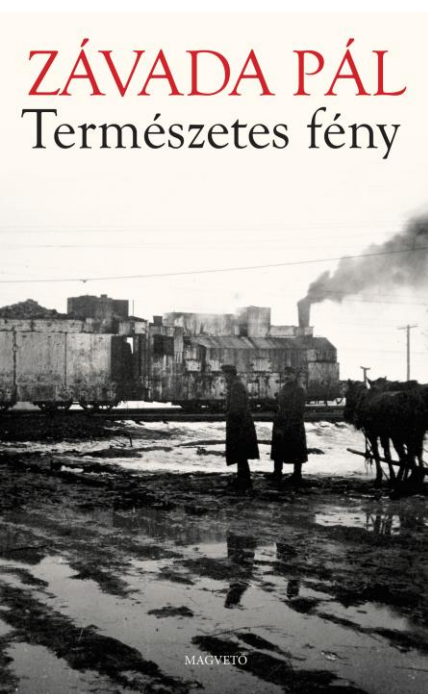


“The illicit untouchables have been designated, and everyone accepts that, don't they.”

Pál Závada *Natural Light*
Novel, 632 pages, Magvető Publishing, 2014



Pál Závada's magnum opus *Natural Light* is set mainly during the Second World War, and the years leading up to it and following it. The story follows the inhabitants of a large Slovak-populated village in Hungary, their lives at home and in various locations in central and eastern Europe. Amid a multitude of characters, the story of two families stands out. The children of the former judge and those of the Jewish photographer grow up together. They talk and play together, and photograph their brief childhood, only for the war to allot to each a fate according to his origins. Mária waits at home for her younger brother, who as a Hungarian soldier travels the length of the Russian front, is a prisoner of war and then escapes; and for Jakab, for whom her love is unrequited, who does forced labour at various camps in Hungary and Austria. Then comes liberation, a new world arrives, the forced exchange of Slovak and Hungarian populations, and dulls the memory of those who did not come back.

In *Natural Light* the reader is swept along by **existing, lost, and even imagined photos, letters, diaries and fictive work-camp reports, and confronted with the everyday experience of the war, which comprises constant fear, boredom and merrymaking**, just as it does the infinite appreciation of memories and relationships. Meanwhile, some become perpetrators, others victims.

This most radical of Závada's novels is also his most outspoken. This time, his customary buoyant narrative **is interspersed with genuine pictures, archive photographs, which as a new writing tool blend perfectly into the fabric of the novel.**

The book is particularly timely with the approaching anniversary of the end of the war, and the related surge in interest. Seven decades have passed, we've forgotten the whys and wherefores: we've been light-heartedly flicking through the retouched photos. And we should put a stop to it. That is what Pál Závada's novel suggests, while the appallingly dispassionate natural light shines upon us to this day.

Pál Závada

Born on 14 December 1954 in Tótkomlós, Hungary, he studied at the University of Economic Sciences in Pécs (1974–1978) and read sociology at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (1980–1982).



He worked at the sociology department at the Janus Pannonius University (teaching assistant 1978–1982) and the Research Institute for Sociology (scholar junior member 1982–1993). Since 1990 he has been the editor of the journal *Holmi*.

His novel *Jadviga párnája* (*Yadviga's Pillow*) was one of the greatest literary best sellers of the past decades.

Previous books on the international scene

JADVIGA PÁRNÁJA (*Yadviga's Pillow*)

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