposed to find his or her place in the world through all-encompassing definitions given by others. Animal references on the most subtle level, that of folklore, highlight the choice between accepting or battling the impression cultural heritage leaves on a young person trying to navigate through a changing world. Animals, whether through their direct presence, embeddedness in a figure of speech or in folkloric building blocks, help the reader gain insight into the protagonist's unspoken thoughts and behavioral patterns, revealing much about the choices he has to make during his quest.

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## Henry Clay and Lajos Kossuth's Visit in the United States, 1851–1852<sup>1</sup>

Csaba Lévai

The visit of Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) in the United States is one of the best-known chapters in the history of Hungarian-American relations. It has often been seen in the Hungarian literature as a triumphant journey when the great Hungarian patriot charmed the American public and convinced it to support the cause of the freedom of Hungary (Pivány, 1944, 13–14). On the other hand, some segments of American society and politics vehemently opposed the measure of European intervention proposed by Kossuth. Such influential American intellectuals took the floor and denounced the ideas of the former governor of Hungary as William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879), Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), and Orestes Brownson (1803–1876) (Várdy, 2000, 53–54; Várdy 2002, 27–29; Jánossy, 1940, 167–168). This powerful opposition played a crucial role in Kossuth's failure in the United States.

Much has been written about the causes of Kossuth's fiasco and about the roots of it in American domestic politics. Among others Steven Béla Várdy, Timothy M. Roberts, Daniel W. Howe and myself called the attention to the different factors behind the refusal of contemporary American politicians, including the debate about slavery, the political, and economic interests of the United States, and the tactical mistakes made by Kossuth himself (Várdy, 1998, 337–339; Várdy, 2000, 51–55;. Várdy, 2002, 21–31; Howe-Roberts, 166–167, 172–173; Lévai, 317–320; Vida, 2012, 9–13) The authors, who covered the topic, often pointed out the role contemporary American political leaders played in these events. Ödön Vasváry described the refusal of Kossuth by President Millard

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<sup>1</sup> By the help of this essay I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Zsolt Virágos who helped my academic career on diverse occasions.

Fillmore (1800–1874), and several historians gave account of the political motifs of secretary of state Daniel Webster (1782–1852) (Vasváry, 1988, 81–82; Várdy, 1998, 334, 337; Várdy, 2000, 52; Várdy, 2002, 22; Lévai, 309–320). It is mentioned by some experts that yet another leading figure of American politics opposed vehemently the ideas of Kossuth concerning the intervention of the United States in European affairs on behalf the Hungarian independence (Howe-Roberts, 173; Nolan, 363; Lévai, 319; Oliver, 492–493, 495). This person was senator, former secretary of state, and three times presidential candidate Henry Clay (1777–1852) who had been one of the most prestigious politicians in the United States by the 1850s. Born only one year after the declaration of American independence, the seventy-four year old Henry Clay was the grand old man of contemporary American politics, thus he was very influential and respected. He was one of the important leaders of the governing Whig party which meant that his opinion could influence the formation of the opinion of Whig leadership about Kossuth and his visit in the United States. This role of his is usually ignored by historians of Hungarian origin. Dénes Jánosy was the only Hungarian historian who discussed the opinion of Henry Clay in a somewhat detailed manner, but even he referred to it only sporadically in his two-volume collection about the history of the Kossuth emigration in England and the United States, and did not summarize it. Understandably, American historians devoted much attention to the opinion of Henry Clay concerning Kossuth and the “Hungarian question”, but they usually studied it exclusively from the point of view of American domestic politics. In this essay I intend to combine the approach of Hungarian and American historians and analyze the intermingled questions of the aims of Kossuth and American domestic politics as a coherent problem. American politics had been preoccupied by two issues at the beginning of the 1850s: the “Hungarian question”, that is the reaction of the United States to the defeat of the European and Hungarian revolutions in 1848–1849, and the problem of the territorial expansion of slavery. These two issues had been interconnected not only in politics but also in the mind of Henry Clay. My goal in this essay is to answer the question, why Henry Clay opposed so vigorously Kossuth’s ideas about European intervention. With the above mentioned in mind one can answer this question only if he or she studies both issues as a coherent problem in the mind of the Kentuckian politician. In order to answer this question, first we need to summarize briefly the political career and ideas of the “grand old man” of contemporary American

politics. Then, I am going to discuss the impact of the “Hungarian question” on the thinking of Henry Clay, followed by looking at his opinion about the territorial extension of slavery. Finally, at the end of my treatise, I will try to explain how the interconnected issues of the Hungarian revolution and slavery determined the ideas of Clay concerning Lajos Kossuth.

### **The political career of Henry Clay prior to 1848**

Henry Clay was born on April 12, 1777 in Hanover County during the revolutionary war in the contemporary frontier region of Virginia. He studied law and he moved to Kentucky at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, where he established a very successful legal practice. His growing reputation urged him to start a political career. He was elected to the state legislature in 1803 where he continued until 1806 when he was elected to the United States Senate. (1757–1840). During his long political career he served in the Senate in 1806–1807, 1810–1811, 1831–1842, and 1849–1852, and he was the member of the United States House of Representatives in 1811–1814, 1815–1821, and 1823–1825. He was a three times presidential candidate (1824, 1832, 1844), and also served as the secretary of state of President John Quincy Adams between 1825 and 1829. Here and now I do not want to describe his career in details, but I focus only on those parts of his life which are important for the purpose of this essay. It means that I emphasize his efforts as the “Great Compromiser” to find a peaceful solution to the problem of the territorial expansion of slavery

Henry Clay played a crucial role in the formation of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The debate about the admission of Missouri into the Union was the first occasion when the problem of the extension of slavery became the crucial question of national politics. The territory of Missouri was the part of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Since the territory was populated mainly by Southerners, the proposed state constitution of Missouri recognized slavery. By the year of 1820 the North had outstripped the South in population, and consequently could gain control of the United States House of Representatives. During the debate of the Missouri constitution a representative from New York proposed an amendment “requiring the gradual abolition of slavery as a condition of admission” (Jones, 112). Due to the above-mentioned

balance of forces the House passed the amendment but it was defeated in the Senate. There were eleven slave states and eleven free states in the Union at that time and, as Maldwyn A. Jones points out: "Which section would control the federal government in the future depended on whether slavery was to be permitted in Missouri and the rest of the Louisiana Purchase" (Jones, 112). Henry Clay was the main architect of the compromise that could temporarily settle the question. Missouri was admitted as a slave state but in exchange for that Maine, hitherto part of Massachusetts, became a free state. Slavery was forbidden on the territory of the Louisiana Purchase north of the line 36°30' except for Missouri. But Missouri started to exclude free blacks from its territory in 1821 and Clay had to intervene again to devise another compromise. During the debate about slavery in Missouri Henry Clay was motivated mainly by his anxiety about the extension of the power of Congress over the states. This was the first occasion when he played the role of the designer of a political compromise between the supporters of the extension of slavery into the territories and the oppositional party.

The second occasion came at the beginning of the 1830s during the so-called "Nullification Crises." In order to support the development of industry in the United States Henry Clay was the advocate of high protective tariffs. He played a crucial role in the introduction of high tariffs in 1828. High tariffs were not in the interest of the planters of the South. The reduction of duties by the tariff bill of 1832 did not satisfy the planter elite of South Carolina and a popularly elected convention of the state pronounced the tariff acts of 1828 and 1832 unconstitutional as well as null and void. The convention also prohibited the collection of federal customs duties in South Carolina after February 1, 1833. President Jackson "asked Congress for a 'force bill' empowering him to use the armed forces to collect customs duties in South Carolina." (Jones, 144) The result was the so-called "nullification crisis" in which Henry Clay played again the role of the compromiser. He wanted to avoid the outbreak of a civil war at all cost, and behind the scenes he made an agreement with the leading South Carolina politician John C. Calhoun (1782–1850). Clay proposed "a compromise measure providing for the gradual reduction of all tariffs over a nine-year period to a uniform level of 20 percent." (Jones, 144) Congress passed the bill on March 1, 1833 and the South Carolina convention also accepted it two weeks later.

By the end of the 1840s Henry Clay became one of the most influential American politicians, and American politics had to face two

important issues at that time: the impact of the European revolutions of 1848–1848 on the United States, and the territorial extension of slavery. These are the two interconnected factors that fundamentally determined the opinion of Henry Clay about Kossuth.

### **Henry Clay and the impact of the Hungarian revolution of 1848–1849 on the United States**

As Daniel W. Howe and Timothy Roberts pointed out:

The United States had a paradoxical relationship to the revolutions of 1848. On the one hand, the nation had been born out of a revolution, and Americans were extremely proud of this revolutionary heritage. It disposed them to welcome the European revolutions in 1848, and wish them success. On the other hand, however, most Americans also felt somewhat detached from the events they read about. (Howe-Robertson, 158)

The two historians enumerated several sources of this detachment. The European revolutions, especially in central and southern Europe “reflected the national aspirations of ethnic groups. American citizenship, however, was defined in terms of republican ideology, not in terms of national origins.” (Howe-Roberts, 158; Vajda; Lévai 2003) Howe and Roberts also called the attention to the fact that many American Catholics expressed their anxiety because of the European revolutions threatening the rule and the influence of the Pope. The political instability in Europe was not in the interest of some American business groups either. They wanted the return of business confidence and applauded the triumph of authoritarian regimes. (Howe-Robertson, 172–173) The European revolutions of 1848 resulted in the emancipation of slaves in the French and Danish West Indies, and the abolition of serfdom in a few European countries. Some Southern politicians regarded these developments as potentially dangerous examples. On the other hand, in another article, Timothy M. Roberts called the attention to the very interesting fact that many Southern intellectuals, similarly to their Northern colleagues, supported the Hungarian cause. Some Southern editors could find parallels between the position of Hungary and the South. According to an editorial of the *Southern Literary Messenger* “the [Hungarians are] fully aware of their dangerous position ... hated by the Slaves (viz. the Slavs), isolated among the nations of the earth, they were left alone ... to resist

the conspiracy against them.” As Timothy M. Roberts noted although the spelling of the word “Slav” as “Slave” was “consistent with other American periodicals’ grammar of the day ... with its tone and contextual language the southern journal’s sympathy for the Hungarians’ plight sounded like a bleak southern self-assessment.” (Roberts, 271) Contrary to this favorable evaluation of the Hungarian cause, Southern journalists usually condemned the French revolution of 1848. According to Roberts the cause of this different evaluation was that:

Hungarians were not promoting socialist utopias, nor did they maintain West Indies plantations, where slave emancipation was looming. Moreover, unlike France, Hungary did not appear to be trying to extend its revolution to areas near or within American borders. Southerners shared northerners’ revulsion over France’s pathological revolutionary past. Hungary, in contrast, had no preexisting revolutionary identity gone sour. (Roberts, 273)

The opinion of Henry Clay about the European and Hungarian revolutions of 1848–1849 was also very complex. On the one hand, he applauded the efforts of European liberals to establish republican governments in the Old World. As Calvin Colton, the editor of his works, pointed out, “he sympathized with Hungary profoundly; he loved the patriot martyr (viz. Kossuth) who was about to come into his presence.” (Colton, 221) On the other hand, he rejected vehemently the idea of intervention raised by some American politicians and Kossuth himself.

As it is well known, President Zachary Taylor, who supported the expansion of the United States, sent Ambrose Dudley Mann (1801–1889) as an American emissary to Hungary in the summer of 1849. Although Mann arrived in Vienna on July 30, and he did not continue his travel to Hungary or approve of her independence, his mission provoked significant diplomatic tension between the United States and the Austrian Empire. Much has been written about this affair, and the role Chevalier Johann Georg Hülsemann, the Austrian envoy in Washington, and secretary of state Daniel Webster played in it. (Pivány, 1910; Várdy, 2000, 46–48; Lévai, 2005, 302–320; Howe-Robertson, 170) My focus is on the opinion of Henry Clay about Kossuth and the Hungarian revolution in this essay, consequently I do not wish to go into the details. The text of the instructions of Mann, the fact that secretary of state John M. Clayton (1796–1856) publicized the mission of him in the *New York Tribune*, and some passages of the state of the union address of President Taylor in December 1849, forced Hülsemann to lodge an official complaint.



Somewhat later, Senator Lewis Cass (1782–1866), who was the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party at the last election in 1848, submitted a resolution to instruct the Committee of Foreign Relations of the Senate to suspend diplomatic relations with Austria. Cass clearly counted on the support of the Whig Henry Clay, but to his surprise the Kentuckian rejected his overture in a long speech he delivered in the Senate. As Clay pointed out in this address, Cass' proposal would involve the recall of the American envoy from Vienna, and he feared that "the natural conclusion would be to declare war immediately against Austria." (Hay, 643) Instead of the suspension of diplomatic relations, Clay proposed Cass to offer asylum for the Hungarian refugees. Clay reminded his colleague that the recall of the American chargé d' affaires would only "close the door of intercourse with Austria, by which we shall gain nothing in behalf of the suffering Hungarians." (Hay, 644) In addition, such measure would "deprive our merchants and the sailors of our country of what benefits might redound from having a minister in Vienna." (Hay, 644) Cass referred to the fact that Henry Clay supported the recognition of the Latin American republics at the beginning of the 1820s. Clay refused the idea that his behavior might have served as an analogy in the case of Hungary, since, in contrast to the republics of South America more than twenty years ago, "unfortunately, Hungary fell suddenly, and to the surprise of the American world. She is subdued; she is crushed." (Hay, 644) The Kentuckian unequivocally rejected the idea of intervention supported by Cass. He asked his colleague from Michigan to lay down the limits of intervention into the affairs of other nations: "We may say in reference to Turkey, Your religion tolerates polygamy; unless you change your religion, and your habits of social life, we will cease all intercourse with you." (Hay, 644) In the opinion of Clay the United States should condemn Russia's interference in the war, and he did not understand why Cass proposed the suspension of diplomatic relations with Austria instead of Russia. Since Hungary was the part of the Habsburg Empire Cass' proposal would call the United States "to interfere between Austria and a portion of her empire; and we are called upon to do this, in direct contradiction to the whole policy of this Government, first laid down by Washington and pursued by every successor he has had." (Hay, 644) Close to the end of his address Clay posed again the theoretical question: "Sir, if we are to become the defender of nations, the censurers of other Powers, I again ask the honorable Senator where are we to stop, and why does he confine himself

to Austria alone?” (Hay, 644) Finally, referring to the United States, Clay concluded that “this is a great country... that very greatness draws after it great responsibilities... to avoid unnecessary wars, maintaining our own rights with firmness, but invading the rights of no others.” (Hay, 645)

It is clear from this speech that Clay had refused the idea of intervention almost two years before the arrival of Lajos Kossuth in the United States. It means that he did not simply rebuff the person and the principles of Kossuth, but he opposed intervention on theoretical grounds and for other reasons, too. In order to understand the motivations of Henry Clay we should throw a glance at contemporary American politics. Territorial expansion, and in connection with this, slavery became the central issues of American domestic politics by the 1840s. The annexation of Texas and then the war against Mexico (1846–1848) preoccupied American politicians. As a result of the victory against Mexico, the United States gained an enormously large section, including the territories of present day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. It means that the United States did not reject the idea of intervention into the affairs of other countries on the continent of North America, if it coincided with her putative national interests. As mentioned before, Henry Clay originally opposed the war against Mexico, since he thought that it would raise the dangerous question of the territorial expansion of slavery. Expansion was supported mainly by the states of the Midwest and the Democratic Party. Under such circumstances a new group emerged within the Democratic Party by the middle of the 1840s. This group was called the “Young America” and it not only propagated the territorial expansion of the United States, but also urged the American government to support liberal republican political movements abroad. They thought that it was the obligation of the American republic to disseminate republican government all over the world. The name of the group clearly referred to such European revolutionary movements as “Young Italy, Germany or Ireland”. Most of the leaders of “Young America” were young politicians and came from the Midwest. One of the most active leaders of the group was George N. Sanders from Kentucky, Henry Clay’s home state.

Merle Curti called the attention to an old enmity between Sanders and Clay going back to the middle of the 1840s. (Curti, 38) Henry Clay was the presidential candidate of the Whig Party in 1844 and it seemed to everybody that Martin Van Buren would be that of the Democratic Party. The central issue of contemporary politics was the admission of Oregon

and Texas into the Union, and the annexation of the latter also raising the problem of the territorial extension of slavery. Both hopeful candidates thought that this problematic question would divide the nation and would possibly lead to a war with Mexico. Clay and Van Buren respectively issued statements in which they declared “that annexation was inexpedient because it would be likely to bring war with Mexico.” (Jones, 180) Clay was officially nominated by the Whig Party on a platform which was silent about the question of Texas. On the other hand, partly due to his statement concerning the annexation of Texas, Van Buren could not secure for himself the Democratic nomination against James K. Polk (1795–1849), who was a well-known expansionist. The Democratic platform included the reoccupation of Oregon and the re-annexation of Texas and public opinion was clearly in favor of territorial expansion. George N. Sanders had been the main supporter of the annexation of Texas in Kentucky, and thus, his agitation had played a major role in forcing Henry Clay to give up his original intent, and to expose his ideas concerning the annexation of Texas. Clay issued a declaration in which he stated that the problem of slavery was not involved in the question of Texas. He halfheartedly supported the annexation of Texas on the understanding that it could be done “without dishonor, without war, with the common consent of the Union, and upon just and fair terms.” (Malone, 178) According to Maldwyn A. Jones, Clay’s declaration “may have done him some good in the South but on balance it was a mistake for it lost him support in the North, especially in the key state of New York. Had Clay carried it, he would have been President, but Whig antislavery voters deserted to the Liberty Party in sufficient numbers to throw the state to Polk.” (Jones, 181) No doubt, that Henry Clay had the largest chance to win the presidency at this occasion. The race was very close and the Democratic victory was extremely narrow. Voter participation was over 78 percent. Polk received 1,338,464 popular and 170 electoral votes, while 1,300,097 constituents voted for Clay, who received 105 electoral votes. (Chudacoff et. al., Appendix A-31) No wonder that Henry Clay did not sympathize with Sanders and “Young America”. It is also worthy of note that somewhat later in 1853, Sanders had been appointed American consul to London, where he became a close associate of Kossuth, who was living there at that time. (Curti, 48)

Other leading figures of “Young America” were Stephen A. Douglas (1813–1861), James Shields (1806–1879), and William Richardson (1811–1875) of Illinois, William Corry of Ohio, William Polk

of Tennessee, and William R. Smith of Alabama. (Curti, 38) The outbreak of the European revolutions in 1848 provided the opportunity for the politicians of “Young America” to put their ideas into practice. This was also a presidential election year in the United States and under such circumstances the national platform of the Democratic Party incorporated many references to the European revolutionary movements. It referred to the principle of the “sovereignty of the people” and mentioned that European nations were “erecting republics on the ruins of despotism in the Old World.” (Howe-Robertson, 168–169) The presidential candidate of the Democratic Party became Lewis Cass, who was not the member of “Young America”, but who also supported territorial expansion and intervention. (Curti, 36) The victory over Mexico also raised the dangerous problem of territorial expansion and slavery in the same year. Henry Clay feared that under such circumstances the young zealots of “Young America” and its allies could seize the opportunity to push through national politics the program of expansion and intervention. No wonder that under such circumstances Henry Clay vehemently opposed the ideas of “Young America” and the proposal of Lewis Cass.

Although the Senate did not approve the proposal of Cass, the senators obliged the President to clarify his position concerning the mission of Ambrose Dudley Mann. Zachary Taylor sent over the papers to the Senate but he attached a provocative preamble to it which triggered the official remonstrance of Austria on September 30, 1850. Meanwhile, President Taylor died on July 9, 1850 and Millard Fillmore became the new president. He was a close friend of Henry Clay, and he appointed a new secretary of state in the person of Daniel Webster, who responded to the complaint of Austria in a long and detailed memorial on December 21, 1850. Much has been written about this famous piece of Webster and the diplomatic tension it caused between Austria and the United States. (Várdy, 2000, 47; Vasváry, 57-58; Lévai, 2005, 309–313) Webster’s celebrated response was generally well received in the United States and there was a proposal in the Senate to print it out in ten thousand copies. Henry Clay opposed this proposition in a speech he delivered in the Senate on December 30, 1850. He called the attention of his colleagues to the fact that Hungary had been defeated. He posed the question whether under such circumstances it would be a good policy on the part of the United States “to continue to irritate either Austria or Russia” on “a subject which was past and had ended.” (Hay, 837) President Fillmore sent over to the Senate the correspondence between Webster and

Hülsemann and the papers concerning the mission Ambrose Dudley Mann to Hungary. Clay supported the measures of the Whig administration, which are “marked by great ability as everything which emanates from that source generally is.” (Hay, 837) Nevertheless, he opposed “a diffusion of this paper (viz. Webster’s answer to Hülsemann’s remonstrance) among the people of the United States.” (Hay, 837) According to his opinion, these copies “are not wanted by the people of the United States” because “they are satisfied with the principles first laid down by the immortal Father of his Country (viz. George Washington), and to which there has been a general adherence from that day to this.” (Hay, 838) With Mann’s mission in mind he cited the United States as an example to his colleagues. Clay posed the question what would happen if one of the states of the Union “revolted against the General Government, and any European power sent an agent here for the purpose of obtaining information, even such as that which our agent had been sent to Hungary.” (Hay, 838) He was sure that there would certainly be “a great deal of feeling throughout the United States.” He also added that we should “place ourselves in their position” before the United States should take any further action concerning Hungary. (Hay, 838) This passage of Clay is interesting for the purpose of this essay for several reasons. It is clear that he did not agree full heartedly with the sending of Mann to Hungary. As it will be discussed in details later on, this debate about the “Hungarian question” was almost at the same time with the great discussion about slavery that led to the approval of the famous compromise of 1850, in the conclusion of which Henry Clay also played a crucial role. Under such circumstances, his allusion to the revolt of one of the states “against the General Government” referred to a very sensitive issue of the period. It is clear from this statement that the issues of Hungary and slavery were interconnected in the mind of Henry Clay. In the remaining part of his speech he approved the general course of the administration’s policy towards Austria, but he added that it wouldn’t be wise to “say anything in that document (viz. Webster’s response to Hülsemann’s remonstrance), which another Government must feel as reproach.” (Hay, 838) At the end of his address Clay stressed again that “there was no necessity for printing the great number of copies which had been proposed”, since the “principles contained in that paper were fastened and fixed in the American heart and mind”, and the publication of Webster’s response would only “continue the irritation which may exist between a foreign Government and this.” (Hay, 838) Mainly due to

the efforts of Henry Clay the Senate refused the proposal concerning the printing out of Webster's response.

By the time of the arrival of Lajos Kossuth to the United States, almost one year later on December 4, 1851, the seventy-four-year-old Henry Clay was mortally ill. Kossuth was mainly aided by the members of "Young America" and in the Senate by such politicians as Lewis Cass, Stephen A. Douglas, William Henry Seward (1801–1872), and James Shields who supported expansion and intervention. Kossuth arrived in Washington on December 30, 1851, and a little bit more than a week later, he took part at a reception organized in his honor by the Congress on January 7, 1851. At his reception secretary of state Daniel Webster answered the address of Kossuth. Although the language of Webster's speech was more moderate than the intonation of his response to Hülsemann's complaint: he said, for example: "In my opinion, Austria would be a better and a stronger government tomorrow if she confined the limits of her power to her hereditary and German domains, especially if she saw in Hungary a strong, sensible, independent neighboring nation." (Mills, 6) Kossuth visited Henry Clay in his quarters after such antecedents only two days later on January 9. Clay was alarmed by the popularity and influence of Kossuth and also by the assistance of him by such American politicians who supported expansion and intervention, and who were his political opponents. Clay's position was not an easy one since he wanted to express his sympathy towards Kossuth and the Hungarians on the one hand, but he wanted to make clear his opposition to the policy of intervention in Europe by the United States on the other. Lewis Cass, his old opponent, accompanied Kossuth to the bed chamber of Clay. All this mean that one can interpret the speech of Henry Clay to Kossuth only in the context of American domestic politics.

Clay started his address with the expression of his admiration of Kossuth's accomplishments as a politician and orator. He pointed out that "your wonderful and fascinating eloquence has mesmerized so large a portion of our people wherever you have gone, and even some of our members of Congress." (Hay, 944) According to the witnesses of the scene, at this point of his speech, Clay was waving his hand toward the American politicians who accompanied Kossuth, Lewis Cass among them. But after this courtesy he expressed to Kossuth that "I hope, to speak with that sincerity and candor which becomes the interest the subject has for you and for myself, and which is due to us both, as the votaries of freedom." (Hay, 944) Clay assured the Hungarian that "I

entertain the liveliest sympathies in every struggle for liberty in Hungary, and in every country, and in this I believe I express the universal sentiment of my countrymen.” (Hay, 944) But in the next sentence he said to Kossuth that “for the sake of my country, you must allow me to protest against the policy you propose to her.” Clay posed the “momentous question of the right of one nation to assume the executive power among nations for the enforcement of international law, or of the right of the United States to dictate to Russia the character of her relations with the nations around her.” (Hay, 944) According to the Kentuckian politician, Kossuth sought “material aid” in America, and wanted the United States to put into practice its declarations concerning Austria, Russia, and Hungary. In the opinion of Clay, the former governor of Hungary proposed war between the United States on the one hand, and Russia and Austria on the other. But he warned Kossuth:

To transport men and arms across the ocean in sufficient numbers and quantities to be effective against Russia and Austria would be impossible... Upon land, Russia is invulnerable to us, as we are to her. Upon the ocean, a war between Russia and this country would result in mutual annoyance to commerce, but probably little else... her parts are few, her commerce limited, while we, on our part, would offer as a prey to her cruisers a rich and extensive commerce. (Hay, 944–945)

It means that it was clearly not in the interest of the United States to wage war against such powerful European empires. According to Clay, it would be hypocrisy on the part of the American republic to support intervention in Europe when she is strong, and abandon it when she is weak. He argued that the despotic powers of Europe would refer to American intervention as an example, on the basis of which they would support their intervention on the American continent. Henry Clay concluded that the real role of the United States in the struggle against the despotic governments of Europe was to set an example to the oppressed nations of the Old World. By the policy of non-intervention “to which we have adhered since the days of Washington, we have prospered beyond precedent – we have done more for the cause of liberty in the world that arms could effect. We have showed to other nations the way to greatness and happiness.” (Hay, 945) As the result of a European war on behalf of Hungary or other European republics, the United States “could effect nothing, and if in that struggle Hungary should go down, and we should go down with her, where, then, would be the last hope of the friends of freedom throughout the world? Far better it is for ourselves, for Hungary,

and for the cause of liberty, that, adhering to our wise, pacific system, and avoiding the distant wars of Europe, we should keep our lamp burning brightly on this western shore as a light to all nations, than to hazard its utter extinction amid the ruins of fallen or falling republics in Europe.” (Hay, 945–946)

In this speech Henry Clay unequivocally rejected the idea of intervention on behalf of Hungary. He could maintain the traditional foreign policy of the United States towards Europe by the endorsement of the principle of American exceptionalism.

Henry Clay’s speech to Kossuth proved to be his last public address, since he died a little bit more than six months later on June 29, 1852. But this does not mean that he never mentioned Kossuth and the “Hungarian question” in his writings again. He received a letter, for example, from Theodore Freylinghausen (1787–1862), who was a former senator from New Jersey and his running mate during the election campaign in 1844. In his letter Freylinghausen mentioned to Clay that “he had been rejoiced to hear his words of soberness and truth on the exciting question of Hungarian politics.” (Hay, 948)

Due to his illness, Henry Clay was not able to visit the Congressional banquet honoring George Washington’s birthday on February 22, 1852. Nevertheless, his written answer to the invitation provided him another opportunity to express his adherence to the traditional foreign policy of the United States towards Europe, founded by the first president. Referring probably to the efforts of some American politicians and Kossuth, Clay mentioned:

We have seen serious attempts to induce the United States to depart from his great principles of peace and neutrality, of avoiding all entangling alliances with foreign Powers, and of confining ourselves to the growth, improvement, and prosperity of our new country; and in place of them, to plunge ourselves... in the wars of Europe. (Hay, 955)

Clay’s message was printed out in the *Daily National Intelligencer* a few days later, so the position of him could become clear for the public opinion.

Meanwhile, Kossuth had started his tour throughout the United States. He was very well received and applauded in the western parts of Pennsylvania and in Ohio, but his reception in Kentucky was not so cordial. (Oliver, 487–492) The city of Louisville did not invite him officially, and when he delivered a speech in the city in a tobacco store on



March 4, 1852, not only his admirers but his opponents were also present, and the latter caused some disturbance during his address. John W. Oliver attributed the relatively cold reception of Kossuth to the “lukewarm attitude assumed by Henry Clay... his stand was well known to his constituents, and this tended to dampen the enthusiasm for Kossuth in the Blue Grass State.” (Oliver, 492–493) In contrast, Dénes Jánosy ascribed it to the special economic interests of the South. According to him, the European stability provided by the military intervention of Russia, would make possible the maintenance of the economic ties between the South and Europe. Under such circumstances Kossuth felt it necessary to explain his policy of intervention to the audience of Kentucky. In another speech delivered also in Louisville, Kossuth wanted to convince his audience about the correctness of his policy of intervention of the United States in Europe. He argued that only the small nations could have the luxury of detachment from the great events of world politics. But such great nations as the United States were twitted to the world with several thousand ties, so they simply could not detach themselves from world affairs. The neutrality of a great power in itself means intervention on the part of one of the interested parties. In the case of the conflict of Hungary on the one hand, and Austria and Russia on the other, the neutrality of the United States means intervention on the part of European absolutism. The neutrality of the United States could lead to the intervention of European absolutism into the affairs of the American republic. Kossuth posed the question why the United States conducts such a ruinous foreign policy? On the basis of his speech to him, Kossuth attributed it mainly to the harmful influence of Senator Henry Clay. (Jánosy, 328–332)

In this address Kossuth clearly initiated an attack against Henry Clay, and the news of it reached not only Clay himself but Johann Georg Hülsemann, too. In a letter which he sent to an unknown recipient on March 30, 1852, Clay expounded: “I have never distinctly understood what Mr. Kossuth said of me at Louisville. I certainly had given him no cause of offence.” (Hay, 962) He pointed out that his speech to Kossuth was not a private affair, since several other persons were present. As a result “What I had said... was variously and sometimes contradictorily represented in the newspapers.” (Hay, 962) Senator Thomas Ewing (1789–1871) was also present and, according to Clay, he verified the accuracy of the statement that was published. He even added a preface to it in which he treated Kossuth “with perfect respect.” Clay assured his

unknown correspondent that “Over my own sentiments and language I thought I had entire control.” (Hay, 962)

In his report to Prince Schwarzenberg on March 16, 1852, Hülsemann also mentioned Kossuth’s attack against Clay with great complacency. According to him, by attacking the mortally ill Henry Clay in his own state, Kossuth made a serious mistake, what was good news from the Austrian point of view. (Jánossy, 654)

The example of Kossuth and Clay was also invoked in the Senate in these days. Senator William Henry Seward, a member of “Young America”, evoked the example of Henry Clay on March 9, 1852, when he supported the recognition of the young republics of Latin America at the beginning of the 1820s. Seward asked the question, how Clay could oppose intervention on behalf of Hungary when he supported intervention into the affairs of the Spanish Empire thirty years before? (Jánossy, 333)

Meanwhile, Kossuth continued his tour to New Orleans. He arrived in the city on March 27, and his reception was even colder than in Louisville. (Oliver, 495; Jánossy, 341–343) Dénes Jánossy attributed it to the general Southern condemnation of Kossuth, and also to the fact that the former governor of Hungary was invited by a Democratic city government, while, by the time of his arrival, the city had been governed by the Whig Party. Kossuth still believed that the unfavorable opinion of Henry Clay also played a crucial part in it. The local Whig press heavily criticized Kossuth’s Louisville address in which he attacked Henry Clay, one of the most prestigious leaders of the party. Under such circumstances, Kossuth felt it necessary to clarify his standpoint about the Whig politician. He also wanted to win the sympathy of the South. According to the reports of the American press, Kossuth tacitly noticed the reasoning of Clay concerning foreign policy. On the basis of these reports, many came to the conclusion that Kossuth adopted the ideas of the Kentuckian. In the speech he delivered in New Orleans, he wanted to give an explanation of his personal meeting with Clay. According to Kossuth, he did not want to tackle with Henry Clay, because of the serious illness of the latter. He deemed his visit of Clay a private affair, and he did not think that the address of Clay would be publicized. Not to mention the fact that the press misinterpreted his abstention towards the mortally ill senator. Then, in the second part of his address, he drew a parallel between the position of Hungary and the South. According to him, Hungary was fighting for her constitutional self-government, which is also very important for the South. It is clear, that Kossuth realized the

importance of this argument for the South, in the midst of the embittered debate about the territorial expansion of slavery. The intonation of this speech was much milder than that of his Louisville address. Kossuth argued that he did not want the Union to wage war for Hungary, but he simply asked for the sympathy of the American people. (Jánossy, 342–343)

Hülsemann, again, proved to be very well informed about the cold reception of Kossuth in New Orleans. In a report to Prince Schwarzenberg on April 8, 1852, he mentioned that Kossuth was not well received in the city despite the fact that he strove to explain his ill behavior towards Henry Clay.

On the basis of all this it is clear that Henry Clay's opinion about the "Hungarian question" and Lajos Kossuth was partly determined by the developments of American domestic politics, but it was also formed by his opinion about the territorial extension of slavery as well as by his attitude towards African-Americans and the peculiar institution of the South.

### **Henry Clay and the problem of slavery**

As a result of the victory against Mexico the United States gained an enormously large section, including the territories of present day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. This territorial gain raised again the issue of the extension of slavery, and the outbreak of the gold rush in California in January 1848 made it even more serious. Due to the gold rush the population of California exceeded 100,000 by the end of 1849, much more than it was needed to gain statehood. President Taylor did not realize the significance of the problem and urged California and New Mexico to frame constitutions and apply for statehood. Ignoring the heated debate about the right of Congress to restrain the extension of slavery on territories under the authority of the federal government, Taylor practically empowered these states to decide for their own about the question. The California convention ratified an anti-slavery constitution in March 1850 and New Mexico followed the example a few months later. The Southern slave-holding states had been alarmed by these developments for several reasons. Approximately half of the territory of California and the whole territory of New Mexico located to the south of the line established in the Missouri Compromise,

according to which slave holding states should have been formed south of the line 36°30'. As already mentioned, there was a northern majority in the United States House of Representatives from the 1810s, and the number of free and slave states was equal in the Senate in 1849. There were fifteen slaveholding and fifteen free members of the Union then. Under such conditions Southern interests had been alarmed, "since none of the remaining territories was likely to become a slave state, a Northern majority, once achieved, would be permanent and might ultimately be large enough to permit a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery." (Jones, 192) Besides this major question there were minor issues at stake as well. Northerners also wanted to secure the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, while Southerners sought to introduce a more efficient fugitive-slave act. Furthermore, Texas was claiming a portion of New Mexico.

Under such circumstances did the thirty-first Congress convene in December 1849, and the seventy-two year-old Henry Clay was among the members of the Senate again. "The Great Compromiser" decided to return into the Senate in this state of emergency. He hammered out a compromise to cover all the disputed issues in one proposal. He introduced into the Senate on January 29, 1850, almost at the same time with his speech against Cass' proposal concerning the suspension of diplomatic relations with Austria, a set of resolutions which proposed that (1) California be admitted as a free state; (2) other territories acquired from Mexico be organized with no mention of the status of slavery; (3) that Texas abandon its claim to New Mexico; (4) the federal government assume that Texan national debt contracted before annexation; (5) slave-trade in the District of Columbia be abolished; (6) slavery in the District of Columbia only be abolished if the people of the District and of Maryland consented and if compensation were paid; (7) a new and more effective Fugitive Slave Act be passed; and (8) Congress declare that it had no power to interfere with the interstate slave-trade. (Jones, 192-193)

Clay's proposal provoked an embittered debate in the Senate. The other "grand old man" of contemporary American politics, Daniel Webster fundamentally supported the proposal of Clay, while the most prestigious Southern congressional leader John C. Calhoun in the last speech of his life "insisted that the South possessed a constitutional right to take slaves into the territories and demanded a constitutional amendment that would restore the political balance between the sections." (Jones, 193) William H. Seward from New York, a member of "Young

America”, also opposed Clay’s proposal—but from the Northern point of view. President Taylor insisted on his own statehood plan and heavily opposed the compromise. Henry Clay also made a mistake. He combined his proposals into a uniform omnibus bill “in which form it attracted the opposition of all who objected to parts of it” (Jones, 193). The disillusioned and very ill Clay decided to leave Washington at the end of June, 1850, and it seemed many that there is no hope for Clay’s compromise to succeed. But President Taylor suddenly died on July 9, 1850 and he was succeeded by Vice-President Millard Fillmore who was a moderate Whig from New York and a close friend of Henry Clay. Fillmore used his influence in the Whig Party and in Congress to support Clay’s compromise. Support also came from Senator Stephen A Douglas of Illinois who proposed to split up Clay’s “omnibus bill into six separate measures and piloted them through Congress one by one” (Jones, 194). As a result of these efforts Congress passed the major elements of Clay’s proposal between September 9 and 20, 1850. Congress accepted the admission of California as a state and decided to organize the rest of the section acquired from Mexico into two territories. In the case of New Mexico and Utah Congress applied the “sovereignty doctrine” of Stephen A. Douglas and empowered the inhabitants of the two territories to decide whether they would adopt a constitution accepting slavery or not. As the part of the compromise Congress also enacted a new Fugitive Slave Act which “permitted slave-owners to arrest suspected runaways without a warrant, denied alleged fugitives the right of trial by jury and the right to give evidence on their own behalf, and imposed heavy penalties for helping slaves to escape.” (Jones, 194)

### **The opinion of Henry Clay about slavery**

The problem of slavery was behind all the issues covered in the Compromise of 1850. In order to understand the commitment of Henry Clay on the part of the compromise we need to survey briefly his opinion about slavery and African-Americans, and Clay’s attitude towards Kossuth was also determined to a great extent by the problem of the territorial extension of slavery.

Henry Clay was himself a slave-owner. Nevertheless, he wanted to find a middle ground concerning the question of slavery. He did not agree with the radical ideas of such abolitionists as William Lloyd Garrison, but

he called slavery the “deepest stain upon the character of the country” (Vida, 596). He thought that gradual emancipation and colonization could provide a middle course solution to the problem. Clay made his first effort to put his ideas into practice in 1799 when he introduced a plan of gradual emancipation through the constitutional convention of Kentucky. According to this, “beginning in 1855 or 1860, children born to slaves would become free at the age of 25.” (Vida, 596) Similarly to Thomas Jefferson he thought that after gradual emancipation there is no hope for the peaceful cohabitation of the white and black races within the boundaries of the United States, due to the very different physical and moral constitutions of the two races. (Vida, 596) Consequently, he proposed that emancipated blacks should leave the American republic and he advocated the transportation of free blacks to Liberia in Africa. According to him colonization would be advantageous for several reasons. On the one hand Americans would find a peaceful solution to the growing problem of slavery, and American freed blacks would be the pioneers of Christianity and civilization in Africa on the other. Henry Clay was one of the founding members of “The Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America” (American Colonization Society) in 1816. As one of the most prestigious politician in the nation Clay’s ideas about slavery had a great impact on the thought of the younger generation. The views of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) concerning slavery were heavily influenced by the ideas of Clay. As István K. Vida pointed out “It is not by chance that Lincoln was asked to deliver the eulogy of Clay. He hailed Clay for occupying a position between the extremes, quoted his pro-colonization speeches and embraced his idea of gradual emancipation followed by colonization.” (Vida, 597)

## **Conclusion**

Henry Clay was called the “Great Compromiser”, since it was the fundamental element of his political credo to find a peaceful solution to the problem of slavery, which had occupied a central ground in American politics by the beginning of the 1850s. He opposed the further expansion beneath the borders of the United States since it would raise again the question of the territorial expansion of slavery, which could ultimately lead to the dissolution of the union. Kossuth propagated the intervention

of the United States into European affairs, and he was assisted by those segments of American politics, which also supported the further territorial expansion of the American republic. As a result of the victory of the United States against Mexico in the war of 1846–1848, and the outbreak of the European revolutions of 1848–1849, there was a strong affection among some American politicians towards further expansion, especially among the members of “Young America”. As it was argued earlier, American domestic politics and his attitude towards the expansionist forces of it clearly influenced Clay’s opinion about the “Hungarian question” and Kossuth. Under such circumstances, in the midst of the embittered debates about the territorial expansion of slavery and his proposal concerning compromise, Clay saw in Kossuth and in his ambitions a force that could endanger his efforts to save the union. In such a way, his ideas concerning slavery and colonization also heavily influenced his opinion about Kossuth. There were two interconnected sources of Henry Clay’s opposition to the foreign policy proposed by the former governor of Hungary: his interpretation of the European and Hungarian revolutions of 1848–1849 in the mirror of American domestic politics and his opinion about the possible consequences of the territorial expansion of slavery.

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## Lord Rothermere and Hungarian Revisionism<sup>1</sup>

Éva Mathey

The dismemberment of historic Hungary after World War I was an unparalleled tragedy for the Hungarian nation. Revisionism, therefore, provided a powerful unifying force for the Horthy regime between the world wars. Consequently, the rectification of Hungary's prewar frontiers was the most important national concern.

Revisionism generated an extensive literature, including books, pamphlets, leaflets, in various languages.<sup>2</sup> In Hungarian revisionist literature, besides some recurrent themes such as Hungary's role in the war, and rejection of responsibility for it and the war-guilt theory; Hungary and her relations to the Wilsonian peace; the injustices of Trianon; the political and economic necessity of treaty revision for the stability of Europe, one of the most often discussed issues was the role of the "opposing camp,"<sup>3</sup> (that is Britain, France, Italy and the United States

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed list of Hungarian foreign language propaganda publications see Tibor, G. Iant "Some Facts about Hungarian Propaganda for Territorial Integrity Abroad, 1918–20," *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1996): 53–56; and for a bibliography of publications on Trianon in Hungarian see Archimédesz Szidiropulosz, *Trianon utóélete. Válogatás a magyar nyelvű irodalom bibliográfiájából. 1920–2000* (Budapest: XX. Századi Intézet, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> "the idea of revision [...] is not an eager daydream of the Hungarian soul, not the nightmare of a shackled nation, not the sigh of the captive but an actual possibility hinted at by the opposing camp which, after so many vows and promises, has become a first cla

of America) who practically made the Treaty of Trianon, in righting the injustices done to Hungary. This was also underlined by the critical views concerning the Treaty of Trianon advocated by some of the representatives of the British, French, Italian, and American political and intellectual elite.

As early as 1919, there were already some indications that several influential politicians, such as David Lloyd George<sup>4</sup> and Francesco Nitti, realized the problems with the peace terms for Hungary. During the interwar period the number of those who criticized the Hungarian peace treaty grew. By early 1920 an increasing number of British officials voiced their criticism. Admiral E. T. Troubridge, commander of the Allied flotilla on the Danube; Sir William Goode, director of Relief Missions; and Sir George Clerk, head of a special Allied mission to Hungary and Sir Thomas Hohler, the first British diplomatic representative in Hungary after the war, also complained about the proposed peace terms for Hungary, and, thus, prospects for central Europe. Members of the British Parliament (Lord Bryce, Sir Donald McLean, Lord Cavendish Bentinck, Lord Newton, Lord Montague, Lord Asquith, Lord Sydenham and others) also brought the question of Hungary into discussion, and both houses of the British parliament gave considerable attention to Hungary.<sup>5</sup> Another well-known critic of the postwar system, John Maynard Keynes, in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, attacked the peace based on long-term economic considerations and explained that it would shake the

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ss mental concern.” A *Budapesti Hírlap* editorial commented on in Wright’s Memorandum to Secretary of State on “Hungarian Affairs in November 1928,” December 6, 1928. Roll# 10 M708 RG59, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

<sup>4</sup> In his Fontainebleau Memorandum on March 25, 1919, Lloyd George stated: “What I have said about the Germans is equally true of the Magyars. There will never be peace in South Eastern Europe if every little state now coming into being is to have a large Magyar *Irredenta* within its borders. I would therefore take as a guiding principle of the peace that as far as is humanly possible the different races should be allocated to their motherlands, and that this human criterion should have precedence over considerations of strategy or economics or communications which can usually be adjusted by other means.” Quoted in Thomas L. Sakmyster, “Great Britain and the Making of the Treaty of Trianon,” in Béla Király, Peter Pastor, Ivan Sanders, eds., *War and Society in East Central Europe. Essays on World War I: Total War and Peacemaking, A Case Study on Trianon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 119. Hereafter cited as Sakmyster, “Great Britain and the Making of the Treaty of Trianon.”

<sup>5</sup> For more detail see Robert Donald, *The Tragedy of Trianon: Hungary’s Appeal to Humanity* (London: T. Butterworth Ltd., 1928).

“inextricably intertwined” economic bonds among the nations of Central Europe and will cause the system to fall, thus “endanger[ing] the life of Europe altogether.”<sup>6</sup> Although Keynes’ work focused on the repercussions of the Treaty of Versailles, the book generally criticized the peace structure and, therefore, enjoyed popularity in Hungary. Similarly to Jacques Bainville’s book titled *Les Conséquences politiques de la paix* which also pointed out the political shortcomings of the peace settlement and predicted with accuracy its political consequences.<sup>7</sup>

Anything that foreigners said about the necessity of treaty revision “was, of course, seized upon eagerly.”<sup>8</sup> These opinions became represented, as well as misrepresented. These utterances underlined the Hungarian belief that the revision of the Treaty of Trianon was possible. A British example, one of the most noted foreign contributions to revision, also demonstrates this. The media magnate Lord Rothermere’s press campaign gave popular revisionism in Hungary new energies.

In the summer of 1927 Hungarian revisionism received a surprise boost from abroad. On June 21, 1927 British press magnate Lord Rothermere launched an all-out anti-Trianon press campaign in his newspaper, the *Daily Mail*. In his writings, of which the best-known one was “Hungary’s Place In the Sun,” Rothermere pointed out the injustices and the mistakes in the treaty and demanded the return to Hungary of the areas with clear Hungarian majorities.<sup>9</sup> Conducted on the pages of a daily paper, Rothermere’s campaign unquestionably put the Hungarian question into the focus of attention in Britain. Furthermore, the Rothermere campaign closely intertwined with revisionist propaganda for

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<sup>6</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 3-26. Etienne Mantoux, *The Carthaginian Peace, The Economic Consequences of Mr Keynes* (Oxford University Press, 1946) was a response to and critique of Keynes’s ideas.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Deák, *Hungary at the Paris Peace Conference. The Diplomatic History of the Treaty of Trianon* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972), 349–350. Jacques Bainville’s *Les Conséquences politiques de la paix* [The Political Consequences of the Peace] (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie, 1920).

Jacques Bainville was a French historian and journalist, founder of Action Française.

<sup>8</sup> Wright’s Memorandum to Secretary of State on the “Trianon Revision Agitation,” November 4, 1927. Roll# 7 M708 RG59, NARA.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Rothermere, “Hungary’s Place In the Sun,” *Daily Mail*, June 21, 1927. Full text of the article in Wright’s report to Secretary of State. June 28, 1927, Roll#16, M708, RG 59, NARA.

the Hungarian cause in the US: the Kossuth Pilgrimage to New York in 1928 and the Justice for Hungary movement were two of its direct results in America. In Hungary, the Territorial Revisionist League was established and began to publish a series of studies in Great Britain and France on treaty revision. Rothermere also had a formative influence on launching the Hungarian World Federation, which aimed to unite the Hungarians of the world on the platform of revisionism.<sup>10</sup>

Prime Minister István Bethlen, not fully pleased with the Rothermere concept of revision, explicitly distanced himself and his government from Rothermere's action, and he judged Rothermere's campaign ill-timed and unfortunate. The correspondence of Baron Iván Rubido-Zichy, Hungarian minister to London, also testifies to this fact.<sup>11</sup> Still, free propaganda was useful in retaining and reinforcing revisionist sentiments in Hungary and abroad alike.<sup>12</sup>

As Prime Minister Bethlen commented:

Of course, I am very glad that British public opinion is intently discussing the problem of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. The Hungarian Government is, however, in no way connected with Lord Rothermere's action, as far as I know not one member of the Government has had intercourse with Lord Rothermere in regard to this matter. Furthermore, the point of view of the Hungarian Government in this matter is well known: we have no intention of at present demanding the revision of the Peace Treaty because in our opinion the situation is not yet ripe for this purpose. The public opinion of the world must demand consideration of this matter and we are only endeavoring to encourage this method of approach by constant but honest information and propaganda to be carried on by Hungarian society in general and the world press.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Sándor Krisztics, ed., *A magyarok világtörvényszűrésének tárgyalásai Budapesten 1929. augusztus 22–24* (Budapest: Magyarok Világtörvényszűrésa Központi Irodája, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> Miklós Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat* [The Revisionist Thought] (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 116. Hereafter cited as Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat*.

<sup>12</sup> Ignác Romsics, *István Bethlen: A Great Conservative Statesman of Hungary, 1874–1946* (Highland Lakes, NJ: Social Science Monographs, 1995), 226.

<sup>13</sup> To support this see the interview with Prime Minister Bethlen regarding Rothermere's activities in the afternoon paper *Magyarország* of August 6, 1927: "Of course, I am very glad that British public opinion is intently discussing the problem of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. The Hungarian Government is, however, in no way connected with Lord Rothermere's action, as far as I know not one member of the Government h

British official circles had a definite interest in preserving the postwar *status quo* and “so far as His Majesty’s Government [was] concerned” official Britain also distanced itself from the Rothermere campaign and “belittle[d] [its] effect.”<sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin’s remark, “Can you imagine anything more dangerous and irresponsible?” is an expressive and conclusive judgment of the lord’s action.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Lord Rothermere won many prominent British politicians over to the Hungarian cause, among them Lord Newton, who became an ardent advocate of the Hungarian question in the British parliament.<sup>16</sup>

While official circles distanced themselves from Rothermere’s campaign, and his actions did not yield any political results, “Radomír apó,” as he was popularly called, enjoyed the respect and admiration of the Hungarian people, and became the hero of the day.<sup>17</sup> Rothermere was seen as the “savior” of Hungary. Hungarians collected one million signatures in support of Rothermere’s action which were bound in albums, and presented to him in the summer of 1927 in a spectacular London celebration.<sup>18</sup> Songs and poems were written in tribute to him,

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as had intercourse with Lord Rothermere in regard to this matter. Furthermore, the point of view of the Hungarian Government in this matter is well known: we have no intention of at present demanding the revision of the Peace Treaty because in our opinion the situation is not yet ripe for this purpose. The public opinion of the world must demand consideration of this matter and we are only endeavoring to encourage this method of approach by constant but honest information and propaganda to be carried on by Hungarian society in general and the world press.” Quoted in Wright to Secretary of State, August 31, 1927. Roll#7, M708 RG 59, NARA.

<sup>14</sup> Wright’s comments relating to a conversation with a British colleague. Wright to Secretary of State, November 10, 1927. Roll #7, M708 RG 59, NARA.

<sup>15</sup> Wright to Secretary of State, July 7, 1928. Roll#10, M708 RG 59, NARA.

<sup>16</sup> See Lord Newton’s introduction written to István Bethlen’s *The Treaty of Trianon and European Peace. Four Lectures Delivered in London in November 1933* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), ix: “Briefly stated one of the main claims of Hungary amounts to the following: [...] all that is asked for is that all the other former Hungarian subjects should be accorded the right to declare to which State they desire to belong. Since the principle of “Self-Determination” forms the ostensible basis of the Paris Treaties, the demand can scarcely be described as unreasonable [...]”

<sup>17</sup> See Viscount Rothermere, *My Campaign for Hungary* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939) and Miklós Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona* [The Lord and the Crown] (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1977). Hereafter cited as Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*.

<sup>18</sup> Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat*, 114.

and a memorial was erected in his honor.<sup>19</sup> He was awarded several honorary degrees and positions; for example, he became the *Doctor Honoris Causa* of Szeged University. And when Rothermere's son, Esmond Harmsworth, visited Hungary in May 1928, he and his delegation were received as royalty.<sup>20</sup> Hungarian enthusiasm about Rothermere's campaign reached irrational heights when he was invited to the Hungarian throne by legitimist circles in Hungary.<sup>21</sup>

Lord Rothermere's political campaign had an influence overseas as well, when he won over many Americans and Hungarian-Americans after his unofficial visit to the United States in the winter of 1927–1928. While official America ignored him, Hungarian-American communities welcomed the Englishman as the savior of Hungary. He became popular with “the [Hungarian-American] man of the street and of the press.”<sup>22</sup> His eloquent, enthusiastic and highly emotional argumentation stressed the responsibility of the United States in creating an unjust peace and appealed to the American liberal and democratic tradition. He had great influence on his audience by reciting popular slogans such as, for example, that “Trianon was born in the US” and made them believe that “Hungary's future will be decided in the United States;”<sup>23</sup> an argument that seemed obvious to some people, but the objective basis of such reasoning was rather unsound.

The American Legation in Hungary continuously informed the State Department about issues relating to Rothermere's campaign, as well as about the press coverage it received both in Hungary and abroad, with special respect to the successor states. State Department documents make it clear that Rothermere's eccentric activities were deemed unfortunate and

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<sup>19</sup> A Magyar Igazság Kútja was erected in front of the central building of Szabó Ervin Library, Budapest.

<sup>20</sup> Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 93-106.

<sup>21</sup> Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 107-130.

<sup>22</sup> László Széchenyi to Gyula Walkó, February 28, 1928. Doc. 95. 1928, K66, Hungarian National Archives. For Rothermere's popularity with “the man of the street and of the press” see the relevant articles of the January 5, 1928 and February 17, 1928 issues of the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*. I.e. “1928,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* January 1, 1928, 2.

<sup>23</sup> “Magyarország sorsa Amerikában fog eldőlni,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, April 27, 1928, 2. See also “Trianon lélekharangja,” *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, April 28, 1928, 2.



harmful, and encouraged false hopes.<sup>24</sup> American minister to Hungary, Joshua Butler Wright's somewhat harsh judgment concerning Hungarian tendencies to overestimate the significance of the Rothermere's campaign reflects the official American attitudes toward revisionism. That Wright kept a shrewd eye on Hungarian affairs, especially on revisionist propaganda, is best demonstrated by his following comment: considering the extent to which the Hungarians believed that their difficulties interested the rest of the world, "[o]ne gains the impression," Wright said,

that these people are convinced that Hungary is an important factor in the general European policy of England and other great Powers; this is bred from their intense national spirit and love of country, which, I believe, is unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. It is therefore to be regretted that they appear to be blind to the ill-effects of this untimely agitation.<sup>25</sup>

Lord Rothermere's activities in the US triggered two systematic anti-Trianon campaigns: the Kossuth pilgrimage to New York in 1928 and the Justice for Hungary movement in 1931.

At the corner of the Riverside Drive and 113<sup>th</sup> Street, there stands the second statue erected in the US in commemoration of Lajos Kossuth. Hungarians, Americans and Hungarian-Americans alike supported the creation of the statue, which was unveiled on March 15, 1928, during a spectacular ceremony. For the occasion, a delegation of approximately 500 Hungarians, the so-called Kossuth pilgrimage, arrived in New York, representing almost all layers and social classes of contemporary Hungarian society. The pilgrimage was explicitly declared to be a strictly unofficial social and cultural mission and any connections to government or other official or semi-official circles in Hungary were repeatedly denied. That notwithstanding, the Kossuth pilgrimage was a systematic anti-Trianon propaganda campaign in the US. With Kossuth's moral and political reputation as the basis for it, the participants of the Kossuth pilgrimage took every opportunity to speak up for the inevitability of the revision of the Treaty of Trianon.

The erection of the Kossuth statue was a symbolic act. Kossuth generated an image of Hungarians as a freedom-fighting, freedom-loving and democratic nation and it enjoyed a revival during the interwar years.

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<sup>24</sup> Wright to Secretary of State, July 31, 1927. Roll#7, M708 RG 59, NARA.

<sup>25</sup> Wright to Secretary of State, September 30, 1927. Roll#7, M708 RG 59, NARA.

Kossuth, often called “the Hungarian Washington,” came to symbolize democratic and liberal values the American and Hungarian nations were thought to have shared. Such an imagined historical-cultural bond gained special significance in the context of Trianon inasmuch as Kossuth’s political and moral legacy was used to support Hungary’s cause.

The Kossuth pilgrimage was also linked to the activities of the Hungarian Revisionist League, a significant non-government ‘propaganda agency’ established on July 27, 1927 as an immediate outcome of Lord Rothermere’s campaign. The League, in order to gain the widest possible publicity for Hungary’s problem, set up branches abroad. The US capital gave home to the American branch, and Imre Jósika-Herceg was appointed its head.<sup>26</sup> Both Jósika-Herceg, the chairman of the pilgrims’ reception committee, and Ferenc Herczeg, the president of the League in Budapest, were ardent promoters of the pilgrimage, and took their fair share in its preparation and organization, and, thus, the propaganda work for revision in the US.

A better-known anti-Trianon campaign was the famous trans-Atlantic flight, popularly known as the “Justice for Hungary” movement in 1931. After Charles Lindbergh’s achievement in 1927, a prosperous era of aviation came and dozens of adventurous pilots of all nationalities tried to repeat Lindbergh’s feat. Hungarians were no exception to this rule. In the summer of 1931 György Endresz and Sándor Magyar made history by becoming the first Hungarians to fly across the Atlantic non-stop. Money was raised both by Hungarians (the insignificant amount of \$45) and the Hungarian-American community (\$5,000) to help the fulfillment of the ocean flight. Imre Emil Szalay, a well-off Hungarian-American entrepreneur, offered a generous contribution of \$25,000 which was indispensable in securing the firm financial background for the project.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the Lockheed could depart from Harbor Grace, New York on July 15, 1931. Endresz and Magyar managed to cover the distance of 5770 kilometers almost in 26 hours, thereby setting a number of records.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For more see Miklós Zeidler, “A Magyar Revíziós Liga,” *Századok* (1997/2): 303-351 ; Zeidler, *A revíziós gondolat*, 88-124.

<sup>27</sup> Sándor Magyar, *Álmodni mertünk* (Budapest: Aero & Rádió Kft., 1991), 93–95. Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Endresz and Magyar covered the distance of almost 6,000 kilometers almost in 26 hours, hereby they flew at 250 km per hour in general, that is at the highest speed ever until that time in the history of flying. The “Justice for Hungary” flight also marked the fi

Although they had to make a forced landing in Bicske some 30 kilometers from their planned destination in Budapest partly due to unexpected technical problems and shortage of fuel, the pilots received the hail due to the heroes of the nation.<sup>29</sup> While their flight was momentous *per se*, its significance was increased by the fact that the flight served propaganda purposes. Upon Lord Rothermere's advice, who offered 10,000 dollars for the Hungarian pilot who would manage to fly across the Atlantic, the plane was named *Justice for Hungary*.<sup>30</sup> So, the flight besides the triumph of man and technology was a project to call attention to Hungary's seriously troubled political and economic status under the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>31</sup> Since the Justice for Hungary flight received fairly extensive media coverage, Hungarian revisionism got some international attention again.<sup>32</sup> This was, however, quite short-lived. The Hungarian ocean flight, only temporarily and by mere coincidence, diverted attention from other issues of more serious nature, as was the economic and banking crisis which hit Hungary in July 1931.<sup>33</sup>

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rst time that an airplane crossing the ocean had radio contact both with the starting and the landing aerodromes. For more on this see Zsolt Miszlai, "Az első magyar óceánrepülés," *História* (July 2002), 29–30. Hereafter cited as Miszlai, "Az első magyar óceánrepülés."

<sup>29</sup> Miszlai, "Az első magyar óceánrepülés," 30. In order to raise money for the ocean flyers the American Hungarian Transatlantic Committee in Detroit issued special Justice for Hungary postcards which cost one dollar each.

<sup>30</sup> For more on Rothermere's relations to the pilots see Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 62–65.

<sup>31</sup> Nándor Dreisziger, "The 'Justice for Hungary' Ocean Flight: The Trianon Syndrome in Immigrant Hungarian Society," in Steven Béla Várdy and Ágnes Huszár Várdy, eds., *Triumph in Adversity. Studies in Hungarian Civilization in Honor of Professor Ferenc Somogyi on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (New York: East European Monographs, 1988), 573–589; Kornél Nagy, "Igazságot Magyarországnak! A magyar óceánrepülés," *Magyar Szárnyak* Vol. 10 (1981), 63–75.

<sup>32</sup> As compared to the Hungarian newspapers, which hailed the oceanflight with enthusiasm and admiration and devoted long articles to it, the foreign papers dealt with the issue only in the short news section.

<sup>33</sup> Vásárhelyi, *A lord és a korona*, 40, 46.



## **Distinct Places Imbued with Importance in the Lives of Immigrants: Frank G. Paci: *Black Madonna* (1982)**

Judit Molnár

Frank G. Paci is referred to as “Canada’s invisible novelist” (Pivato “Invisible” 7) at the same time he “has been called one of the father’s of Italian-Canadian writing” (Pivato “Invisible” 8), too. My present aim is to contribute to a better understanding of his fictionalized world deeply touched by the air of realism. My analysis will concentrate on this textually richly layered novel *Black Madonna* (*BM*) from the point-of-view of spatial representation. According to Domenic A. Beneventi “[...] very little work has been done on the representation of ‘place’ from a minority perspective, on the ways in which ethnic communities and individuals construct spatial imaginaries which reflect their own sense of identity and belonging” (216–7). *BM* has already been approached and interpreted from different perspectives among them: character portrayal, language use, acculturation, genealogy. In my view place consciousness plays a very important role in the novel under survey as well, therefore, I shall focus on the spatial markers, signs and practices applied in the text.

Paci immigrated to Canada with his mother in 1952 at the age of four and they settled down in Sault St. Marie, Ontario. This city was favoured by Italian immigrants at that time so much so that a “Little Italy” has existed there for long the traces of which have not entirely disappeared yet. Apart from *BM*, Paci’s two other novels: *The Italians* (1978), and *The Fathers* (1984) are also set there. This is how Paci remembers:

My mother emigrated when I was four, my father having preceded us. We took roots in the Italian section of Sault. Ste. Marie, close to the steel plant and the Soo canal. The Sault is a small city in Northern Ontario, virtually at the juncture of Lake Superior and Lake Huron. Needless to

say, it was very far from what my parents had been used to in Italy.  
("Interview" 5).

Sault St. Marie as it is delineated in *BM* is a divided city with two distinct major parts: the West End and the East End. Early in the novel the reader is guided through the different neighbourhoods; the obvious conflicts between being anchored in one of the districts and that of a possible migratory existence among them and even outside them is one of the themes that novel focuses upon. The "Little Italy" where the fictionalized Barone family live belongs to the poor part.

The intricate relationship between cityscape and mindscape is one of the conundrums around which the narrative unfolds. Marie, the young daughter, wants to get out of the house where she was brought up by her demanding and far too traditional Italian mother, Assunta. "Marie thought of herself as a foreigner in her won house"(66). Her infinite and sincere desire is satisfied when she is admitted to university in Toronto where she is heading to pursue her studies in the big city in the process of self-discovery and self-definition. It is a great achievement for her since: "Ever since going to high school, the West End was becoming more and more intolerable to her. For some reason she found everything about it either obnoxious or trite" (29). As Enoch Padolsky sees it: "[she] leaves the cultural restrictions (in her view) of the West End Sault for the more liberating locale of urban Toronto" (48). Her resentful and restless feelings are emphasized all through the novel: "And start fresh from somewhere else. Away from a *dead neighbourhood* in a narrow-minded provincial city. Away from a family that had nothing in common with her – and a mother who lived *in another world*" (77; emphasis added).

Yes, indeed Assunta lives in another world that she transports from Italy to the house built by her husband, who has recently passed away. The house is the microcosm of the "Old World" ("la via vecchia") situated in the radically different "New World" ("la via nuova"). Marie remarks: "[...] *that house is the extent of her [her mother's] world*, like a castle surrounded by the moat of the West End" (161; emphasis added).

Most of the significant and often traumatic incidents are related to the family house. Gaston Bachelard tells us: "[...] our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has *beauty*" (4; emphasis added). Bachelard's assertion supports an ideal but it is certainly disputable regarding the Barones' dwelling

place where the space within the house becomes a terrain of power exercised by Assunta that everybody wants to leave behind. The children's mother, after her husband's death is responsible for creating a sense of placelessness for each member of the family including her own self. It is only Joey, her son, who is trying to create a kind of private sphere for himself in the house but with little success. Assunta also feels disoriented and it is only her kitchen that provides her with some sense of comfort and to which she has a peculiar kind of emotional attachment. This is where she can prepare the meals for her family now and can exercise her despotic power. She was "[...] an absolute tyrant at the dinner table" (31) forcing her children, particularly her daughter, to eat more than necessary because in her early years she suffered from lack of food back in Italy. Padolsky notes: "Marie employes figurative language when she describes her mother's past behaviour: 'The [kitchen] table was like [Assunta's] theatre of operation and her rules were unquestioned' (32)" (77). The mother unreasonably and helplessly convulses with hysteria when Joey prepares a meal with her girlfriend in her/their kitchen: "'What you doing in *my* kitchen?' (sic) Assunta said harshly. [...] 'who told you to use *my* kitchen?' [...] 'You get out of *my* kitchen! Get out!'" (168; emphasis added) To escape from the suffocating ambiance of the house Assunta often goes to church. Interestingly enough, the place for worship which was very important particularly for Italian immigrant women, is not described in detail in *BM*. Assunta is distorted by her nervous, piercing, and helpless agony of spatial dislocation. Padolsky notes: "This process of adaptation, of moving between two worlds, and finding a place within them, is for Paci, a serious issue" (57). For example, as far as Assunta is concerned even when her husband, Adamo, (whom she married by proxy), is still alive she constantly experiences cultural alienation. She tells him: "'How can I have come here? How? I was so content in Novilara. You'll never know! Never!' [...] 'Just give me my passage money back. Let me go back where I came from.'" (94) Nostalgia weighs gravely upon Assunta. According to Edward Casey : "One of the most eloquent testimonies to places' extraordinary memorability is found in nostalgia. We are nostalgic primarily about places that have been emotionally significant to us and which we now miss: we are in pain (*algos*) about a return home (*nostos*) that is not presently possible" (201) Further, Casey adds that the word was coined by Johannes Hoffer, a Swiss medical student in 1688. Hoffer said that it was a synonym for homesickness and that it "admits no

remedy other than a return to the homeland” (qtd. in Casey 201). Assunta’s cherished dream to return to her native land is never realized. The location that brings her closest to her homeland are the railway tracks. Marino Tuzi notes: “[...] she [Assunta] finds solace in the open space surrounding the railway tracks because it reminds her of the hilly fields of her youth” (89). The emotional attachment to the tracks indicates that Assunta’s identity is not fixed; but rather merges with an unfixed locale, a space that actually serves to bridge places; and this is what fills her with relative comfort. She resides in an emotional, spiritual and physical desolate abyss in the New World; walking along the tracks she manages to maintain imaginative and imaginary ties with her homeland. Pivato remarks: “Throughout the novel run the railway tracks of the border city. The train brought Assunta to her new life many years ago and now it took her away from it. The tracks unite the past and the present and the living and the dead” (“Enigmatic” 2). Ironically enough, it is exactly the tracks that cause her death; she is run over by a train and loses her life not long after that she got to know that their house has been sold. The reason for selling the house were the drastic changes their neighbourhood has to endure. The Italian ethno-space in Sault St. Marie slowly starts to disappear; the houses are demolished or are to be sold to city planners. This is how Joey sees the physical layout of this residential area:

In his peculiar state Joey was struck by the images of the apartment buildings against the glow of the full moon. They were like *gravestones* marking gigantic graves. And the parking-lots beneath them were the flowered mounds of earth that covered the West End. (133; emphasis added)

Despite this dismal and decaying ethnic neighbourhood, “with its dominating Steel Mill [in] the declining West End” (Padolsky 39), this is where Assunta, apart from the railway tracks, builds up relative spatial security: in the very house that she thinks is hers. When she learns that her husband has left it for her son she goes through another of the many tremendous crises she has already been confronted with. Mother and son break into a flaring row:

“This is *not* your house, Ma,” he [Joey] said, infuriated with her.  
[...]  
“What are you saying?: she said smugly. “This is my house.”  
“No, Mamma! He had to shout back. “This is my house.”  
“*Stupido!*” she yelled back. “This is my house.”  
Losing his temper, he screamed at the top of his voice.



“It’s my house, understand! Babbo [his father] left me this house!  
It’s mine, not yours!” (169; italics original)

Assunta’s in part not unexpected death prevents her from facing the consequences of having to move out of the house inherited by her son. Martin Heidegger convincingly argues: “[...] dwelling is a building in which man takes shelter [...]” (145). For Assunta the house built by her husband is the only shelter in which she feels safe, therefore having to part with it means losing security in a threatening and disturbing world that surrounds her in Canada.

Selling the house has given a new thrust in the development of the family’s life. Marie is informed about the course of events when she returns home to attend her mother’s funeral. However, her attention is centered only on one object in their home; she is again seized by her very strong almost demon-like obsession to find the key to the dowry and trousseau trunk Assunta took with her from Italy. Marie calls it Hope Chest ; “she [...] used to think of it as *her personal possession*, even though it had always been locked in their mother’s bedroom. Joey could remember Marie’s *determined efforts to find the key*” (10; emphasis added). Sciff suggests:

For Marie the chest has become part of a ritual; it has always scattered her as something mysterious and her curiosity to discover Assunta’s hidden secrets has become stronger and stronger, but she has always been unable to find the key to open it. Her failure in finding the key symbolizes her failure in finding a key to enter and understand her mother’s nature. (95)

We are informed at the very beginning of *BM*: “Assunta calls it a *bavulo* in dialect. According to her it contained her only possessions when she crossed the ocean” (10; italics original). The intrinsic importance of the trunk is foreshadowed in an enigmatic way till the very end, when Marie actually has no difficulty opening it because it is not even locked. Assunta is likely to apprehend her impending doom and wants to depart without appropriating the secrets that she has hidden for long. In Novilara the dowry trunk is supposed to be handed down from one generation to another on the occasions of the daughter’s marriage or the mother’s death. She informs her children about this tradition when they are young. Bachelard devotes a whole chapter “Drawers, Chest and Wardrobes” in *The Poetics of Space* (1958) to the particular position these self-acting spatial entities convey. He says: “[...] drawers and chests [are]

*hiding places* in which human beings, great dreamers of locks, *keep or hide their secrets*" (74; emphasis added). Earlier, he also mentions that we start to daydream in the house where we were brought up. (4-5). Marie daydreams of opening the chest; being close to the Hope Chest fills her with joy on the one hand, but on the other hand also with frustration because of not being able to open it. Quite unexpectedly when she finally manages to do so with ease a new world opens up for her as well. Sciff maintains: "Now the moment to take hold of Assunta's treasures has arrived; Marie is now ready to begin the journey into her mother's secret world (95). Bachelard remarks that in the case of chests what fascinates us is that they "[...] are objects *that may be opened* (85; emphasis original). Marie is a perfect example: "After all those fruitless years of searching. [...] Casually she [Marie] reached over to see how securely the lid was locked. To her *utter surprise* it moved" (190; emphasis added). She goes through the Hope Chest's contents meticulously layer by layer discovering all the hidden objects among them clothes, linen, photographs, "religious items" (191), candles and a small font. Sciff suggests: "Passing from one layer to the other is like going deeper and deeper into the past; it is a retracing back her maternal lineage, a lineage, lost in the mists of time" (96). Marie is completely lost in time while she is curiously probing the trunk: "Marie noticed that as she dug deeper and deeper the contents appeared to be older and older, as if she were unearthing various layers of a person's life" (190). Padolsky observes: "The 'open' mystery of the Black Madonna, symbolized by the open chest, can be 'solved' by entering the past, confronting the realities and values of Italian culture [...] (51). Marie puts on a black dress that she finds there and "She wasn't surprised that it fit like a glove" (191). She goes through a ritual while changing the bedroom into a kind of sanctuary; the formerly aggravating bedroom becomes a holy place. Marie creates a sphere similar to an altar where she lights candles in front of a picture-stand holding old family photographs embraced by two small statues of the Virgin. The interior of the trunk dominates the exterior world around it. Marie's outward life turns inward; she goes through a personal transition in this imaginative space that she has formed and discovered where "[...] she felt her mother's presence [...] 'Mama, I'm sorry,' she said out loud" (192). In this sacred space Marie is also tempted to pray for a moment" (192). The space comparable to a shrine becomes the blessed place for reconciliation between daughter and mother. Padolsky emphasizes: "[...] Paci is very much at home in the

‘underground’ world of psychological space [...]” (55). The Hope Chest plays a central role in Marie’s psyche from childhood to adulthood. Interestingly enough, she decides to take it back to Italy when she is invited to one of her cousin’s wedding after her mother’s funeral. She says: “I don’t deserve it and she [her cousin] can probably make a better use of it than I can” (195). The Hope Chest becomes a transitory place, a liminal zone that also has a temporal function via connecting different passages of time.

Assunta’s dream of going back to Italy is fulfilled by her daughter. Critics call our attention to the far-reaching importance of the return journey in Italian-Canadian literature. Pivato says in short: “The most significant effects of the return journey experience, then, are revealed in the literary works themselves. The return journey recurs so often that it can be described not just as a major theme but as an obsession in the Italian-Canadian imagination” (“Return” 170). Marie’s sudden and initiatory decision is quite unexpected and there is no foreshadowing given how she will be transformed after she has visited the land of her parents. Will she move as “minority subjects” often do between “two spatial and cultural polarities (the here and now of Canada vs. the there and past of Italy)?” (Beneventi 232). Will she develop an in-between existence? Pivato claims that in Italian-Canadian writing the major metaphor is that of the journey: “The immigrant journey is a metaphor for the journey of life” (“Left” 38). We might assume that Marie may live in a “third space” in her future life, and experience a threshold existence but it remains unknown. Beneventi’s observation certainly holds true both for first and second generation immigrants, including the character of Marie: “The first step in crossing the chasm between the old world and the new involves reinscribing the self within a genealogical and historical continuum, often in the context of the ‘return journey’” (223).

Marie’s brother, Joey also moves away; he leaves behind the crumbling urban terrain of Little Italy and chooses to go to the other end of town, to the East End, where the space of the mainstream culture is propagated mainly by the Anglophones. Earlier, when Marie escapes to Toronto to lodge in a mental space in which she can realize her own self; she finds it significant to confine herself to the space of rationality: the realm of logics and mathematics. Simultaneously, Joey flees to the domain of dreams, to dreamland; he is seeking rather, in contrast with his sister, a spiritual space than a rational one. Joey’s dreaming of a huge lake on which he can either skate or play ice hockey is an often recurring motif

in the text: “In bed that night he had his *familiar dream* of skating on a *limitless expanse* of a lake as huge as Superior. He thought it was a lake because it was so huge and he was alone with only the *sky above him*” (57; emphasis added). It is not the depth of the lake that he is enthralled by but the horizontal vastness of the space and vertically by the openness of the space above him. In his dream, in his invented space, he is free from the unavoidable anxiety that is manifest in the interior of the house where he lives. For long his dream is in the centre of his everyday life; strangely enough, it is this very dream that confines him to the West End: “[...] they [his dreams] were too strong – and he hadn’t quite managed to live in the world outside the West End” (88). Formerly, “All he could look forward to was his dream” (96). But over time, he changes and looks forward to a “new” and real habitat and as mentioned above, and moves to another residential area in town. Before doing so, however, like his sister, he also goes through a kind of ritual; both of them hold a place in memory of their parents: Marie an altar, Joey a pyramid.

The pyramid Joey builds in the garden is just as mysterious as Marie’s altar in the parents’ bedroom. By building a memorial for his parents Joey expresses a conciliatory and respectful gesture towards his parents: “The base of the pyramid took up almost the complete width of the garden. Around it, the rest of the area was littered with materials. Pieces of broken brick. Bags of cement and lime. A crate of bricks. A wheelbarrow with wet mortar” (197). Joey’s father is a bricklayer in the steel plant.; Joey inherits his manual skills and he intends to follow in his father’s footsteps in an inventive and artistic way. He listens to his father’s parental and determinative advice: “That’s [plant] no place for a real bricklayer. You have to build houses or churches or bridges – that’s what you have to build” (63). Creating new places, constructing new dwellings have always been an integral and essential matter in the Italian community’s life. Paci recalls: “My father and his friends on the same street, for example, all enjoyed working with their hands. They all renovated their homes, made basements, installed plumbing, and then for years fixed this or that” (“Interview” 11). Joey pays tribute to his parents by erecting a pyramid-like monument with the help of his father’s admired tools which painfully reminds one of a burial place. The truly revered trowels’ significance is beyond their physical presence: “Yet each trowel, like the first, fit so well in his [Joey’s] palm that they could have been made for him” (64). Assunta’s black dress comes to the reader’s mind that “fit [Marie] like a glove” (191). On the one hand, both the

trowels and the dress settle a forgiving and generous reconciliation of differences between the children and their parents. On the other hand, I also agree with Tuzi who claims: “Yet the narrative redemptive moments – Joey’s reconciliation with his sister and the erecting of a brick pyramid that is a *totem to the immigrant past* – are infused with a sense of *flux*” (72; emphasis added). “The totem” will disappear, Joey’s future is unforeseeable; his transplantation to a new ethnic enclave will certainly effect his refined sensibility.

In conclusion, I followed Beneventi’s assertion according to which: “[...] place is central to the construction of ethnic identity [...]” (232) My objective was to prove that the exploration of the spatial arrangement in *BM* will deepen the understanding of the novel. Undoubtedly, all through this intensely place-oriented narrative, be it private or public, the places that create idiosyncratic spaces are constantly present. The story unfolds as the places emerge and come into a distinct view at the different layers of the narrative structure. The places’ character and nature, however, change at their different occurrences. Various places are endowed with different implications and spirits altering notably and undeniably. For instance, one part of the city slowly disappears, the deserted house is likely to be bulldozed, the railway tracks that first bring encouragement and hope finally induce death, the closed Hope Chest is open and is transported, the bedroom is transformed into a shrine, Italy that is first connected to the past becomes a land to be discovered. In the light of all the above, I fully agree with Beneventi: “Paradoxically, place is at the same moment inimical to ethnic self-definition, since place presents constant shifts in meaning, perspective and signification, rendering difficult the construction of “stable” ethnic identity” (232). In *Black Madonna* past, present and future are interwoven in the characters’ lives; their emotional attachment to certain stages in time is just as unsteady and agitated as their attachment to different places: characters and places are in transition.

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## **Racial Identity Transformed: Suzan-Lori Parks's *Topdog/Underdog* and David Henry Hwang's *Yellowface***

Lenke Németh

"The mask which the actor wears is apt to become  
his face." (Plato)

"The face we choose to show the worlds—reveals  
who we really are." (Hwang, *Yellowface*)

Enthusiastically praising the opportunities, the peace and wealth in the new land, French immigrant St. Jean Crèveceour described the new nation in his *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1782 as follows: "here individuals of all nations are melted into a *new race of men*, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world" (italics added, 70). Less than a century later in 1855, Walt Whitman, the bard of American democracy, shared Crèveceour's fervor and joyously declared that "America is the Race of Races."<sup>1</sup> Prophetically, they both envisioned a *new race*, a new amalgamation of people of different nations, races, and ethnicities, and interestingly enough, they also anticipated the elusiveness of this concept. Indeed, the pluralistic and multi-racial American society has always struggled to conceptualize the national character thus Crèveceour's question "What, then is, the American, this new man?" raised in the eighteenth century has never lost its validity. Insistence upon a singular definition of the national character, however, has proved to be futile since the meaning "is transformed by experience, this being the gift offered by a culture in which transformation is the essence" (Bigsby 2).

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<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, 1855.

Paradoxically, the *constant* feature of American culture lies in its inherent *dynamism* and its always changing nature due to the never ceasing flux of immigrants. “The story of the American process,” as Zsolt Virágos articulates it, “has always been that of unifying forces versus divisive issues” (“Diagnosing” 19), and accordingly, the effects of two basic forces, centripetal—directed toward centralization—and centrifugal—moving away from a center—have shaped the American culture. Arguably, over the past three centuries two major models, the *assimilationist* and the *multicultural* have evolved. While the first one targets the unification of the American nation, the second throws into relief the heterogeneity of the American culture. With an unprecedented focus on the distinctiveness of ethnic groups and various subcultures in the decades from 1960s to mid-1990s, the multicultural era, however, created as well as deepened schisms and splits in the American society. Labeling multicultural America a “boiling pot,” Virágos maintains that the separatist impulses then “spawned a whole spate of ‘versus patterns’ (we-ness versus they-ness, Eurocentrist vs. Afrocentrist interpretations of history, male vice vs. female virtue, virtually everybody vs. the white male, etc. and other divisive strategies of polarization and mythicized exclusionism” (“Diagnosing” 16).

As opposed to the multicultural phase when the cult of ethnicity and difference was celebrated, in a matter of less than two decades since the mid-1990s, the American society has entered its postmulticultural phase and is approaching a *sybiosis* of different cultures, which, ideally, involves a mutually beneficial interaction between them. I suggest that the New Millennium marks a cultural paradigm shift from multiculturalism to *postmulticulturalism*, which qualifies as the *third model* of the American culture. Inescapably, the postmulticultural phase necessitates the reconceptualization of Americanness and national identity. Harry J. Elam maintains that postmulticulturalism “offers space for new explorations of cultural and ethnic hybridity, for the interrogation of racial meanings, and for a re-thinking of the politics of cultural identity” (Elam 116). In the present paper my aim is to explore dramatic representations of the new kind of cultural identity that I term the *cultural mulatto* and will offer a description of this new literary archetype. The plays selected for study include two productions in the postmulticultural phase of American drama: African American Suzan-Lori Parks’s Pulitzer Prize winning play *Topdog/Underdog* (2002) and Asian American David Henry Hwang’s *Yellow Face* (2007). Before having a closer look at the works, however, I



will highlight certain socio-economic causes leading to the emergence of postmulticulturalism and will provide a characterization of the cultural mulatto.

The shift to postmulticulturalism is due to major socio-economic changes in the US that have challenged previous notions of citizenship, race, and ethnicity. As a result of the effects of globalization (integration of national economy into international economy) a new migration of people began in the late 1980s on the US-Mexican, US-Caribbean, and US-Pacific borders for job opportunities and better living conditions. The unprecedented increase in the numbers of immigrants on the borders of the US has triggered radical changes and the rearrangement of priorities in many facets of US life. First of all, the massive migration of the people who moved to and fro across the borders while maintaining their familial ties with their relatives has challenged former conceptions of American identity, race, and ethnicity. Arguably, within the context of transnational migration and a globalized world “monolith communities like Asian American and African American, ceases to exist as a successful marker of difference” (Park 280).

The 2000 Census marks the first occasion when the assignment of *mixed race* could be chosen by the respondents, who could acknowledge any combination of races they were descendants of. Prior to that Census only one racial designation option was allowed to choose, which corroborates the emphasis on the cult of ethnicity and difference celebrated in the multicultural phase. The introduction of the new mixed race category brought about a re-arrangement in the racial and ethnic composition of the American population. 7 million Americans identified themselves as mixed race in 2000, while by the 2010 Census their number grew to more than 10 million. It is predicted that their number “could account for one in five Americans” by 2050 (Kotkin).

I propose this era produces a new hybrid, fluid cultural identity that I term the *cultural mulatto*. Introduced originally by cultural critic Trey Ellis to identify a type of African American appearing in the 1980s, the cultural mulatto, by extension, aptly describes the new American in the postmulticultural era. By definition the cultural mulatto embraces the cultural legacies of two or more cultures that are in a mutually interactive relationship with each other. Navigating easily in between the iconic signifiers of several cultures, the cultural mulatto breaks down the arbitrary barriers between ethnicities and races that induced much strife and pain in the course of American history.

This new type of identity emerges in the literature and art of a new generation of artists—primarily black—who were born into or grew up in a radically altered cultural and political scene after the multicultural era. The new generation's art is not burdened with the separatist and nationalist impulses inherent in the 1960s-1980s, neither do they define black experience in terms of segregation and slavery but present characters with “a hybrid, fluid, elastic, cultural mulattoesque sense of black identity” (Ashe 614). The legitimacy of identifying literature in the postmulticultural period as a discrete literary period as well as its label is still contested—the names range from post-soul, post-liberated through post Black, post-ethnic to New Black. I prefer to use the label *post-ethnic* on its being the most comprehensive to refer to all the ethnicities in the post-Civil Rights Movement era literature.

As regards Ellis's definition of the cultural mulatto he places much emphasis on the cultural mulatto embracing various cultural legacies: “[j]ust as a genetic mulatto is a black person of mixed parents who can often get along fine with his grandparents, a cultural mulatto, educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures, can also navigate easily in the white world” (235). By giving prominence to the *multi-racial* and *multi-cultural* legacies as shaping factors of the black self, Ellis not only removes centuries-old social and psychological burdens that African Americans have experienced in their marginalized position but also pries open race-imposed cultural boundaries and dichotomies that have long traumatized African American consciousness and existence. Pertaining to the mixed legacies Ellis notes that “[w]e no longer need to deny or suppress any part of our complicated and sometimes contradictory cultural baggage to please either white people or black” (235). Perceptively, Bertram D. Ashe is right in extending the definition of cultural mulatto referring not only to all African Americans but to all Americans: “All African Americans are, to one extent or another, naturalized ‘cultural mulattos,’ as are all Americans, and any other Americans, of any race or ethnicity, who grew up in this country” (614).

On the basis of the abundance of characters with a hybrid and fluid sense of identity in post-ethnic literature Ashe establishes the cultural mulatto archetype (612), though he declines to describe its specific features. I find the following criteria can be set up and adequately be used for the identification of this archetype: (1) a quintessential representative of the post-ethnic era, the cultural mulatto possesses a *composite identity* that evinces biraciality and biculturalness; (2) the cultural mulatto's

identity is never stable but is always in flux; (3) the cultural mulatto transforms the former no man's land, the *wild zone* between the white and the ethnic worlds into an intercultural sphere, a *contact space* thus securing long-desired space in between the two cultures; (4) the cultural mulatto crosses the color line and re-inscribes himself/herself in the history of America; (5) the cultural mulatto embraces the iconographic signifiers of both the white and the black cultures and histories.

Erika Fischer-Lichte's theoretical considerations pertaining to the role of theatre and drama in demonstrating as well as challenging outdated or traditional conceptions of identity are effectively corroborated in the dramatization of the cultural mulattoesque identities as presented in the plays selected for study here, Parks's *Topdog/Underdog* and Hwang's *Yellow Face*. Fischer-Lichte points out that there has always existed a "dialectic relationship" between the theatre and the cultural and social reality of the outside world: "theatre or drama has never been satisfied with merely mirroring or depicting this external world but has always also functioned as a forum of questioning and critical analysis, a sphere of experimentation offering or even initiating alternative identities" (5). Like other forms of cultural performance—for example, rituals, ceremonies, or rites of passage—theatre is particularly concerned with the formation and change of identity, while the self-reflexivity of drama illustrates how the genre examines its own structure in the light of changes in the concept of identity. I claim that both *Topdog/Underdog* and *Yellow Face* deconstruct stereotypical beliefs about race and identity and at the same time they push beyond simple racial definitions based on binaries.

Hybridity and fluidity of identity are central to both plays, which is conveyed by a sense of duality constantly interacting on their thematic and formal levels. A never-ceasing oscillation is present between fact and fiction, historical figures and fictional characters, reality and illusion, and characters performing different roles, races, and identities. Both Parks and Hwang re-visit scandalous events in American history and provide a highly inventive blend of fact and fiction achieved by populating the stage with historical as well as fictional characters. Parks addresses the theme of the archetypal rivalry between brothers over power, yet by naming the African Americans brothers Lincoln and Booth—given to them by their father as a joke—she not only extends the play with racial, cultural and historical dimensions but the continuous interaction between them creates a sense of fluidity of races and identity. Hwang is concerned with the scandalous event of casting a white actor, Jonathan Pryce for the main

role in the Broadway performance of the musical *Miss Saigon*—even though the role called for a Eurasian and gives an account of his own protest against this practice of yellowfacing. By doubling himself, Hwang assumes the role of DHH, the narrator/announcer in the play, who is a replica of himself, and thus he is able to trace his own journey from his initial orthodox convictions about race to greater openness, an entirely altered view about it.

Whitefacing, the reversal and challenge of the politically incorrect practices of blackfacing and yellowfacing widely used on stage and screen, especially in the first half of the twentieth century constitutes a central element in both plays. Linc and Booth identify with historical figures from white history and culture, which is an ironic re-writing of the history of the United States “A reformed card shark” (Geis 114), Linc has given up making living out of the three-card monte game and instead each day he whitefaces himself to transform into Abraham Lincoln, the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the US in order to enact his assassination in an arcade. Booth enacts his namesake’s fate as he kills his brother in a dispute over money.

Hwang effectively demonstrates in his play “how the oppression has less to do with one’s actual ethnic background than with how one attempts to perform one’s identity in a world fond of neat classifications” (Park 282). Hwang and his supporters (which originally included Actors Equity) found it outrageous that after decades of white actors donning “yellowface,” it was morally and ethically wrong for a white actor to play “Asian.” DHH thinks it appalling: “Yellow face? In this day and age? It’s—It’s—did suddenly turn the clock back to 1920. Are we all going to smear shoe polish on our faces?” (Hwang 11). So in response to the *Miss Saigon* debate DHH writes *Face Value*, in which an “Asian American character is supposed to infiltrate a production wearing whiteface, only to reveal later that he is Asian” (Park 282). In order to avoid stereotypical assumptions about typical physical Asian features, by accident, DHH casts the role of the activist to Caucasian Marcus Dahlman, assuming that he is mixed race. When realizing his casting mistake, DHH covers it up by going so far as giving Dahlman a new name, Marcus Gee and a Siberian Jew ethnic background. Ironically, by yellowfacing himself, that is performing the role of the oppressed Asian American actor, the Caucasian Marcus gains recognition and wealth. Eventually DHH has to face that his political correctness (beginning of the 1990s) is merely “a blatant restriction of artistic freedom” (Hwang 11).

The performative nature of identity and race is accentuated in both plays. Linc's whitefacing himself involves putting on the signifiers of identity change, the hat, the beard and the coat, which transform him into Abe Lincoln. Linc's constant fluctuation between his role enacted in the arcade and his real self, however, reinforces the performativity of identity. He fights against the signifiers that, "Fake Beard. Top hat. Don't make me into no Lincoln. I was on my own before any of that" (Parks 30). Yet, the Lincoln role creeps into his everyday life. In a hurry to catch a bus home Linc has not time to take off the costume and a kid asks him for his autograph. "They'd just done Lincoln in history class and he knew all about him," as Linc tells the story to Booth, and "there was Honest Abe right beside him on the bus" (Parks 11). Dressed as President Lincoln is not only an "uncanny reminder of the performativity of identity," but also "makes us intensely aware of Lincoln's (the actor's) 'blackness'" (Dietrick 58).

Booth's acts and deeds convincingly reinforce the performative nature of identity. Desperately trying to learn how to deal cards the way his brother used to, he constantly imitates him by rehearsing the moves and gestures, yet "his moves and accompanying patter are, for the most part, studied and awkward" (Parks 7). Adamant to assert his masculinity and his success with Grace, his apparent girlfriend, he sets up a scene of a romantic dinner with champagne but Grace never turns up. Additionally, the brothers have their common game of acting out the roles of Ma and Pa, a highly comic fast paced ritual of joy when Lincoln brings home his pay:

BOOTH. Lordamighty, Pa, I smells money!  
 LINCOLN. Sho nuff, Ma. Poppas brung home thuh bacon.  
 BOOTH. Bringitherebringitherebringithere. (Parks 26)

The constant metadramatic quality of *Topdog/Underdog* is further enhanced by Linc's description of reality and illusion in the Lincoln performance thus creating a *mise en abyme* and also raising question pertaining to reality and mimesis. Linc begins his account by emphasizing, "Its pretty dark. To keep thuh illusion of thus whole thing" (48). The sense of duality operates here since the darkness in the arcade refers to Linc's impersonation as well as to the actual theatre performance that Abe Lincoln was watching when he was assassinated. Then the issue of the ability of seeing or not seeing in the darkness, that is perceiving reality or an image/imitation of reality is further expanded by Parks. Though the

one to be assassinated should not (be able to) see the assassin, Linc admits that he can see an upside down reflection of the customers in the “Big old dent” on the silver metal electrical box on the opposite wall, so “everything reflected in it gets reflected upside down” (48). The acute irony of this scene lies in Linc’s highlighting the moment of *reality* that turns out to be entirely inappropriate: “There is a moment of reality: Me looking at him upside down and him looking at me looking like Lincoln” (50). Ultimately, both the customer and Linc see distorted versions of reality, since Linc can see an upside-down, a “carnivalized” version of reality, while the customer can see a fake Lincoln. Reality, as seen by them, is merely a replica of the real historical event that took place in the nineteenth century.

Irony and a farcical tone operate in Hwang’s play as well. For comic effect, the person of color in *Yellow Face* is a white man. By the end of his journey DHH understands that “people of color, do not choose to live inside labels: race is acted upon them from the outside in” (Park 282). Ultimately, DHH, that is Hwang, is able to transcend the more outdated assumptions of multi-culturalism and suggests: “Maybe we should take words like Asian and American like race and nation – mess them up so bad no one has any idea what they mean any more (63).”

Lincoln’s oscillations between his masks and selves as well as Marcus Gee acquiring a new identity by merely consistently performing it adequately illustrate that both plays trouble blackness and Asian Americanness, respectively, and hold them up for examination in ways that depart significantly from previous—and necessary—preoccupations with struggling for political freedom, or with an attempt to establish and sustain coherent black or Asian American identity.

Both playwrights’ works benefit from constant experimentation with dramatic form. Their innovative methods and techniques are most obvious in their handling of the theatrical space. The observation pertaining to Parks’s use of stage that it is an “accumulation of places” [...] “in which characters from various historical times and locations can appear” and thus characters have “multi-spatial and multi-temporal existence” (Wilmer 444) is equally valid for Hwang’s stage. They both populate the space with historical, imaginary and real characters thus they not only underlie the multiplicity of selves and legacies but they create a peculiar synchronic presence of various spaces and times.

The cultural mulatto navigates easily in between the iconic signifiers of several cultures, enhances cross-race dialogue and transcends

racial difference thus breaking down arbitrary barriers between races and cultures. I tentatively suggest that the cultural mulatto embodies an American identity that Crèvecoeur and Whitman prophetically envisaged and attempted to define centuries ago.

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# **Money Has No Smell: Anti-Semitism in Hungary and the Anglo-Saxon World, and the Launching of the International Reconstruction Loan for Hungary in 1924.**

Zoltán Peterecz

## **Introduction**

Today, anti-Semitism is a recurring phenomenon in Europe. This is somewhat strange if one takes into consideration the suffering of this people during World War II and the staggering number of Jews murdered during the Holocaust, a fact that is well known to everyone and commemorated in every year on given days. Despite of this, there are always those who deny the Holocaust publicly and, in doing so, they encourage the uneducated layers that often had an anti-Semitic upbringing. Still, before World War II, anti-Semitism was very much an everyday feature not restricted to much of Europe and Great Britain but also in the United States. It was true not only for those coming from strongly devout families where anti-Semitism was a doctrine deeply seated in the religious teachings, but also for the well-educated upper classes. Although this layer was also affected by Protestant or Catholic teachings, their experience on account of their regular travels to other parts of the world and contact to various elements of society, their worldview could and should have been changed but was not. This article first examines the nature of anti-Semitism in Hungary, Great Britain, and the United States, then it will present the case study of the launching of the Hungarian reconstruction loan in 1924, which was interwoven with clear manifestations of anti-Semitism.

In 1924, Hungary was the recipient of an international loan as the main part of the financial reconstruction launched and overseen by the

League of Nations. This undertaking in the name of rehabilitating Central and Eastern Europe had its political underpinnings. After the various peace treaties, the defeated and punished countries tried to find their place in the sun both in diplomatic and economic senses. Austria, where the first League-administered reconstruction took place in late 1922, Hungary, which was the most severely punished country after World War I, and Germany, where the Dawes Plan was launched in the fall of 1924, in a largely similar fashion to that of Austria and Hungary, all felt resentment if not outright hatred against France. They saw their draconian punishment as a result of French efforts. Hungary had all the more reason to resent France, because the Little Entente, an alliance of the successor states, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, had an open anti-Hungarian agenda with French backing. Therefore, it is no wonder that all these states in dire straits were seeking Anglo-Saxon help. While they hoped to find some diplomatic backing from Great Britain, a well-known opponent of France, in the financial field these countries put their faith first and foremost in the United States and, to a lesser degree, into Great Britain. In the case of Hungary, in both the diplomatic and financial fields, it was equally important to ensure the support of these Anglo-Saxon powers.

### **Anti-Semitism in Hungary**

In Hungary, Jews had been on the scene for centuries in small numbers. Their quantity started to grow in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Jewish diaspora accounted for less than 4% of Hungary in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; by the eve of World War I, this figure rose to 6%. Although there were seldom atrocities against them, it can be said that Jews lived in relative peace but not in popularity. Since they took up liberal professions (such as private medical doctors, lawyers, journalists, merchants, and businessmen) that many coming from middle and upper middle classes found demeaning, and some of the Jewish families became wealthy, they were an easy prey of the aforementioned layers, and jealousy soon turned into common dislike and sometimes into outright hatred. The Hungarian Jewry, especially in the large cities, deemed it extremely important that their children have a good education. They made use of the positive changes in the field of education in Hungary, which started to achieve a high standard. On the highest level

of education, the proportion of Jewish students was way above their ethnic ratio compared to the whole of Hungary.

World War I and its aftermath changed many things. One of them was that the general dislike against Jews turned into broad loathing. One of the reasons for this was the Hungarian Soviet Republic in the spring of 1919. Since many of the Bolshevik commissars were of Jewish origins, the backlash after the fall of this regime hit the whole Jewish group in Hungary hard. The fact that most of the participants in the Bolshevik coup and regime were poor Jewish immigrants from Galicia and not the traditional “Hungarian” Jews did not seem to bother the majority. In the wake of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, in which Hungary was rendered a small country shorn of two-thirds of its territories and population, the Jews became an easy target to blame. The Jewish people were looked upon as a scapegoat, which the ruling conservative side, and the country’s population in general, needed and found in them. The Jews were an easy mark. They had accumulated great wealth in the past few decades and via that money, most of which was accrued in the banking sphere, some of them became accepted in the highest circles. Still, Jews could never attain true Hungarian nationality in the eyes of many, and for a lot of Hungarians they were anathema. As the historian Tibor Frank notes, it was not only the political events that evoked such sentiment, since the “Jewish question [was] deeply embedded in early twentieth-century Hungarian society.”<sup>1</sup> It was especially the right wing elements in the country that wished for a stricter anti-Jewish agenda, and even the expulsion of the Jews was acceptable for them as well.

The first and most spectacular manifestation of such feelings took place already in 1919. During the White Terror following the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Jews were usual victims. In the words of the historians Yehuda Don and George Magos, anti-Semitism in Hungary turned “ into a bigoted savage movement during the first months of the ‘White Terror,’ as of August 1919, [and] antisemitic outbursts became an immediate danger for Jewish existence, and were followed by an unprecedented wave of conversions.”<sup>2</sup> There were sporadic explosions of violent anti-Semitic actions in the coming years. In April 1922, nine Jews were killed

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<sup>1</sup> Tibor Frank, *Double Exile. Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 191-1945* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Yehuda Don and George Magos, “The Demographic Development of Hungarian Jewry” *Jewish Social Studies* 45, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1983): 194.

and twenty-three injured in a bomb explosion in Budapest at a club attended mostly by Jews. Although in this case the offenders were legally punished, it was not always the case. One of the most famous ones was the attack in Csongrád, where a bomb was thrown into a ball room on December 26, 1923, where Jews were celebrating. In the wake of the explosion, three people died and many suffered serious injuries. Despite the fact that the suspected members of a far right group admitted their guilt, they were acquitted later on.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from sporadic physical atrocities, the anti-Semitic sentiment was manifest in the infamous *Numerus Clausus* Act, which regulated the percentage of Jewish students that were allowed into the highest educational facilities. The bill declared that the ethnic ratio among university students must correspond to their ratio in the population, but obviously, the clear goal of the law was to limit the numbers of Jews studying in the highest education, for the gain of the Christian middle class.<sup>4</sup> Before and immediately after 1918, the ratio of Jewish students was well above 30%; the new legal ratio was 6% for them, but it was not strictly followed, and their percentage in the highest education was around 9%, still a very sharp decrease.<sup>5</sup> This Act, the first of its kind, did not help postwar Hungary to get out of its political isolation. The League of Nations put on its agenda the question twice in the first half of the 1920s, once on the petition of Hungarian Jews, but it did not lead to any drastic steps.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, the ruling legal and common environment made many Jewish intellectuals decide in favor of leaving Hungary. Among such scientists who later became world famous were Theodore von Kármán, John von Neumann, Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner, and Edward Teller.

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<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews. Policy and Legislation 1920–1943* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1981), 82. These terrorist attacks were attributed to the “A wakening Hungarians,” a far right group.

<sup>4</sup> The text of the law is in *Magyar Törvénytár, 1920. évi törvénycikkek* [Hungarian Law Collection, Law Bills of 1920] (Budapest, 1921), 145–146. According to the 1920 census, there were almost half a million Jewish people in Hungary. In more detail on the *Numerus Clausus*, see Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews*, 60–79.

<sup>5</sup> Gergely Egressy, “A Statistical Overview of the Hungarian Numerus Clausus Law of 1920—A Historical Necessity or the First Step Toward the Holocaust?” *Eastern Europe an Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (January 2001): 447, 451–452, 457.

<sup>6</sup> The first was in November 1921, the second in December 1925. Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews*, 64–69; Cabinet Meeting, November 6, 1925, 32-33R/35, K 27, Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian National Archives] (hereafter cited as HNA).

Although they all started their studies in Hungary and came from the upper middle class, in order to fulfill their scientific hunger and eschew repression at home, they needed to leave their home country. Probably many more Jewish persons would have chosen immigration, but with the quota laws in the United States in the first half of the 1920s, there were only precious few who could get entry visa to the U.S. The two Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924, and their effect on Central European, and more precisely, on Hungarian immigration were significant. Hungary, which contributed about 100,000 immigrants per year before World War I, was now restricted to 5,747 in 1921, then to a mere 473 in 1924, a figure that was equal to 2% of their representation based upon the 1890 US Bureau Census, and even a two-fold increase in 1924 did not alter this situation significantly.<sup>7</sup>

### **Anti-Semitism in Great Britain**

In Great Britain anti-Semitism had also had a long history, although it was different and far from the Hungarian type. British anti-Semitism was many times a manifestation of anti-alienism. Such newspapers as the *Pall Mall Gazette* did everything to entice readers against what they saw an engulfment by Jews. The well-established Jewish community, for instance, did everything to make the poor Eastern European Jews turn back in order to avoid anti-Semitic backlash against their status already earned in England<sup>8</sup>. Two momentous events are worth mentioning concerning the Jewish question, both happening at around the same time. During World War I, the question of loyalty was high on the political agenda, and suspicions against aliens grew. Since many Jews had arrived from Germany, the war was a good occasion to force many Jewish citizens to declare their loyalty toward their chosen country. Another act stemming from the war effort took place in November 1917, when His Majesty's government issued the Balfour Declaration, which basically promised "a National Home for the Jewish People." This seemingly liberal political declaration had more to do with present war efforts. Lloyd George later admitted that the main goal was to gain Jewish sympathies

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<sup>7</sup> Frank, *Double Exile*, 181–182.

<sup>8</sup> Severin Adam Hochberg, "The Repatriation of Eastern European Jews from Great Britain: 1881–1914" *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (Winter, 1988 – Spring, 1992): 49–62.

and the significant Jewish financial support world wide it might mean for the Entente.<sup>9</sup> It is more probable, however, that the main purpose of the declaration, which was received with positive feedback from the United States to Russia, was to insure that Britain enjoyed friendly feelings in Palestine and among the Jews in general, which was the British diplomatic goal in the Near East.<sup>10</sup>

The other defining event was the Russian Revolution, which was soon was depicted in Britain as a Jewish conspiracy.<sup>11</sup> The menacing Bolshevik tide that seemed at moments to engulf some of the defeated countries, and, therefore, to endanger the possibility of the stability dreamed by the Western Powers, easily created a chance to cry out against both Bolshevism and the Jews. As Winston Churchill wrote, in the Russian Revolution “the majority of the leading figures are Jews. Moreover, the principal inspiration and driving power comes from the Jewish leaders.”<sup>12</sup> The future prime minister thought that conversion to Zionism was a much better outcome for a Jew, and for Great Britain and the new world order, than to become a convert of Bolshevism. He made clear to every reader where the danger lay:

In the Soviet institutions the predominance of Jews is even more astonishing. And the prominent, if not indeed the principal, part in the system of terrorism applied by the Extraordinary Commissions for Combating Counter-Revolution has been taken by Jews, and in some notable cases by Jewesses. The same evil prominence was obtained by Jews in the brief period of terror during which Bela Kun ruled in Hungary. The same phenomenon has been presented in Germany (especially in Bavaria), so far as this madness has been allowed to prey upon the temporary prostration of the German people. Although in all these countries there are many non-Jews every whit as bad as the worst of the Jewish revolutionaries, the part played by the latter in proportion to their numbers in the population is astonishing.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Lloyd George, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, vol. 2, 1116–1122, 1134.

<sup>10</sup> In more detail, see, Isaiah Friedman, “The Response to the Balfour Declaration” *Jewish Social Studies*, 35, no. 2 (April 1973): 105–124.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876–1939* (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1979), 141–143; Gisela C. Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England, 1918–1939* (Oxford: Macmillan, in association with St. Anthony’s College, 1978), 16–25.

<sup>12</sup> Winston Churchill, “Zionism versus Bolshevism. A Struggle for the Soul of the Jewish People,” *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, February 8, 1920

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Lord Curzon, the Foreign Secretary between 1919 and 1924, used similarly harsh words when he depicted Jews taking part in the leadership of the Soviet government as “a small gang... who are preying like vultures on the bodies of that unhappy [Russian] people.”<sup>14</sup> Harold Nicolson’s, another decisive person in the Foreign Office, confession is illuminating as well: “The Jewish capacity for destruction is really illimitable. Although I loathe anti-Semitism, I do dislike Jews.”<sup>15</sup> But it was not only the political and diplomatic elite that harbored such sentiment. If nursery rhymes are in any way a measure of popular feelings, the following lines are telling much about long-standing popular sentiment toward Jews, on both sides of the Atlantic:

Jack sold his gold egg  
To a rascally Jew,  
Who cheated him out of  
The half of his due.

The Jew got the goose  
Which he vowed he would kill,  
Resolving at once  
His pockets to fill.<sup>16</sup>

Both in the higher political circles and among common people, anti-Semitism was an everyday feature.

### Anti-Semitism in the United States

In the United States, anti-Semitism was on a lower scale than in Europe. It was mainly due to the more liberal relation to newcomers and aliens as such. A country made of immigrants, it was little wonder that an ethnic or religious minority can have a more secure environment. Still, the dominant creed was that of the Protestant members of the society and they had a deeply grained dislike against Jews mainly on account of their religious teachings. The many Catholic immigrants arriving throughout the nineteenth century only added to this general feeling. So, when poor Jews arrived in large numbers during the period lasting roughly 1880 to World War I, anti-Semitism gained ground, similarly to Great Britain, as

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in England*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> *The Book of Nursery Rhymes* (Philadelphia: Theodore Bliss & Co., 1846), 44–45.

part of anti-alienism. Still, since Jewish people arrived from all over Southern, Eastern, and Central Europe, the antipathy against them was stronger than to any one nation. Among the upper class, the national elite so to speak, anti-Semitism was a typical feature, but not necessarily a malign thought. It was much more part of a worldview.

Due to the efforts of the Nativist movement and the political elite, toward the end of the nineteenth century the literacy test became to symbolize the possibility to exclude the poor immigrants, many of them Jews, arriving from Europe. It was thanks only to the various presidents that such a bill never became law up until 1917, but the many Jews already living in the United States found growing discrimination in other forms: they were barred from exclusive clubs and resorts or private schools.<sup>17</sup> What really churned up the feelings against Jews, in addition to religious, economic, and racial dislike, was the Russian Revolution. The new ideology seemed to threaten the American way of life and democratic institutions, and since many leaders of the revolution were Jews, Bolshevik and Jew became almost synonyms, one fueling the hatred for the other.

After World War I, the failure of the “American peace” at Paris, and the slow but sure consolidation of the Bolshevik rule in Russia, the country’s interest definitely turned inward and anti-Semitism became fervent. Such printed material such as *The Cause of World Unrest*, which was the American edition of the infamous *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,<sup>18</sup> or Henry Ford’s newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent* from 1920, only added to the already prevalent anti-Semitism. The very first article of Ford’s paper bore the title “The International Jew: The World’s Problem,” and claimed on the front page:

The Jew is the world’s enigma. Poor in his masses, he yet controls the world’s finances... The single description which will include a larger

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<sup>17</sup> From 1890 to 1914 16,516,081 immigrants arrived in the United States of whom 1,694,842, or slightly more than 10 percent, were Jewish. Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 58.

<sup>18</sup> *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was originally concocted by the Russian secret police around the turn of the century and had an enormous success in Great Britain. By all likelihood, the original author was Pyotr Rachovsky, chief of the foreign branch of the Russian czars’ secret police between 1885 and 1902, and “a born intriguer” according to a 1957 CIA study. *The Times* already in 1921 revealed that the book was mere fabrication and plagiarism, but this did not affect the book’s influence. Thomas B. Allen, *Declassified. 50 Top-Secret Documents That Changed History*. (Washington D. C., National Geographic, 2008), 259–260.



percentage of Jews than members of any other race is this: he is in business... The Jew is supremely gifted for business... In America alone most of the big business... are in the control of Jewish financiers or their agents. Jewish journalists are a large and powerful group here... They absolutely control the circulations of publications throughout the country.<sup>19</sup>

The periodical must have touched upon a popular nerve, because its circulation grew and reached around 700,000 in 1924.<sup>20</sup> Its success can also be attributed to its often quality articles on a score of other issues. In the words of one historian, “*The International Jew* more than any other literary source... spread the notion that Jews menaced the United States... [and its] perverse accomplishment was to combine the inchoate anti-Semitism of the Progressive era with the postwar fear of hidden forces.”<sup>21</sup>

Anti-Semitism was not restricted to weeklies or books alone, but infected higher education as well, in a similar fashion to Hungary. The percentage of Jewish students at colleges and universities had multiplied in the past decades, which scared many WASP people. As a reaction, restrictions were introduced as to how many Jewish undergraduates could be enrolled. Ivy League colleges and universities carried the torch for the quota system. Dartmouth College introduced a Selective Process in 1921 to keep Jewish enrollment under control.<sup>22</sup> Columbia University had a huge ratio of Jewish students, 40 percent, but by 1922 the institution had managed to cut it back to 22 percent.<sup>23</sup> The most well-known case took place at Harvard University, where President Lawrence A. Lowell

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<sup>19</sup> *The Dearborn Independent*, May 22, 1920.

<sup>20</sup> Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 81. The collections of these articles later was published under the titles, *The International Jew* (1920), *Jewish Activities in the United States* (1921), *Jewish Influence in American Life* (1921), and *Aspects of Jewish Power in the United States* (1922).

<sup>21</sup> Leo P. Ribuffo, “Henry Ford and ‘The International Jew,’” *American Jewish History* 69, no. 4 (1980: June): 4437, 475. When Ford was sued for libel in 1927, he retracted the charges against the Jews and the short but influential lifetime of *The Dearborn Independent* came to a halt. On the legal case against Ford, see, Victoria Saker Woeste, “Insecure Equality: Louis Marshall, Henry Ford, and the Problem of Defamatory Antisemitism, 1920–1929,” *The Journal of American History*, 91, No. 3 (2004: December): 877–905.

<sup>22</sup> Tamar Buchsbaum, “A Note on Antisemitism in Admissions at Dartmouth,” *Jewish Social Studies* 49, no. 1 (Winter, 1987): 80.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

fathered an informal quota system on Jewish students. For Harvard, the 22 percent that Jews represented was frightening in view of their ratio of 3 percent of the whole population. The Harvard Plan of 1923, just as in the case of Hungary, did not name the Jews; it only proclaimed that the student body should represent the ratio of different races in the country. In both cases, such an order went against the Jews.<sup>24</sup> The real significance was Harvard's prestige and indeed, other famous institutions followed suit, such as Princeton, Yale, Duke, Rutgers, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, or Penn State.<sup>25</sup>

### Anti-Semitism and the Loan

It is important to investigate the raising of the international loan for Hungary against the above described background. Hungary was in dire straits and it seemed that without outside help there would be no end to the ever worsening conditions. The League-initiated Austrian financial reconstruction in late 1922 gave a workable scenario for Hungary and the League of Nations alike. For Hungary it meant the possibility to put the financial house in order and gain absolute legitimacy in and out of Europe, while for Great Britain, the major European power in the League of Nations, it was a golden chance to further the reconstruction scheme in Central Europe. In the early spring of 1924, after protracted negotiations that were not free of diplomatic acrimony, Hungary was assured of a reconstruction plan on condition that it accepted strict control in the form of a Commissioner-General in Hungary. To commence the actual work, a \$60-million loan had to be raised in the international financial market.

Hungarian Prime Minister of the period Count István Bethlen pursued a practical realpolitik both in the domestic and foreign political arenas, and he dealt with the Jewish question accordingly. Although he declared, that "I am against all kinds of noisy anti-Semitism. We will under all circumstances make law prevail," he did nothing to have the *Numerus Clausus* Act repealed.<sup>26</sup> This was partly attributable to his own, somewhat mild, anti-Semitism, and partly to the political necessity of preserving the majority in Parliament to be able to govern. In order to

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<sup>24</sup> In detail, see, Oliver B. Pollak, "Antisemitism, the Harvard Plan, and the Roots of Reverse Discrimination," *Jewish Social Studies* 45, no. 2 (Spring, 1983): 113–122.

<sup>25</sup> Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*, 85–86.

<sup>26</sup> István Bethlen, *Bethlen István gróf beszédei és írásai* [The Writings and Speeches of Count István Bethlen] vol. 1, (Budapest: Genius Könyvkiadó Rt., 1933), 161.

achieve his aims, he saw no incompatibility in the fact that his liberal-conservative Unified Party counted among his members both the openly anti-Semitist Gyula Gömbös and his followers, for example, and members of the Jewish elite as well. In retrospect, he was walking a fine line when he said that he approved of “Christian policies, but these policies should not be manifest in anti-Semitism but must be made pro-Christian.”<sup>27</sup> For Bethlen it was crucial to get the international loan and carry out the League of Nations plan, because he saw in it the chance to further consolidate his standing.

The first obstacle to clear was the person of the General-Commissioner. Aside from other complications, when finally the American Jeremiah Smith, Jr. was chosen, his name created confusion and alarm among the Hungarian political leadership. Not well versed in New England local culture, the Hungarian leaders suspected that Smith might be a Jew. Under the ruling Hungarian anti-Semitic sentiment it would have been unacceptable to the Bethlen government for a Jew to control the country’s finances. Under the ruling domestic circumstances, it would have been a political suicide for Bethlen to accept a Jew to the post of strict supervision. Only after being convinced that Smith was of no Jewish origin did the Hungarians finally approve of his nomination, a fact that the British Consul General happily conveyed to London.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps it was even of more crucial importance to raise the international loan without which there could have been no reconstruction the promising plans notwithstanding. The chief problem was that Hungary did not seem very a lucrative investment, and since there were no state guarantees for the loan as in the case of Austria, central or private banks were less reluctant to lend money. The main figure behind the whole scheme was Montagu Norman, the powerful Governor of the Bank of England. His main goal was to make financial reconstruction in general without politicians and he wanted to see it left to the expert bankers of which he was one of the most defining. He also believed in central bank

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<sup>27</sup> *Magyarság*, October 19, 1922, III/238.

<sup>28</sup> Hohler to MacDonald, April 5, 1924, C5704/37/21, 9907, FO371, The National Archives of Great Britain (hereafter cited as TNA). In more detail on Smith and his nomination to the post of Commissioner-General of the League of Nations, see, Zoltán Peterecz, “Picking the Right Man for the Job: Jeremiah Smith, Jr. and American Private Influence in the Financial Reconstruction of Hungary,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 15, no. 2 (2009 Fall): 45–65.

cooperation, where the various central banks of the different countries could cooperate without any government intervention. Since raising the money was not easy, Norman had to take the lion's share if he wanted to achieve his aim. His main purpose was to ensure that the brunt of the money came from Great Britain and the United States.

For some time it seemed that J. P. Morgan & Co. would take a larger tranche. Being the leading private bank in the world, its taking part in the loan would have automatically ensured that any sum missing would be issued in other countries. It was a sobering moment when the mammoth banking house in May definitely refused to participate. The new National Bank of Hungary was set up and was soon to open, therefore it was crucial to secure some American participation. The problem, as it turned out, was not the lack of companies willing to come in, but the anti-Semitic worldview that some of the involved Anglo-Saxon unofficial leaders had.

Speyer & Co. was the American branch of an old banking family of German and Jewish origins. Its leader, James Speyer, was active in mainly in the foreign loan business and railroads, first of all in Latin America. They were the first to float a Cuban loan, for example, they were active in Bolivian railways, and had large interests in the Mexican railroads parallel to domestic railroad companies. On the other hand, Speyer was an active philanthropist and was closely associated with the founding of various institutions. An ardent New Yorker, his largest contribution to his beloved city came in the form as the initiator and founder of the Museum of the City of New York, which opened in 1932. As recognition for this and many other activities, he was bestowed with the annual gold medal of the Hundred Years Association in 1938. His philanthropic drive was manifest not only in civic affairs. His firm was the first private banking house in New York to establish a pension fund for its employees from his own donation in 1906. Speyer also helped raise funds for Jewish sufferers in the First World War, mainly in Poland.<sup>29</sup>

The reason why this financier was interested in providing loans to European countries, aside from the obvious hunger for profit, lay in his belief in the cooperation of the United States and Europe. As he saw, "the granting of credit by our banks and bankers, and the purchase of foreign

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<sup>29</sup> The data are from Genealogical and Biographical Notes, Box 2, James Speyer Papers, Rare Books and Manuscript Division, The New York Public Library (hereafter cited as Speyer Papers).

securities by investors [was] a practical business... It would add to our contribution towards European recovery.”<sup>30</sup> Since the Europe of the mid-1920s provided ample possibilities for investment, it is not surprising that Speyer & Co. had signaled more than once that they wanted to come in for the Hungarian loan.<sup>31</sup> According to an American businessman, Speyer and his men were “anxious to occupy the place in any Hungarian loan that J. P. Morgan & Co. hold in the Austrian loan, and are preparing, they tell us, to underwrite \$25/30,000,000 of such Hungarian loan.”<sup>32</sup> After Morgan’s refusal to join the venture, Speyer & Co. may have seemed ideal for the vacuum that was created on the American part. There was a serious problem, however. The company did not enjoy popularity and was disliked by other banking houses and investment bankers, above all by John Pierpont Morgan.

J. P. Morgan’s dislike for his business rival stemmed for various sources. It was one thing that Speyer was of German origin, a nation Morgan came to resent very much on account of World War I. Speyer’s close relations with Germany put him in an awkward position that caused some damage for the company. To make things worse, James Speyer, despite having been born in Manhattan, had a heavy German accent.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Morgan made no secret about the fact that he was “not very enthusiastic about Jews” and he did not want to see business in their hands.<sup>34</sup> Naturally, this trait ran in the family. His father, according to one of his first biographers, “had a deep-seated anti-Semitic prejudice and on more than one occasion needlessly antagonized great Jewish banking

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<sup>30</sup> James Speyer, “America’s Cooperation in European Rehabilitation Primarily Dependent on Europe,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 102 (July 1922): 176–177.

<sup>31</sup> Norman to Strong, April 9, 1923, G35/4, Bank of England Archive (hereafter cited as BoE).

<sup>32</sup> Caldwell to Beneš, August 10, 1923, in Wheeler to Hughes, August 22, 1923, 864.00/547, Roll 6, M. 708, Microfilm Publications, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Austria-Hungary and Hungary, 1912–1929, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter cited as NARA).

<sup>33</sup> *Time*, June 13, 1938.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Edward M. Lamont, *The Ambassador from Wall Street. The Story of Thomas W. Lamont, J. P. Morgan’s Chief Executive* (Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1994), 210.

firms.”<sup>35</sup> The older Morgan also referred to Jacob H. Schiff, also a German-born Jew, head of archrival Kuehn, Loeb & Co., simply as “that foreigner.”<sup>36</sup>

The younger Morgan followed his father both in his business practices and anti-Semitic worldview. In May 1920, for example, before the Lowell Plan to reduce the number of Jews at Harvard, Morgan served as an overseer of Harvard University. In that capacity, he felt his duty to alert President Lowell of the grave danger posed by a board vacancy:

I think I ought to say that I believe there is a strong feeling among the Overseers that the nominee should by no means be a Jew or a Roman Catholic, although, naturally, the feeling in regard to the latter is less than in regard to the former. I am afraid you will think we are a narrow-minded lot, but I would base my personal objection to each if these two for that position on the fact that in both cases there is acknowledgment of interests or political control beyond, and, in the minds of these people, superior to the Government of this country—the Jew is always a Jew first and an American second, and the Roman Catholic, I fear, too often a Papist first and an American second.<sup>37</sup>

In light of these facts, it is no wonder that J. P. Morgan & Co. tried to oppose Speyer & Co. in any way they could.

The feud went back quite some time. Morgan’s father declared already in the nineteenth century that he did not wish to see “business largely in the hands of Speyer & Co. & similar houses.”<sup>38</sup> In order to see this achieved, he was not shy to use his status and connections when it came to outmaneuvering Speyer. James Speyer kept filing complaints to the State Department about governmental favoritism toward J. P. Morgan & Co. and its close collaborating banking houses, obviously to no avail.<sup>39</sup> During the Mexican debt settlement, for instance, the Morgan house made sure that Speyer & Co. did not have a seat on the International Committee of Bankers on Mexico (ICBM), presumably because of Speyer’s business

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<sup>35</sup> John Kennedy, Winkler, *Morgan, the Magnificent: The Life of J. Pierpont Morgan* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1930), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Ron Chernow, *The House of Morgan* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), 90.

<sup>37</sup> Morgan to Lowell, March 2, 1920, quoted in Chernow, *The House of Morgan*, 214–215.

<sup>38</sup> J. P. Morgan, Sr. to J. S. Morgan & Co., February 1, 1895, quoted in Ron Chernow, *The House of Morgan* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), 74.

<sup>39</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World. The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900–1930* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 65, 94.

tactics in Mexico.<sup>40</sup> With Morgan's prestige and connections it was not surprising that other firms were not enthusiastic about Speyer either. The main London house, Rothschilds, would have been willing to work for the League loan in cooperation with Hallgarten, Dillon, or Chase National, for example, but not with Speyer & Co.<sup>41</sup> In light of the fact that the Rothschild family was of the same German Jewish decent as the Speyers and was conspicuous in fighting for equal rights for Jews in Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and elsewhere in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their attitude makes one arrive at the conclusion that religious and racial ties were secondary to those of connections of wealth, once the opposition to one's race was overcome.<sup>42</sup> Jeremiah Smith, Jr., Hungary's freshly chosen Commissioner-General, in all likelihood to his ties to the House of Morgan, also thought that the Speyer house, though not insignificant, was speculative and its participation was to be avoided.<sup>43</sup>

Anti-Semitism reached the Speyers in Great Britain as well. James's brother in London suffered more. The English Branch of the Speyers was forced to close down and Edgar Speyer, the head of the company, had to leave the country. Although on the surface it was his loyalty that was called into question because of his German origins, but the prevailing anti-Semitism joined hands with the natural German phobia during World War I. Edgar Speyer refused to produce a letter of loyalty and instead chose to renounce his title and resign his membership of the Privy Council, which the Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith did not accept. But a Scottish noble challenged Speyer's right to the position on account of the latter's not being a natural-born British citizen. Although these

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<sup>40</sup> Stephen N. Kane, "Bankers and Diplomats: The Diplomacy of the Dollar in Mexico, 1921–1924," *The Business History Review* 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1973): 343; Edward M. Lamont, *The Ambassador from Wall Street*, 210–211. The bitter rivalry led to the exclusion of Speyer & Co. from the American part of the Dawes loan. Ibid. Also, Chernow, *The House of Morgan*, 74.

<sup>41</sup> Szapáry to Daruváry, May 28, 1924, 209/123, 10-1390/1282, K 69, Economic Policy Department, HNA.

<sup>42</sup> It is also interesting to note here that allegedly, up until the rise of the Rothschilds, at the end of the eighteenth century, the Speyer house was the richest Jewish bank in Frankfurt. . Steven C. Topik, "When Mexico Had the Blues: A Transatlantic Tale of Bonds, Bankers, and Nationalists, 1862–1910," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 734.

<sup>43</sup> Korányi to Teleszky, May 17, 1924, 209/123, K 69, Economic Policy Department, HNA.

forces failed to oust Speyer officially, the personal attacks did not cease and soon, he had had enough of the British atmosphere and moved to New York. In 1921, his naturalization was revoked and he was stripped of his nobility and position on account of treason during the war.<sup>44</sup>

It is little wonder, then, that on neither side of the Atlantic was Speyer & Co. welcomed. Still, the question of the League loan was burning. Time seemed to run out if no one issued an American tranche. Norman realized that serious compromises had to be made. Although he was “viciously anti-Semitic,” and, according to Émile Moreau, his French counterpart, he seemed “full of contempt for the Jews about whom he spoke in very bad terms,” and described Speyer & Co. only as “Jews, with great ambitions,” his goal to consolidate Central Europe tied closely Great Britain and the pound overrode other considerations.<sup>45</sup> He quickly put aside whatever prejudices he may have had and set out to arrange the loan business that had many other difficulties without taking into consideration racial biases.

As for Hungary, as was shown, even the possibility of a Jewish controller was a red rag. The main point seems to have been that no physical presence of the Jewish world be visible, that is, that the Commissioner-General be of non-Jewish stock. The source of the money, however, was a sensitive issue as well. But in the realpolitik vein Bethlen possessed and practiced, it was of secondary importance where the money came from. The main point was that Hungary should receive the loan, if from “clean” sources only all the better, but if some Jewish banker was involved that was tolerable for Hungary. Also, the Hungarian government knew that some of the money coming from London would arrive from the House of Rothschild, perhaps the most prominent banking house in Europe, and of Jewish origin. On March 27<sup>th</sup>, Bethlen submitted the package of the Reconstruction Bill to the National Assembly, where

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<sup>44</sup> See, H. W. Brown and Gordon Leith’s letter written to the English press on January 6, 1922, Correspondence, Box 1, Speyer Papers, “Strictly Confidential” note without date, “Memorandum of Conversation with the Lord Chief Justice, December 19, 1915, and a secret Foreign Office letter of October 4, 1918, all in Miscellaneous Papers, Box 2, Speyer Papers; Colin Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876–1939* (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1979), 123; C. C. Aronsfeld, “Jewish Enemy Aliens in England during the First World War,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 4 (October 1956): 278–283.

<sup>45</sup> Chernow, *The House of Morgan*, 245; Liaquat Ahamed, *Lords of Finance. The Bankers Who Broke the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 260; Norman to Siepmann, May 15, 1925, OV33/73, BoE.



debate was sometimes fierce in tone. Some of it concerned the person of the future commissioner, some the source of the money. It is enough to mention that during that debate, a member of the Assembly said that with the flotation of this loan the Jewish question would get in the limelight because the banks abroad that would float the loan and the majority of the Hungarian banks were in Jewish hands.<sup>46</sup> This was naturally a half-truth, because at this time it was still surmised that J. P. Morgan would provide one-third of the loan. Bethlen faced resistance but was adamant that the bill go through and, with the help of the overwhelming majority of his party, there was no doubt about the outcome. Still, the parliamentary debate lasted three weeks in 16-hour sessions before the Reconstruction Bill was passed on April 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>47</sup>

Speyer, somewhat living up to the negative image others held about him, was bent on making the most out of the vacuum that his rival Morgan had left. But he was stirring waters till the very last moment in order to have the best deal of this loan business. On the one hand, he tried to secure US governmental backing for the deal. He asked the State Department to issue a statement saying that American bankers do intend to take part in the pending loan. The Department decided that such action would constitute a bad precedent, since it was private banks that were doing the lending and a statement of that nature might imply US government involvement, which was inconceivable. First Speyer tried to threaten that they would not participate if the required State Department statement was not made, but he did take part in the flotation of the loan anyway in the end.<sup>48</sup> Also, before finally signing a contract, Speyer's promise varied between \$4.25 million and \$10 million.<sup>49</sup> In the end, shrewdly looking ahead, Speyer raised his participation to \$7.5 million, but wanted exclusive right to do other Hungarian business in New York during the period of the loan, which was vehemently refused by both the

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<sup>46</sup> Nemzetgyűlési Napló [National Assembly Diary], 1922–27, Budapest: Athenaeum Nyomda, 1924, Vol. XXIII, 341. See also, *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>47</sup> In great detail about the detail, see, Nemzetgyűlési Napló, 1922–27, vol. XXII, 60–68, 237, 268–289, 299–315, 317–341, 343–397, 399–452; vol. XXIII. 1–153, 163–241, 243–333, 335–426, 437–510.

<sup>48</sup> E. Rosenberg, e-mail message to author, January 6, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Norman's Diary Entries, June 18 and 20, 1924, ADM34/13, BoE.

British and Hungarians.<sup>50</sup> On June 30<sup>th</sup> he signed the loan contract without the exclusive clause and the flotation could begin in earnest.<sup>51</sup>

The Hungarian government did not seem to mind that the American bank was in the hand of a Jewish family, let alone that the Rothschilds were Jewish as well. “Money has no smell,” and all that mattered for Hungary was that Great Britain and especially the United States be represented among the lending countries. Overriding racial qualms, Bethlen proudly informed American readers that “Now the American bankers have also decided that Hungary is a good, safe investment.”<sup>52</sup> He did not deal with such petit questions like Jewish sources of the money. In the true practical sense of Bethlen and as further proof of the Hungarian government conditional anti-Semitism, Speyer & Co. and Hungary had following business connections, and James Speyer was even honored. The Cabinet agreed that Speyer should be awarded a medal as recognition for his services to Hungary. He was decorated with the Hungarian Order of Merit with Stars, Class II, which he received in the United States from the Hungarian Minister László Széchenyi.<sup>53</sup> This was also a sign of the somewhat languishing anti-Semitism in Hungary, which, unfortunately, in the 1930s picked up again and led to terrible consequences.

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<sup>50</sup> Norman’s Diary Entries, June 28, 1924, ADM34/13, BoE; Felkin to Salter, June 28, 1924, 1924, Dossier concerning the American tranche. Doc. No. 37289, Registry Files, R. 413, League of Nations Archives. A few months later, Speyer managed to get the exclusive rights for further business made in New York.

<sup>51</sup> Felkin to Salter, June 30, 1924, 1924, LNA, Registry Files, R. 413. Dossier concerning the American tranche. Doc. No. 37289. The text of the contract is in 9/VIII/5/62–66, K 275, Kállay Papers, HNA.

<sup>52</sup> *Time*, July 7, 1924.

<sup>53</sup> Records of Cabinet Meetings, September 14, 1928, 32–33R/56, K 27, HNA; Genealogical and Biographical Notes, Box 2, James Speyer Papers; *The New York Times*, November 1, 1941. This was not the only high decoration James Speyer received. The German Emperor gave him the decoration of the Red Eagle of the Second Class in 1912, an honor which was bestowed upon only J. P. Morgan, his rival, and President Nicholas Butler of Columbia University. One of the reasons for that medal was that Speyer gave the Trustees of Columbia University \$50,000 to establish the Theodore Roosevelt Professorship of American History and Institutions at the University of Berlin. Genealogical and Biographical Notes, Box 2, James Speyer Papers; *The New York Times*, November 13, 1905, and January 20, 1912. In more detail about the business connections between Speyer & Co. and Hungary after the reconstruction loan was launched, see, Zoltán Peterecz, “James Speyer and Hungary: An American Jewish Banker in Anti-Semitic Hungary in the 1920s,” In Lehel Vadon (ed.), *To the Memory of Sarolta Kretzoi* (Eger: Eszterházy Károly College, Department of American Studies, 2009), 207–220.

## Sherman Alexie's Postindian Reconstruction of the Spokane Indian Reservation in *Reservation Blues*

Judit Szathmári

Inspired by the immediate success of Sherman Alexie's 1995 *Reservation Blues* Gloria Bird claims: [the novel] "contributes to an exaggerated version of reservation life [and] perpetuates many of the stereotypes of native people and presents problems for native and non-native readers alike" (1). Bird criticizes the images of reservation life as presented by Alexie's novel and implies that such presentation results in a detrimental reception of contemporary Native America. Bird's claim is further supported by David Treuer who, in his *Native American Fiction* states: "hate [for Indian people] flourishes for the same reasons [...] that love survives" (112). Treuer challenges the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of contemporary Native American literature and calls into question the fictional quality attributed to Indigenous peoples represented in this very literature. In his view stereotyping is a dangerous route regardless it is employed to express pro- or anti-Indian sentiments. He proclaims that "We readers are trained to interpret [literature] the same way we are encouraged to 'read' the exhibit of Native American art at the Weisman Museum: with our hearts, not with our heads. It also proves that the words and images, the literary work in Native American literature, takes a backseat to issues of identity and perceived 'authenticity'" (Treuer 163). That is, by the application of "the terrible twins" (Treuer 5) – the notions of identity and authenticity – the reader is misled by the belief that they read Native American culture, and fail to recognize the fictional elements of contemporary Native American literature. The present paper attempts to reconcile the tension between the perpetuation of stereotypes and the employment of identity and authenticity by utilizing Gerald Vizenor's "postindian" concept to denote

how a new tribal presence is created in stories (12). Postindian warriors generate the “sensation of a new tribal presence in the very ruins of the representations of invented Indians” (Vizenor 3). Through an analysis of *Reservation Blues* I wish to prove that Alexie consciously employs stereotyping to reconstruct an Indian identity both fictional and real, strongly rooted in 20th century postethnic America. The common attributes of reservation life will be interpreted to provide an explanation to how stereotypes de- and reconstruct images of contemporary reservation existence.

Federal Indian trust lands have always played a crucial role in white-Indigenous relations. As their primary creation demonstrated Western ethnocentrism and they were products of competition and power differences reservations have come to provide a clearly defined geographical locale for ethnic stratification. Concomitantly, reservations have become a hotbed of extreme stereotyping. To complement volumes of anthropological and sociological analyses of Indian peoples’ adaptation to urban environments, I explore a postindian novel to testify to the changes of reservation Indian identity. *Reservation Blues* is a “novel of education” (Treuer 164). However, [...] the person being educated is not the main character. It is the reader who is being taught. As a “cultural manual” “the education offered by *Reservation Blues* is a curriculum designed for the outsider” (Treuer 164–65, 169). Yet, this curriculum both constructs and deconstructs itself.

Through its literary presentation of the most commonly misunderstood characteristics of reservation life *Reservation Blues* contests the forces shaping Indian identity from the outside, depicting them instead as having come to be internalized and turned to the Spokane community’s own advantage and applied within their interpretation, thus reconstructing the “ancient” phenomenon of Indian country in a postethnic society. While postethnic and postindian may sound synonymous and imply moving beyond a certain “cultural separatism,” (Hollinger 6) I argue that the novel both criticizes and asserts the legacy of the Native perspective by its introduction of other ethnic cultures in the reservation context.

Daniel Grassian claims that “[b]y placing traditional African American music and contemporary music in the contemporary context of the reservation and then having individuals from the reservation move into mainstream America, *Reservation Blues* straddles the lines between ethnicities, cultures, time frames, [and] religions” (78-79). Grassian’s

reference to the novel's magic realistic character of Robert Johnson and Seattle's grunge music scene fails to acknowledge Alexie's strong belief in the legacy of a spatially separate Indigenous sphere of existence where other cultures are judged, welcomed or rejected according to Spokane standards. Alexie does not offer an explicit definition of the reservation, rather, following Treuer's interpretation reservation "means Indian and Indian means reservation in a dizzying tautological duet, the division between what is Indian and what is not Indian are absolutely clear" (181). In Alexie's interpretation the matter is less complicated. "If I write it, it's an Indian novel. If I wrote about Martians, it would be an Indian novel. If I wrote about the Amish, it would be an Indian novel. That's who I am" (qtd. in Grassian 7). Thus, the Spokane practice to decide on the incorporation or exclusion of certain cultural properties is justified.

In the larger context of Indian country the "active Indian presence" (Lurie 52) and Indians' interaction as Indians (Szathmári 225) should manifest ideally on the Spokane Indian Reservation. However, as the title of the novel already suggests, it is not an isolated place where outside influences may only arrive by the right of force. Stereotypically devastating reservation conditions resonate through the choice of traditional African American music. [Alexie] "invites the reader to learn whenever the narrative stops and the characters discourse, but by attaching the adjectival 'reservation' to the objects in these lessons, he simultaneously holds the reader outside the reservation" (Treuer 182). It is through this contrast [of rejection and education] that meaning is generated (Treuer 182). His story can be specific and—by mobilizing a similar but slightly different set of ideas about Indians (the alcohol, the government handouts, the traditions, the very fact of difference itself)—universal at the same time (Treuer 182).

The plot suggests a reenactment of the traditional warrior initiation rite: Coyote Springs, the mostly Spokane rock band, ventures out into the world to make money as rock stars. It apparently contradicts Robert Parker's claim that "Indians do nothing, or nothing counts as anything, and whites cannot stop doing," (29) by which Parker considers the inactive, procrastinating young male characters a typical feature of Indian literature. The band's choice of name already alludes to an epiphany in their lives. While Springs may be a natural phenomenon borrowed from the widely held "Mother Nature" concept, the leap taken by Coyote often associated with Trickster offers the interpretation of an active role of the young Spokanes to shape their own future.

Although Coyote Springs introduces a new kind of heroism misunderstood by both the Spokane and the white world, their interpretation of activity stands its ground. The band is a new generation of warriors, the product of historical confinement to a federally determined geographical location. Resonant of the old tradition, the three young Spokane men reconstruct themselves as postindian warriors and venture out to count coup and go on a raid for existence and experience, seeking prey in cowboy bars, Seattle and New York. Throughout their trip, their interaction is Indian, thus carrying Indian country within themselves. But, while Indian country lacks exact geographical definition (Szathmári 221), their Spokane reservation is defined by very vivid constraints. Its borders, originally separating cultures, serve as bastions of cultural protection. This protection is carried to the extent that the Spokane do not believe a band composed of a “crazy storyteller, a couple of irresponsible drunks, a pair of Flathead Indians, and two white women” (Alexie 176) would create an acceptable image of the tribe. Confinement is internalized by the tribe for the sake of retaining tribal identity spatially defined by reservation boundaries. While residents of the Spokane trust land the band members, except for the two white women, had been an integral part of the community. Trust is rather an ironic term in this case—and, in fact, all throughout U.S. history. In *Reservation Blues* trust is lost upon leaving trust land for the outside world. Unlike heroic old time warriors, the crazy storyteller, the suicidal college dropout, and the bullying drunk are met with antagonism upon return. “But we still live here,” Thomas, the storyteller argues. “But you left. Once is enough” replies an elder (Alexie 180).

Dominant cultures tend to compartmentalize the colonized world. *Reservation Blues* reverses this process, and the ethnocentric perspective is shifted to the reservation terrain. The above mentioned education process “follows the same pattern: a white person does something stupid, which is racialized as ‘white behavior,’ and the Indian characters react, sometimes in thought, sometimes in dialogue, and other times, though rarely, in action” (Treuer 167). This way the reservation, formerly in Fanon’s terms “a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute” (37) becomes safe haven. It secures “reciprocal exclusivity” (Fanon 37) imposed by Indian practice and not by an exclusive white society.

Yet, this fact does not automatically generate the idolization of Spokane surroundings. While the reservation Spokane consider themselves culturally superior to any other entity they remain tolerant and

receptive to outside influences provided they come to their geographically defined place. As long they enter reservation terrain, Elvis, Jesus, Jung and Freud are all respected Indians, or more specifically, Spokane. Their achievements are a testimony to the validity of reservation existence. Elvis returns to learn the art of music from Big Mom. Jesus feeds the crowd with a single can of salmon. Jung and Freud prove their Spokane heritage by their appreciation of the importance of dreams (Alexie 18), which mainstream culture often fails to acknowledge. Eating, music and dreams are not culture specific, but they are more culturally loaded in the Spokane world view. In *Reservation Blues* they are presented as export goods from the Spokane.

The reservation also possesses the healing capacities of home. Part of the sacred pool of words, dreams, songs, myths, and visions, it should be the setting for healing Robert Johnson, the ghostly guitar player, who arrives to nullify the deal he made with the Gentleman. Yet, his guitar speaks more for him by “abducting” Thomas, Victor and Junior into the musical terrain. The compulsory oral component of Indian literature (Parker 80–101) is replaced by blues, the mutually intelligible communication channel. In addition, lead singer Thomas Builds-the-Fire, who also fulfills Spokane storyteller functions, fails to make any sense of words:

Thomas repeated stories constantly. All the other Indians on the reservation heard those stories so often that the words crept into dreams. An Indian telling his friends about a dream he had was halfway through the telling before he realized it was actually one of Thomas’s stealth stories. Even the white people on the reservation grew tired of Thomas’s stories, but they were more polite when they ran away. (Alexie 15)

With the irritated Spokane reaction to Thomas’s stories Alexie moves beyond the traditional/oral culture. While due to the effective operation of the moccasin telegraph everyone knows about Robert Johnson’s arrival within five minutes, nobody except Thomas is willing or able to communicate with the black man. And, the Spokane “rock star” takes his heritage onto a non-Indian stage, even if it sounds like the Sex Pistols. The tired tradition of the Spokane “gospel” is refreshed by Robert Johnson’s blues, while the off-reservation world benefits from the storytelling tradition.

The same reciprocal effect is applied in the treatment of reservation institutions, and formerly controlling federal presence is incorporated into

reservation life. In Alexie's decolonized reservation it is not the "Indian characters [...] who seem ridiculous [...] rather the world we find them in, the situation, and the description of Indian action, is ridiculed" (Treuer 174). Government agencies and organizations related to Western culture acquire an Indian meaning, function and relevance. So far oppressive establishments become integral parts of reservation topography. They are manifestations of adaptation, and prove the regained strength of the Spokane. "Essential" government agencies, such as Indian Health Service, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs earn their legacy in everyday Spokane life. The trading post, often a symbol of defeat, poverty and white oppression is elevated into a fictional council house. The literal descendant of Wounded Knee I and II, hosts most community affairs and offers room for tribal discussions and conflict resolution. The building itself, as well as the ceremonial objects of this modern Indian world, carry the same sacred power that the traditional sanctuary and regalia had: "Its shelves were stocked with reservation staples: Diet Pepsi, Spam, Wonder bread, and a cornucopia of various carbohydrates, none of them complex. One of the corners of the Trading Post was devoted to the gambling machines that had become mandatory on every reservation" (Alexie 12). The trading post assumes the religious and communal functions of a council house by relying on traditional community discipline. When Coyote Springs does not comply with the tribal norms of behavior, it is ostracized and "excommunicated" from the store. The often criticized consumer culture of mainstream society enters the reservation and the evils of commodity are reshaped in forces essential to secure community integrity.

Other federal agencies, such as HUD and the Indian Health Service are treated with a tone of sarcasm. Yet, it is their dysfunctional character and not their existence that makes them a target of criticism. The Department of Housing and Urban Development laid the foundations of its houses on "all the dreams that were murdered here" (Alexie 7). The dreams of the past still haunt modern constructions since "[they] were buried quickly just inches below the surface" (Alexie 7). Although tramping on old Spokane dreams, they also provide shelter and prove an apt place to host the society of modern warriors. The tradition of hospitality finds its way up from the buried past, but the ceremonial pipe sharing has to be replaced by commodity grape juice.



Officially Indian Health Service is responsible for the physical and mental well-being of Indian people, and it does attempt to fulfill its obligation to its best. Yet, its ignorant operation turns it into a motivation for vision quest. Since “Indian Health only gave out dental floss and condoms, and Thomas spent his whole life trying to figure out the connection between the two” (Alexie 6), Thomas becomes a spiritual traveler who, amidst the changing circumstances of his life, tries to interpret and live up to the vision he received at an early age. His mental health is secured by the contemplation on IHS practices, and the band members’ physical condition is also taken care of after a drunken brawl.

The Spokane make the best of the Trading Post, IHS and HUD, and incorporate all into the neo traditionalism of the reservation’s spiritual life. This spiritualism, however, bears the same significance as the traditional one. The three government agencies become sacred entities in place of other, more viable potentials. The first buildings the reader encounters upon setting foot on Spokane territory are “the Assembly of God Church, the Catholic Church and Cemetery and the Presbyterian Church and Cemetery” (Alexie 3). Yet, “nobody believed in anything on this reservation” (Alexie 28). The ethic the churches project is most fulfilled by their Sunday social gatherings. The irony of the massive Christian presence is highlighted by a remark on the spiritual state of the young men of the reservation: “all they know about religion is what they saw in Dances with Wolves” (Alexie 145).

This would imply a serious criticism of the loss of tradition. But, while Christian church premises dominate the view on the level of everyday existence, an eternal presence oversees the entire reservation from her abode on the top of Wellpinit Mountain. Seated above the Spokane both spiritually and topographically Big Mom, the mostly invisible clan mother, forms a bridge among various cultures. A natural master of songs, she teaches Elvis, Robert Johnson, and Janis Joplin, artists of various colors and cultures, the power of music. Her presence is acknowledged, respected, even feared by the spiritually barren reservation. Her immortal nature secures not only a Spokane, but also a universal future.

The golden middle between Big Mom’ spirituality and the literally down-to-earth churches is the community itself. Some of the sacred functions are “colonized” by the Spokane reservation. Samuel Builds-the-Fire, Lester Falls Apart, Michael White Hawk, and Luke Warm Water demonstrate the pattern of combining traditional with modern Indian

existence in the process of naming. These names reflect the extent of cultural modification of the sacred rite of naming in the Spokane world. Characters tend to have a Christian first name, some of Biblical origin, and an Indian last name. In the postethnic perspective such naming suggests that blood and genealogy do determine the possible affiliations of an individual. While the tribal character is preserved through ancestry and is inherited through generations, the new culture is embodied in the common address of the individual. A culturally loaded example is the character of Lester FallsApart, the “most accomplished drunk” on the reservation. By turning the stereotype of the drunken Indian into an honorable position both mainstream and Native culture shift their foci. From the non-Indian perspective Lester FallsApart is the typical reservation drunkard, never getting anything right, a permanent target of jokes. His well-deserved last name is a reinforcement of the Indian stock character. As a traditional trickster figure he also lives up to his Indian name: the clumsy and lovable “reservation magician, reservation clown” (Alexie 34). Yet, undermining his qualities attached to his ancestral heritage and white image, Lester holds the community together. Personally he may be falling apart, but tribally he is a cohesive force. By stumbling in on tribal council meetings, he is the one who casts the decisive vote to keep the community together and show more tolerance to the outside world.

Losing the right to naming, instead of the spiritual and moral comfort churches are intended to provide, the three church buildings are reshaped into a battlefield. The most sacred purpose of all three congregations is to prepare for the Spokane Indian Christian Basketball Tournament, and winning souls for redemption is dwarfed by the possible points scored on the court. (Alexie’s poem “Defending Walt Whitman”, published the same year as *Reservation Blues* replaces Walt Whitman’s “What is the grass” in “Song of Myself” by “what is the score”). The sanctity of basketball resonates throughout the plot, and the entire tribe views it with respect. Replacing old time physical conflict with the sport event is the Spokane way of interpreting contesting spheres.

Treuer says: Native American literature [...] does not constitute culture. “It constitutes desire with seemingly culturally derived forms. It is literature that creates the fantasy of the Native American—not the other way around. As if the illusion has created the illusionist” (199-200). By the employment of widely known stereotypes *Reservation Blues* de- and reconstructs a fictional setting for the reservation Indian identity to be

formulated in. By relocating ethnocentric cultural concepts cherished by both the Spokane and the off-reservation world, a new Indian is created. In his later fiction Alexie removes his characters from the reservation setting, and their return always signifies a momentum of quest, such as in *The Toughest Indian in the World* or *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Yet, the intercultural bridges of *Reservation Blues* assert the legacy of a postethnic-postindian reservation.

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# **The Indian captive as an early manifestation of the American Hero**

András Tarnóc

## **[1] Preliminary remarks**

Robert Bellah's observation: "American history, like the history of any people, has within it archetypal patterns that reflect the general condition of human beings as pilgrims and wanderers on this earth" not only reinforces Joseph Campbell's hero's journey Monomyth, but it provides a fertile theoretical apparatus for the examination of the topic indicated in the address of the present essay. As Campbell asserts the mythological hero is lured at the threshold of adventure, then s(he) is either carried away or voluntarily proceeds further. On the journey the hero can be accompanied either by threatening forces putting him to a test, or helpers providing magical aid. The nadir of the mythological round is the supreme ordeal. After surviving the ordeal the triumphant return can be accompanied by apotheosis and freedom implying atonement or divinization along with transfiguration and expansion of consciousness respectively (227–28).

The American myth of origin as an expression of the covenant theology positing a direct relationship between God and the representatives of a chosen nation can also be interpreted in a similar manner. Consequently, as an illustration of the conflation of individual fate and communal destiny, chosen people give rise to a chosen nation whose mission is to convey redemption to other peoples or cultures via a divine errand. The "thousand faced" Campbellian hero is part and parcel of the American myth of origin as well. As several researchers including Richard Slotkin and more recently Susan Faludi have posited the Indian captivity narrative as one of the manifestations of the American myth of

origin, the forthcoming essay will examine how the American hero is presented in such narratives of confinement.

The study will not single out any particular text, but will concentrate on the captivity narrative as a genre. Spanning over three centuries the following texts will be used as reference points: “Captivity of Father Isaac Jogues of the Society of Jesus, Among the Mohawks” (1643), “A Faithful Narrative of the Many Dangers and Sufferings, as well as Wonderful and Surprizing Deliverances of Robert Eastburn, During his Late Captivity Among the Indians” (1755, “The Sovereignty and Goodness of God... being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson.”(1682), and “A Narrative of the Capture and Subsequent Sufferings of Mrs. Rachel Plummer, Written by Herself” (1836). The chronological terrain includes the early years of the colonial period, King Philip’s War, the American Revolution, and the rise of an independent political and literary culture. The examination will employ a theoretical research apparatus including the works of such leading figures of myth criticism as s Joseph Campbell, Daniel Hoffman, and Leslie Fiedler.

## **[2] The Indian captive as the American hero**

The American hero is inseparable from the American myth of origin. Ever since its appearance on the global cultural scene the American hero has become an object of fascination both for professional and lay observers of American culture. While these days the American hero is primarily projected via the electronic media and the channels of popular culture, said figure has a long history during which the protagonist of Indian captivity narratives is considered but one milestone. John Smith captured by the Powhatan Indians in 1608 and overcoming all obstacles, becoming triumphant against all odds, while propagating the values of a newly formed settler society offers a prototype of the respective cultural figure. Other relevant manifestations include the hunter as illustrated by Benjamin Church’s *Entertaining Passages* or the Daniel Boone narrative, known as “the first literary vaulting over the hedge” (Slotkin *Regeneration* 177).

The Indian captivity narrative reflecting the concept of messianic mission, elected status and a heliotropic view of cultural evolution is one of the primary manifestations of the American myth of origin. The Indian

captive displayed a variety of features and personal fortitude similar to his or her counterparts commemorated by such leading figures of American literary culture as James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain. The main characteristics of the Indian captive resonated in Natty Bumppo, both as an inverted Robinson and sufferer of captivity himself, in Melville's Ishmael, whose existential musings at sea form a parallel with the reluctant admiration felt by the Indian captive attempting to find his or her bearings after the ambush and in the course of the subsequent forced march across the wilderness. Furthermore, Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn also bears resemblance to the topic of our inquiry via his encounter, of course on a much more friendly terms, with the ethno-racial Other.

While discussing the various features of the American hero, the very adjective has to be handled with a certain degree of caution as in captivity narratives originating in the colonial period the captives refer to themselves as English and allusions to being American can only be found in texts produced after the American Revolution. The concept of being chosen appears as a central consideration in case of the American myth of origin and its cultural and literary reification, the American hero. In the respective cultural context the pilgrimage alluded to by Bellah refers to the rise of a nation of chosen people from a set of elected individuals. Just like Daniel Hoffman presents the American hero as a figurative cultural orphan, the American myth of origin has no professed European roots or parents, it breaks away from the continental pattern of cultural evolution, and presents a novel paradigm of organic culture development.

Inspired by Bellah I propose that the American myth of origin compels its protagonist to embark upon the respective pilgrimage. The pilgrim is called upon an errand in the wilderness eventually facilitating the promotion of Anglo-Saxon democracy and the promulgation of the tenets of Christianity. The Indian captive is one of the early variations of Bellah's pilgrim, or by extension, the American hero. Moreover, reinforcing Bellah's conviction, Slotkin considers the Indian captive the first mythological hero of American culture (*Regeneration* 21).

The trials and tribulations of the Indian captive retrace the stations of the hero journey outlined by Campbell. The commemoration of the adventure serves more than mere entertainment purposes as it provides an explanation for the rise of the American nation.

Slotkin envisions a rotating cycle of regeneration and violence during which not only the frontier was populated by settlers, but a rapid

economic, cultural, and political development was triggered. The hero's journey not only includes a series of physical and psychological tests, but leads to redemption as well. Interpreted on the macro-social level the crossing of the threshold of adventure launches the community or nation building process.

The Indian captive as the American hero not only puts on one of the "thousand faces" of Campbell's model, but functions as the emissary of the American value system. Consequently, in addition to being a manifestation of the American Adam, "a hero dissociated from its past," the Indian captive reflects such crucial components of the American value system as individualism, liberty, democracy, equality, and mobility.

The expression of individualism ranges from the characteristics of the very genre via the description of the captive's abandoned position to authorial musings on the value of physical and psychological suffering. The captivity narrative as one of the early forms of American autobiography reaffirms the psychological rewards in describing an image of the self along with the writer's conviction of his or her experiences' worthiness for presentation to the public (Séllei 19). Just as the American myth of origin inscribes its protagonist, that is creates its own hero via being chosen, the very act of captivity leads to the reaffirmation of identity.

The captivity narrative became one of the crucial examples of life writing in the early Republic. The onset of Romanticism with its unwavering faith in the individual coincided with the American tendency of the celebration of the self in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, inspired by the two principal autobiographical documents of America, the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the United States Constitution (1787) along with the literary achievements of the leading figures of the American Renaissance autobiography became the principal means of expression for the less powerful or the marginalized as well. Walt Whitman's remarks in "Democratic Vistas" (1870): "The key to American development had been 'personalism' or the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality" provided powerful explanation for the proliferation of life writing texts.

The prominence of the individualist impulse is substantiated by the commemoration of the physical abandonment and psychological/spiritual isolation of the captive. The rendering of the captive as a solitary representative of settler society and of Christian religion among nomadic heathens combines personal suffering with redemption on the macro-



social and geo-political level. Mrs. Rowlandson's lament is instructive: "The Indians were as thick as the trees: it seemed as if there had been a thousand Hatchets going at once [...] I my self in the midst, and no Christian soul near me, and yet how hath the Lord preserved me in safety? "(445) Being torn away from the original family and/or kinship network calls for the deployment of a variety of problem solving skills including narrative construction as a way of controlling the seemingly unstoppable flow of events.

The concept of "redemptive suffering" is a central component of captivity narratives. Physical tribulations imply withstanding deprivation and making adjustments to radically different living conditions. The captive crosses several borders including political, racial, cultural, and ecological dividing lines. One of the illustrations of the dramatic modification of the captive's living conditions is Mary Rowlandson's forced immersion into nature involving being forced to cross the river barefoot and her self-imposed starvation. Another source of suffering is physical abuse including the submission of the captive to the gauntlet as demonstrated by the fate of Isaac Jogues and Robert Eastburn. It is noteworthy, however, that unlike their male counterparts, female captives are not as frequently exposed to physical violence. One possible exception could be the Comanche tying and beating Rachel Plummer. It is hardly beyond doubt that witnessing the suffering or eventual deaths of their children cause the most anguish for female captives.

The very fact of suffering forces the victim of the captivity experience to seek explanations for his or her fate. The most frequently deployed justification is primarily of religious nature reinforcing the doctrines of Puritanism as Mary Rowlandson finds a potential remedy in unconditional trust in God: "That we must rely on God himself, and our whole dependance must be upon him" (467). Suffering, however, can produce certain advantages or results. One potential benefit is the increased knowledge of the self along with a more thorough familiarity with the respective social environment. The aforementioned educational experience compels the captive to re-evaluate his or her life as well. The torment also continues on the psychological level even after return, as demonstrated by the sleepless nights endured by Mrs. Rowlandson during which she tried to provide a meaning to her tribulations. "I remember in the night season, how the other day I was in the midst of thousands of enemies, and nothing but death before me. It is then hard work to perswade my self, that ever I should be satisfied with bread again" (466).

The story of Regina Leininger, known as the German captive, highlights the character building capability of the ordeal: "The miserable mode of living was a good assistant and means of restraint to curb the sinful flesh and its growing desires and the Word of God implanted in her tender youth could so much the more readily promote the growth of the inner life" (Heard 33).

Physical or psychological ordeal can imply the promise of salvation. The covenant of grace is reinforced by the fact that despite all religious or parochial omission or derelictions of duty, the protagonist is not deprived of the chance for salvation. Moreover, the personal connection maintained with the Lord during captivity alludes to the notion of chosenness, as Mary Rowlandson invokes the biblical explanation. "For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb.12.6) (467).

The American hero is of course a member of an elect nation driven by messianic activism. The very structure of Puritan ideology consists of three levels, the top or mythological level is the highly exalted concept of the chosen nation composed of chosen people driven by a messianic commitment to deliver redemption in the form of Anglo-American democracy and Christian values for the deserving few. The American hero is also connected to the notion of Civil (civic) Religion, as apart from Robert Bellah, the "founding father" of that school of thought Will Herberg asserts that "national life is apotheosized, national values are religionized, national heroes are divinized, national history is experienced [...] as redemptive history" (Virágos *Myth and Social Consciousness* 183). The role of the Indian captive as a defender of Puritan faith is further accentuated by David Austin (1760-1831)'s description of the American hero in his work titled: "The Downfall of Mystical Babylon; or Key to the Providence of God in the Political Operations of 1793-94:" "Behold then, this hero of America, wielding the standard of religious and civil liberty over these United States! Follow him, in his strides, across the Atlantic!" (Virágos "American" 124) The standards of religious and civil liberty are paralleled with the triumphant propagation of Christianity and the Anglo-Saxon democracy. This statement offers an expression of the apocalyptic perspective including two main features: the messianic sense of mission and the "not readily discernible" interpretation of suffering and ordeal as a prerequisite for a victory promised by God (Virágos "American" 125-26)

The Indian captivity narrative also commemorates the process during which the captive is removed from a hierarchical society and is integrated into a communal social organization. The respective texts not only utilize an opportunity to promote the values of American democracy, but certain captivity narratives resort to the very paraphernalia of the latter as Charles Johnston commemorated his experiences on the pages of the records of Virginia's Constitutional Convention discarded in the forest. The relatively democratic structure of Narragansett society is implied by Mrs. Rowlandson's easy access to King Phillip.

The egalitarian impulse of captivity narratives is also expressed in the political and economic cooptation of the captive as (s)he can play a major role in the life of the captor tribe demonstrated by Mary Rowlandson sewing clothes for Indian children or Rachel Plummer previously socialized to the private sphere of the frontier community developing a reluctant sympathy and appreciation of the status of women within Comanche society: "No woman is admitted into any of their Councils; nor is she allowed to enquire what their councils have been. When they move, the women do not know where they are going. They are no more than servants, and looked upon and treated as such" (355). Indicating a stronger public presence of women in the Northeastern Cultural Area Isaac Jogues is mutilated by an Algonquin woman converted to Christianity. Moreover, James E. Seaver, the biographer of Mary Jemison highlights the value of autobiography in promoting the principles of democracy: "At the same time it is fondly hoped that the lessons of distress that are portrayed, may have a direct tendency to increase our love of liberty; to enlarge our views of the blessings that are derived from our liberal institutions" (52). The liberal institutions Seaver refers to include the importance of political participation, or the mainstays of indirect democracy. One notable implication of the increasing political role of women is Mary Rowlandson's contribution to the negotiations concerning her ransom and eventual release.

The frontier as the topographical background of captivity narratives provided a testing ground for the personality traits of the captive, reflected in Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis: "that coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients [...] that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism [...] the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise." According to Richard VanDerBeets the heroines of captivity narratives had to develop features

and traits considered the cornerstones of the American value system including resourcefulness, self-reliance, independence and mental and physical strength, along with resilience (xiii). Consequently, Mary Rowlandson mapped the northwestern territory of New England and Rachel Plummer explored the Southwest. The resourcefulness of the Indian captive is demonstrated among others by Isaac Jogues creating an altar in the wilderness, Robert Eastburn continuing to work as a blacksmith, or Rachel Plummer deceiving and physically defeating her captor.

Captivity narratives assign a high esteem to another crucial component of the American value system, liberty as well. According to Daniel Williams narratives of confinement performed important cultural work in the early Republic, reinforcing the dichotomy between slavery and liberty and demonstrating how people functioned when deprived of individual freedom. Mary Jemison's statement while summing up her life tends to substantiate Williams' theory: "I am sensible, however, that no one can pass from a state of freedom to that of slavery, and in the last situation rest perfectly contented" (158).

The captivity narrative also commemorates the mobility of the respective victim, thereby reinforcing another key ingredient of the American value system along with a perspective emphasizing an activist outlook. Mobility or locomotion, although of a forced nature is paired with enhanced spatial perception. The mobility of the captive also performs a culture and character building function and the description of the social life or political activities of the given captor tribe often provides a comparison with the democratic system of the home community.

The removal of the captive into the American wilderness and the resulting first encounter with nature helps to cast the hero in light of the American Adam. Following R. W. B. Lewis it is the captivity that leads to the very loss of innocence, or in a typological context the confinement in the hands of Native Americans is seen as a punishment for venturing beyond the hedge, that is the figurative Garden of Eden. At the same Roy Harvey Pearce's application of the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall concept holding that "Man's suffering was found to be good because it gave him the wisdom to comprehend his own bitter situation in his world" (104) reverberates in Mary Rowlandson's invocation of David: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (467). Furthermore, the captive's contact with nature, especially Rachel Plummer finding "healing balm for her wounded soul" in an underground cave (351) is reminiscent of the early

hunter narratives, as demonstrated by Daniel Boone's Narrative, and his adoration of nature:

"One day I undertook a tour through the country, and the diversity and beauties of nature... expelled every gloomy and vexatious thought. [...] I had gained the summit of a commanding ridge, and looking round with astonishing delight, beheld the ample plains, the beauteous tracts below" (Filson <http://www.earlyamerica.com/lives/boone/> accessed on 2010 October 1).

The American West as primarily the scene of the captivity experience provided adventure and a testing ground for the American hero. This is well illustrated by Theodore Roosevelt's ethnocentric insistence of the purification of the West from the Indians in order to make room for the expanding Anglo-Saxon race. In *The Winning of the West* (1894) he advances the time-worn Social Darwinist argument:

"The most ultimately righteous of all wars is war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and the most inhuman. The rude fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under his debt. Americans and Indians, Boer and Zulu, Cossac and Tartar, New Zealander and Maori— in each case the victor, horrible though many of his deeds are, has laid deep the foundations for future greatness of a mighty people" (Winning III 45-46 qtd in Virágos *Myth and Social Consciousness* 172) ).

### [3] Final observations

The protagonist of the captivity narrative commemorating the darker and temporary defeat ridden side of these "ultimately righteous" aspirations can be appreciated in light of other substantial achievements of American literary criticism. Daniel Hoffmann, in *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (1961) presents a criteria system for the American hero. Accordingly, and reinforcing Northrop Frye's argument as well, the main feature of these experiences is the quest, the search for and the exploration of one's self and identity. This quest at the same time entails self-definition as the settlers being removed from the safety of their homes have undergone a similar experience to that of slaves kidnapped into Heideggerian nothingness. As Hoffmann argues the American hero has no past, parents, or home. Being deprived of the past implies America as a new beginning, the lack of home refers to the fact that the American

hero broke away from the European past and the respective adventures cannot be considered the continuation of the European experience. The captive settler driven by a search for national identity and freed from the shackles of European culture belongs to an array of such well-known stock figures of the pantheon of American heroes as the *frontiersman* and the *Yankee*. Slotkin also points to hunters, outlaws, and of course the Indian captive as the true founding fathers or mothers of the nation. The self exploration or discovery indicates individualism which is further accentuated by the lack of siblings or parents. The dearth of the past also implies a sense of exile or the fact that European culture was not reproduced overseas.

Furthermore, one can apply Leslie Fiedler's "Archetype and Signature" concept, in which archetype refers to the timeless patterns given to the most frequent aspects of human life, thus it is the space of the unconscious, the primordial self while the signature entails the aggregate or individuating factors in the given text. The captivity experience itself is the archetypal situation, while its commemoration either in an oral or written form is the signature. (Leitch 126-127). The Indian capture entails an encounter with the devilish Other hidden in the deep innermost fears of the victim. As Fiedler argued whatever society represses it resurfaces in its literature, thus despite the total exclusion of the Native American from mainstream discourse, he returned and in the life of the authors of captivity narratives appeared in immediate proximity. The fear of the Other or the wilderness materialized and gained a certain reinforcement by the captivity experience. The American Adam irretrievably lost his innocence as the threat of Indian captivity personified by Hawthorne's "devilish Indian behind every tree" (525) became a mainstay in the collective unconscious at the North American frontier.

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## The Body Politic Throws a Party: Political Allegory in Poe's "King Pest"

Gabriella Vöö

Poe had an utter dislike for allegory. He denounced as utterly fallacious the idea that this trope can ever "be made to enforce a truth." He made, however, one concession to such harsh condemnation: "[I]f allegory ever establishes a fact," he added, it is "by dint of over-turning a fiction" (*Essays and Reviews* 582). Occasionally, Poe did apply allegory with gusto when exposing ideas, attitudes, and public personalities that his contemporaries held dear. One of his early prose pieces, "King Pest: A Tale Containing an Allegory" is a political satire directed against President Andrew Jackson, whose second presidential term had begun in the spring of 1833.<sup>1</sup> Set in medieval London "during the chivalrous reign of the third Edward" (240), the tale recounts the exploits of Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin, two sailors committed to "peregrinations... in and about the different tap-houses" of the city. However, before completing their pious mission, they run out of pennies and, evading payment for their pints, leave the Jolly Tar in great haste. Cornered by the tavern owner, they take refuge in an enclosed area of the pest-stricken city, grope their way among the ruins and corpses, break into the wine cellar of an undertaker, and stumble upon a drinking-revel presided over by King Pest

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<sup>1</sup> The tale was meant to be included in *Tales of the Folio Club*, a collection of parodies and satires. In the late fall of 1833 Poe offered the manuscript to the publishers of a Baltimore magazine, the *Saturday Visiter* and, subsequently, to the Philadelphia publishers Carey and Lea (Thomas and Jackson 134, 135), but the book never materialized and the tales appeared separately later in the decade in the various magazines that Poe was associated with. "King Pest" was published in the September 1835 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the Richmond magazine for which Poe worked briefly as writer, critic, and editor between July 1835 and December 1836 (Quinn 218, 259).

himself. After their warm welcome turns into a hostile dispute, the two tars ruin the party and make their escape, hauling two loathsome ladies along as they run for their lives.

Intended to be a literary parody, “King Pest” mocks the medievalism of Sir Walter Scott as well as the pomposity of Washington Irving who was frequently referred to as the “American Scott” (Hammond, “A Reconstruction” 31, “Further Notes” 18). Ruth Hudson suggests that the revel scene was directly inspired by Benjamin Disraeli’s fashionable novel *Vivian Grey* (1826–27), especially the chapter “Palace of the Wines” at the beginning of the second volume (403–4). Disraeli’s book of social comedy and farce was directed against—and succeeded in stirring up—the fashionable society of London. Similarly, “King Pest,” is a jibe at the retinue of Andrew Jackson, the mob of pretentious politicians who rose to power during the presidency that redefined American politics. The tumultuous personality and dictatorial demeanor of King Pest is a satiric portrayal of the President himself, frequently referred to by the press as “King Mob” and “King Andrew the First.” As Poe gave “King Pest” the subtitle “A Tale Containing an Allegory” we are at liberty to look for topical correspondences between the quirky events and motley characters and the goings-on in Washington D. C. during the presidency of Andrew Jackson whose two momentous terms between 1825–1833 redefined American politics, transforming the political culture from a virtuous Enlightenment republic into a white men’s democracy.

Through the motley cast of characters in “King Pest,” Poe explores the redefinition of both the body politic and the political person in American democracy. The medieval doctrine of the body politic held that the natural, mortal body of the monarch stood for the ideal body of the state, the body politic. Thus, the representation of the sovereign was in fact the image offered to people to contemplate the harmony, wholeness, and authority of the body politic. Anointing the physical body at coronation meant that special status was given to it: anointment represented assuming leadership by divine right. “The quasi-divine Body politic was symbolized by the ritual anointing of the monarch during the coronation ceremony, which separated the king from all other lay persons” (Mirozeff 59). In a republic, the body politic is “the people who collectively constitute a political unit under a government” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*). Andrew Jackson was the first President of the United States who did not belong, as did all the presidents preceding him, to the patrician class of either Virginia or New England. However, his

critics applied the register of the monarchy when referring to his presidency. They referred to him as “King Mob” and “King Andrew the First” (Davis 7). “King Pest” explores the relationship between the physical body of the country’s political leaders and the body politic as the symbol of the state. The reign of King Pest over his ruinous domain resonates with the claims made by Jackson’s critics about the incompetence of his cabinet and the dictatorial character of his presidency. There are, thus, strong topical correspondences between the quirky events and motley characters of Poe’s fiction and the goings-on in the nation’s capital during the alleged “reign” of Andrew Jackson.

### 1. “King Mob”

In 1833, the year when Poe most probably completed “King Pest,” Jackson’s second presidential term was just beginning. For a Southern gentleman like Poe, who counted himself among the intellectual elite, the Indian fighter and hero of the battle of New Orleans was a sinister tyrant undeserving of his high position. To this, the President’s rowdy mien and authoritarian attitude, as well as his popularity among the uneducated masses, was an irksome addition. Jackson’s victory in the elections of 1828 had been largely due to the mobilization of the voters and the large electoral turnout orchestrated by the Democratic Party (Keyssar 40).<sup>2</sup> On the day of his first inauguration, opponents were appalled by the rough intensity of popular sympathy surrounding Jackson. After the inauguration ceremony held on 4 March 1829, Judge Joseph Story despondently remarked in a letter that in the city of Washington “[t]he reign of King ‘Mob’ seemed triumphant” (qtd. in Schlesinger 6). The “mob” would eventually come to signify more than the rough populace celebrating the arrival of the President-elect in the nation’s capital. It covered, on the one hand, the redefined notion of the political person, the voter who did not even own property. As an increasing number of states adopted the universal white male suffrage (Keyssar 37), it was they who propelled Jackson into the presidency. On the other hand, a crowd of newly appointed officeholders flooded the capital, replacing many former

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson had won 56 percent of the popular vote, defeating his opponent, the incumbent John Quincy Adams, by a margin of 178 to 83 in the Electoral College. In the election of 1832, his triumph over Henry Clay was no less impressive: 219 to 49 in the Electoral College (Meacham 49, 220).

federal officials. According to contemporary estimates, the number of replacements was around 10 percent of the government (Cole 41). Additionally, the President relied heavily on an informal circle of advisors, the so-called Kitchen Cabinet. In "King Pest," Poe captures the scene of Jacksonian politics, and creates an enduring satire of both the common man and the new political elite. The cast of characters includes two illiterate and drunken sailors, the sinister monarch's three intimate friends, as well as two women figures with bruised reputations. All of them are grotesque or ghastly figures in varying states of stupidity, stupor, or palsy, illustrating the sorry state of national politics and the prospect of death and destruction in the new age of "mobocracy."

The two main characters of "King Pest," the illiterate but agile seamen Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin, evoke "the common people" as the critics and opponents of Jackson saw them. They are grotesque figures with limbs, eyes, and other bodily features out of proportion, their facial expression "beyond all attempts at imitation or description," pushy, insolent, and "intoxicated beyond moral sense" (241, 243). They are, however, much less repugnant than King Pest's drinking companions who have taken possession of an undertaker's wine-cellar. King Pest, the "gaunt and tall" personage with a complexion "yellow as saffron" and a forehead "unusually and hideously lofty" (244) is recognizable as Andrew Jackson himself. His companions are military and political personages in varying conditions of infirmity. The "little puffy, wheezing, and gouty old man" with one bandaged leg (246) is probably Jackson's former aide-de-camp and Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton, and the gentleman "in long white hose and cotton drawers," his jaws tied up in muslin is (246) Francis Preston Blair, editor of the *Washington Globe*. The paralyzed man, singularly habited "in a new and handsome mahogany coffin," may represent William H. Crawford, the statesman and former Secretary of War and of the Treasury, or Amos Kendall, also editor of the *Globe*, and US Postmaster General in Andrew Jackson's Cabinet.<sup>3</sup> As a satirist, Poe was brilliant in selecting for ridicule the most conspicuous characters in Jackson's close circle, most of whom had no political record. An outsider in national politics, Andrew Jackson lacked the friendly relations that would have made him comfortable in the political circles of the capital,

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<sup>3</sup> The characters of "King Pest" are identified by William Whipple ("Poe's Political Satire" 81-95), as well as by Stuart and Susan Levine (*The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, 294, 319-20).

and the old Washington establishment looked upon his informal clique advisors with contempt.

Political power in a republic is wielded by a representative government, which acts on behalf of the people, the body politic. In Jackson's view, his own power and authority was justified by the popular vote by which he earned the presidency. According to John Meacham's summary of Jackson's views, he "wanted a political culture in which a majority of the voters chose a president, and a president chose his administration" (82). Jackson personally chose his intimate advisors. In "King Pest," Poe dwells at length upon the natural bodies of Jacksonian America's informal ruling elite, the representatives of the collective body politic. He suggests a metonymical, part-whole relationship between the body parts of the ruling elite and the body politic. Each character has at least one conspicuous body part that, if assembled together, would constitute a grotesque image of a single body, that of "the people." Hugh Tarpaulin observes, for example, that each personage "seemed to possess a monopoly of some particular portion of physiognomy" (245). King Pest's forehead looks like "a bonnet or crown of flesh superadded upon the natural head." His royal consort is an ample lady with a mouth that reaches from ear to ear. The "diminutive lady" at the Queen's side has a nose "extremely long, thin, sinuous, flexible and pimpled, [hanging down] far below her upper lip." The others, repugnant individuals in different states of affliction and decomposition, have "cheeks reposed upon the shoulders of their owner," "[a] pair of prodigious ears," and "huge goggle eyes" (244–47). The plebeian characters, Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin, also add to the composite picture of the Jacksonian ruling elite. Legs, obviously, sports "a pair of stumpy bow-legs," and Hugh Tarpaulin, whom William Whipple identifies as Secretary of State Martin Van Buren (83), has "huge protruding white eyes" (240–41). The body parts belonging to freaks who are sick, dying, or just hideous, will never cohere into a harmonious whole, the ideal body politic of the republic. The motley throng in "King Pest," the allegorical representation of Andrew Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet, evokes a political elite that is literally rotting.

For all their decaying or putrefying condition, King Pest and his friends are having a good time celebrating in Will Wimble's wine-cellar. Poe was fond, especially at the beginning of his career, of using the structure and scene of the symposium in order to create "a mock-heroic classical assembly" (Fisher 1) where the uses and pleasures of alcohol were debated. In this particular story, the awful monarch declares that the

purpose of the revel is “to examine, analyze, and thoroughly determine the indefinable spirit [of] the wines, ales, and liqueurs of this goodly metropolis” (249). One of the satiric intents of the tale is to expose the irrationality and stupidity, coupled with snobbery and pretense, of Andrew Jackson and his associates. But Poe does not stop here: he also denounces the deluded voters who elected the President. King Pest cordially invites the representatives of the masses, the two drunken tars, to join the party. At his order, they should “imbibe,” each of them, “a gallon of Black Strap” (249). Poe’s story probably struck a note with Jackson’s opponents who watched with unease the transformation of an orderly republic into a slovenly democracy.

The immediate inspiration for King Pest’s revel must have been the inauguration banquet of 1829 when Jackson invited “the people” to celebrate with him in the White House. About 10,000 showed up (Mackey 59), and transformed the party into a violent brawl. “Orange punch by barrels full was made,” recorded an eye-witness, “but as the waiters opened the door to bring it out [to the White House lawn], a rush would be made, the glasses broken, the pails of liquor upset, and the most painful confusion prevailed” (qtd. in Parton 170–71). Poe depicts a banquet in which all the palpitating forces of hell are unleashed. In a short speech full of pathos—maybe a mock-inauguration oath—, King Pest swears allegiance to “that unearthly sovereign reign is over us all, whose dominions are unlimited, and whose name is Death” (249). The tale seems to predict an apocalyptic end to Andrew Jackson’s rule. Energized by liquor, King Pest and his associates enjoy their brief moment of exalted merry-making, singing and shrieking. However, their revel cannot last long, as they are all incapacitated not only by alcohol, but also by palsy, the gout, and consumption. Their outfit of palls, shrouds, winding sheets, and even a well-tailored mahogany coffin (245, 257) also suggests that their end is near. At last, the day is carried by the tricky plebeians’ heroes, Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin. Roguish rascals as they are, they stand up against the wayward tyranny of King Pest and manage to drown the whole party of cadaverous pretenders in a flood of ale.

## **2. “King Andrew the First”**

Poe’s tale portrays an accomplished despot of the kingdom of death. Clad in a black “silk-velvet pall,” his head decorated with “sable hearse-

plumes,” King Pest exercises his monarchic powers by means of a scepter in the form of “a huge human thighbone” which serves him for knocking down “some member of the company for a song” (245). At the request of the confounded sailors, he identifies himself as the “monarch [ruling] under the title of King Pest the First” (248). The allusion could not be lost on contemporary readers. “King Andrew the First” was the nickname by which opponents denounced the President’s authoritarian leadership. Andrew Jackson rose to national fame as a general in the Tennessee militia, on account of his successful campaigns in the Creek War (1813–14), the War of 1812 against Great Britain, and the First Seminole War (1817–18). According to his critics, these accomplishments might have contributed to his inflated public image, but did not qualify him for political leadership. His arch-rival, Henry Clay doubted that “killing two thousand five hundred Englishmen at New Orleans qualifies for the difficult and complicated business of the chief magistracy” (qtd. in Meacham 44). “General Jackson,” wrote Alexis de Tocqueville, “is a man of violent character and middling capacities; nothing in the whole of his career indicated him to have the qualities needed for governing a free people” (278). Jackson embodied the self-assertive leader with an ability to make quick and effective decisions during his campaigns, even if those were not acceptable to his superiors in Washington. His sense of independence and momentousness, however, was enough grounds for his popular appreciation which delivered him the presidency.

However, it was exactly this impulsiveness that left Andrew Jackson’s career sprinkled with deaths. The duels he provoked and fought, as well as the armed altercations he took part in, earned him a reputation of ruthlessness, vindictiveness, and even savagery. At the time when he ascended to the presidency, he had been carrying two bullets in his body: mementos of his 1806 duel with Charles Dickinson, and of a pistol fight, in 1813, with the brothers Thomas and Jesse Benton (Burstein 58, 96). As a military leader, he was implacable with defectors. For example, during the 1814 campaign against the Creek Red Sticks in Alabama, he had an eighteen-year-old enlistee, John Woods summarily tried and shot for mutiny. In 1818, during the First Seminole War, he had two British subjects, alleged spies, executed at Fort St. Marks (Burstein 105, 131). His first presidential term commenced with a large scale of dismissals of office holders in the Washington bureaucracy, which caused waves of anxiety and had, as former President John Quincy Adams noted, “indirectly tragical effects.” Adams mentions a clerk named Henshaw

who “cut his throat from ear to ear, from the mere terror of being dismissed” (144).

Poe made several allusions to Jackson’s deadly exploits in “King Pest.” The two sailors who enter the district under the pest-ban, assailing the cadaverous monarch’s dominion, behave like Indians, General Jackson’s antagonists in two major campaigns. In their flight from the owner of the Jolly Tar, the “grim” Legs lets out “yells like the terrific war-whoop of the Indian,” seconded by Hugh Tarpaulin’s “bull-roarings *in basso*” (243). Their war hoops are replied to by “a rapid succession of wild, laughter-like, and fiendish shrieks” of King Pest’s motley court. The sailors-as-Indians will end up to be the monarch’s challengers, causing his downfall—or rather, drowning—in “a hogshead full of October ale” (251). But before the burlesque ending of the tale, many more details point to the character and exploits of Andrew Jackson. The members of the drinking revel celebrate under a makeshift chandelier, a human skeleton suspended upside down, his cranium filled with “a quantity of ignited charcoal.” Further skulls serve as drinking cups (247). All of these can be regarded as mementos of Jackson’s record as a duelist and a ruthless commander. Poe takes good care that the brutality of Jackson’s personality and leadership should not be lost upon his readers. Nor do we miss the suggestions to Jackson’s pride and vanity. At first, King Pest behaves generously and invites the representatives of “the people,” two sailor-rascals, to the party. However, he immediately takes offence when one of them behaves disrespectfully. Hugh Tarpaulin upsets the King when he refuses to drink to “the health of the Devil.” On top of this, he recognizes King Pest as “Tim Hurlygurly the stage-player,” exposing the monarch and his court as common frauds (250–51). The reaction is immediate, and revenge is quick to follow. “‘Treason!’ shouted his Majesty King Pest the First,” and hurls the offender into a huge puncheon of ale (251). The gesture bespeaks not only of the President’s inclination to hold grudges, but also of his vindictiveness and his acts performed on impulse. Poe must have been familiar with the circumstances of the first assassination attempt ever threatening an American president. On January 1835, Jackson was attacked by a young deranged house-painter who tried to shoot him, but both of his pistols misfired; the President, “[i]nstead of ducking away,” went for his assailant with his cane (Remini 297).



### 3. "King Pest"

The setting of "King Pest," the sealed-off, pest-stricken district of London, invites an association with Washington D. C., the theater of national politics. The capital appears as an enclave reserved for the political elite, a site of snobbery, pretense, and even dishonesty and debauchery, a veritable "strong hold of pestilence" (244). Fenced off from the rest of the country with "terrific barriers," it is the realm of "Awe, Terror, and Superstition" (241, 242) arrested in a state of moral and intellectual corruption. Evoking the picture of general ruin and decay, Poe manages to render, quite impartially, the political atmosphere of the city where the game of national politics was being played. The years preceding Jackson's presidency were marked by bitter political contests, changing loyalties, and cunning maneuvers. In the election of 1824, Jackson had won the popular vote but not the Electoral College majority. Convinced that he had the support "the people," he resented the political maneuvering by those he called "our political weathercocks," politicians who decided the outcome of the elections in the House of Representatives. He meant Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams, whom he suspected of having made a "corrupt bargain" (qtd. in Meacham 44) in order to procure the House votes for the latter. The next, 1828 election was carried by Jackson, but his victory came at the expense of much personal slander and mud throwing between his own supporters and those of John Quincy Adams. Rumors about the legal irregularities concerning the marriage of Andrew Jackson and Rachel Donelson were aired in the press, enraging Jackson and causing much distress for Rachel.<sup>4</sup> In December 1828, Jackson's beloved wife died, and the President-elect blamed Adams and his supporters in the press for the tragedy (Brands 399).

The moral implications of political machinations and the change of political climate were not lost upon Poe, the satirist. Nor did he miss the signs of alarm among the Washington elite at the arrival in the city, during the spring of 1829, of Jackson and his associates. In 1833, at the

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<sup>4</sup> During the election campaign of 1828, Rachel Jackson was accused with bigamy, having married Andrew Jackson before her divorce from her first husband, Lewis Robards was pronounced. The accusation of bigamy was technically correct, although unjust. At the time of Andrew and Rachel's marriage, the divorce had not yet been made official. Yet under frontier circumstances, with the slow and imperfect means communication, the couple supposed that their marriage was legal (see Burstein 243).

time when Poe probably wrote “King Pest,” Jackson’s momentous second term was just beginning, and the President was intent on carrying the Bank War to an end. While the atmosphere of the capital became more plebeian during Jackson’s presidency, criticism of his dictatorial leadership abounded in the opposition press. In the fall of 1833, a broadside was issued with the picture of “King Andrew the First” in full regalia, with one of the inscriptions declaring that he was “Born to Command.”<sup>5</sup>

Poe, brought up and educated as a Southern gentleman, was at the moment a struggling magazine writer. He resented both the patrician privilege of the old political elite and the unsophisticated views and attitudes of the Jacksonians. “King Pest” has an assortment of grotesque characters, the entourage of the gruesome monarch, who boast with aristocratic titles but look like freaks and behave like the rabble. The sinister monarch courteously introduces the aggregation of his closest intimates as his Serene Consort Queen Pest, Her Serene Highness the Arch Duchess Ana Pest, His Grace the Arch-Duke Pestiferous, His Grace the Duke Pest-Ilential, His Grace the Duke Tem-Pest (248). All of them are in states of dropsy, consumption, alcoholic tremor, and palsy (245–47), but make efforts to look “dignified,” “*dégagé*,” proud, or elegant (246–47, italics in the original). The King’s urbane manner and his court’s snobbish affectations have a comic effect, which soon turns into one of terror when the monarch’s wrath is unexpectedly unleashed. King Pest roars—“Profane varlet! ... profane and execrable wretch!”—, and orders that Legs and Hugh Tarpaulin should be “duly drowned as rebels in yon hogshead of October beer!” (249, 250). Civility, Poe’s tale suggests, is only an outer layer concealing the moral decay and madness of Washington politics. Meanwhile, the whole country is falling apart, eaten away by the disease of political cronyism, corruption, and incompetence.

No political satire is complete without some juicy scandal. Apparently, Poe was in no dilemma about showing disrespect for the memory of Rachel Jackson. She, too, is a member of the tale’s bizarre cast under the name Queen Pest. A lady with an ample figure, with a face “exceedingly round, red, and full,” she is introduced as King Pest’s “Serene Consort” (245, 248). Apart from her repulsiveness, she is of little relevance in the tale, just as the late Rachel Jackson Donelson was not an

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<sup>5</sup> Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.

entity for any public personage but her bereaved husband. The characterization of the other lady at King Pest's table, the "diminutive" one with hectic spots and a nose hanging down "far below her under lip" (245, 246), probably struck a chord with contemporary readers. The Arch Duchess Ana-Pest represents Margaret Eaton, the wife of Jackson's War Secretary Major Thomas Eaton. Margaret, or "Peggy," was the object of a scandal shaking the world of the Washington political elite in 1829. Her reputation as a woman of loose morality was founded in rumors about her previous marriage which ended with the death, presumably by suicide, of her first husband, the naval officer John Timberlake. It was suggested that her affair with Thomas Eaton had been the cause of her husband's act of despair, and the wives of Jackson's Cabinet shunned the couple (Brands 420). Andrew Jackson took the side of the Eatons, alienating many politicians of his own party.<sup>6</sup> Poe duly places the lady Ana-Pest among King Pest's close associates and portrays her in a manner that is suggestive of Peggy Eaton in both looks and demeanor. For all her consumptive wheezes and inconveniently long nose, the Duchess Ana-Pest is a veritable beauty among the ghastly characters. She has an air of "*haut ton*," her hair hangs "in ringlets," and she is singled out by the "gallant Hugh Tarpaulin for flirtatious conversation. The two of them are quaffing red wine "for their better acquaintance" (246, 248, italics in the original). As the party and King Pest and his court are washed away in October ale, the two homely women are spirited away by the nimble sailors. Poe seems to suggest that although "the people" do not profit much from Andrew Jackson's policies, at least they will get away with their lives, and may even end up with some of the spoils.

### Concluding Remarks

Jackson was not only a commanding personality but a stalwart executive who extended the political power of the presidency by wielding the veto power, interpreting the Constitution, and carrying out federal law even against the resistance of individual states. In 1833, at the beginning of his second term, he successfully exercised his executive power in both major political crises, the Bank War which led to the destruction of the Second Bank of the United States, and in the South Carolina Nullification

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<sup>6</sup> The so-called "pettycoat affair" had long-term consequences in the politics of the US, by alienating the Vice-President, John C. Calhoun from the President.

Crisis of 1833 (Yoo 105). Yet for all his tempestuous display of personal power, Jackson was committed to democracy. He made and carried out all his decisions with the firm conviction that he was acting in the best interest of “the people” who had elected him, and whom he represented. Such an interpretation of democracy reminded Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster of monarchy, and led him to demand, in a speech delivered in the Senate on 11 July, 1832, “the rescue [of] Liberty from the grasp of executive power” (385) and to make the sarcastic remark that that “[i]f he is the representative of all the American people, he is the only representative they all have” (391). For Jackson, though, the notions of the people’s “rightful sovereignty” (qtd. in Burstein 169) and the powerful presidency were not mutually exclusive.

Poe’s tale captures Jackson’s expansive view of himself as the people’s champion and enlightened public servant. In answer to the insolent request of Legs to identify himself, King Pest affably gratifies his “reasonable curiosity” and invites the intruders to join the party. However, Poe makes his own statement about American democracy as it was taking shape during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. He suggests that the rising political relevance of the uneducated common people will unleash a power that would be, in the long run, destructive. In a bold tirade evocative of Jackson’s dramatic public speeches, King Pest makes a revealing statement about his role and mission as monarch of “these dominions”: his purpose is “to advance not more our own designs than the true welfare of that unearthly sovereign whose reign is over us all, whose dominions are unlimited, and whose name is ‘Death’” (248, 249). Apart from occasionally letting his political opinion transpire in a satire like “King Pest,” Poe did not comment on topical issues and never took a stand in political debates. His sentiments, however, must have been congenial with those of the Whigs who rallied into a formal political opposition to the Jacksonian “Democrats” in the emerging second party system of the United States.

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## **Balogh, Máté Gergely. The Kossuth Emigration and the Civil War.**

**Review of *Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War: A History and Biographical Dictionary*, by István Kornél Vida. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012 and *Világostól Appomatoxig: Magyarok az amerikai polgárháborúban*, by István Kornél Vida. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2011.**

Máté Gergely Balogh

The Kossuth emigration, which took place after the fall of the 1848-49 Revolution and War of Independence, was the first major wave of Hungarian immigration to the United States. It is named after Lajos Kossuth, regent of Hungary during the revolution, who visited America in 1851-52 to gather support for the cause of his homeland. He returned to Britain, but many of his followers chose to settle in the New World. Less than a decade after his trip the Civil War (1861–65), the bloodiest military conflict in the history of the United States, broke out. In *Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War: A History and Biographical Dictionary* István Kornél Vida examines the reasons why Hungarians decided to join the war, the extent and consequences of their involvement, and provides a detailed survey of the known Hungarian-American participants of the Civil War.

István Kornél Vida is assistant professor at the North American Department of the University of Debrecen. His main research areas are migration studies, Hungarian-American relations, and 19th century American history, mainly the Civil War and the preceding years.

*Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War* is the result of ten years of his research in Hungary, the United States, and Germany. While there were some earlier attempts to present Hungarian involvement in the Civil War, these were not scholarly works.<sup>1</sup> Myth-making is a common practice when ethnic authors write about the contributions of their own ethnic groups, but it is obviously not proper history writing in a scholarly sense. Vida's work is the first book that discusses the role of Hungarians in the Civil War on an academic level.

The book was published both in English and in Hungarian, and, for obvious reasons, there are certain differences between the two versions. It can safely be assumed that the target audience of the Hungarian edition is more or less aware of the events and the most important figures of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–49, while it needs a more detailed introduction to the history of the American Civil War and the preceding years. At the same time, the English-language audience is in all likelihood more familiar with the American events, and oblivious of the Hungarian situation. In the English version, after the acknowledgements, a preface places the work in the current body of scholarship. This is followed by an introduction, entitled "Martyrs of Freedom," a short overview of the Hungarian revolution, Kossuth's role, and the story of the Kossuth emigration. The introduction precedes the acknowledgements in the Hungarian edition, and consists of a concise summary of the history of the Civil War, a presentation of the current state of scholarship, and the enumeration of sources.

The structures of the two editions are also slightly different. The content of the English version is divided into two parts: "History," which is composed of eight chapters, and a "Biographical Dictionary." In the Hungarian book the list of biographies of Hungarian participants in the American Civil War is not a separate part, but it is the ninth chapter of the work. The two lists are identical, but the distinction between the historical and biographical sections is stronger in the English edition.

The first chapter is about Hungarian immigration to the United States in the 1850s, while the second examines the life of Kossuth

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<sup>1</sup> *Hungarians in the American Civil War* by Eugene Pivany, *Lincoln's Hungarian Heroes* by Edmund Vasváry, and *Magyarok az észak-amerikai polgárháborúban* by Tivadar Ács, see: István Kornél Vida, *Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War: A History and Biographical Dictionary* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 1 (hereafter cited as *Hungarian Émigrés*).



*émigrés* in the new country. The importance of the Kossuth emigration does not lie in the number of people who arrived from Hungary, which was relatively low compared to some other nationalities in the same period (e.g. the Irish), or the extent of later immigration waves from Hungary.<sup>2</sup> The real significance of the Kossuth emigration was that it placed Hungary on the map for Americans, and it created the long-lasting image of the Hungarian freedom fighter. Afraid of the retaliation that followed the Revolution, these *émigrés* left their homeland and were greeted enthusiastically as champions of liberty by the American public; many saw a close resemblance between the American and the Hungarian wars of independence. But this interest in the struggle of Hungary proved to be short-lived, and many *émigrés* quickly found out that there was no such thing as a free lunch in the land of the free. Many of them had qualifications that they could not use in the United States, and while their financial situation improved by the end of the 1850s, it still remained below the national average.

Being veterans of the 1848–49 War of Independence, many Hungarians saw the outbreak of the Civil War as an opportunity to put their military skills to use, and joined either the Union or the Confederacy. The third chapter discusses the motivations of Hungarian immigrants for fighting, and the fourth presents the military units they joined. Earlier works on Hungarian-Americans in the Civil War ignored the fact that, although in smaller numbers, there were also Hungarians fighting for the South, and argued that the freedom-loving Hungarians wanted to abolish the evil institution of slavery. Vida argues against this allegation and points out that the abolition of slavery was initially not among their war aims. The preservation of the American system of government, and the fight for their chosen country were the main reasons why many Hungarians decided to get involved in the war, but material gains and the possibility of social advancement were also important factors for a lot of them. The reason why more Hungarians joined the Union than the Confederacy was that there were much fewer of them in the South, and the Confederacy was generally more suspicious of foreigners. No matter which side they fought for, Vida argues convincingly, slavery was not an important issue for Hungarians when they decided to join the Civil War. The involvement of Hungarians was similar to that of other nationalities, and they often

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<sup>2</sup> According to the federal census in 1860 there were 2,170 Hungarians living in the United States *Hungarian Émigrés*, 38.

enlisted in units that had a high number of immigrants; most notably, the Hungarian-American community was often closely linked to the German-Americans. Most Hungarian soldiers concentrated in New York, around General Frémont in Missouri, and in the Midwest.

Chapters five, six, and seven present the careers of some Hungarian-Americans who fought in the Civil War. Chapter five is about Alexander Asboth, Julius Stahel, and Charles Zagonyi. Asboth was a skilled soldier, who started the war as chief of staff of General Frémont, and finished it as major general. Stahel was the only Hungarian-American who got the Congressional Medal of Honor in the Civil War, and also received the rank of major general. The story of Charles Zagonyi is slightly different: he became famous when led Frémont's bodyguards to a cavalry charge in the battle of Springfield. This act might have had slight military or historical significance, but gained special importance when it was turned into a Hungarian-American myth by the community. Chapter six introduces another well-known "Hungarian," Béla Estván, the author of a popular book on the Civil War, *War Pictures from the South*. But it turns out that Estván was not Hungarian after all, but an Austrian, who was born as Peter Heinrich in Vienna. He was a real impostor who claimed his fake identity because he hoped to benefit from the positive attitude towards Hungarians as a consequence of the 1848-49 Revolution and War of Independence. The next chapter is about Hungarian officers in the colored regiments. Most immigrants from Hungary were shocked by the existence of slavery, and rejected the "peculiar institution." Many applied to serve as officers in the black units, some because of sympathy for blacks, and some believed in the usefulness of the colored regiments. Vida, however, concludes that the higher pay was probably the main attraction and some expected advancement in their careers.

The last chapter deals with the aftermath of the Civil War: it looks at the consequences for Hungarian-Americans, and their situation after the end of the war. Quite a number of Hungarians died and were wounded in America's bloodiest war. Vida asserts that most of those who survived the war benefitted from their military service. They advanced in rank: 87% of Hungarians finished the war as officers. Their involvement in the war gained them respect and acceptance in their respective communities. This is why only a few of them returned to Hungary. At the end of the chapter we are presented an overview of the memory of Hungarians in the Civil War: places and institutions named after them, memorials, literary depictions, and a single movie.

The second part of the English and the ninth chapter of the Hungarian book are a biographical list of Hungarian participants of the Civil War in alphabetical order, combined with an appendix listing the most common misspellings of their names, which can help the work of future researchers. In the Hungarian edition a small Union or Confederate flag indicates which belligerent the particular soldier fought for, unfortunately, this is missing from the English version. Vida did an enormous job by collecting all this data on every known Hungarian who fought in the war; surely, the biographical dictionary will prove to be immensely useful for anybody who does research on the topic.

*Hungarian Émigrés in the Civil War* processes a field that was previously not covered on an academic level. It disproves many previously held myths about Hungarian involvement in the Civil War. The book is based on solid research, and it will be useful for both scholars who are interested in the American Civil War and those who study Hungarian emigration to the United States. Though it is a scholarly text it is easily readable, and is also recommended to those who are not experts in the field.