

**"Where the impossible becomes possible by virtue of the wondrous."**

**The story of one man, two civilisations...**

**A tale of family, travels and self-discovery**

**A novel about identity**

## **Árpád Kun: Happy North**

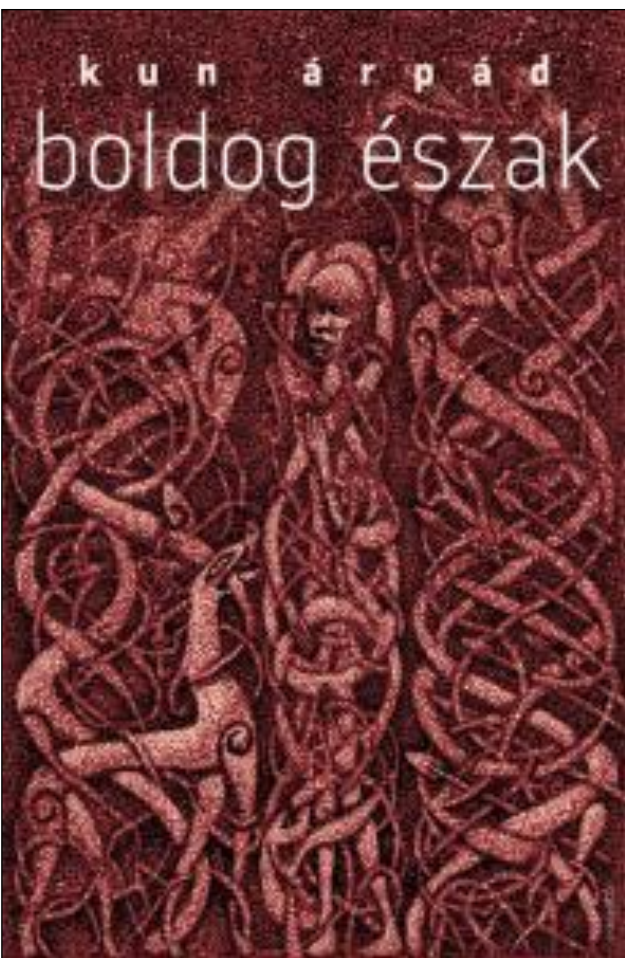
(Boldog észak, novel, 440 pages)

2013, **Magvető Publishing, Hungary**

**The hero of this novel, Aimé Billion, is a real outsider, who feels as a stranger not only in Africa or Europe, but even in his own body.**

**While he is of Yoruba, Vietnamese and French descent, Africans consider him as a white man, while white people see him as an African.**

**The grandson of an African sorcerer, he spends the first thirty-eight years of his life in Benin, where he works as a nursing assistant in the French hospital of the most populated city of the country. He also helps the missionaries of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, among others by translating religious texts, prayers, even though he himself does not believe in God. Leaving Benin, after a short detour in Bordeaux, he arrives in the faraway country of Norway, where the people know so much about being a stranger, about isolation, and it is among these reserved people, the Norwegians, that he will try to find happiness in a very special love relationship. Being a home care aide, he meets a physically challenged woman and they will gradually grow closer and closer.**



### **Quote from the novel:**

*"Many different aspects of reality should interconnect for you to become a French citizen."*

*"Are you saying you can't make a miracle?" – I asked him to make him show his real colours.*

*"Not the one which you are expecting from me, no." – my grandfather replied proudly, with a hint of sophisticated condescension in his voice, then he went on, in a lecturing tone: "No one can do that. For the same reason no one should throw a curse. For someone to do that would mean that along with their actions, they are putting themselves outside of the created universe, that the Laws do not apply to them. That would be entirely impossible, and presuming so is nothing else but profanation."*

On the one hand, the novel, in **a very enjoyable, sensitive style, presents the West African country of Benin, and its traditions, among other voodoo, magic, the beliefs anchored in folklore and the healing activities;** on the other hand, **it paints a picture of the welfare society of Norway.**

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**"Where the impossible becomes possible by virtue of the wondrous."**

## Árpád Kun

Árpád Kun was born in 1965 in the west-Hungarian town of Sopron. He is now living in Norway.

He had planned on moving overseas to switch languages and become an English-language writer, but he only got as far as the Faculty of Arts of Budapest University, where he graduated with a degree in Hungarian Literature and History in 1991. For two years, he organised a weekend secondary school in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca, Romania). He graduated in Paris with a university degree in French Literature in 1996. He attended half-heartedly a PhD training in Aesthetics at the end of the 90s, but did not become a doctor, he taught – quite more than half-, but not really whole-heartedly – the history of painting at a French university, he wrote – quarter-heartedly – scripts for a TV series, he was a university lecturer in Bordeaux between 2003 and 2005 – this time with three quarters of his heart in it.



Since 2006, he has been living in Norway with his wife and his four children. He works in a village near a fjord as a home care aide for the elderly. Family and literature are his life, but he also likes making strudel, picking mushrooms, and many other things.

He has written four volumes of poetry, a

The primary aim of Árpád Kun's important, emotionally uplifting novel is not, however, to compare the two countries – **while these two civilisations are, of course, protagonists of the novel in their own right, the book is more than that: it is the story of Aimé Billion, a tale of family and travels; it is a Bildungsroman, a novel about identity.**

It is original and outstanding in its **portrayal of the human condition**, which is here neither black-and-white, nor apocalyptic like it so often appears in books, but rather perplexing and inscrutable in its complexity, the mirror of a real world described with deep empathy.

**Happy North is beautiful fiction – a story which brings strange worlds to the reader and makes them seem familiar... and even heart-achingly homelike.**

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