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CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN LITERATURE

Aletta Vid – Attila Bartis – Péter Bánáti – Ferenc Barnás – Éva Bánki – Éva Berniczky – László Bertók – Péter Bíró – Ádám Bodor – Kriszta Bódis – Centauri – András Cserna-Szabó – László Csiki – László Darvasi – György Dragomán – Virág Erdős – Péter Esterházy – Virág Erdős – Mari Falszik – Péter Farkas – László Garaczi – Krisztián Grecsó – Péter György – Jake Smiles – Tamás Jónás – Zsolt Karácsonyi – Péter Kántor – István Kemény – Tibor Keresztury – György Kerékgyártó – Imre Kertész – Noémi Kiss – András Ferenc Kovács – László Krasznahorkai – Miklós Latzkovits – Júlia Lángh – Sándor Lénárd – György Magos – Alíz Mosonyi – András Nagy – Zsolt Nagy Koppány – Ádám Nádasdy – Balázs Pap – Lajos Parti Nagy – Zsuzsa Rakovszky – Szilárd Rubin – Laura Spiegelmann – György Spiró – Anna Szabó T. – Balázs Szálinger – István Szilágyi – Ernő Szív – Zsuzsa Takács – Sándor Tar – János Térey – Krisztina Tóth – Dániel Varró – Gábor Vida – Tamás Vitray – Pál Závada

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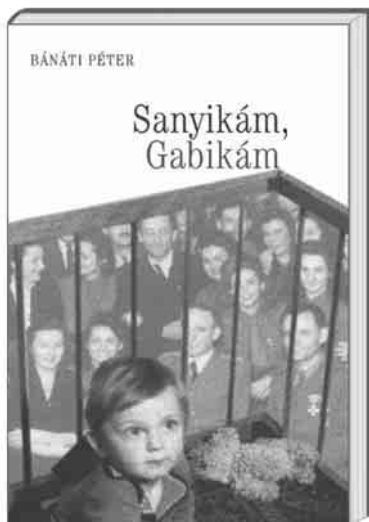
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Péter Bánáti: *Sanyikám, Gabikám* (*My Dear Alex and Gabe*);

published in 2002, 288 pages

“We find ourselves exposed to something for a while but soon feel ashamed of what we see.”
Élet és Irodalom

Péter Banati was born in 1947 and started writing in his fifties. Despite being something of a beginner this respect, critics have found his novel a mature, exciting, and powerful piece of work. The novel *Sanyikám, Gabikám* (*My Dear Alex and Gabe*) is an autobiographically inspired story.



The protagonist of Bánáti's novel is a lonely, old man looking back over his life, searching for its meaning as he considers its highs and lows with the wisdom of age. Spanning a period of over seventy years, he delves into memory, boosted by poverty and physical pressure. His loneliness is haunted by relatives, friends, lovers, strangers, tormenters, and the tormented. He has only one link to the world, his son, from whom he begs forgiveness although he is not willing to forgive.

This very strong novel presents the breakdown of a family in the 20th century. Confused confessions flow in quick succession demonstrating that the continuity of destiny, fear, and lack of love remain the same against a shifting historical setting.



Éva Bánki: *Esőváros (Raintown)*;

published in 2004, 301 pages

“The reader is enchanted by a wealth of astutely observed detail and capricious flights of imagination that fill the air.”
Élet és Irodalom

“This is a very purposefully crafted novel [...] a true masterpiece.”
Litera.hu

Éva Bánki was born in the Hungarian town of Nagykanizsa in 1966. Since graduating from the Arts faculty at Budapest's Eötvös University, she has become a university lecturer, teaching world literature, specialising in mediaeval poetry and Portuguese literature. Her poetry has appeared in various magazines, but this novel is her first published work followed by *Aranyhímzés* (*Golden Stitches*, 2005).

The first novel is based on the intertwined histories and fates of two well-to-do peasant families, the Tormas and the Bujdosós, who live a long island, known as the Csallóköz in Hungarian. It lies between the Danube and its tributary just east of Bratislava and once formed an integral part of Hungary until ceded to the new Czechoslovakian state under the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon following the First World War but is now part of independent Slovakia. Over successive generations, the two families remain closely linked by recurrent intermarriage, their respective members coming together time after time despite misfortunes and prohibitions. The scions of the Torma family show an abiding interest in technology, technical innovation, and “machines” in general, which provide the source of various accidents. The Bujdosó family, by contrast, are more strongly drawn to the spirit world, mysticism, and spiritualism, which leads to problems of a different kind. These two family passions are finally reconciled in the present day with the advent of the internet.

The Csallóköz setting of these stories provides a distinctive take on Hungarian history over the course of the 20th century, with characters either crossing borders to venture out into the wider world, or else being overtaken by border changes.

Sold to:
Slovakia – Kalligram



Éva Bánki: *Aranyhímzés (Golden Stitches);*

published in 2004, 301 pages

"Éva Bánki leaps from one novel to another like someone changing worlds but all the time remains herself: brilliant and entertaining."

Új Forrás

During the reign of King László, a Hungarian delegation journeys to glorious Venice where they hope to discover more about the mysterious past of Bishop Gellért and further facilitate his beatification. Their party is lead by the aged and sick figure of Sebe, a former pupil of Gellért, who succeeded his tutor as bishop. This holy, old man still holds memories of a time before Christianity when the land was ruled by pagan masters. The story of Sebe's journey to Venice is a detective story. The expression of this wise, old man reflects both the present and the past and it is through his eyes that we see the mosaic of Venice, petty deception, murder, and mysticism. He searches for the true legend of Gellért but it becomes increasingly clear that his mission will mean so much more.



Éva Bánki: *Magyar Dekameron (Hungarian Decameron);*

published in 2007, 365 pages

"Would I write differently if I were a man? I can't decide if women write differently or whether it is relevant to speak about women's literature. Perhaps we use the term to describe topics that no longer interest men."

Kultúra.hu

Rather like Boccaccio's heroes, Éva Bánki's characters are the sons of mediaeval Italy ravaged by the plague. They are not willing to settle for the refuge of a quiet, rural outpost where they might weather the storm but instead bleed across the borders of their homeland to a place where this dreaded disease does not even possess a name. They come to Hungary. These figures travel not only through space but also time, and by the time they arrive in the residential suite of the Budapest Hotel, they have left the last millennium behind them with all its love affairs, art, and atrocities. This string of short stories threads together outrageous tales from the "backlands" about great men and little women, the sensual to the senseless.



Éva Berniczky: *A tojásárus hosszúnapja (The Egg-Seller's Day of Atonement);*

published in 2004, 193 pages

"Her sentences show a distinctive power of language that forges a near-metaphorical link between the descriptions of events and surroundings... and the psychological states and fates of the protagonists."

Élet és Irodalom

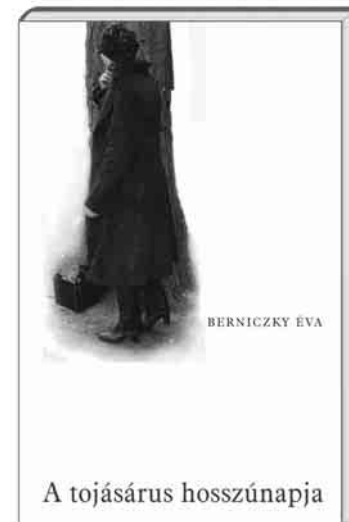
"In more than a few passages, this world bears a passing resemblance to the author's Trans-Carpathian homeland, but there is little doubt that post-Soviet Eastern Europe equally informs the setting of the stories."

Litera.hu

Éva Berniczky was born in 1962 into the ethnic Hungarian minority population of the small Trans-Carpathian (or Ruthenian) town of Beregszász, then part of the USSR but now in Ukraine, close to the border with Hungary. She has previously published two collections of children's stories and two short-story collections in her native land, but these were hard to obtain and thus attracted little attention in Hungary. This is her first volume to be published in Hungary.

The seventeen short stories making up this collection are all set in the Trans-Carpathian region of today. This is a territory that formed part of Hungary until the end of the First World War, when it passed into the sovereignty of the USSR until that too broke up in 1991. It is a traditionally impoverished and deserted part of the world, remote from any centre, and nowadays a devastatingly run-down, oppressively Eastern-European, ex-socialist land, inhabited by a mix of ethnic Hungarians, Russians and Ukrainians. Its desolate housing developments are polluted, rubbish-strewn, walls graffiti-scrawled, and windows smashed. Its rural "houses of culture" are freezing cold and shoddily appointed with battered furnishings.

The characters in these stories are have-nots, frequently luckless, penniless, and devoid of material ambitions, yet their desires and emotional world are just as complex and rich as those of their more fortunate fellow men. Among the characters we meet are an ex-steelworker turned mortuary attendant, a market stallholder, and an old woman waiting for her son.



Incidents are quotidian: a children's bicycle is stolen, a dress is somehow never finished, and a wife deceives her husband. Figures and stories alike are absurd symbols of hopelessness. With good reason, critics have compared the world that Éva Berniczky creates with that of Ádám Bodor.

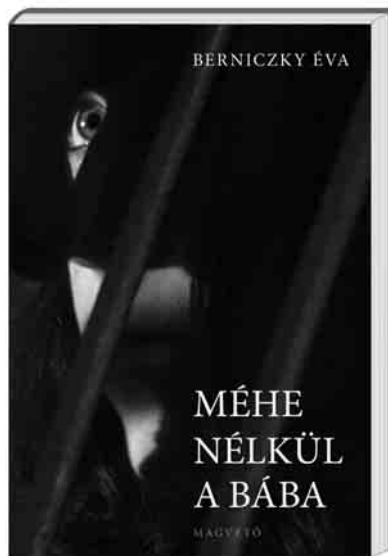
The sense of alienation and nightmarish atmosphere are intensified by the frequent resort in the texts to Russian words, or dialect words that the Trans-Carpathian Hungarian community has borrowed from that language, such as "samogon" (home-brewed spirits), "bulochka" (bread roll), "gastronom" (food store), "dregan" (rot-gut liquor), or "rodyina" (home). A helpful glossary of these words is provided at the back of the volume.

Éva Berniczky: *Méhe nélkül a bába* (*Midwife Bereft her Womb*);

published in 2007, 202 pages

"*Midwife Bereft her Womb* creates a style and a world all of its own. It's a great novel."
Alföld

Two women both of whom live in Transcarpathia and they have never met. One woman is mesmerised by Szvitelszki, the light-eyed book collector, and sets off after the other woman. She recreates the other woman from the fabric of her own diary who emerges from her cocoon like a butterfly that flutters away leaving her love behind and nothing more than a memory. And another thing, a question: whose life is the first woman living who searches for secrets and uncovers one after the other? Éva Berniczky's magical novel captures the essence of the land of her birth with its past and present, scent and flavour, sorrow and joy.



Kriszta Bódis: *Kemény vaj* (*Hard as Butter*);

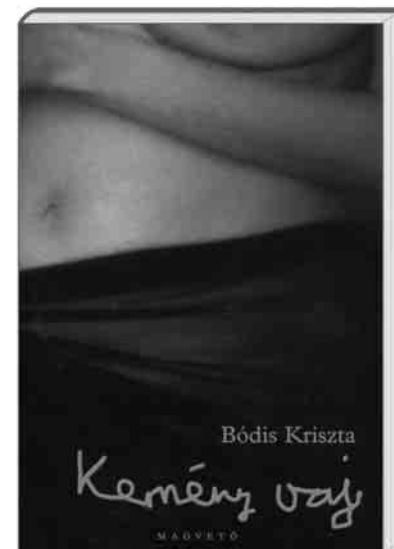
published in 2003, 372 pages

"*To my mind, this is a masterpiece, going beyond a striving for authenticity with its sociographic scene-setting and psychologically well-limned characters.*"

Litera.hu

Born in Budapest in 1967, Kriszta Bódis studied psychology and aesthetics at Eötvös University. As well as working as a documentary filmmaker, she writes poetry, her first volume of which appeared in 2002 under the title *Mind csak idegenyebb egy* (*All Just Stranger Like That*). This is her second novel.

This is a novel about suffering, about being placed at the mercy of others, about physical and intellectual privation; a novel that enters the world of Hungary's Roma (Gypsy) community and broaches the problem of prostitution, portraying sexuality in its full brutality. Shining out above all are its attention to sociological and psychological accuracy and a willingness to deal with legal and political issues of public concern. The main protagonist and narrator is a Gypsy girl who comes from the shanty slum of an industrial city. She has a bad stutter, the legacy of a childhood trauma, but she is a voracious reader and jots her thoughts down in notebooks. For all the grammatical errors, she gives a subtle and authentic account of her life. To flee starvation, she moves to the capital, where a relative puts her to work as a street girl. At 14, she bears a child, who is taken from her, and then she ends up in prison for some offence and is released only after a year and a half, although the penalty should not exceed 20 or 30 days. A foreign priest tries to help her but to no avail, as she returns, pregnant again, to her former pimp, and it is implicit at the end of the novel that she will return to the streets. The novel probes a specific Hungarian manifestation of the general phenomenon of destitution with inserted passages that might almost sit in a sociographic study, analysing the hopelessness of the plight of Hungary's Gypsies and the complex predicament of prostitution, including the responsibility for this state of affairs borne by the country's politicians, media, legislation, courts and, law-enforcement agencies.



György Dragomán: *A fehér király (The White King)*;

published in 2005, 303 pages

"He treats his subject in a truly exuberant, shocking work of consistently high standard."

Népszabadság

György Dragomán was born in the Transylvanian city of Marosvásárhely (Targu Mures, Romania) in 1973, but moved to Hungary with his family in 1988.

Like his first novel, *A pusztítás könyve (The Book of Destruction)* – 2002, the second conjures up a world of Eastern-European dictatorships, yet analyses the general human condition and how it is possible for us to survive, indeed carry on hoping, in even the most dreadful circumstances, with people whose lives have been disfigured by political brutality.

The White King is narrated by an eleven-year-old boy. For political reasons, his father is taken off to a labour camp in the Danube Delta, leaving the boy with his mother. At first, of course, the child is not aware, and cannot understand, what exactly has happened, even though he has seen with own eyes his father being carted off by his "colleagues", as they call themselves. Gradually, however, a true picture begins to emerge and he grasps the essence of the tragic situation that lies behind the silences and lies. The story spans a single year, the book ending with the father being allowed out to attend his own father's funeral, when he is able to meet his son, though we do not find out what happens after that.

The setting is Romania of the 1980s. It is of particular interest that events are seen from the viewpoint of a child, which means that the tragic developments often leave more of an impression of strangeness, oddity, and even intrigue. The boy somehow always manages to find mischievous excitement in the wasteland that surrounds him.

The language of the book is cleverly constructed according to the vernacular and ways of thinking that children adopt, allowing the reader to get closer to the nature of a world that the boy does not fully understand and yet is able to map perfectly in terms of his own logic and imagination.



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 Denmark – Borgen
 Greece – Livanis
 Israel – Modan
 China – Eurasian

Péter Farkas: *Nyolc perc (Eight Minutes)*;

published in 2007, 110 pages

"Péter Farkas's novel is a parable held constantly at the point of culmination. It is a "studio piece", thorough and elaborate in its wording and composition down to the very last syllable. It moves into an infinite void owing to the inevitable, if unpronounced, closeness of death accompanied by the apparent contingency of life itself. Farkas begins the story where Beckett finished it. Not that there is more hope in the voice he brings than there was in Beckett's. Only, perhaps, more love. This is what makes the difference. We have here a book of immense significance."

Tibor Babiczky, Magyar Narancs

"Eight Minutes is a work of lyrical prose, a graveyard poem, and an X-ray. The archetypal imagery of Philemon and Baucis, or the elderly in Ovidius's Transformations, are not only evoked, but made manifest in the reader, be that a conscious, or an unconscious process."

Lajos Jánossy, Litera

Péter Farkas was born in Budapest in 1955. He was actively involved with the Hungarian democratic opposition from the early 1970s and the editor of a volume of samizdat writings that appeared in 1979. He left Hungary for West Germany in 1982 for political reasons where he now lives in Cologne. He has nonetheless maintained his friendships with the generation of Hungarian writers who came to prominence beginning in the early 1980s, including Gábor Németh. Despite the links, Farkas's prose style is distinct from theirs: putting less emphasis on irony, he instead builds on the unfolding of emotions and on catharsis. Farkas's first book, which he called a "digest of selected autobiographical themes", won the Bródy Prize as the best first novel in the year of its publication. At that time, he was already working on a grand hypertext venture, a novel-essay titled *Gólem (Hyperperiodical Approaches)*, whose open, "three-dimensional prose" is woven into an organic whole with multiple layers of quotations and passages of self-reflection and contemplation, most of which were based on his perception of texts found on the internet. The book *In Instalments – A Way Out of Gólem*, published in 2004, presents a "linear" selection of these writings.

The novel *Eight Minutes*, published in 2007, is Péter Farkas's most mature work to date. The "net-weaving" approach so characteristic of the author is immediately recognisable: he does not tell a linear story proceeding from a beginning to an end, but instead chooses to unfold a singular state of mind from several, shorter descriptions that strikingly complement one another in circular escalation. The disparate pieces of this intricately woven novel come together almost invisibly as an organic whole. The story takes its reader into a world of which few have any experience and the sheer existence of which most of us would choose to deny even if it stared us in the face: old age. Farkas depicts this with a rare sensibility and a conscious avoidance of sentimentalism. The two protagonists are an elderly couple, a man and a woman, who wish to break their binds with the outside world, the world where



human beings interact and breathe. Perhaps they would not be able to maintain contact with this world even if they wanted to, as their lives seem to have come to an end. Gradually, they peel themselves away from its fabric, holding on only to the thread that binds them together beyond language and beyond memories, as they find each other again and again in everyday routine. The metaphor of the title's "eight minutes" stands for their current state, that is beyond hope and hopelessness: if the sun were to explode, it would take us a whole eight minutes to realise. Unrelenting and poetic, *Eight Minutes* is a powerful challenge to everyday sensibilities, and yet one that touches the soul.

Sold to:

Germany – Luchterhand
The Czech Republic – Dybbuk

Péter Farkas: *Törlesztés (In Instalments);*

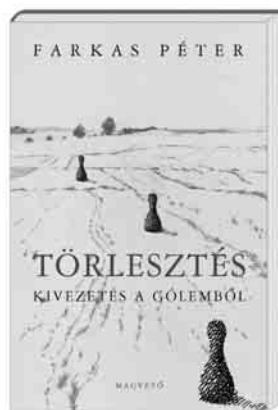
published in 2004, 256 pages

"... the reader is presented with the freshness of experimentation, with the enigmatic thrill of discovery, with a variable board game."

Élet és Irodalom

Everyone in this book is taking a walk, or planning to take a walk, with seemingly no purpose at all. At the same time, you can feel that there is something around these walks. They tell us about something, though they are wordless. What are these wordless walks about? Perhaps they are about exploration, or about returning home. Or maybe they reflect the senselessness of our world. All the characters know that they can never reach their goal but they also know that they have no other choice than to keep trying to reach what they cannot. They are forced to stay on the road because they have to settle their debts. Mysteriously, all of them get to the same point each and every time. Péter Farkas presents no difference between dream and reality. All that happens belongs to the past.

In Instalments is the lead out of the *Golem* hypertext. *Golem* has been written continuously and publicly on the internet since February 1997. You can reach it at: www.interment.de/golem/index.htm.



András Forgách: *Zehuze (Zehuze);*

published in 2007, 644 pages

"The material, as it stands, is still remarkably rich. Though a little hard-going at first, this is a book you can get lost in: after the first careful reading, you are ready to make the journey again from beginning to end."

Péter Dérczy, Élet és Irodalom

"It's a picture of inevitable failure in spite of persistent optimism. At once a chronicle of individual suffering and the heroism of eulogy. All told, the book does validate the protagonist's opinion that it would take nothing less than a thousand-page novel to express all these things. And the pieces came together."

Tamás József Reményi, Népszabadság

"András Forgách has created a real Yiddish mama who has an opinion about everything, from world politics to dustballs, but still worries most of all about her family, her grandchildren, trying from a distance of thousands of miles to keep them all together and protect them; in short, offering advice on just about everything possible in letter form."

Péter Dérczy, Élet és Irodalom

András Forgách was born in 1952 in Budapest. He studied history and philosophy at Eötvös University in Budapest and worked in theatre between 1976-1984 and 1995-1997. He is now a freelance writer, playwright, translator, and author of three novels. Awards include: 1992 Critics' Prize, 2000 Szep Ernő Prize, 2006 Jozsef Attila Prize.

Zehuze is a Hebrew word that means roughly that's how it is, c'est la vie, like it or lump it. In this hefty epistolary novel a woman, from middle age onwards, writes regular letters to one of her two daughters. The woman was born in Hungary and during the dying days of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, in 1917-18, settled in what was then Palestine. This daughter, who was born in 1922, decided to move the other way, settling in Hungary in 1947. The slowly ageing mother, who in time becomes a grandmother, is not named but is the wife of Henrik Apfelbaum, a literary translator from German (e.g. the works of Thomas Mann) to Hebrew, and keeps the letter-writing going right up to 1976. A very distinctive family saga unfolds from the letters, with the mother, who happens to be a card-carrying Communist of the more intellectual variety, expressing an opinion about virtually every major event or issue that crowds in on her, including, for instance, the rights of Arabs in the various Arab-Israeli conflicts. The daughter—who is also never referred to or addressed by her own name, merely as Jakirati, the Hebrew for darling, dearest—becomes bogged down in Hungary with her husband and, eventually, four children. The very last sentence of the novel is unfinished, an indication of the mother's death. The spelling and vocabulary of the letters that she has written over the years are now testaments to a vanished world. Mothers like her no longer exist.



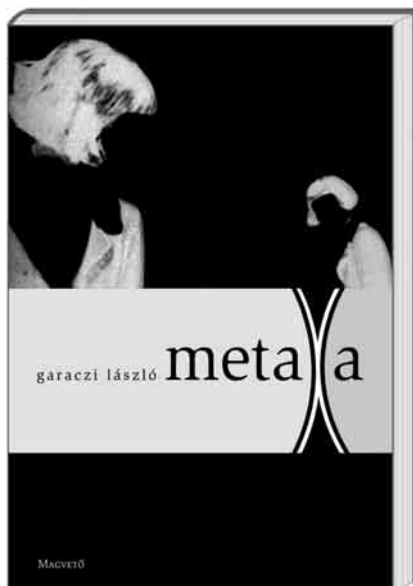
László Garaczi: *MetaXa – Novel*,

published in 2006, in 164 pages

László Garaczi was born in Budapest in 1956. He graduated from Eger University in 1981 and gained an MA in Philosophy at Eötvös University in 1988. He is a very popular author and has received many accolades for his work. (1985 – Mórícz Zsigmond Grant, 1987-1988 – Soros Grant, 1989 – Prize for Literature of the Future, 1990 – H. C. Kaser Prize, Italy, 1991 – Füst Milán Prize, 1993 – IRAT Prize, 1994 – Alföld Prize, 1994 – Déry Prize, 1996 – DAAD Prize, 1998 – Krúdy Gyula Prize, 2001 – József Attila Prize, 2001 – Szép Ernő Prize, 2002 – Márai Sándor Prize.)

One sentence, two women, and the man (nearly) dies

The protagonist of *MetaXa* is being crushed between two women. He is an artistic type, who cannot find his place in the world of sensibility. He's fed up and destined to be damned. Meanwhile, Garaczi provides the reader with a view of the eternal experience of human foolishness that shapes all our lives. The reader develops as the plot progresses and although you may become no wiser, the plasticity and perfection of his prose will get the better of you in the end. The year 2000 saw *MetaXa* win shared first prize in an online literature contest run by Origo and Magvető. However, the author had the feeling there was something to add to the work before sending it to press which he did, the result being pure Garaczi: humour, with playful language, giving an exact and sometimes cruel vision of reality and spirituality.



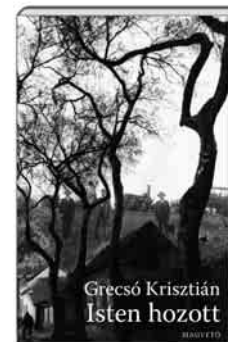
Krisztián Grecsó: *Isten hozott (Long Time No See)*;

published in 2005, 319 pages

“His wandering motifs and marvellous depiction, cast in his own personal ‘Grecsó idiom’, with everyday miracles familiar from the works of magic realist authors, propel the author to the forefront of younger fiction writers in Hungary.”
Népszabadság

Grecsó's first volume of extended fiction is a coming-of-age novel; a singular detective story which brings happenings in a provincial village to life.

An orphan, Gergely has to leave the village as a young boy to pursue his studies, marking the break-up of the Ede Klein Club. He returns as an adult to explore his roots and starts to ask questions about his past and village history. He suspects that Ede Klein, the man after whom the children's club is named and who was expelled from the village in 1948, may have been his father, although in the end that does not prove to be the case. However, a blood libel case actually did occur in Szegvár in 1948 resulting in the expulsion of one of its residents. The Klein diaries occupy an important role in the village, written to Aunt Panni (who may be Gergely's mother), and about which no one knows anything for certain although this doesn't stop them sharing their own personal interpretations.



Mystical matters play a major role in the novel with threads of superstition and local lore weaving their way through its fabric, the roots of which stem back to an unusual religiosity, pagan belief, and frequent drunkenness. Miracles and incredible events are everyday occurrences: a man who has been shown to be medically sterile fathers three children, with one whom looks suspiciously like his grandfather. A firecracker goes off in Hildi's mouth, but Ignác falls in love with the disfigured girl and takes her as his wife. Masses of marvellous subsidiary stories about the strange residents of the village, their lives both tragic and comic, provide the reader with an insight into the realities of rural Hungarian society.

One particular strength of the novel is the stimulating erotic feel with which the stories of adolescence are embellished. The reader also gains an unusual perspective on the fate of Hungary's provincial Jewish community when many were forced to leave their native land despite having only just returned from Hitler's death camps. Gergely sees certain similarities to his own journey and this drives him to discover all he can about his birth. With its lively, compelling style, the novel makes marvellous use of the vernacular. Few novels stand the test of having favourite scenes recalled over and over again, but this is one such novel. Its characters and descriptions are very much alive, creating a tangible image of village life.

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Turkey – Acik Deftter

Krisztián Grecsó: *Pletykaanyu (Ma Tittle-Tattle);*

published in 2008, 194 pages

"Signs of Mórcaz, Hrabal, Esterházy, Darvasi, Parti Nagy, and Závada can be spotted in the author's first published prose. This is natural enough, the difference is that Krisztián Grecsó has managed to create a worldview and language that is uniquely his own."

Jelenkor

The stories in *Mamma Mouthful* are set in the unruly world of the Hungarian Lowlands but in a very modern milieu – no sign of kitsch parody or false romance. However, a past steeped in tradition still casts a shadow across the present, and however fresh the fruit, its roots burrow deep into the way things have always been. These twelve short stories are loosely linked as all the characters inhabit a closed community where everybody knows everybody else and like nothing more than to badmouth one dear neighbour to the next. Their rich and raucous humour lacks all trace of pathos. To them, "townie tolerance" is not only hypocritical, it's inconceivable. They laugh at themselves, each other, and the provincial world in which they live. Their laughter has the power to liberate rather like a Kusturica film: an ability to laugh provides a strategy for survival.



Krisztián Grecsó: *Tánciskola (Dance School);*

published in 2008, 304 pages

"As you finish the last pages of Dance School, prepare to bid farewell to one of the most significant novels of recent years."

Népszabadság

The *Dance School* is not a concrete place where the characters of Krisztián Grecsó's new novel choose to tango. The *Dance School* is not a real but more of a space, a generation, a world a mystery. It is infused with the desire for wonder and it is this desire, this will, which provides the only tool to preserve our dignity. Grecsó conjures up a fairytale world of country life in which everything is impossibly real. A young lawyer finds himself in an unfamiliar town where he is forced to confront temptation, the sublime, the ridiculous, the wonder of women, and the horror of death. He doesn't know whether the devil is toying with him or the endless struggle of everyday life has pushed him to the limit. Chance love affairs and a selection of exotic drugs provided by his uncle make everything too confusing to handle. He may be his uncle's most devoted fan but it becomes increasingly clear that he is set on the wrong track.



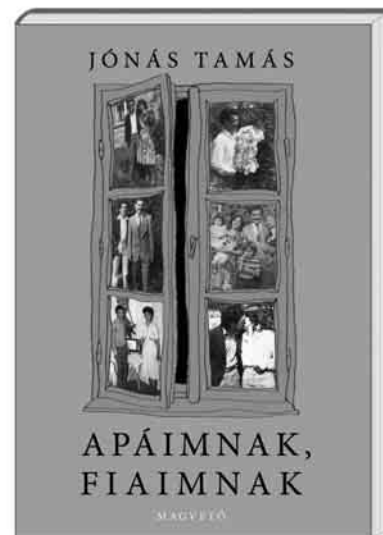
Tamás Jónás: *Apáimnak, fiaimnak (To My Fathers and Sons);*

published in 2005, 232 pages

"These short stories in To My Fathers and Sons pretend to have been written in a period of pain when you feel like the universe has fallen apart. If he doesn't give up there, he will add something to the world, presenting exquisite short stories written in perfect sentences about pain. Lovely."

Magyar Nemzet

Tamás Jónás was born in 1973 in Hungary. He is a poet, writer, journalist on *Amaro Drom*, and host of Radio C, the Hungarian Roma radio channel. After graduation, he studied literature, philosophy and information technology in several universities. Péter Esterházy recommended him for the Herder Prize in 2002, which he won. He has published two books of poetry: *Bentlakás (Lodging)* in 1999 and *Ő (She)* in 2002. His latest book (*Apáimnak, Fiaimnak – To My Fathers and Sons*) is a collection of ten short stories.



The passions and deaths of Jónás's characters all appear to take place the next village, next street, next door. In other words, these stories can happen anywhere and anytime. They are exactly the kind of stories that we prefer not to hear in order to keep our peace of mind. We do wrong. Jónás's heroes are little boys, growing up on loveless streets, miserable and unlikely to survive. Those who do, the big boys, manage to deny God and mankind, but still remain hopelessly poor, locked into a daily fight for survival. Their sin: thriving instead of happiness. This book is real life in all its gruesome glory, transforming into literature through the writer's eyes. Read these stories and you will see such darkness and depth you cannot hope to escape with your innocence intact.

Noémi Kiss: *Trans (Trance);*

published in 2006, 166 pages

"The romantic, visionary elements of Hoffman emerge through a modern world drawn with the precision of a realist."
Szépirodalmi Figyelő

Woman as flesh, woman as heart, woman as a journey, transcending borders, gender and relationships. *Trance* is an extraordinarily colourful collection of short stories reflecting many points of view. We are presented with the situation faced by Eastern European immigrants in the West contrasted with the life of those at home. Kiss describes contemporary European issues with a language that is both fresh and precise. Her experience and description, her critical eye, her plastic depiction, and a voice that can deal with the obscene to the finer points of psychological interpretation, make Kiss Noémi one of the most promising young talents of contemporary Hungarian literature.



Sold to:
Germany – Matthes & Seitz
Serbia - Agora

György Kerékgyártó: *Hegyi szakaszok szobakerékpáron (Off-Road Riding on an Exercise Bike);*

published in 2005, 216 pages

"Kerekgyártó follows his characters step for step as they navigate the labyrinth of the story, [...] with a twist at every turn."
Könyvhét

György Kerékgyártó was born in Budapest in 1970. He writes short stories, works in theatre, and is currently studying theology.

György Kerékgyártó's prose is reminiscent of the greatest South-American writers with themes that include the hazardousness of existence, the futility of things considered important, and the possibilities presented in obscure

detail. He walks a high wire between the miraculous and the everyday, without losing his balance for a single second. Captain Morgan is expecting the thousandth letter from a woman in a raincoat, but the letter reaches the island too late. Father Guido reveals the fifth argument against God not more than an hour before mass as he sits chatting with angels swigging Coca-Cola, huddled around the father's stove. And then there is Captain Wheeler, who faces mortal fear a day after his own death. The moral behind these eccentric episodes is that however painful and hopeless a situation may be, God is smiling down on us wherever we are.



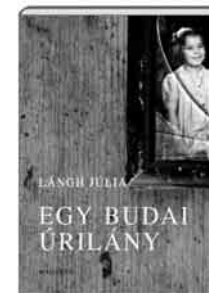
Júlia Lángh: *Egy budai úrilány (A Lady of Buda);*

published in 2003, 260 pages

"The fourth edition of A Lady of Buda obviously proves that readers can identify with the story and its setting."
Libri.hu

Júlia Lángh was born in 1942 in Budapest. She has worked as a teacher, writer, translator, social worker, and reporter. She lived in Paris from 1977 and worked at Radio Free Europe from 1984 until its eventual closure. She left Europe and travelled to Africa for a year, where she worked as a kindergarten teacher before returning to Chad in 2001, where she taught radio-journalism to young people. Her first two books (*Közel afrikához, Near to Africa*, 1996 and *Vissza Afrikába, Back to Africa*, 2002) are about her African experiences. Her latest book (*Egy budai úrilány, A Lady of Buda*, 2003) is also a memoir. Júlia Lángh lives in Hungary.

This book relates the author's memories of her childhood between 1945 and 1960. Júlia Lángh's parents attempted to raise her as a lady of Buda in an age when being a lady was not an advantage at all, in fact it was quite dangerous. The outside world leaks into the life of this middleclass, Christian family who suffer the symptoms of the age: fear of doorbell ringing, an aunt sent to prison for hiding gold jewellery, an uncle who loses faith in communism, the best china sold to mortgage the house, and ceremonial Sunday suppers. Posters and slogans on the streets with a puppet show opposite the headquarters of the feared State Security Department, where performers prepare and the narrator discovers open speech and hears about politics and love for the very first time.

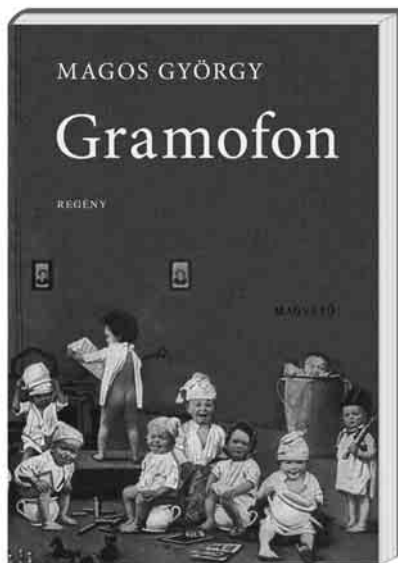


György Magos: *Gramofon (Gramophone);*

published in 2008, 370 pages

"Life is a great and glorious load of nothing..."

Tango and socialist anthems, crocheted covers and dictatorships, cheap spirits and mass murders, the joy of life and the never-ending pain of survival – György Magos's family tale is set in twentieth-century Hungary. He writes with empathic humour and yet still preserves the power to disturb the reader. A family's past and the story of those who crossed its path unfold in front of us like a nostalgic evening spent in the company of a storyteller who has seen it all. The characters of this novel find themselves pushed and prodded by a concoction of sin, love, desire, and failure all buried deep in the past, set to a background of old songs with lyrics so banal and yet so descriptive of our shared fate.



András Nagy: *A Bang-Jensen ügy (The Bang-Jensen Case);*

published in 2005, 400 pages

One of the most important historical events of the Cold War was the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, one of the most interesting consequences of which was the UN's efforts to handle the tragic situation. In my work, I would like to understand what happened (and what did not happen) during the revolution and in the years that followed, from October 1956 up to 1962, while the "Hungarian case" remained on the UN agenda.

The events on the streets of Budapest in October 1956, followed by the reactions in the meeting halls of the UN, were all of enormous importance. It soon became evident that the only hope for the success of the Hungarian Revolution would be the involvement of the international organisation (or so thought the revolutionary government). Recently declassified documents show progress, how the Hungarian leaders understood what should be done for the country, and what were the obstacles faced. For many Hungarians, both outside and inside the country, the Danish diplomat, Povl Bang-Jensen (the deputy secretary of the Special Committee) was a very important participant in the investigation. His support for the revolutionaries as well as his fight against the controversies in the handling of the "Hungarian case" expressed both the expectations and the frustrations of the nation. When his conflicts involved the Special Committee and, later the UN itself (being also fired from the UN), his criticism was shared by many members of the Hungarian émigré community. When, in 1959, he was found dead in Long Island, the revolutionaries believed that he was yet another victim of the fight for freedom. The recently discovered archival materials, as well as a collection of interviews and documentation, shed new light on this tragedy.



Sold to:

Italy – Baldini Castoldi Dalai

Balázs Pap: *Sikergyánú, Realitás [Kölcsey] Feri (Blockbuster, Reality, Franky [Kölcsey]);*

published in 2005, 280 pages

“...what materialises here it is not the alienated chaotic delirious madness of an arts student that turns into a self-destructive freak but the schizophrenia between reality and scholarly existence.”

Magyar Hírlap

Balázs Pap was born in the Hungarian town of Szeged in 1975. He currently lectures in Hungarian and Comparative Literature at University of Pécs. This is his first book.

Two young Englishmen are the protagonists, who for some odd reason start studying poetry. This is not enough for them: they study the great Hungarian poet of national calamity, Ferenc Kölcsey; and stranger still, they plan to canonise the poet in Anglo-Saxon literature. Anyway, Kölcsey's philosophy, and calamity as “deus ex machine” are present throughout the novel as a source of humour. These sources prove to be very prolific, making the novel a post-modern picaresque. We follow our heroes through adventures, locations (from London through Paris to the Amazon), and the two young men improve themselves, as much as it is necessary. However, the main point is adventure and exploration both in terms of plot and language. The protagonists plan their lives even their sexual lives with prosodic regularity. Such regularity creates order in the plot, enlightens their stumbling, and regulates their oblivious distraction. The novel educates as it entertains and entertains as it educates. It is impertinent, cheeky, but fully literate.



(Pseudoname:) Centauri: *Kék angyal (Blue Angel);*

published in 2008, 342 pages

“Centauri knows that language is the subject of literature; an author can only imagine a world if he invents the language with which to describe it.”

Litera

Centauri is a mysterious author – all we know of him is that he has chosen to place this name between himself and the wider world and so sought total invisibility. This collection of short stories lavishes the reader with exotic and bizarre tales of a monk who lives at the bottom of a well, a mysterious fishing expedition, the ruination of an arctic adventure, and an apocryphal Flaubert legend. Science-fiction, the magical tales of Borges, Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym, and E. T. A. Hoffman's magical hallucinations – a cacophony of sound and style, which Centauri moulds in his own form to create a collection of short stories that merge as one.



Szilárd Rubin: *Csirkejáték (Chickenplay);*

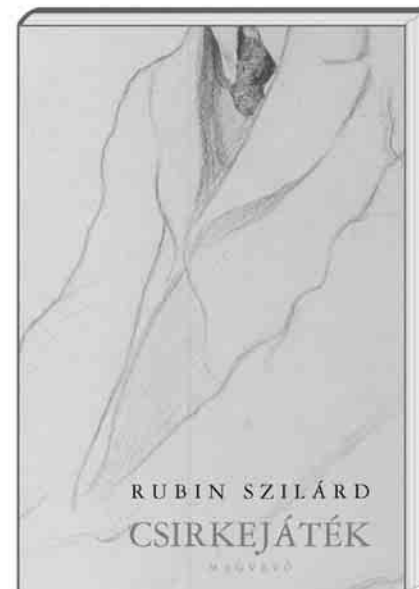
published in 2004, 214 pages

“It is really rare to read such a detailed examination of self-ugliness in Hungarian with a lack of sentimentalism and the cold fire of dispassionate curiosity. It is a naked, pagan look, not objective but straight and outright. Rare indeed. Calmness. Calmness after defeat, or even in shame; calmness in hysteria: you get what you got. It's the calmness that makes this book unique; a meteor, a Martian – but still.”

Péter Esterházy

Two people, two lives – their fate. Fate that welds these two people, these two romances, into the man's, the narrator's misery. Szilárd Rubin's novel depicts the days of a deep and suffering love. It was first published in 1963, but has been republished several times since. Its importance in Hungarian literature is compared to Géza Otlík's novel *School on the Frontier (Iskola a határon)*. It provides fantastic reading for those who are sensitive to passion and will also fascinate those interested in language. The protagonist presents the greatest burden to himself throughout. This frantic man is opened up in front of us as his teenage romance reaches the final, devastating break-up. In his letter to the author, Miklós Szentkuthy called *Chickenplay* a modern *Werther*, while Péter Esterházy summarised it as “unique”, “meteor”, “Martian”.

Sold to:
Germany – Rowohlt



György Spiró: *Az Ikszek (The X-es)*;

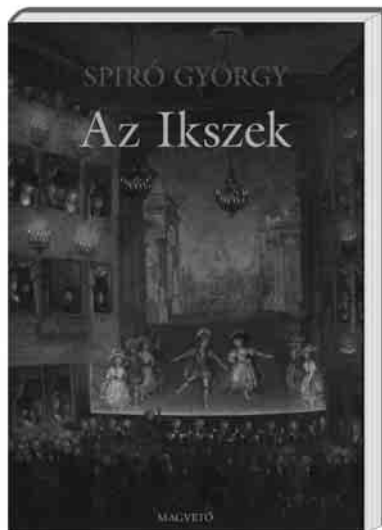
published in 2007, 542 pages

"Every line in this novel proves the Shakespearean proposition that all the world is a stage. Spiró is a born storyteller and guides the reader through this period of Polish history with vision and humour."

Ágnes Széchenyi

György Spiró was born in Budapest in 1946. As a writer, he is the author of 22 books, which include volumes of short stories, novels, plays, and essays as well as monographs about the Croatian playwright Miroslav Krleža (1981), the history of Central- and Eastern-European drama (1996), and multiple roles in Shakespeare (1997). His own plays have been collected in the volumes *Csirkefej (Chickenhead)*, 1987) and *Mohózat (Slapstick)*, 1997). His fiction includes the early *Kerengő (Cloister)*, 1974) and the major novels *Az Ikszek (X-es)*, 1981), *A jövevény (The Comeling)*, 1990), and *Jégmadár (The Kingfisher)*, 2001)

First published in 1981, Spiró's historical novel is set in a fractured Poland at the end of the 18th century. The majority of the Polish nobility are collaborating with either their German or Russian occupiers and groups of intellectuals hatch plans of revolution while the man on the street is struggling to survive. It is amid all of this that the theatre director Osiniński battles to keep his company in one piece but is challenged in his post by the return of a legendary actor long past his prime. He is driven by a single goal: popularity. Despite early acclaim, critical articles begin to appear that slate the acting legend, signed simply with "x-es". There is obviously someone out there set on ruining him and the trail leads to the very top...



György Spiró: *Fogság (Captivity)*;

published in 2005, 770 pages

"Ethically as well as historically, this a parable of grand proportions [...] Captivity can get its feet under any literary table you care to mention..."

Élet és Irodalom

"This book is a major landmark of the year."

Népszabadság

His fourth major novel has become the literary sensation of 2005 in Hungary. As with his previous ventures, this too deals with the relation of the individual to history. Set in the first century after the birth of Jesus Christ, the new novel plays out in the Roman Empire when Christianity was first emerging as a religion. It is not concerned with the early Christians as such, but with the political and intellectual climate that was prevalent in the 1st century, where Christianity, in the eyes of the time, was merely a minor sect.

Captivity is an adventure story. The hero, Uri (Gaius Theodorus), is a Jew who is born and grows up in Rome's Jewish community. He is a puny, unprepossessing, short-sighted, young man, whom his father, in return for risking his entire tiny fortune as a loan to a high imperial official, gets instated as a member of the delegation that takes the ritual tax for the Jewish community of Rome to Jerusalem every year. Travelling through the eastern half of the Roman Empire, the first great global economy in history, Uri spends time in Judea and Alexandria before finally making his way back to Italy.

Along the way, he is imprisoned by Herod's officials for a week in Jerusalem (being joined by two thieves and, it would seem, Jesus himself shortly before their crucifixion) before dining with Pontius Pilate. He is then forced to work among peasants in the Judean countryside before making his way to Alexandria in Egypt. There, he wins a place for three years at the city's elite grammar school, indulges in the pleasures provided by the local prostitutes, and lives through a pogrom with the erection of the first ghetto in history. Uri returns to Rome to find his father has died during his absence and that he is now obliged to take on repayment of the money his father borrowed. He works first as secretary to some of the richest Jewish dignitaries and later as a labourer on a palace for the Emperor Nero, before he is unjustly labelled as being a Nazarene and exiled from his birthplace as a penniless outlaw. Although he eventually acquires a family, he dies a lonely, neglected figure in wretched circumstances. The very last sentence of the book runs: *"I still want to live, he thought to himself, and was lost in wonder."* He therefore leads an exciting, varied, and truly adventure-packed life, which offers him the opportunity to become versed in a dozen or more very different occupations. During the course of events, he transforms himself into a true intellectual of his time, reading widely, learning a clutch of languages, acquiring first-hand knowledge of a thousand and one things, and honing a first-class intellect. Despite finding himself in peril on several occasions, but blessed with luck, he ultimately fails to make anything of his life.

This comes as no surprise, given everything that has happened during Uri's life. In the light of his truly historical exploits, he gains the ability to hold an independent view of things, transcending his immediate political

and religious surroundings. He comes to realise that it is better to fade into the background and hide in order to survive but remains sufficiently astute to clearly see what games are being played. Though at one stage in his life he becomes an intimate of many leading figures in Roman and Jewish life, he never really belongs. He picks up on the intellectual movements of the day and yet remains aloof from them. This makes him a classic novel hero, his story a palimpsest for the entire world in which he lives.

Sold to:

Italy – Ponte alle Grazie
Russia - Inostranka

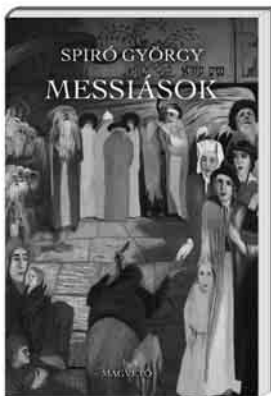


György Spiró: *Messiasok (Messiahs);*

published in 2007, 646 pages

“A grandiose depiction of the age that carries the reader from Jerusalem to London, meeting the Pope, rabbis, bankers, and beggars along the way, providing a glimpse into the world created by a so-called messiah and the ensuing scandal.”

Könyves Blog



A mysterious figure appeared in the Polish émigré community of Paris in the 1840s. He came from Vilna, established a religious sect and claimed to be the Lord. He had a great influence on this circle of Polish intellectuals who had fled their homeland after the revolt of 1830-31, including such literary greats as Mickiewicz and Słowacki. Followers of the *Lord's Cause* put all their efforts into spreading the word and although they numbered no more than sixty in total, they still managed to cause an incredible stir. They not only attempted to convert the Pope but even set their sights on the Jewry as well as making a military contribution to the revolution in 1848–1849.

This fascinating period of European history was written by life but is now retold by the author in his gripping novel. György Spiró is typically thorough in his depiction of the eternal human motifs that weave through religious communities. He paints a picture of an era in which

his characters never once suspected that the age of false messiahs, cults and religious renegades had arrived and they were now in the age of national pride and mass revolt. The characters in *Messiahs* may live in 19th-century Paris but Spiró's skill allows us to join them as their contemporaries.

Géza Szócs: *Limpopó (Limpopo);*

published in 2007, 246 pages

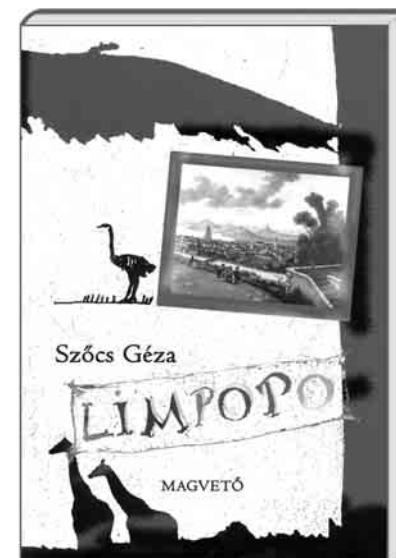
“The ostriches learn to interpret language in all its forms. The first world they try to eradicate is ‘love’ and according to Limpopo, ‘hope’, ‘faith’, and ‘freedom’ are soon to follow. Is this how we really work?”

Új Könyvpiac

Géza Szócs was born in Marosvásárhely (Targu Mures, Romania) in 1953. Received a teacher's diploma in Hungarian and Russian at the Transylvanian University of Kolozsvár.

From 1976 he was one of the editors of the newspaper Igazság (Truth) in Kolozsvár; the student's journal Echinox; and literary programme manager at the same time. 1979-80 received Herder Grant; and that time he was an editor of the samizdat journal Ellenpontok (Counterpoints). He left Romania in 1986, and moved to Switzerland because of constant political persecution. Between 1989 and 1990 he was the leader of the Budapest office of Radio Free Europe. After the Revolution in 1990, he returned to Transylvania; became a member of the Senate, and he was the Secretary General of the party RMDSZ (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania). He is living in Budapest.

Just how do ostriches end up in the heated cages of an ostrich farm in Eastern Europe? And why is it that when night comes, they are called to another part of the planet with the haunting promise of freedom? Could an ostrich ever learn to fly? Could it escape? And if so, where on earth would it go? Géza Szócs gives the reader exclusive access to the personal diaries of an ostrich where we can witness quite how sensitive these birds are to social subjugation, injustice, and the complex questions of metaphysics with a humour that is uniquely contagious.



Krisztina Tóth: *Vonalkód (Barcode – Short Stories);*

published in 2006, 186 pages

“Women’s literature has sought its rights and merits for some time now. Reading Krisztina Tóth, however, should reassure us all. The mature mnessga eof her work is unmistakable both in terms of the author and genere. It positions the writer in a significant place in modern Hungarian literature.”

Litera

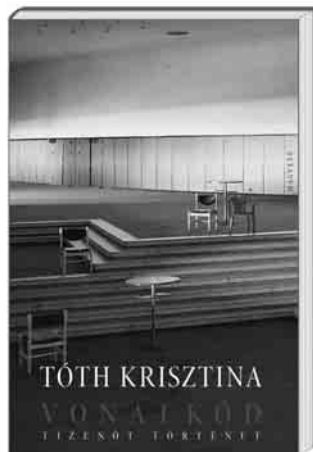
Krisztina Tóth is one of Hungary’s most highly acclaimed young poets. She has won several awards, including the Graves Prize (1996), the Déry Tibor Prize (1996), and the József Attila Prize (2000), and her poetry has been translated into many languages. Her poems have strong connections with different Hungarian and European poetic traditions (she translates French poetry), their trademark being a subtle combination of strong visual elements, intellectual reflection, and a very empathic, yet often ironic concern with everyday scenes, conflicts, and people. Krisztina Tóth lives in Budapest where, apart from writing and translating poetry, she designs and produces stained-glass windows.

This is the first work of prose from a remarkable poet. There are fifteen short stories in the book, and each of these has a subtitle, and each contains the expression *line/bar*. The seventh novel, *Warm Milk*, has the subtitle *Barcode*. The story is about an American girl, Kathy, who visits her friend in Budapest in the early ‘80s. Kathy disrupts her host’s life, edges her out of her room, and unravels her relationship with her boyfriend, Robi. The young girl eventually begins to consider suicide. *Barcode* acts as a metaphor for Western goods and therefore symbolises an unreachable world far away from Hungary.

The narrator of the stories is either a young girl or a young woman, depending on the reader’s interpretation of each story and some may see her as the same person all the way through. However, every action is seen from a woman’s point of view: childhood acquaintances, school-camps, love, children, deceit, and journeys set against the backdrop of the Kádár era towards its close.

Sold to:

Germany – Luchterhand
Serbia – B92



Gábor Vida: *Fakusz három magányossága (Fakus’s Three Times Lonely);*

published in 2005, 348 pages

“Gábor Vida writes ornately with the ability to create a powerful atmosphere. *Three Times Lonely* provides a detailed depiction of the hidden self, clearly detachable from the visible one. It is the hidden self that can be found in us all.”

Litera.hu

Gábor Vida was born in 1968, in Kisjenő, Transylvania. He has lived in Marosvásárhely since 1994, where he is a prose editor on *Látó* magazine. Published works: *Farewell to Films (Búcsú a filmtől)* 1994, *Reserve (Rezervátum)* 1998.

In this novel, a graduate psychologist by the name of Fakus takes to the road on a journey of exploration. He always has the option of going back to his rich mother with her kitchen smelling of coffee and cigarettes and, of course, her inexhaustible credit card, although each and every return is an annihilation of himself. He faces a ghost and passion in an ancient boarding school before falling in love with a Gypsy girl in an attempt to find the solitude he seeks. A meeting with God and the discovery of his inner-self lead to the realisation that we are the ones who make the world worse, and only we are able to make it better. Our world is one and indivisible, endless and uncountable, with harmony found in controversy. This calmly flowing novel consists of three stories where impossibilities become bearable, selfishness becomes identity, and Transylvania transforms into a fairyland.



Gábor Vida: *Nem szabad és nem királyi (Not Free and Not Royal);*

published in 2007, 316 pages

“Reading these stories one has the sense that anything can happen and be experienced in a world free of privilege.”

ÚjNautilus

When a place is “neither free nor royal” it is pointless looking for further adjectives. Life has to be led differently. But how and why? The characters in Gábor Vida’s novel are Transylvanian folk held hostage by their own circumstance and history. We typically join them when their lives are at a crossroads between heaven and hell.

The language of these stories explores and expands in a way that is even more exciting than the events it describes as this exploration continues and invites us behind the scenes to witness the whole that makes the part. We can only claim that of life which we can touch with our hands, our eyes, and our mind: a journey through the desolate mountains; the scented female form; a lungful of sharp mountain air; the taste of wine never savoured before; the science of soldiers, hunters, rogues; howling in the distance, a wolf perhaps; a point of light burning bright, an angel, of course. This book is just as implausible as our ability to come out on top despite it all.



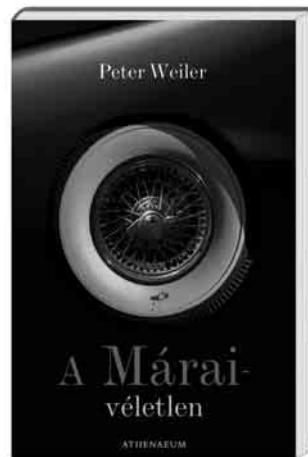
Péter Weiler: *A Márai-véletlen (The Márai Incident);*

published in 2008, 352 pages

The heroine of this thriller is the beautiful Pamela Taylor, a young biologist working at San Diego's Salk Institute. Her life changes beyond recognition when she purchases the car of her dreams, a Pontiac Catalina, at an estate auction. Pamela has no idea why the car was entombed in an underground garage by its previous owner and neither does she suspect that she is about to become part of the ongoing tragedy that surrounds the vehicle.

Two mysterious statues appear in the background, each a perfect copy of the other... These bronze works of art ruin the lives of all who pursue them while others discover them by pure chance. But no one knows exactly which statue they hold in their hands.

Thomas Johnston is a world famous cardiac surgeon and owes his life to having once touched one of the statues but this same meeting also leads to his father's tragic death just moments later. The famous, Hungarian émigré, Sándor Márai, comes into contact with one of the statues in Paris as a young man and this meeting revisits his life towards its end, back in California.



Populated by a peculiar cast and set in an array of eccentric locations, this mystical tale unfolds as Pamela moves through it. Single for a long time, Pamela falls in love with a medical student called Paul. Fate intervenes at the outset and they are parted from one another before Paul overcomes all obstacles to save the girl's life.

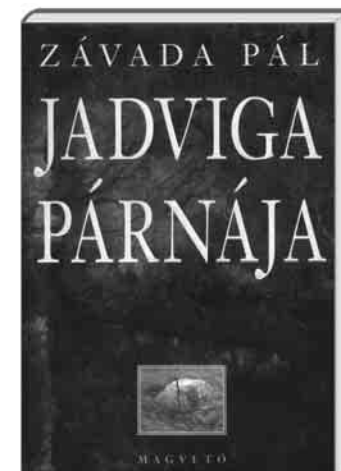
The Márai Incident combines the unpredictability and excitement of *The Da Vinci Code* with a complex plot that would make Agatha Christie proud.

Pál Závada: *Jadviga párnája (Jadwiga's Pillow);*

published in 1997, 448 pages

Born in 1954 to a Hungarian-Slovak family in Tótkomlós, in the south-eastern corner of Hungary, Pál Závada worked first as sociologist and later as an editor. His first book, *Kulákprés (Kulak Press, 1986)*, dealt with the 20th-century social history of his native village. His first novel, *Jadviga párnája (Jadwiga's Pillow, 1997)*, was a bestseller, winning plaudits from critics and the reading public alike. It was made into a film of the same title directed by Krisztina Deák in 2000, followed by *Milota* in 2002.

This bestselling novel portrays a Hungarian village with a Slovak minority and spans the period from the First World War, through the national awakening of the Slovaks, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, to the Second World War, with the story of its last surviving character reaching into the recent past. The novel is written in the intricate form of several diaries. The body of the text is the "little book of notes" kept by András Osztatni, a betrayed but forgiving husband and an unfortunately fallible figure. After his death, his wife (and perhaps his half-sister?), Maria Jadwiga Palkovits, adds her own comments to the book. The manuscript is finally edited by a third hand, Jadwiga's second son, who counterpoints the passion of the first two speakers with his clumsy and badly articulated notes. The lives of the protagonists are governed by love, defencelessness, betrayal and the fateful events of the 20th century in this novel written with great linguistic inventiveness.



Sold to:

Germany – Luchterhand

Netherlands – Wereldbibliotheek

Pál Závada: *Milota (Milota);*

published in 2002, 700 pages

*"I might even suggest that Závada has written a better second novel than his first – better, that is, than *Jadviaga's Pillow*, to which *Milota* is related, in a Faulknerian manner, by several incestuous strands."*

Ferenc Takács, *Népszabadság*

"Very much a large family novel of the traditional sort."

Péter Dérczy, *Élet és irodalom*

Závada's second novel, another story of a family, a village and a love rolled up in one, is set in a similar Slovak-speaking community, although in the 1990s, and is related to the former book through certain links between the characters' families. Like the earlier book, it too is framed in diary form, containing parallel and alternating texts by two characters. Sixty-seven-year-old irresponsible but amiable György Milota dictates into a tape-recorder the story of his life, the doings of his family and his own love exploits, digressing all the while into the tricks of beekeeping and the production of poppy seeds. We read the typewritten, complicated love-life of thirty-four-year-old Erka Roszkos in parallel; the mystery of this intricate chronology is that the two characters are supposed to be remembering at the same time, both in full knowledge of the other's texts, as the entries talk back to one another. In the end, another secret is revealed: Erka, in love with the younger Milota, is in fact the daughter of his father.



Pál Závada: *A fényképész utókora – regény (The Photographer's Legacy – Novel);*

published in 2004, 413 pages

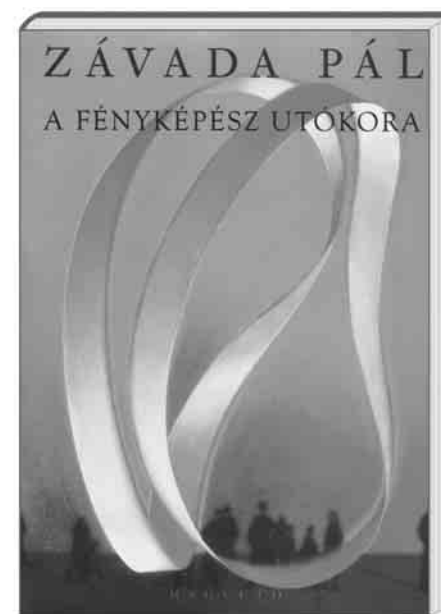
"The novel strikes [...] an intriguing and successful balance between dislocation and integration."

Népszabadság

Rather like his two previous works, Závada's third novel is rooted in the same village community in south-eastern Hungarian, comprised largely of ethnic Slovaks, and he has carried a couple of characters over. The photographer referred to in the title is Miklós Buchbinder, who was of Jewish descent and thus deported, along with all his family, to be killed in a Nazi death camp during the summer of 1944. He may no longer be present himself, but the novel concerns his legacy and specifically a photograph that he took in 1942, in which all the main figures can be seen. Having gone astray, the photo eventually ends up in the hands of the main protagonist, Ádám Koren, grandson of the Slovak woman who appears in the picture and we follow the story of Ádám's life right up to the present day.

More important than its plot is the novel's comprehensive yet astonishingly detailed view of the complex changes that have been going on in Hungarian society: the patchy bourgeoisification and still semi-feudal rural world of the pre-war years, the crippling of peasant life under communism or the stealthy return of bourgeois values to the world of the capital's intelligentsia toward the end of the Kádár régime. Much is said as well about the position of Jews in the country, which is presented as one of the gravest questions that

Hungarian society faced during the twentieth century. For all that, many of the characters who feature in the story are of ethnic Slovak rural background, even if this is not highlighted to the same degree as in the earlier novels.



Sold to:

Germany – Luchterhand

Slovakia – Kalligram

Pál Závada: *Idegen testünk (Our Foreign Body);*

published in 2008, 390 pages

“Pál Závada’s latest novel is his best and most mature work to date.”

Könyves Blog

Pál Závada’s scene is set in a photographer’s studio in September 1940 at a gathering of relatives, friends and lovers all linked by the single figure of a housewife called Janka Weiner – her cousin who works in a fashion boutique, her seminarian brother, a military attaché, a young poet, a reporter, girlfriends, journalists, some Swabish, some Hungarian, some Jewish and many less simple to define. They are enthralled by news of regained territory lost in the First World War and mystified by the race laws. Where have they come from and what will become of them when the war is over?

Pál Závada gathers his cast for a single evening in which he skilfully portrays the mental, physical and spiritual trauma created by the trials and tribulations of the 20th century. He looks at how elements of society become fragments. What does it mean to lose your country to war and how are the seeds of a new dictatorship sewn? This novel is close-up and provocative.

