



THE

Hungarian Historical Review

NEW SERIES OF ACTA HISTORICA
ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ

Family and Emotions

VOLUME **9** NUMBER **4**
2020

Institute of History,
Research Centre for the Humanities,
Eötvös Loránd Research Network

The Hungarian Historical Review

New Series of Acta Historica
Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae

Volume 9 No. 4 2020

Family and Emotions

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Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

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The Stepfamily from Children's Perspectives in Pest-Buda in the 1860s

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This paper examines the distinctive aspects of children's letter-writing practices, sibling relationships, and the use of urban spaces by one of the most educated, intellectual stepfamilies in mid-nineteenth century Pest-Buda. In this bourgeois family, children grew up in an exceptionally rich intellectual atmosphere, as their mother (Júlia Szendrey) was a poet, writer and translator, their father (Árpád Horvát) was a historian, and one of their uncles (Pál Gyulai) was the most significant literary critic of the time. Consequently, reading and writing was a fun game and a source of joy for even the youngest members of the family. As a result, many of the analyzed sources were produced by children, offering us the exceptional possibility to examine stepfamily relations, emotional practices, urban and everyday life, as well as material culture from the perspective of children. The study aims to identify the practices through which the family experience and the family identity and the sense of belonging in the Szendrey-Horvát family were constructed.

Keywords: childhood, middle class household, parent-child relations, half-sibling relations, urban history, use of space, private and public spheres

On July 21, 1850, in the chapel of the parish of Lipótváros in Pest, a 21-year-old woman and a 30-year-old man were married. It turned out to be one of the most frequently mentioned marriages in nineteenth-century Hungary. The bride was Júlia Szendrey, the widow of Sándor Petőfi, who had been one of the most popular poets of the Reform Era and one of the most important figures in the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849. The groom was Árpád Horvát, a historian and professor at the University of Pest. Public opinion condemned the new marriage, though it was the only escape for the young widow.

Sándor Petőfi, the first husband, died on July 31, 1849, during the defeat of the Hungarian War of Independence in one of the last battles in Transylvania.¹ His young widow was left alone with their child, who was seven months old

1 On the military history of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, see Hermann, *1848–1849, a szabadságharc hadtörténete*.

at the time. As a result of the harassment she endured at the hands of the the Austrian authorities, the uncertainty of her financial background, and malicious rumors which had been spread about her, she was in a desperate situation in which she could not take on the role of “the widow of the nation” that the public wished to give the wives of martyrs who had fallen in the war of independence. Her contemporaries did not empathize with her demanding situation, and they condemned her decision to flee to a new marriage. Her figure is still surrounded by stereotypes. This also contributed to the fact that the documents concerning Júlia Szendrey’s second marriage and the majority of her literary works from the 1850s and 1860s remained unpublished.² From a socio-historical point of view, given the abundance of relevant resources, this phase of her life is at least as exciting as the period connected to Petőfi, not only because her independent literary career unfolded during this period but also because she belonged to one of the most educated, intellectual stepfamilies of the era.

Júlia Szendrey took her 19-month-old son, Zoltán Petőfi, with her into the new marriage. She and her second husband, Árpád Horvát, had four children. Attila Horvát was born in 1851, Árpád in 1855, Viola, who died early, in 1857, and Ilona in 1859. In the resulting stepfamily, the children grew up in an exceptionally rich intellectual atmosphere, as their mother was a poet and writer, their father was a historian, and one of their uncles, Pál Gyulai, was the most significant literary critic of the time. Consequently, reading and writing was a fun game and a source of joy for even the youngest members of the family. As a result, plenty of relevant sources have survived from them, sources which are exciting not only because they concern or were created by the members of this special family, but also because the historian only rarely has, among her sources, writings which were created by children.³ The aim of the present study is to examine the distinctive aspects of the children’s perspectives, the sibling relationships, and the practices which influenced the formation of family identity through the correspondence and greeting poems of Júlia Szendrey’s sons and the floorplans made of their family home.

2 On her literary career in the context of the contemporary debates on female roles and women writers, see Gyimesi, *Hungarian female writers after the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849*. I collected and published all her poems in a critical edition in 2018: Szendrey, *Szendrey Júlia összes verse*.

3 I published the previously unpublished sources in 2019: Gyimesi, *Gyermekekkel Szendrey Júlia családjában*.

Children's Perspectives in Historiography

Although the history of childhood has a significant body of secondary literature both internationally and in Hungary, analyses of the sources created by children and the special worldview manifested in them are relatively rare in the historiography. While researchers have shown an increasing interest in the study of children's ego documents (such as children's diaries written during the 1956 Revolution and World War II) about the politically significant events of the twentieth century,⁴ this aspect of research is strikingly missing in the nineteenth-century context. One factor in this is the shortcomings of the sources, or more precisely the failure to study the relevant sources. As a result, the history of childhood has been examined primarily on the basis of sources created by adults. The beginning of research on the subject is linked to the name Philippe Ariès, who claimed in his 1960 book that, before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concept of childhood was unknown, children were not given particular attention, and the child-parent relationship was not characterized by sensitivity and a close bond of love.⁵ The hitherto unusual choice of topics inspired further research in this area, and several historians questioned Ariès's thesis. Linda A. Pollock, for instance, sought to refute claims about the quality of the child-parent relationship by analyzing diaries, correspondence, and autobiographies.⁶ Barbara Hanawalt also argued persuasively that adults did indeed pay particular attention to people in different stages of human life (including childhood) even in the Middle Ages, and thus they recognized the importance of childhood and adolescence.⁷

Recent research deals with the emotional relationships not only between parents and children but also among siblings. The role of siblings in the wider kin networks has been taken for granted by historians for a long time, so it has only recently been made the subject of scholarly inquiry.⁸ Leonore Davidoff has pointed out that the sibling relationship is the longest and, therefore, in a

4 The research of Gergely Kunt in this field should be highlighted: Kunt, "És a bombázások sem izgattak...", Kunt, *Kamasztűkrök*. In connection with the 1956 Revolution, the childhood diary of Gyula Csics, published by the 1956 Institute and edited by János Rainer M. on the fiftieth anniversary of the revolution, is very significant. It touches on the period between October 1956 and March 1957. Csics, *Magyar forradalom 1956 – Napló*.

5 Ariès, *Gyermek, család, halál*.

6 Pollock, *Forgotten Children*.

7 Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London*, 5–6.

8 Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, 1–2.

sense, the defining relationship in a person's life, as it can generate additional kin and kinship ties (e.g. aunts, uncles, cousins). In Davidoff's concept the notion of the "long family" plays an important role which refers to the fact that in the Victorian era, exceptionally large families, often with more than ten children, were formed due to improved living standards and health care. Thus, there were at times very big age differences among siblings, as up to two or three decades could have passed between the birth of the first child and the birth of the last.⁹ Therefore, an intermediate generation was formed between the parents and the younger children, where the older children also functioned as caregivers, teachers, and playmates for the younger, and after the older siblings had married, their younger siblings, who had grown into teenagers, helped them raise their own children. Leonore Davidoff's book focuses primarily on the history of English middle-class families between 1780 and 1920, but not exclusively. The chapter on the relationships within the Freud family is significant in Central European terms.¹⁰ Based on a number of cases and a rich array of sources, Davidoff found that childhood experience, sibling relationships, and the reflections of relatives could fundamentally determine the awareness of the child's position in society and the quality of his or her political, social, and personal life, both in the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth.¹¹

In Hungary, the study of childhood was undertaken mainly from an ethnographic point of view and also from the perspectives of child labor and the history of education.¹² While the history of childhood may be of increasing interest to researchers as part of family history, in the context of the nineteenth century and earlier eras historians only rarely have sources written by children on which to draw, alongside the sources produced by adults (memoirs, autobiographies reflecting on childhood, and depictions of children in the printed press, fiction, and visual culture). Sources created by children are essential if we seek not simply to study childhood as it was understood by adults at the time but also from the viewpoints of children themselves.

Family history research has been inspired by an approach that perceives family not simply as a biologically based, timeless entity, but as a social construct that changes over time. In the present paper, I examine family relationships based on the children's letter-writing practices, the use of the house by family

9 Ibid., 78–107.

10 Ibid., 281–307.

11 Ibid., 132.

12 Deáky, "*Jó kis fiúk és lányok.*"

members, and the use of space during their city walks. I aim to identify the practices through which the family experience and the family identity and the sense of belonging in the Szendrey-Horvát family were constructed. The correspondence of Júlia Szendrey's children is an exciting source in terms of the characteristics of the nineteenth-century stepfamily, the history of emotions, urban history, everyday life, and material culture.¹³ In the period of roughly seven years when the letters were written (1861–1868), Zoltán Petőfi was between the ages of 13 and 20, Attila Horvát between 10 and 17 years old, and the youngest son, Árpád, between 6 and 13. Thus, we can see Pest-Buda from the perspective of young boys growing from children into adolescents.

The Family Home

In the first three years of their marriage, Júlia Szendrey and Árpád Horvát lived in Lipót Street in the city center (on the southern section of today's Váci Street). In 1853, they moved to the corner of Hársfa and Király Streets, which was located in former Terézváros in a part closer to City Park. (Although today this area belongs to Erzsébetváros, in the 1850s and 1860s it was part of Terézváros. Erzsébetváros was established only in 1882, when Franz Joseph allowed the 7th district to be separated from the former Terézváros to be named after his wife.) Hársfa Street served as the main area in which the family moved for 14 years, until 1867, when the parents separated.

We can learn the exact furnishing of the apartment and the division of the rooms from a special source. In 1869, Júlia Szendrey and Árpád Horvát's eldest child, Attila Horvát, made two detailed floorplans of the former family home and its surroundings. Their home in Hársfa Street did not exist any longer at that time, since in 1867, the family broke up. The parents never divorced officially, but from then on, they lived in separate households. Júlia Szendrey moved away from her husband with her daughter, Ilona, while the boys stayed with their father, Árpád Horvát. They sold their family home in Terézváros and rented a room in the city center. After suffering from uterine cancer for a long time, Júlia Szendrey died on September 6, 1868. The floorplans showing the interior design were thus made in the period following the breakup of the family and the death of the mother. One of them marks the location of the furnishing within each room, and the other shows the wider surroundings of the house and the various

13 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*.

plants in the garden in greater detail. Attila Horvát also recorded the date of birth of his siblings, and he named each room on the floorplans from the child's point of view ("Mom's room, Dad's room," etc.). One can interpret this gesture, the creation of floorplans which record the furnishings and surroundings of the former family home with meticulous accuracy, as an expression of strong emotional attachment and the desire of the adolescent boy to preserve family memory.

According to the floorplans, the house consisted of the following rooms: entrance hall, small room, father's room, mother's room, children's room, kitchen, the pantry, the lavatory, and the soldier's room.¹⁴ The children's room opened off the hall. The presence of a children's room and the reference to this space as a children's room were by no means part of an obvious, everyday phenomenon, as even in the housing inventories of later decades there were only rarely examples of a separate children's room, even in cases in which the large number of rooms would have allowed it.¹⁵ The presence of the children's room in the bourgeois apartments was not evident even at the beginning of the following century, although the need for such a space had been emphasized more and more by then. The research of Gábor Gyáni suggests that the placement of children in bourgeois flats was often complicated and involved the use of a single space for several purposes. The beds used by older children were sometimes placed in the dining room or another room, while younger children often slept in the bedroom with their parents.¹⁶ In contrast, the children's room provided a separate space for the children of Júlia Szendrey and Árpád Horvát, which was not only nominal.¹⁷ In addition to the floorplans, the correspondence between Attila Horvát and Zoltán Petőfi also proves that the children's room provided them with a space where they could occasionally retreat from the adults.

14 As a significant proportion of soldiers were housed not in barracks but in the private homes of citizens and peasants, from the beginning of the eighteenth century the practice of maintaining a "soldier's room" gradually developed in areas where boarding was regular. There are no indications in the sources as to whether any military person actually lived in the room marked "soldier's room" on the floorplan for Júlia Szendrey's family's home. The children's correspondence suggests that maids used this room.

15 Gyáni, *Az utca és a szalon*, 144.

16 Ibid.

17 A similar example from the last third of the nineteenth century: the boys were also given a separate room in the bourgeois home of Dr. Gyula Janny's family in Koronaherczeg Street (now Petőfi Sándor Street in the fifth district of Budapest), and a part of the room was separated from the parents' bedroom for the daughter: Horváth, *A Janny és a Zlamál család otthonai és tárgyai*, 49.

The floorplan is a valuable source because it gives a list of its premises and furnishings and it shows their locations within the private spaces. On the basis of the interior design, one can make hypotheses concerning the internal relations of the family, the roles of the men and the women, and the ways in which these roles in this family differed from social conventions. One can also venture conjectures concerning the functions of some spaces of the apartment and the relationship between the private space of the home and the public spaces of social life.

In the house of Júlia Szendrey and Árpád Horvát, less emphasis was put on shows of wealth and status than in average bourgeois apartments, where usually the salon or drawing room was a space of particular importance; by contrast, in the Szendrey-Horvát family home, spaces for private, intellectual work were important. The salon, which was the most significant place in contemporary bourgeois homes as a space to welcome guests and meet social expectations, was missing from the house. The piano, which would usually have been placed in the salon as a status symbol, was in Júlia Szendrey's room, which opened onto Hársfa Street.¹⁸ The lack of a salon and the furniture in the rooms also showed that the furnishings of the house were not intended primarily for the public, but rather for everyday, private use, tailored to individual needs, and this was unusual in the home of a relatively prosperous family at the time. Both the husband and the wife did intellectual and artist work, and both demanded the private space and furnishings required for this.

It is striking that the "gentleman's room," often referred to as the "men's room," was not exclusively a privilege of the husband in their case. According to the apartment inventories analyzed by Gyáni, this space usually functioned as the study of the paterfamilias and often as a library.¹⁹ A desk with chairs, a bookcase, and a sofa (an indispensable accessory of the "men's room" in the later decades as well²⁰) were found not only Árpád Horvát's room but also in Júlia Szendrey's room. This is also remarkable because the wife usually did not have her own room, even though it was a woman's job to create the tasteful furnishings of the home.²¹ The presence of the necessary fixtures for artwork in Júlia Szendrey's room draws attention to the fact that the female member of the family also carried out in-depth intellectual work and regular publishing activities. All this

18 As early as 1882, Janka Wohl emphasized this norm, which fundamentally defined bourgeois domestic culture for a long time: Wohl, *Az otthon*, 59.

19 Gyáni, *Az utca és a szalon*, 143.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 149; Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience*, 53–58.

indicates not only the literacy of the resident of the room, whose daily cultural needs included regular reading and writing, but also that she had a separate room and its furnishings did not differ from the furnishings found in her husband's room, and this was exceptional at the time. The furnishings played a prominent role in both rooms, and in its dimensions, Júlia Szendrey's room was even larger than her husband's.

The furnishings of Júlia Szendrey's room combined the functions of a bedroom, a study, and a salon, although the boundaries of the spaces with different functions were delineated relatively well within the room. The curtain bed was located in the innermost part of the room; this point of the room constituted a private space. The most important element of the bourgeois apartment, a piano, was at the opposite side of the room in front of the window, on "display," together with a rose bowl and a sofa. As a counterpoint to the private sphere, this part of the room overlooking the street was the space of representation in which objects indicated the wealth and social status of the family. The desk was around the middle forming a liminal space between the intimate, inner and the public, open parts of the room. Thus, Júlia Szendrey's room performed the functions of the bedroom, the study, and the salon, though within the room itself the borders between spaces with different functions were relatively clear.

If one compares the wife's and husband's rooms, it is also striking that the former was more spacious and, in addition to the desk (which can be interpreted as a sign of the importance of intellectual work), it was also furnished in a manner that made it suitable for representation. For instance, it had a piano, a sofa, and a bookshelf.²² In contrast, the latter (the husband's room) lacked the objects which would have been necessary as signs of social status to make the room appropriate as a space to welcome guests. It was furnished almost exclusively for solitary work. In the husband's room, a large desk stood in front of the two windows and bookcases stretched along the walls. As a result, Júlia Szendrey's room was better suited to serve as a salon, while Árpád Horvát's room was more of a study, although this was not exclusive in either case. The furnishings of the rooms suggest that the husband and wife played roles within their family that did not correspond to the more traditional roles, in which the wife was a more secondary figure to her husband. The emphatic separation of rooms and living spaces could also be understood as a sign of a cold relationship between the spouses.

22 Gyáni, "Polgári otthon és enteriőr Budapestén," 46.

The Characteristics of Correspondence between Half-Siblings

When Júlia Szendrey married her second husband, she took a 19-month-old boy, Zoltán Petőfi, from her first marriage to the new marriage. From the very beginning, the young mother tried to emphasize the connection with her first husband's memory and the legacy of the name Petőfi in the child's identity.²³ However, according to the family correspondence, Zoltán had a harmonious relationship with his stepfather for a long time: in his letters he referred to him as father.²⁴ Their relationship became tense only later, after the final deterioration of the parents' marriage and the death of Julia Szendrey.²⁵ The couple's two eldest sons, Attila and Árpád, wrote several letters to their half-brother, Zoltán Petőfi, in the 1860s. The origin of the letters is due to the fact that the teenager Zoltán was no longer in Pest with his mother and stepfather's family, but in Békés county in the eastern part of the country, with his uncle and guardian, István Petőfi, who worked as a bailiff. In the nineteenth century and the earlier centuries, it was not exceptional for relatives, especially aunts and uncles, to be involved in raising children.²⁶ This, in turn, meant that children, especially in their teens, lived away from their parents' home for an extended period of time in a relative's household. Júlia Szendrey's decision to have her eldest son move and live with his uncle was a typical strategy of the era.

Writing played a particularly important role in Júlia Szendrey's family. It was important not only on a theoretical or aesthetic but also on a material level. We learn from the letters that the boys often received gifts related to writing from their parents; Attila, for example, reported that he had received "a beautiful album and inkwell, stationery, and a wallet for Christmas in 1865."²⁷ Holidays had a special role for the Horvát boys, as they gave them the opportunity or at least hope for a personal meeting with their half-brother, Zoltán Petőfi. There were several references to this in the letters. For example, on February 24, 1864, "We are also very happy that you'll come at Easter"; February 3, 1865: "You will come at Easter, well I know you'll have such a moustache and beard"; April

23 Szilágyi, *Határpontok*, 119–32.

24 OSZK Kt. VII/135.

25 After the death of Júlia Szendrey, Árpád Horvát wrote to his children about his stepson: "Only write a response to Zoltán – do not write otherwise; for not only is he behaving very disrespectfully towards me, but I can even say his manners are truly offensive; he barely raises a hat in front of me..." OSZK Kt. VII /141.

26 Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, 165–94.

27 Ibid., 151.

14, 1866: “Are you coming for Pentecost? Surely, it would be good because we haven’t seen each other for almost a year.”²⁸ There was a reference to the physical distance between the half-siblings several times in the correspondence, similarly to the one found in the last sentence cited above, i.e. the reference to the fact that they had not seen each other in a long time. By writing to each other, they seem to have wanted to bridge this physical distance and avoid growing emotionally distant.

Zoltán Petőfi’s act of sending a photo of himself to his half-siblings can be interpreted similarly. Seen alongside their correspondence, it seems to have contributed to the creation of an illusion of coexistence. Attila Horvát’s reply, written on August 25, 1866, again referred to the time that had passed since their last meeting: “We were very happy to get your photo, it’s been more than a year since I saw you; it’s a nice shot, I think.”²⁹ The latter remark refers to an intimate relationship. It implies that Attila knew Zoltán, who was only three years older, well.³⁰ Among the brothers, Attila was the most ambitious with his correspondence. On December 11, 1866, after a three-month absence, he wrote Zoltán, “We haven’t written to each other for a long time, it would be good if we resumed writing.”³¹ He expressed a desire for more frequent written contact several times. He also tried to write about topics in which his half-brother might have taken an interest or which might have affected him. In addition to the city events, he often referred to teachers and peers whom Zoltán also knew and who remembered him. The letters seem expressive of an intention to maintain common points of contact with Zoltán, both among the students in Pest as well as in the family. The latter is proved by the fact that Attila Horvát regularly reported not only about his own condition to his half-brother, but also about the condition of other family members (such as their cousins), and he reminded Zoltán of birthdays, such as his youngest sister’s birthday on July 25, 1868: “Iluska is fine; it’s her ninth birthday today. My God, how fast we all grow up!”³² The latter remark is also a good example of Attila Horvát’s view of his family as a community; his perception of himself as part of the family was an important part of his identity when he wrote with love about others. Zoltán Petőfi also frequently wrote warmly of and to his half-siblings in his letters. He referred to

28 Ibid., 156.

29 Ibid., 158.

30 Zoltán Petőfi was born on December 15, 1848, Attila Horvát was born on September 6, 1851.

31 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 162.

32 Ibid., 165.

Ilona, who was eleven years younger than he, as a “little angel” and as “dear little Ilona,” and he finished his sentences to Attila several times with “yes, indeed, little mischievous one.” He also used the term “my sweet siblings,” for example, when he reported on his sixteenth birthday in Csákó: “This evening, I would have liked so much to have had fun with you, my sweet brothers!”³³

The emotional language in family correspondence was so widespread in the era that its norms were included in publications of letter templates. The so-called “correspondence books” for example, the much-published *Hölgyek titkára* (The Secretary of the Ladies) and *Pesti magyar-német házi titoknok* (The Hungarian-German House Secretary of Pest) were intended to facilitate the practice of correspondence, so they offered template texts corresponding to social norms and categorizing the various life situations and occasions of letter writing.³⁴ However, in the correspondence of Júlia Szendrey’s children, several aspects prove that the loving language of the letters was not based on adherence to the norms, but rather on the emotional closeness of the brothers. The boys were connected by a number of games and jokes, and humor was an important component of the letters. For instance, in a letter written to his half-brothers on May 1, 1865, Zoltán used misspellings to imitate the voice of a child still learning to make sounds (I give the Hungarian text for those who read Hungarian): “Mit csinál a kedves kisz Ijonka, igen öjűjök neki hogy szokojtat és tisztejtet, majd ha Pestre megyek viszek neki valami szépet.” One might playfully translate this as, “What is wittle Hewwen [Helen, the English version of the Hungarian name Ilonka] dowing? When I go to Pefft I will bwing her sumfing nice.”³⁵ Ilonka, who was the youngest member of the family, was almost six years old at the time, but there are many references in the family documents to her pronunciation (presumably as a source of humor from previous years), as the eldest child, Zoltán, addressed his younger half-siblings in his writings with wit and playful kindness.

This loving attention was manifested not only in his interest in the wellbeing of those at home, but also in his colorful and enjoyable descriptions of his own experiences and local, rural peculiarities, in which he highlighted phenomena that may have been surprising, unusual, or interesting to his family members in Pest-Buda. While the experiences described by the Horvát boys are exciting sources on the urban culture of Pest-Buda in the 1860s, Zoltán Petőfi’s letters

33 Ibid., 129.

34 Típray, *Legújabb és legteljeseb pesti magyar-német házi titoknok*, Vajda, *Hölgyek titkára*.

35 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 138.

are valuable, among other things, because of the detailed description of rural experiences. The rhetoric of the letters is shaped by the fact that they are written by an urban boy in the countryside who was writing to his urban siblings about his experiences in the countryside. Therefore, he often describes events that would be everyday to people living in rural communities with colorful explanations. Thus, the events on which he dwells are determined in part by the specific life situation of the boys. A good example of this is an excerpt from a letter dated December 24, 1864, in which he explains the meaning of a pig slaughter to Attila. In peasant culture, pig slaughters were timed for the winter, so it is not surprising that, according to Zoltán's account, they received several invitations in the month of December: "Over the course of the past weeks, there have been several pig slaughters, one after the other. One day, I was invited to one, the next day, I was invited to another one."³⁶ Even Zoltán's sixteenth birthday was celebrated during a pig slaughter on December 15. On another occasion, he wrote about peasant weddings in details. His letters contain not only personal but also rhetorical twists imitating the print press ("my gentle questioner," "dear reader"). Travelogues, which contained descriptions of a similar nature in which their authors dwelt on different customs, were very popular in the contemporary press, and Zoltán's family members were regular newspaper readers. By bringing the rhetoric of his letter closer to newspaper articles, Zoltán also expanded the functions of his letter writing: in addition to sharing experiences and keeping in touch, he also considered it important to entertain his younger half-siblings with his writing style and personal observations.

Material Characteristics, Style, and Functions of Their Correspondence

James Daybell pointed out that the study of correspondence requires an interdisciplinary approach: social, cultural, palaeographic, gender, and literary-critical research approaches and considerations need to be interlinked, and, accordingly, it is worth noting that the researcher is not confronted with neutral, completely fiction-free historical sources, but with age-specific, gender-specific, class-specific letter writing practices.³⁷ Along with the interpretation of correspondence as a writing practice, the examination of material characteristics have come to the fore. Historians have become aware of the importance of

³⁶ Ibid., 129.

³⁷ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 9–10.

letters not only as documents and texts, but also as cultural products which bear meanings through their material forms, so the quality of handwriting, the letter folding technique, and the seals used must also be made subjects of scrutiny. In addition, in recent analyzes, the purpose for which the letters were created has become an important consideration, taking into account the intersections of the different categories (pragmatic, business, religious, family, literary, etc.).³⁸ Analyzing the emotional language of correspondence among brothers, Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent found that the act of writing the letter itself, which was mostly a public, shared activity among families belonging to elite, also played a fundamental role in maintaining emotional attachments among family members. Letters often served a similar function to gifts in the context of both social obligations and emotional closeness.³⁹

In the case of the correspondence among Júlia Szendrey's children, the material characteristics also deserve attention, because in many cases, these characteristics were closely related to the content of the letters. On September 25, 1865, Attila informed Zoltán that he had received, among other things, a stamp printer from Árpád, on which his name had been engraved for his birthday. According to the surviving envelope, Attila "inaugurated" the gift (used it for the first time) the following day: the letter sent on September 26 in Pest contained a red stamp monogrammed with H. A., and Attila used the stamp on the envelopes for several subsequent letters. In addition to the seals, the letter paper also deserves attention, as in many cases, the paper on which the letters were written were embossed with inscriptions. In the upper left corner of one of Zoltán Petőfi's letters there is an embossing depicting the Hungarian coat of arms with a crown, surrounded by the first line of the national anthem as an inscription: "God bless the Hungarians." The contour of the Hungarian coat of arms was redrawn in blue ink, but the crown was not. Zoltán Petőfi was the draftsman, and presumably, by redrawing the Hungarian coat of arms but not the crown, he made clear which symbol he considered important and which he rejected. This can be interpreted as a very subtle expression of his antiroyalism, his conviction in favor of the independence and freedom of the Hungarian nation, which can be considered the spiritual heritage of his father, Sándor Petőfi.

38 Ibid., 10.

39 Broomhall and Van Gent, *Corresponding Affections*, 147.

In Zoltán's letters, several times he wrote separate messages to each of his three half-siblings (Attila, Árpád, and Ilona) on the same sheet of paper. The styles and contents of the letters written by the four half-siblings differed sharply. The wording used by the Horvát boys was usually more concise, and in one paragraph, they often presented completely different types of information (for example, in one letter, they wrote about Morzsa, their dog, in one sentence and about the parliament in the next), but as a result, they presented urban life, the contemporary press, and the events in which they took an interest in extremely varied ways. Zoltán's style was different. He wrote long sentences, and in many cases, the separate, new sentences merge, as the beginning of a new sentence is not always marked with the use of a capital letter and punctuation is often lacking. An individual letter (especially longer, newspaper-like accounts of experiences) was often about a single topic. Since Zoltán corresponded not only with his half-siblings but also with his mother, he sometimes called on Attila to read the letter written to his mother as well, because he had written on something in more details there, or vice versa, he asked his half-brothers to show the letter he had written to them to their mother because he had not sent a separate one to the "sweet good mom." In one such case, he also remarked, "and I also write my letters to you all."⁴⁰ This suggests that he considered reading letters a common, familial affair rather than a private act.

Familial Use of Space in the Children's Correspondence

In the letters, the presentation of the family's use of urban space was given a special role in the holiday descriptions. Attila Horvát and Árpád often reflected in their letters about where they went in the city and what they saw and did.⁴¹ Descriptions of such experiences have been highlighted many times in the accounts of the holidays. In the following, I examine what practices were related to the holidays in the family and how this was all related to the growing urban culture of Pest-Buda.

Attendance at Haydn concerts in contemporary Pest-Buda was closely related to the rituals of the Easter celebration. In the spring of 1865, Attila wrote to Zoltán that he and his mother had attended two concerts "at the Buda Castle Church" before Easter, where they had heard performances of *The Lamentations*

40 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 126.

41 They wrote about urban experiences not only in their letters, but also in their journals, which they made as a gift for their mother. Gyimesi, "Urban Space through Children's Eyes."

of *Jeremiah* and *The Seven Last Words of Christ*. Although the traditional venue for Easter Monday in Pest-Buda was Gellert Hill,⁴² the Horvát boys were taken to the bank of the Danube River and to a café called Kávéforrás by their father: "We were on the bank of the Danube and at the café with dad on Easter Monday, the Danube has risen so much; what used to be 14, 15 feet from the shore to the Danube is now only 1, 1½ feet!"⁴³

May 1, which was considered the spring holiday, the "Wedding of Nature," and which was already celebrated in Pest-Buda in the eighteenth century, was also mentioned in the children's correspondence. As had been the case on Easter Monday, on May 1 the boys went for a walk with their father. In a letter to Zoltán dated May 12, 1865, Attila Horvát mentioned May 1 as a day of celebration in the City Park: "Rain rarely occurs here. On May 1, there was a little rain which crushed the sea of dust in the city park, we went walking there with father and had ice coffee, hot coffee, and chocolate."⁴⁴ As the letters indicate, the children were taken for walks on the holidays by their father, who worked mainly as a historian and university professor and spent a significant amount of time in the library.

The mention of delicacies as if they were an integral part of urban experience may be explained by the fact that the letters were written by children. The letters evoke the city as it presented itself to the senses: the senses of vision and taste played important roles in the texts, especially the experience of urban flavors (chocolate, coffee, cocoa). Consumption of chocolate was also an important indicator of the social status of the family. In the Hungarian Reform Era, confectioneries appeared in Pest-Buda as places suitable for local consumption (candy shops existed much earlier, as far back as the 1770s), and the Biedermeier furnishings were intended to suit the tastes of the emerging bourgeoisie.⁴⁵ In his book *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, Sidney Mintz analyzed how sugar reached the lower classes of society after having become common in the households and day-to-day lives of the affluent social strata and how its symbolic meanings changed.⁴⁶ Although the consumption of chocolate was no longer the exclusive prerogative of the aristocrats in the second half of the nineteenth century, it certainly belonged to the customs of the wealthy and,

42 Zoltán, *Népi szórakozások a reformkori Pest-Budán*, 63–70.

43 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 137.

44 Ibid.

45 Csapó and Éliás, *Dobos és a 19. század cukrászata Magyarországon*, 15–16.

46 Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*.

more specifically, the urban elite. Attila Horvát's description also draws attention to the fact that rare delicacies were a treat with which the family marked a holiday.

The Szendrey-Horvát family spent not only May 1 but also August 20 in the City Park in Pest, which was the traditional venue of St. Stephen's Day celebrations in memory of the founder of the state, the first Hungarian king. In 1863, one day after the August 20 holiday, Júlia Szendrey wrote to Zoltán Petőfi of the day she had spent in the City Park and the disappointing, low-quality fireworks: "We came home terribly dissatisfied, regretting having spent two forints for this boredom."⁴⁷ The City Park had been used as a venue for firework shows, a much-loved form of entertainment, in the Reform Era. People who wanted to see the spectacular fireworks of Anton Stüwer, Vienna's "patented Viennese fire master," who was advertised in the contemporary newspapers, gathered in the park.⁴⁸ The excerpt from Júlia Szendrey's letter cited above indicates that they had already seen firework shows, and they had been able to compare the spectacle on that day with earlier, similar experiences. Although the children's correspondence makes no mention of the August 20 celebration, the description provided by their mother is significant. First, alongside the colorful descriptions found in the boys' letters, it adds a factor which may well have been more relevant to an adult, namely the (allegedly excessive) cost of the experience. Júlia Szendrey also offers a rational characterization of the St. Stephen's Day City Park program, thus drawing even more attention to the peculiarities of the tone and perspective of the children's letters. Finally, she writes of an event when all the members of the family (apart from Zoltán) spent the day together in the City Park, which was very rare according to the children's correspondence. In their letters, the boys generally mentioned either their mother or father as their companion, and they never once wrote of joint family walks. This is not surprising if one keeps in mind that the problems in Júlia Szendrey and Árpád Horvát's marriage⁴⁹ had become so serious by the early 1860s that the idea of divorce had arisen.⁵⁰ It

47 OSZK Kt. VII/ 234.

48 Magyar, "Társalkodási kertek, promenádok, mulató- és népkertek," 197; Zoltán, *Népi szórakozások a reformkori Pest-Budán*, 95.

49 For more on the marriage, see Gyimesi, "egy nő, több mint csak asszony" Szendrey Júlia és Horvát Árpád házassága."

50 Júlia Szendrey was already considering divorce in 1861, but in the end she did not separate from her husband until 1867. She wanted to convert to Protestantism (she was a Catholic) in order to divorce from Árpád Horvát, but her death on September 6, 1868 prevented her from doing so. The reasons for the breakdown of the marriage are revealed in two letters. In one, Julia Szendrey asked her father's permission to divorce, stressing that she had suffered a lot because of her second husband. The other letter

cannot be a coincidence that no family photo has survived depicting the two of them together, considering that studio photos of Julia Szendrey and her children were taken several times. Although they remained together until 1867, family programs were presumably not left untouched by the cold relationship between the mother and the father. The ways in which the family seems, on the basis of the sources, to have used urban spaces suggest that both the mother and father were involved in the children's lives and had close emotional relationships with them, and one can conclude, on the basis of the childrens' letters and the mention of the activities in which they engaged with each parent, that both Júlia Szendrey and Árpád Horvát devoted time to raising their children, even if they did not do this together.

The Role of Gift-Giving in the Family

In the correspondence of Júlia Szendrey's children, descriptions of the family's use of leisure time and of space in city parks were important in connection with the holidays discussed above in the spring and summer. When writing about the winter holidays (the Feast of Saint Nicholas, Christmas, New Year's Eve) and the birthdays and name days of the family members, however, the children mainly noted the gifts they had received from their parents, their relatives, and one another.

The serious change in the role of gift-giving in the family is indicated by the advertisements in the contemporary press and the mass spread of toys for children. Beginning in the 1860s, the toy trade played an important role in the economic life of Budapest.⁵¹ Children's toys were offered primarily by so-called Nuremberg ware shops named after the German trade center, Nuremberg. Although the number of specialized toy stores began to increase at the end of the nineteenth century, these types of shops remained important until the first decade of the twentieth century, selling relatively cheap consumer goods for everyday life, including a very large number and selection of toys.⁵²

The prestige of gifts became increasingly important. At the turn of the century, the dollhouse as a gift for daughters and the rocking horse as a gift

was addressed to the abandoned husband himself. This letter suggests that Árpád Horvát's violent, often threatening behavior led to the deterioration of their relationship and that they thought very differently about the roles of women and men, happiness, and sexuality.

51 Tészabó et al., "*A Babatündérhez*," 18.

52 Ibid., 19.

for sons were also important markers of a family's social status and financial situation. Toy retailers whose spatial location was close to areas that were easily accessible and popular among children (such as the Museum Garden) were able to stay in business for a long time.⁵³ Toy stores, advertisements targeting children, and shopkeepers also sparked social debates about gifts in the contemporary press. In the 1860s, when these trends were beginning to emerge, Júlia Szendrey and Árpád Horvát's son regularly wrote to their half-brother, Zoltán, of the gifts they had received. When they wrote about family Christmases, they dwelled for the most part on presents.

Christmas Júlia Szendrey's Family

Children's Christmas presents in 1863 included sweets ("Sugar fruits from Genoa") and toys ("two span perimeter rubber balls," "Porcelain figures," and boardgames). In February of the following year, the eight-year-old Árpád wrote to Zoltán in detail of the gifts he had received for Christmas. The emphasis on books in the list is particularly noteworthy: *Andersen's Fairy Tales* and *Puss in Boots* were among the titles. The copy of *Andersen's Fairy Tales* was presumably given by Júlia Szendrey, who was the first person in Hungary to publish the literary translations of the works of the Danish author through German mediation in a volume. She dedicated her well-received book, published in 1858, to her children.⁵⁴ In 1864, Attila also mentioned that he had received a copy of "Andersen" from his mother. Another member of his family had also given him a book: he had received *One Thousand and One Nights* from his aunt, Mária Szendrey, for Christmas. He was also given a "capsule pistol," a gift he had long wanted, as he had a love of military games.

The correspondence of Júlia Szendrey's children is also an exciting source from the point of view of toy history. The boys were given books and military toys, but also several spectacular pyrotechnic gifts. I managed to identify these toys, which seem both dangerous from our perspective but also special compared to the classic gifts often mentioned in connection with the nineteenth century (rocking horses, military figures, and dollhouses), by examining contemporary

53 Ibid., 23.

54 Szendrey, *Andersen meséi*.

price lists and advertisements.⁵⁵ One of the Nuremberg traders⁵⁶ who played a central role in the Hungarian toy trade was Tódor Kertész. His price lists, which included everything for sale in the shop,⁵⁷ included “harmless room fireworks.”⁵⁸ The fireworks were given fancy names, such as “Mephisto’s Shining Paper.” Readers could see the advertisement for the “room fireworks,” which were allegedly suitable for home use, in the columns of contemporary newspapers.

In the *Fővárosi Lapok* (Newspaper of the capital city), Tódor Kertész advertised the Christmas and New Year’s gifts available at his store with the following caption: “the latest room fireworks...”⁵⁹ His price lists also included magic kits,⁶⁰ “mind toys,” and “amusing boardgames.”⁶¹ The latter included boardgames that were also suitable for chess, mill, backgammon, and draughts. Árpád was surprised in 1863 when he was given one of these boardgames for Christmas by his parents.

Tódor Kertész opened his shop around Christmas in 1861, and every subsequent year, he had organized Christmas toy exhibitions.⁶² His customers included famous politicians and writers of the period (including Ferenc Deák and Mór Jókai).⁶³ As the widespread distribution of specific toy retailers can be traced back to a later date, Árpád Horvát may have obtained special gifts for his children from a Nuremberg merchant (perhaps at Tódor Kertész himself).

According to the letters, in the Szendrey-Horvát family, the children were given an equal share of educational and entertaining gifts, and in many cases, they were given gifts which served both functions. Given the games that were mentioned in the letters, it is not difficult to imagine how family members spent the Christmas holidays, but notes in the correspondence offer additional clues to this as well. In 1864, on the occasion of the first Christmas Zoltán spent away from his parents’ home, he wrote the following in a letter to his family: “When you have fun, play cards, remember me, who, though far from you, will think of

55 I would like to thank Júlia Tészbó and Irén Császi for their advice, which helped further my research on toy history.

56 For more on the Nuremberg merchandise stores and Tódor Kertész, see Tészbó et al., “*A Babatiúndérhez*,” 18–19, 57–58.

57 Tészbó, “A játék szerepe a gyerekek fogyasztóvá válásában,” 161.

58 The supply of goods changed relatively slowly during the era, so the price lists which survived from later decades provide a reliable point of reference for identifying toys.

59 *Fővárosi Lapok*, December 20, 1865. 1156.

60 Kertész, *Képes árjegyzék 1899*, 9.

61 Kertész, *Képes árjegyzék 1876*, 23.

62 Tészbó et al., “*A Babatiúndérhez*,” 9.

63 Ibid., 32–33.

you on Christmas Eve.”⁶⁴ Attila’s response confirmed the imagined scene: “We were playing cards with Mr. Óváry on Christmas Eve.”⁶⁵ These two remarks also draw attention to the fact that, at the time, Christmas was not necessarily a holiday for which family members would gather, much as it had also been perfectly normal, two decades earlier, when Julia Szendrey had been a child, that a child pursuing studies somewhere far from his parents would not spend Christmas at home. Also, not only family members but also friends (in this case, József Óváry, the Horvát boys’ tutor) could join the celebration.

Family Birthdays and Name-Days

In addition to the importance of the Christmas celebration, gift giving also played a significant role in family holidays such as birthdays and name-days. Attila Horvát recorded the following about his fourteenth birthday in September 1865: “For my birthday, I received many gifts, and so I’ll list them here: a very beautiful and expensive knife and a beautiful crocheted purse from Mom. Mythology and a ‘Students’ Pocketbook’ from Dad. For the price of two forints I got some paint, a pencil, Spanish wax, and a sealer with my name engraved on it from Árpád! Ilona gave me a small bag that she crocheted herself.”⁶⁶

The list draws attention to several things. First, the gifts seem to indicate the gender of the person who gave them. Regarding Ilona, the only daughter, the brothers repeated noted in their letters that she was able to knit. As a result, she mostly gave crocheted or knitted gifts not only to her siblings but also to her mother (such as a garter). Not surprisingly, gifts also indicated the gender of the person who received them. Ilona, for instance, received toys considered appropriate for girls from her parents, such as “a dozen of dolls, cooking utensils.”⁶⁷ The gifts also highlight the importance of writing. The boys gave one another writing related items (pencils, Spanish wax, a sealer), and the parents were also happy to bestow such gifts. For Christmas 1865, Attila received “a beautiful album and inkwell, stationery, and a wallet,” and Árpád received paint and stationery, among other things.

The father was happy to give gifts with educational functions to help cultivate the intellectual curiosities of his sons. Elek Peregriny’s book *Mythologia*

64 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 129.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid., 145.

67 Ibid., 151.

a két nembeli ifjúság használatára (Mythology for the use of youth of both sexes) discusses in various chapters the religious rites, the main gods (including their Greek and Roman names), the demigods, the mythological wars, and the morals and customs of the Greeks and Romans (including, for instance, the construction, the “palaestra exercises,” such as the topics of working out, clothing, marriage, parenting, meals, guest ceremonies, dance, funerals, and mourning).⁶⁸ He thus encouraged his children to acquaint themselves not only with the characters of mythology but also with the history of Greek and Roman culture and lifestyles.

Certain gifts seem to have been intended to strengthen his children's attachment to their Hungarian identity. On Attila's twelfth birthday, he wrote the following in a letter to Zoltán: “My birthday was good and happy, I got a big national flag from my father, which hung from his window during the revolution[.]”⁶⁹ The gifts thus had several meanings. They were not simply toys intended to entertain the children. They were also symbols of the values that the parents intended to pass on. The central role of culture, the importance of writing and reading, the value of learning and knowledge, the encouragement of activities assigned to gender roles, and the emphasis on national identity all appeared in the range of meanings represented by the gifts. In addition, gifts given by the children expressed similar values. The toy magazine, edited as a gift for their mother, bearing the title *Tarka Művek* (Multicoloured Works), and containing writings by the children, were gifts that showed the effect of the family environment on the children's interests and ways of thinking. The children seem to have considered writing a source of joy, a gift, and a game. It is no coincidence that in 1864, on Attila's thirteenth birthday, he interpreted the letter he sent as a gift: “Receive this letter from your brother as a birthday gift, who often thinks of you.”⁷⁰ Thus, the gifts that were exchanged among the members of the family can be seen as reflections of the growing consumer culture, which developed dynamically in the 1860s, but they can also be interpreted as expressions and embodiments of the values of the urban educated bourgeoisie. Parents and relatives who considered intellectual curiosity and the arts and sciences important in education were able to express this with the gifts they gave to their children, which, they presumably hoped, would help nurture these values in their children.

68 Peregriny, *Mythologia*.

69 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 128.

70 Ibid., 126.

Poems by Júlia Szendrey's Children as Gifts

Júlia Szendrey's children regularly wrote poems for family occasions. They mainly greeted their mother, aunt, and cousins on birthdays and name-days, but poems written for wedding anniversaries and New Year's Day also survived in their bequest. In many cases, poetry manuscripts can be found on fine, lavishly decorated letter paper. Writing greeting poems for family members and relatives for different festive occasions was such a common practice in the era that books were also published which specifically included this type of template text in order to help children with the obligation to write festive poems. Ferenc Neÿ's book *A gyermeki kegyelet tolmácsa* (The Interpreter of Children's Grace) is an example of one such book. It was published in 1851 by Gusztáv Emich. Its function and target audience were revealed by its subtitle ("Celebratory greetings, toasts, dialogues, and scenes for all kinds of family celebrations. Recommended for the youth by Neÿ Ferenc"), but even more so by a sentence from the author's foreword: "The child rarely finds words for his sweetest emotions, so in order to support their more beautiful aspirations, I am happy to offer myself as an interpreter, and they will certainly rejoice if they learn to express what they feel in their hearts. For this reason, I recommend this booklet to the youth."⁷¹ The volume included New Year's greetings, dialogue scenes for festive occasions, and name-day and birthday greetings. The various texts in the book are arranged not only by the type of holiday but also by family members: they included separate subchapters for poems to mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, godmothers, etc.

Poems to the Mother

The greetings written by Attila, Árpád, and Ilona Horvát were influenced by this tradition. They each used the contemporary formulae with which children expressed respect, but the poems also show signs of their creativity and imagination. The texts were made personal with references to current life situations and personal greetings. In poem written on the occasion of a name-day, Attila wished his mother not only a long and happy life but also that she have the good fortune to travel to Venice, where she had longed to go for a long

71 Neÿ, *A gyermeki kegyelet tolmácsa* (without page number.)

time: "And may you greet Venice with its gondolas this year!!"⁷² In reality, Júlia Szendrey had never been to the romantic city, although a piece of writing has survived which gives the illusion that she was writing the lines in Venice (which suggests that the city had captured her imagination). Only in the last lines of the text does it become clear that it is not an account of an actual experience, but rather merely something she wrote while she was looking at map of the city spread out on her couch.

The poems were also made personal by the fact that the children often wrote about their feelings and life situations, even if they used traditional rhetorical formulae of the genre. For example, in one such poem, they apologized for writing something that was too short, "[b]ecause the nightmare of the exam is looming."⁷³ There are even poems the specific function of which seems to have been to serve as an apology. In one poem, Attila even explained, in lines written above the poem, why he was writing (he had made his mother angry), and he made a promise: "Well, I see I have made you angry a lot. / And my conversion is not just a scribbling."⁷⁴

The children also wrote poems for one another. The texts of these poems offer impressions of the images of themselves that the children sought to convey, and the poetry also offered them an opportunity to compete and tease one another. For example, the younger son, Árpád, suggested to his mother that she could choose to go overseas with him in her old age, "to Haiti, Cuba / Or if you like to California / where lots of gold and diamonds can be found," or she could choose to remain with Attila "in the boring city of Pest."⁷⁵ Thus, the greeting poems, despite their genre, were not conventional, as the children enriched them with their own ideas and also included their own family members and relatives in the texts of the poems. Because of this, the poems reveal a lot about the authors' self-images and their images of each other, primarily through their wishes and plans for the future.

In 1864, Attila envisioned a future like this in his mother's birthday greeting: "When you are old, and Ilonka married, / Árpád at the sea, but me at your side."⁷⁶ He depicted his sister as playing the traditional role of the wife and his

72 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 207.

73 Ibid., 204.

74 "Sokat busítottalak tégedet át látom / De ím megtérésem nem csak ákom bákom." Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 205.

75 Ibid., 211.

76 Ibid., 196.

brother as pursuing the adventurous career of the seafarer, while he reserved for himself the strongest expression of a child's love and devotion to its mother. Therefore, the greeting poems can be interpreted as a creative expression of the parent-child relationship and a proud self-depiction of the author, who intended to present himself as the mother's most loving child.

In several poems, the boys wished their mother a happy grand-motherhood and happy silver and gold wedding anniversaries. For Júlia Szendrey's thirty-eighth birthday (December 29, 1866), Attila offered a vision of his mother as a grandmother surrounded by at least ten children. He also referred to his own imagined future as a professional:

I'm going to talk about fields and cows
As a farmer is entitled to do.
Little Árpád is about machines,
As is typical of a technician.⁷⁷

This is the only indication in the texts in question that Attila was preparing for a career in farming and Árpád for a career in mechanics and engineering (there were frequent references to Árpád's alleged desire to be a seafarer). As an adult Árpád, worked together with Tivadar Puskás and Ferenc Puskás, who established the first telephone network in Budapest.

Greeting poems by the Horvát boys also shed some light on the family lifestyle. When wishing Júlia Szendrey well, one of them wrote, "[h]ave a faithful maid, in addition to good spirits, / May you never be angry with the maid or with the child."⁷⁸ The typical problem of the period, the maid issue, also affected the Szendrey-Horvát family. This is also indicated by comments in the correspondence, for example, "mom has a lot of trouble with the maids because they are hardly here for two weeks then they leave. Even today, as I write this letter, a new one is being hired." In another letter, Attila complained that "[t]here is still a lot of trouble with the maids; about a dozen or so maids and cooks have left since you left."⁷⁹

The children did not stop writing poems for the mother when she and her husband separated. Even in the last year of Júlia Szendrey's life, when her sons no longer lived with her but resided instead with Árpád Horvát, they still wrote

⁷⁷ Ibid., 198.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 213.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 132.

new poems for her. They promised her a happy future, which would contrast with the sufferings of the past and present, and they wished her good health and expressed their hopes that her illness would soon be a thing of the past.” In December 1867, Árpád expressed his warmest wishes for his mother’s birthday as follows:

May you be a happy grandmother,
Have a gold wedding anniversary,
May you even forget that
you were suffering from disease.⁸⁰

Two months later, in a poem written on the occasion of his mother’s name-day in February 1868, Attila wished her a speedy recovery and wrote of the pain he felt at having to be separate from her, despite the love which bound them.⁸¹ The function of poetry writing thus expanded even further during this period. In addition to serving as a way of marking an occasion by offering festive greetings, it also contributed to maintaining a sense of a loving connection between the mother and the children, despite physical distance.

Poems for the Cousins

The visions of the future of the family that appeared in the greeting poems were intertwined with ideas about contemporary gender roles as well. This is especially noticeable in the poems addressed to their aunt, Mária Szendrey, in which good wishes are addressed not only to her, but also to the children’s cousins. Mária Szendrey (1838–1866) was the younger sister of Júlia Szendrey. In 1858, she married the prominent literary historian, Pál Gyulai. They had three children: Aranka was born in 1859, Kálmán in 1861, and Margit in 1862. Their family lived in Kolozsvár (today Cluj, Romania) between 1858 and 1862, which is why Attila Horvát portrays all of his cousins as the future prides of Transylvania. He wanted his cousins to fulfil the classic role models of women and men (housewife, patriotic girl, valiant hero, patriot): “Aranka should be a good housewife / The pride of the beautiful Transylvania”; “Aranka is a proper girl / Let her work for the benefit of the nation. / What should I tell about

80 Ibid., 199.

81 Ibid., 201.

little Kálmán / The little patriot / When he grows up he will be the most beautiful valiant knight of Transylvania.”⁸² In the visions drawn for the girl and the boy, personal deeds done for the sake of the nation are common elements. Otherwise, the ideal visions of female and male life are markedly different, as was the case in Attila’s poem for the new year of 1866, in which he predicted a marriage for Aranka and a future in literary criticism for Kálmán, following his father. A vision determined according to gender roles also appears in relation to the siblings in Attila’s poem of 1864 cited above, in which he envisions his sister, Ilona, as a wife with a husband and his brother, Árpád, as an adventurer at the sea. While the poems looking into the future usually emphasize some kind of occupation or profession (critic, sailor, technician, farmer) in the case of the boys, in the case of the texts written for the girls, they almost exclusively envision them as having become wives.

The boys’ correspondence also shows what they considered newsworthy about the girls. For example, Zoltán wrote at Christmas 1864, in response to his half-brothers’ letter: “I’ve heard that little Ilonka can already knit. Well done! Now she can compete with Aranka.” A diary entry which mentions Júlia Szendrey’s name-day also reveals that the boys followed the traditional gender roles and accordingly played no part in the kitchen preparations (baking and cooking) for the festivities. They considered the task of writing name-day greetings an adequate contribution on their behalf: “Only we boys have done as was expected, we have already handed over our poems; there isn’t anything we should do now. We can’t be used in cooking anyway.”⁸³

Júlia Szendrey’s and Mária Szendrey’s children wrote poems not only for the adults but also for one another. The poems which have survived constituted sources on their relationships as cousins. In the poems written by the older boys to the younger relatives, the practice of addressing one another by nicknames played a very prominent role. Attila called Aranka “Anka” and “Anka Bankám,” and Árpád called Kálmán “Kálmánka” or “little Kálmán” in his poems. Birthday wishes in these poems were also aligned with gender roles. Attila wrote to the three-year-old Aranka, “[m]ay she have many good children” and “[l]et her be a good patriotic girl,”⁸⁴ and on her sixth birthday he wished her “[t]reasure, happiness / a good husband and family.”⁸⁵ Árpád’s poem to Aranka also dwelt

82 Gyimesi, *Gyermekszemmel Szendrey Júlia családjában*, 219.

83 Ibid., 174.

84 Ibid., 222.

85 Ibid., 223.

on the importance of family. He wished his niece many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and he wished her parents an extremely long life.⁸⁶ According to the vision offered by the “poet,” the four generations will sit contently around the “family fireplace” together. The boys jokingly expressed their love for their aunt and niece, too: “We love you, we love you, sweet good Marika / We will marry you if we can, sweet good Aranka.” The imaginary marriage between the male and female cousins expressed their strong togetherness and common identity.

The nieces also had good relationship with each other. They were not only relatives, but friends. Ilona Horvát and Aranka Gyulai were the same age. They were both born in the summer of 1859. Ilona called her cousin “little playmate” in her writings.⁸⁷ Among her poems, a message of her to Mária Szendrey survived which was presumably created when Aranka was visiting her cousin’s family. The girl sent greetings to her aunt, assuring her that Aranka was in good spirits.⁸⁸ In 1868, after mother’s death, Ilona moved into her uncle Pál Gyulai’s home and lived together with her cousins, who had also lost their mother. Mária Szendrey died in 1866 during the cholera epidemic. The nieces attended the same school in the 1870s: their teacher was Róza Kalocsa, who later wrote the most popular handbook of manners in Hungarian.⁸⁹ Therefore, the cousin relationships remained strong even after the parents had died.

Summary

In Júlia Szendrey’s family, the sources suggest an intermixture of pre-modern and modern forms of parenting. By “pre-modern,” I am referring to the active participation in family life of kin who fell well outside the nuclear family. By “modern,” I am referring to the participation of the father in childrearing to a larger degree than was customary at the time. Alongside Zoltán’s mother and father, his relationship with his uncle, István Petőfi, also played a crucial role in his upbringing, i.e. the family used a strategy that was widespread both at the time and in the previous centuries: the boy experienced life both in his parents’ household and in a relative’s household, and thus he discovered a second environment. Familial use of space also reveals a great deal about the husband-

86 Ibid., 228.

87 Ibid., 230.

88 Ibid., 229.

89 Ibid., 254.

wife and parent-child relationships. According to Júlia Szendrey's letters and the letters written by the boys on family events, the mother took the children for walks on weekdays and the father took them for walks on public holidays. This suggests that, despite their deteriorating relationship, the husband and wife devoted time and attention to their children. Since in the circles of nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and in the world of norms conveyed by the contemporary press, the figure of the working father and the mother raising her children at home was considered ideal (even if the rigidity in practice of the theory of "separated spaces" based on radical separation is questionable based on a number of sources), it was not evident that the father would also be involved in the children's leisure-time activities. Thus, as a father, Árpád Horvát took a very active part in the life of his children compared to the expectations and norms of the period, according to which raising children was clearly the mother's task.

The uses of urban space during the city walks and the uses of the family home can be compared from the points of view of the parents. In both cases, the spaces used by the wife and husband were strongly separated. Quite unusually at the time, Júlia Szendrey had her own room, the furnishings of which indicated that writing and creative, individual intellectual work were important to her. However, the marked separation also showed that the relationship between the spouses was not characterized by the emotional closeness shown towards their children.

The analysis of the family's uses of space also showed that the rituals associated with the holidays and routines of everyday life were considerably different. As a historian and university professor, Árpád Horvát worked on the weekdays, but he took time off from work for Easter, on May 1, and on similar holidays and spent this time with his children. The Horvát boys' descriptions of urban phenomena are especially colorful and entertaining. The boys reflected on phenomena that an adult would not necessarily notice or consider worth mentioning. At least on the basis of the letters they exchanged, the children growing up in the Szendrey-Horvát family seem to have been sensitive to visual stimuli, novelties, and the atmosphere of urban life, and they showed remarkable enthusiasm and curiosity. This suggests that the stereotypes emphasizing metropolitan passivity, insensitivity, and alienation should be rethought.⁹⁰ The examination of intersections between urban history and family history can contribute to research on urban experience

90 For critiques of the paradigm of the urban modern personality created by Georg Simmel, see Gyáni, "Térbeli fordulat" és a várostörténet," 4–12.

from the perspective of the history of emotions, with particular reference to relationships and practices which can be understood based on sources concerning the uses of space by members of stepfamilies.

Correspondence played a key role in establishing family identity and in maintaining emotional ties between family members living far apart. It is particularly important that, in his letters, Attila Horvát depicted himself as a member of the community of siblings, regularly using the term “all of us” and reporting not only on himself but also on the lives of other members of the family (such as his cousins). He constantly encouraged maintaining contact with the physically distant Zoltán Petőfi and writing about topics that would be of interest to him. The accounts of regularly shared experiences allowed the half-siblings to be part of one another's daily lives from afar. The formation of the children's family experiences and the feeling of belonging were influenced by events and practices such as writing and reading letters, giving gifts, sharing puns and jokes, teasing, and describing experiences during city walks, on weekdays, and during family celebrations. Thus, in the Szendrey-Horvát family, the family identity as strongly shaped by writing practices connected both to the little things of everyday life and the rituals of the holidays.

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HU ISSN
2063-8647



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