

REVIEWS

Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske (Ed.)

**Budapest and New York:
Studies in Metropolitan Transformation**

New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994. 400 pp.

Comparative history is a fascinating field but the road leading to it is full of dangers. The risk of publishing a collection of essays on New York and Budapest by American and Hungarian scholars is that neither side would be familiar with the history of the other. Fully aware of the difficulties of their pioneering work, the editors of this volume have decided to solve this problem by writing a general introduction and an afterword. Except for these two texts, comparison is virtually limited to the brief introductions to the five sections. Although no name is attached to these interchapters, it is safe to assume that the American editors are responsible for their composition. Since their knowledge of Hungarian history is second-hand, their summaries are inevitably one-sided.

Most of the essays on Budapest are analytic rather than synthetic. When some details are taken out of their original context and placed in a new one, the result may be an interpretation that will not hold up under scrutiny. Sometimes a shift in emphasis may lead to misunderstanding, as in the case of the discussion of the 1919 Commune in Hungary. In the general introduction it is mentioned that "one of the actions of the brief revolutionary government in Budapest in 1919 was to abolish the admission charge to Margaret Island" (16). While this statement is absolutely correct, it may mislead a reader who is unaware of the consequences of the dictatorship introduced by Béla Kun and his colleagues after March 21, 1919. In a similar way, the argument that Admiral Horthy represented "Hungarian reaction and provincialism" (9) seems farfetched if compared with the much more complex characterization of this statesman given by Thomas Sakmyster in his recent book *Hungary's Admiral on Horseback: Miklós Horthy, 1918-1944* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1994).

The most valuable chapters are those in which the contributors seem reluctant to draw parallels. The analysis of municipal policy in the two cities gives the reader a chance to reach his own conclusions. Here the excellent American contribution is preceded by an equally subtle examination of the interrelations between the adoption of liberal ideas by the city leaders and the rise of the Hungarian capital. Somewhat less perfect is Part II. While the essay on New York's Central Park is highly illuminating about changes in the use of public space, the equivalent chapter on Budapest suffers from lacking a clearly defined focus. Once it has been established that Városliget "was and has been the only urban public park of the city that can be compared to well-known urban gardens elsewhere" (89), the reader would expect a history of this "City Grove." Instead of such a systematic approach, the author devotes special attention to a working-class demonstration held in different parts of the city on May 23-24, 1912. The 1896 exhibition is neglected, although it was held in Városliget and is generally regarded as an unquestionably significant public event that made a lasting impact on the life of Budapest as a whole. As is wellknown, the first subway line and several important public buildings and monuments date from 1896 and continue to remind citizens and tourists of the Millennium Celebration which had radically changed the image of the Hungarian city.

Of particular interest is the next section entitled "Neighborhoods: Class and Ethnicity." On this occasion the methods followed by the two scholars are different: the inquiry into the residential distribution of immigrant groups in New York City is based on published sources, whereas the description of St. Imre Garden City relies on field research. In the Hungarian essay social history is happily combined with semiotic investigation. What I find not quite convincing is the theoretical underpinning in this interdisciplinary study. In my view it was not Roland Barthes but John Stuart Mill who "worked out the denotation - connotation antithesis," in *A System of Logic* (1843), translated into Hungarian in 1874-77; Peirce, Derrida, and Gadamer cannot be characterized as representing "a historical analyses of semiotics;" and it is an exaggeration to assert that "the historical disciplines - with the sole exception of ethnography - have made little use" of semiotics (175).

The last two sections are devoted to the cultural life of the two cities. While it is perfectly understandable that popular culture is taken very seriously by specialists of urban history - vaudeville, operetta, and journalism are given a substantial and thought-provoking treatment - it is somewhat surprising that only accidental references are made to musical activity in Budapest. The libretto of *The Gipsy Baron* is based on a text by the Hungarian novelist Jókai, but it was composed by an Austrian for his native Vienna, and even *The Merry Widow* was originally intended for a Viennese audience. Dohnányi, Bartók, and Kodály, on the other hand, lived and worked in Budapest in the early 20th century and were attached to such institutions as the Budapest Academy of Music, founded in 1875, or the Opera, opened in 1884. The first president of the Academy was Liszt and the Opera had directors as distinguished as Erkel, Mahler, and Nikisch.

Historians examine works of art as social documents; it is not their task to do justice to aesthetic value. Still, I find some of the conclusions reached by the authors of the last essay questionable. If we remember such paintings as *The Eastern Station at Night* (1902), by Tivadar Csontváry Kosztká or the cityscapes of János Vaszary (two major artists not even mentioned in the book), or the long line of novels written about Budapest, we may have doubts about the relevance of the statement that "the city of big tenements and brownstone schools, of the eclectic and ambitious public buildings, of millenary monuments and broad avenues, does not surface in the picture painted or stories told of Budapest" (317). *Midás király* (King Midas, 1891-92), a long novel by Zoltán Ambrus, opens with the naturalistic presentation of a tenement in the Budapest of the late 19th century; *Budapest* (1901) by Tamás Kóbor is about the life of prostitutes in a rapidly changing city; *A vörös postakocsi* (1913, published as *The Crimson Coach* in 1967) by Gyula Krúdy portrays the life of actresses; *A kristálynézők* (Crystal Gazers, 1913) by Kálmán Harsányi is about the work of Ödön Lechner, the most important Art Nouveau architect in Budapest; *A régi ház* (1913, published in New York as *The Old House* in 1922) by Cécile Tormay deals with the transformation of Biedermeier Pest-Buda into a capitalist metropolis; and *Anna Édes* (1926) by Dezső Kosztolányi tells us the story of a district of Buda in the politically crucial years 1919-22.

It is an interesting hypothesis that in Budapest aesthetic modernism was opposed to urbanism, but the validity of such a generalization may be limited if we do not forget that Hungarian artists could hardly paint skyscrapers. The social and political criticism formulated by some of the contributors is also somewhat vulnerable. It is easy to ridicule the Hungarian gentry; it is far less easy to explain why so many original artists and writers of the early 20th century came from that class. In view of the fact that several among these composed their best works in the interwar period, it is a simplification to maintain that "the 1919-1920 emigration completely broke the continuity of Hungarian culture" (322).

The reason for some of the weaknesses of the volume may be careless translation. The statement that "Ady created the unforgettable figure of Kornél Esti" (360) suggests that

inconsistencies are probably due to the translator's imperfect understanding of the original Hungarian text. *Kornél Esti* (1933), one of the landmarks in twentieth-century Hungarian literature, is a book of Kosztolányi. It is unlikely that the author of the essay in which this work is mentioned is responsible for such a misstatement. Another possibility is that the notes added to this chapter may have been supplied by some other person. In the text a book by Zsigmond Móricz is mentioned as "She Has Her Say" (364), whereas in the notes "As Asszony Közbeszól" [sic!] is given as the Hungarian title and the English version is "The Woman Interferes" (366). The original title is "Az asszony beleszól," so the correct translation is given in the essay and not in the notes. Other parts of the book have similar imperfections: the map of Budapest has some inaccuracies (37), the first permanent bridge of the city is mentioned under two different names (1, 3), and Hungarian words are misspelt and titles mistranslated in several parts of the book. Minor as these errors may seem, they occur quite frequently and may remind the reader that the distance between New York and Budapest is so wide that coordinated projects run the risk of being uneven. Yet the shortcomings of the editorial work should not make us forget that this collection includes several brilliant essays and the American-Hungarian project has helped break the ice for further experimentation with the comparative study of regions which have very different historical legacies.

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Armin A. Wallas (Hg.)
 Zeitschriften und Anthologien des Expressionismus in Österreich.
 Analytische Bibliographie und Register.
 Band 1: Analytische Bibliographie;
 Band 2: Register
 München/New Providence/London/Paris: K. G. Saur, 1995.

Expressionistische Periodika in Österreich: Bestandsaufnahme und Analyse

Alle Forscherinnen und Forscher, die sich mit dem literarischen Expressionismus bzw. mit der literarischen Avantgarde befaßt haben, wissen, daß Zeitschriften und Anthologien oft die wichtigsten Quellen sind. Die literarischen Texte in diesen Publikationen sind zumeist Erstveröffentlichungen. Darüber hinaus ist - schreibt Armin A. Wallas, der Herausgeber der neuesten, umfassenden Bibliographie in seiner Einleitung - „den expressionistischen und aküivistischen Periodika [...] ihr Manifest-Charakter gemeinsam: oft nur kurzlebig, in geringer Auflage verbreitet, artikulieren sie die kulturpolitischen Vorstellungen und ästhetischen Positionen ihrer Herausgeber und der um sie gescharten Gruppierungen. Anhand der Periodika und Anthologien läßt sich geradezu paradigmatisch die Rolle von Expressionismus und Aklivismus als ästhetische und ethische, nicht nur Literatur und Kunst, sondern auch Philosophie und Politik erfassende Erneuerungsbewegung untersuchen. Die Zeitschriften könnten als interdisziplinäre Gesamtkunstwerke interpretiert werden: sie enthalten nicht nur literarische Beiträge, sondern auch Graphik, Reproduktionen, Photos,