

THE JEWISH WOMAN AS AN ALLEGORY: THE PORTRAYAL OF JEWISH WOMEN IN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY¹

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I

"Budapest, May city. My pen is unable to depict all your beauty. You are like a fair woman whose features are all graceful and familiar, who captures and detains with her unspeakable brilliance. am a prisoner of this city, this burning woman who invites a kiss."²

These are the lines of the star of literary life at the turn of the century, the Jewish writer Sándor Bródy, or Alexandre Bródy to be exact, since they were published in a French language anthology. The volume, published on the occasion of the millenary celebrations, was supposed to present, in a glorious light, the "modern" Hungary treading the path of industrialization and economic development with neophyte enthusiasm. Budapest was the most spectacular proof of this boom. Regarding its population, in 1867 it was the seventeenth largest city in Europe but by 1900 it was the eight already, surpassing Rome, Hamburg or Liverpool with its 733,000 inhabitants and slowly approaching Vienna. The metropolis was young, self-confident, and proud of its Western allure, its palaces, its underground—the first on the Continent—and its more than five hundred cafes.

For the first time in Hungarian literature, writers took notice of a city that was increasingly theirs; they left their country environment for it, and they were born there in growing numbers. Budapest became a real metropolis, both administrative and literary centre: it was hardly possible or desirable to stay away.³ Budapest, the framework of authorial life, the exalted or condemned city—or rather its inhabi-

tants—became for the first time the object of their studies. The working girl, the schoolmistress, the coquette, the upper middle class housewife—that is the “modern woman”—entered Hungarian literature whose authors and readers now came mostly from the emerging bourgeoisie. The writers, especially if they were popular, increasingly felt the pressure to reflect a picture that strengthened their readers’ view of the society they were living in.

One distinguished type emerged from among these female personages: the wealthy banker’s wife, the elegant lady from Lipótváros (the 5th district of Budapest), that is: the Jewish upper class woman. Why she of all people?

Finally emancipated in 1867, Hungary’s Jewish population—which rose from half a million at the time of the Emancipation to almost one million in 1910—played a fundamental role in modernizing economic structures, introducing Western cultural norms, and establishing Budapest as an industrial, financial and cultural metropolis. By the turn of the century, the Jewish upper class controlled some 90 percent of Hungary’s modern banking system and industrial plants.⁴ By that time, it had become obvious that, contrary to the vision of the future put forward at the time of the Hungarian *Vormärz*—which foresaw the Hungarian nobility as the future backbone of the country’s modern middle class—it was, in large part, the Jews who constituted Hungary’s modern commercial and industrial middle classes, and particularly the financial upper classes. In the 1900s, Hungarian Jewry’s social influence was unparalleled in Europe.

The Jewish upper class was therefore of symbolic importance. Naturally, if we associate the all-embracing lemma of “modern” with the Jews, and the Jewish women, we must also note that Jewish female society also had other representatives who were all the more modern that they questioned middle class order and morals. Jewish women were in a majority among the founders of the nascent feminist movement and played an important role in the social democratic party, as well as in progressive intellectual societies like the so-called Sunday Circle.

Even though the writer Sándor Vay alias Sarolta Vay did not hesitate to call feminists the “most damned type of modern women”⁵ and even though anti-Semites equated feminism with Jewish women (as they so often did in the case of progressive movements and Jews),

nevertheless the most striking phenomenon, generating the most curiosity or antipathy, was the rise of Jewish middle and upper classes, which were generally identified by contemporaries with Budapest, or rather, its business centre, the Lipótváros. The confusion was understandable, but largely wrong. The majority of Budapest's Jewish inhabitants—203,687 persons in 1910 representing 23.1% of the total population—were in fact lower middle class people. As for the "Lipótváros", if everybody used it as a synonym for upper class Jews, by the 1910s, the metaphor did not really reflect the reality any longer. Although in 1910, 28.9% of metropolitan Jewry lived in the 5th district, "the cream of the crop of the Lipótváros society—wrote three Jewish writers in a little book on the district published in 1913—are precisely those who do not live in the Lipótváros, but rather around the Városliget park."⁶

The "Lipótváros" was a rather closed world. Closed, as are all elites that indicate their acquired or inherited position by emphasising their detachment from the lower classes, and closed because it was Jewish. Defined by the traditional elite whose prestige rested upon features that gained actually sense in their contrast with characteristics attributed to the Jews, the prevailing mentality established an intellectual partition wall around even the most acculturated Jews, which limited and perverted the formation of personal relations. "A real baron who is not a poor man and yet mingles with rich Jews is in itself a suspicious phenomenon",⁷ says a Jewish journalist in a novel by Ferenc Herczeg published in 1903. As for the impoverished nobility who attended the soirees of upper middle class Jews in hope of some kind of financial benefit, "they sink deeper in the eyes of their former society—wrote Ferenc Molnár—than countesses ending up at music-halls".⁸

At the same time, one should add that the same distancing was also manifest among the Jewish upper classes, either by desire to avoid potential humiliation, or by bourgeois disdain towards the traditional noble elite, or even by simple indifference. Among other indicators, the tendency of endogamy within the Jewish upper middle class reflected their reluctance to mix with the traditional elite. As the Jewish journalist, Ödön Gerő wrote about the Lipótváros: "Even its time diverges from that of the outside world. That one has days and nights, it has *jours* and *soirées*. ... [local people] attend the evenings of the

Hubay quartet, it is only because Popper plays the violoncello part."⁹ Is it necessary to point out that Jenő Hubai was not Jewish but David Popper was?

Furthermore, there was a question of visibility in everyday life. The Jewish businessman enthroned dreadfully in his office, invisibly for the masses of employees, returned home by fiacre or automobile, or had himself driven to the Lipótváros Club whose very few Christian members played the questionably honourable role of the honorary goy. The lack of over-refinement in his attire, simplicity in his taste—even if it originated in the pseudo-Puritanism, which was forced upon him by middle class morals and if his social status paradoxically required him to flaunt his wealth in certain situations—did not make it possible for Lipótváros mythology to crystallize in the character of the Jewish man.

The situation was different in the case of women. Although the topology of their urban presence also implied some kind of segregation—namely the absence of men—the uncompromising ritual of shopping on Váci Street or Kossuth Lajos Street in the morning, walking along the esplanade in the afternoon, or the mounted walk along Stefánia Boulevard, made them more visible to the eyes of "others". Jewish upper middle class ladies had other almost obligatory pursuits, which they shared with women of the traditional Hungarian elite and which established a regular connection between them. These were, for example, the numerous charity societies, the specific locations of female socialization, whose meetings "are attended, as one knows, by the Pest *société mixte*".¹⁰

As the main representative, the substantive attribute, not to say the "object" of her social group's wealth, it was one of the roles of the Jewish upper class woman, elegant and richly bejewelled, to show off, to make her husbands prosperity felt. Alone or at the side of her husband, it was she who was noticed. In his book about Budapest, the French André Duboscq devoted a few pages to the "Jewish question" (in a favourable sense towards Jews), but when he described his urban walks, he mentioned only women. "Jewish women stand out with the voluptuousness of their becoming curves and rather gaudy outfits. They flag their hats with feathers and ribbons. One might see them everyday at the promenade."¹¹

Finally, Jewish women—as contemporaries emphasized accommodatingly—seemed to take on this role rather willingly. Identifying with their role, they even accentuated it, making it spectacular, and laying themselves open to both admiration and aversion. As Jenő Heltai wrote about two Jewish upper middle class women from the Lipótváros:

The husbands were simple but wealthy Jews. Simplicity and Jewishness did not show on their wives. Their wealth was all the more obvious.¹²

(That their Jewishness did not show does not mean it was not visible, since Heltai noticed it. The aspiration of Jewish upper middle class women to get rid of their Jewishness—proven impossible by the fact that none of the authors let it go unremarked—belonged in fact to their characteristic traits in the eyes of the contemporaries.

This way a symbolism was born, contrasting the Jewish woman—whose proud beauty has been gladly referred to by literary clichés ever since Walter Scott and Chateaubriand—and the Jewish man, whom the descriptions—this was certainly the case in the turn of the century Budapest literature—portrayed as ridiculous and unhand-some, the absolute opposite of the perky Hussar. His “simplicity” when coupled with wealth, became “vulgar”. As the philosopher Bernát Alexander wrote half ironically, half bitterly:

We cannot walk nicely, cannot greet well or salute finely, we are not polite enough; we yell, push, we are brash, our clothing is not fashioned to the latest trend, we love thick watch-chains and so forth.¹³

The views expressed about the Jewish upper middle class woman, much more so than in the case of her husband, offered a mirror of the dominant society's response to the rise of the Jewish bourgeoisie.

All portrayals, including the literary ones, are partial, all generalizations are partially false. Naturally, there were exceptions. Did this Jewish upper middle class woman really exist? Obviously not all elegant middle class female citizens, all “modern women” were Jewish. But we see what we want to see. And this is what interests us, not so much “reality” but rather its representation: the picture of the Jewish woman in literature—drawn mostly by non-Jewish authors, as the

reflection of the "Jewish question" that was, as another French author noted in 1908, "one of the most important questions arising now in Hungary".¹⁴ This Jewish woman was real though, but just as much a metaphor. The picture drawn of her did not just refer to her but was an allegory of this "Jewish question".

II

Because of our approach, we do not aim to draw the portraits of real life women. Besides, in the turn of the century Budapest, we would search in vain for archetypes as Rahel Varnhagen, whose extraordinary personality overrode her own story to reflect other people's lives. The lover of the great poet Endre Ady, Adél Brüll, alias Léda, just to mention the most obvious example, was more a Parisian (or "Nagyváradean") woman than a Budapestester.

This way, although some background seems to be useful, we shall limit ourselves to a more than curt introduction.¹⁵ "A comfortable home, large household, system and organization all around",¹⁶ wrote the younger sister of György Lukács and daughter of the ennobled banker József Lukács about her childhood spent in Budapest at the turn of the century. Jewish upper middle class life: spacious apartment full of bric-a-bracs, devoted servants, banker, businessman, lawyer, doctor or reputable intellectual husband, homemaker wife, the real mistress of the house, whose job was the beautification of the home, and whose days were spent instructing the personnel, shopping, strolling along the promenades, visiting, and playing the piano. The children—increasingly cared for by French or English, rather than German nurses—received thorough nurturing, girls were under strict surveillance, but middle class morals allowed boys to have affairs with bonnet-makers or the maid as long as the flirt remained discreet.

All these were characteristic not only of the Jewish middle and upper middle classes, but there were some especially typical attributes indicating the modernity of their lifestyle. Included among these were the birth and death rates, which were far lower among Jews in Budapest than among non-Jews, the consistent practice of birth con-

trol and the aging of the population being classical indicators of modern societies. The decrease in the birth and death rates was certainly even more significant within the richer metropolitan Jewish categories, although there are no statistics on this topic. Divorce, another characteristic of modern Western societies, was also more frequent among Budapest Jews than among other denominations.

With special regards to women: the level of education among Jewish males was higher than the average, but the proportion of Jewish women at universities exceeded even that of Jewish men. The doors of Hungarian universities—at least the medical and humanities departments—opened their doors to women in 1896. During the next ten years, 48.6% of female students were Jewish, while in 1895–1896, “only” 29.5% of male students were Jewish¹⁷ (Jews represented 20.4% of Budapest inhabitants in 1900). The first woman to attend the medical university, Sarolta Steinberger and the later feminist Vilma Glücklich, attending the department of philosophy, were both Jewish.

The increasing ratio of Jewish women in secondary schools and universities was naturally noticed by contemporaries, and linked with the frightful challenge of modernity, as the words of one female character of Mihály Babits’ novel, *Halálfiái* (Deathwards) indicate:

We will work... study... women can learn, too... I am starting a new life... ... Nellike’s faint heart got frightened: all this was so extreme! [...] To go to secondary school, like the Jewish misses!¹⁸

Evidently, this resulted in Jewish women’s dominance in professions where the presence of women was still new: in Hungary in 1910, 52.6% of private female medical doctors, and 38.5% of female journalists and editors were Jewish. As Viktor Karády wrote:

By any measure, Jews played in Hungary a primary role in legitimating the behavioural model of the Western middle class woman.¹⁹

As Babits wrote about the young non-Jewish hero of *Halálfiái* who arrives in Budapest around 1900 to continue his studies: “At that time, Imrus almost despised Christians. ... He declared that he would be proud to be considered a Jew. Anyway, all his fiends were Jewish,

since, he said, Christians and 'gentlefolk' were all brainless and uncultured."²⁰ As Jews played a significant role in distributing modern culture, from the incipient forms of mass culture to most of the avant-garde movements, the metropolitan Jewish middle and upper middle class was equally overrepresented among the consumers. As a renowned antisemitic author wrote about the 1900s: "According to all contemporary testimonies it is almost exclusively the Jewish intelligentsia that purchases books, just as it is also the one filling theatres and concert halls. Writers and publishers all bustle up to adapt to its taste."²¹ Jewish audience—female audience: if Gyula Krúdy wrote about the poet and editor in chief of *A Hét* (The Week), József Kiss, that "he writes his poems for women who do not correspond on the green envelope of Pictorial Family Papers any more",²² it was not just a habitual question since the editor in chief knew very well that "the weekly may count on one reliable and eager audience, under any circumstances: the ladies".²³

The entertaining literature that flourished at the turn of the century contrasted the pursuit of knowledge and attraction towards intellectual novelties of Jewish upper middle class women with the minor intellectual curiosity and ignorance of their husbands regarding new trends. As Jakab Berzsenyi or rather "Jacques de Berzsenyi", one of the main characters of Zoltán Ambrus' novel portraying the Lipótváros upper class self-ironically remarks: "The only obsolete thing I tolerate in my apartment is myself, personally."²⁴ His endeavour to persuade his daughter Elza about his interest in classical scholarship is not really convincing:

Do not think that I am not interested in literature. I do like nice essays, I am just reading the history of Enlightenment by a certain Schultz, it is a very informative book, I will lend it to you, I fall asleep over it anyway.²⁵

A character of a Ferenc Molnár short story complains to her girlfriend how little understanding her husband shows for that crucial accessory of the Lipótváros *soirées* who is "the modern", namely the young man who is specifically invited to be impertinent to women, mock the rabbi, spit on the carpet and damage the furniture:

My husband wanted to throw him out the last time, but I stopped him from doing so. My husband, you know, spends all day at the office and does not have any time to study literature, so he does not understand this character. But we had lots of fun.²⁶

If the wife's condescending attitude towards her husband is meant to be funny, her attitude also reveals the implicit critic of the author: in their snobbish thirst for novelties, the Lipótváros "trendys", Molnár suggests, were inclined to confuse literature with fashion. Was it not their primary aim to distinguish themselves from others (first of all from other Lipótváros women) in this permanent competition in which the introduction of the newest cultural trends, rather than reflect true intellectual curiosity, served as an indicator of social standing?

I always have to create new things for women—complained an uninspired 'modern' in Molnár's short story—because they are tired of Lohengrin with the blonde beard, ... they are tired of the Dorian Grays and the Oscar Wildes and all those new fashions, but they still want more and more because Lipótváros is not a sweet little whitewashed and fox-grape-showered super-sober Calvinist rectory, but a demanding culture-intelligent society wishing constantly for something new.²⁷

Be they Jewish as Ferenc Molnár and Ödön Gerő, or not, as Zoltán Ambrus and Gyula Szini, these (male) authors were inclined to reduce the erudition of these women to a ludicrous thirst for the new. As Ödön Gerő wrote about the Lipótváros:

Recently even philosophy became a drawing-room topic. Since the books of Nordau have established drawing-room wisdom, women are threading in the maze of sophisms.²⁸

Gyula Szini was even more categorical:

The *haute financière* chit-chats about Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, debates free love with pleasure if you mix in follies-jokes, adores English-German ditties and in fact knows nothing about nothing.²⁹

Do these views correspond with reality? This, as we have already mentioned, does not belong to our topic. In any case, one perceives between the lines of these opinions the male society's aversion to the new and intellectually competitive generation of women fighting for emancipation. Regarding the satirizing of the husbands' illiteracy, suffice it to say that the erudition of certain Jewish upper middle class men was proverbial. It was the case of Zsigmond Kornfeld, one of the most influential bankers of the turn of the century or József Lukács, whose broad knowledge almost frightened the young Albert Gyergyai. As for the allegedly false erudition of their wives and daughters, if József Lukács's daughter was indeed disturbed by the superficial chat of her mother talking about books she never read, the new generation of Jewish upper class girls made a deep impression even on the young literary critic Marcell Benedek, who wrote in his diary around 1910:

One or the other put me to shame because of their literacy as Görgy Lukács once did.³⁰

III

We have already quoted Zoltán Ambrus' book, *Baron Berzsényi and his Family*, published in Budapest in 1902. It is worth dwelling upon it for a while. The novel portrays in easy style the daily life of an ennobled, converted upper class Jewish family, it achieved significant success and was reprinted five times in the first year of its publication. At first it strikes one as a set of clichés formed of Jewish upper bourgeoisie—this would be interesting in itself—although it provides a much more refined picture, partially contravening these clichés.

The mother's portrait ("Sadly fat, ... still looks good at concerts, diamond pendants as big as my fist. Otherwise insignificant"³¹) is depicted as the Jewish upper class woman usually was: deeply snobbish, she ardently longs for the recognition of the aristocracy, which naturally rejects her, while she fears to be considered Jewish, which she naturally is by everyone. Paralyzed by her constant concern about the way the others, that is, the non-Jews look at her, she is unable to

get rid of her stiffness in the most intimate situations. She scolds her husband in the evening as they sit tête-à-tête in their boudoir for daring to call her "sweetie": "I have asked you a number of times not to call me that. What will people think? Say 'my dear'."³² In bed in the evening, she reads the *Gotha Almanach*, amazing even her husband, and would like his name, changed from the Jakab to Jacques, to be re-translated into the hyper-Hungarian *Zalán*, "because Jacques is *Zalán* in Hungarian, isn't it?"³³ When somebody refers to her husband by his real name, she almost blacks out: "Jakab! Jakab Berzsenyi! Why not 'that kike' right away?"³⁴

Similarly to her mother, the beautiful and cold Blanka, her older daughter, hastens to look as arrogant and as little Jewish as possible, she is a rather roughly made character, serving as the counterpoint to the portrayal of her younger sister. Elza is a lovable and contradictory personality, she ironically criticizes the behaviour of the members of her class, not sparing any touchy subjects. One of these is the charity work of the Jewish upper middle class. Wealthy Jews were all the more active in philanthropic works that they saw it as the most appropriate disproof of the accusation of miserliness directed against Jews. Disclosing the diligently cultivated but also hypocritical charity work which primary aim was not so much to alleviate misery as to imitate the aristocracy, Elza mocks her mother and sister who go "to beg for the poor": "It is posh to give, but it is chic to beg. To give, you only need money, but begging also requires Christian humility. In a word: Mrs. Metternich does it and that's enough for Mom."³⁵

Elza is not less ironic about one of her girlfriends, who comes from an ennobled and converted family like her and "is only happy when country chaps mistake her for Countess Thurzó".³⁶ Criticising her older sister, she points out the inclination of the Jewish upper class—so often mocked by contemporary Christians and even more harshly attacked by Jews themselves—to model their behaviour after the traditional elite, "to mimic the gentry" to use the term of the period:

All this is not so ridiculous as your eternal fear of being ridiculous. To live all your life according to others' tastes when this means a constant inconvenience, is there anything more ridiculous than this?³⁷

Reality is ambivalent. It should logically follow from Elza's behaviour that she accepts her Jewish origins, which she usually does. On some occasions, though, she takes offence at the tiniest hint regarding her Jewishness. To her sister, who is irritated by Elza answering a question with another question because "it is a Galician custom", she declares:

You can call me whatever you want: Khazar, Assyrian, Polish, or Spanish. But do not forget that your ancestors did not arrive in this country on horseback, either.³⁸

But to her cousin, who reminds her that their grandmother "was not Catholic yet", she retorts, scandalized: "I won't stand for such jokes!"³⁹

Elza also talks about her fate as a woman. A conversation about the social standing of actresses offers her the occasion to disclose her desires. This is by the way the only topic where her older sister shares her views. As Blanka remarks regarding actresses:

They are independent, they earn money, they live a feverish, nice life and let us admit it, we envy them.⁴⁰

Worshipped in both Vienna and Budapest, and admitted to the most exclusive circles, the actresses embodied a twofold ideal. Having achieved financial independence, they were freed from men's control while their special status allowed them to live a rather free sexual life in a society which otherwise considered extra-conjugal sexuality as some kind of anarchistic element and admitted its practice only in the case of men. Elza, who secretly hangs on the "licentious" writings of Marcel Prévost and Jean de la Vaudère, admires and envies actresses, because "if they misbehave, they are overlooked, not like the ones art does not absolve".⁴¹ She longs for an independent life, and explains to her cousin how "terrible" she considers the thought of devoting her life to one man, and sacrificing it for him. As it appears, the converted young girl sees the source of her emancipational endeavours in her Jewish background.

You know—she explains—the love of freedom is very strong in me. This might be the consequence of the fact that our foremothers, the poor oriental slaves partook in everything but freedom.⁴²

Zoltán Ambrus' novel painted a picture of the Jewish upper middle class and its women whose nuances we can hardly track down in the mirror held up by politicians or committed intellectuals. "Jacques de Berzsenyi", to say a word about the "hero" of the novel, accepts in the public life the values of the traditional elite, but gives voice in private to the successful businessman's contempt for that very same elite, he is both a snob longing to play cards with aristocrats and a proud self-made-man despising those who were born with a silver spoon in their mouths, a converted Jew who avoids mixing with other (converted) Jews while always cracking Jewish jokes and showing solidarity with the miserable Galician Jewry. Ambrus' portrayal provides an image of the Jewish elite's ambivalent attitude towards both the values and representatives of the traditional elite and their own Jewishness that very few of his contemporaries were able to show. The non-Jewish author's sympathy for his Jewish characters, especially Elza, is obvious. The novel, as we have mentioned, was met with great success. Given that the reading public was far from being exclusively Jewish, it indicates that there was—at least at that time—an audience which transcended religious affiliations and consisted not only of the entrenched camps of Jewish and Christian middle classes.

In 1903, one year after the publication of Ambrus' book, another entertaining novel consisting mainly of dialogues came on the market. *Andor és András* (Andor and András) did not deal specifically with the Jewish upper middle class, it told the story of two journalists' complicated friendship in this Hungary of the turn of the century where "everyone is liberal but nobody can stand the Jew".⁴³ One of them, Andor, is Jewish and the other, András, is the offspring of an impoverished noble family. This work of Ferenc Herczeg was reprinted four times between 1903 and 1911, then another three times between 1925 and 1934. A German translation was published in Vienna as early as 1904.

The reader gets acquainted with the Szingers of Szilas, an ennobled but this time unbaptized Jewish family, through Andor, the Jewish journalist. The family lives in a mansion on Andrásy Street—"Everything *was gut und teuer ist* can be found there—and most of all gold-plating, lots of gold-plating".⁴⁴ The mother is fattish and insignificant, the complete opposite of her daughter, Ada:

Her hair is bronze-coloured, her lips narrow and cold, but her eyes, usually cast down, are fiery, ingenious and evil. ... Her father and mother naturally adore her but are unable to live with her in any kind of spiritual community. The daughter is the real head of the house. ... Everything belongs to Ada and everything is here for the benefit of Ada.⁴⁵

"Ingenious and evil"—the tone has been set. The Ambrus-type empathy towards his charming and loveable, warm-hearted heroine is ruled out here. Ada is unquestionably intelligent, and acerbically so, for example when she exposes to András the hypocritical nature of the relationship between the Christian and Jewish upper classes:

Balls like this are held for our guests, not for ourselves. They amuse themselves, because they gossip about us. ... I particularly hate our domestic Christians! ... The Christians, who come to us, always want something from us. A wife, money or whatever. They do not come for the company. You do not want anything because you are still very young. Later you will also want something. And if not, you will drop away.⁴⁶

Ada's antipathy towards Christians mirrors the blurred but apprehensible antipathy the author fosters towards his heroine. Herczeg slips through the sensible description of the young woman—isolated because of her father's wealth and her Jewishness, and torn between the desire to please and her hatred of hypocrisy—into a portrayal where the reader does not know any more when Ada is sincere and when she is not. In the end, one must suppose that she is never sincere. Unable to accept herself, Ada chooses interchangeable and hypocritical roles. She is hypocritical in the affection she demonstrates towards her father, she is hypocritical towards men. It is only in Andor's company that she is able to express her sincere feelings. Andor loves her, but perhaps because he is unattractive—"if I were a girl I would not pick me either"⁴⁷—or perhaps because he is poor, Ada refuses him, while still expecting him to constantly assure her of his fidelity. What binds them together is the supposedly Jewish "intellectuality" alienating them from "real" life. "You always argufy, Andor. I do the very same. That is why we will never live a normal life."⁴⁸ Herczeg gets Ada out of her emotional dead-end by picking her a solution that

condemns her at the same time. Ada marries the "arch-Catholic" baron Koller. He does not love her, nor does she love him, but instead of the passion she is incapable of feeling anyway, he offers her the prospects of a "colourful and enjoyable life".⁴⁹ As Ada confesses to Andor at their last meeting, she has realized that she is "totally heartless".⁵⁰

Compared to Ambrus, the change of perception is obvious. It is naturally possible to refer to Herczeg's misogyny and note that he portrayed the Jewish journalist in more positive tones. Still, Zoltán Ambrus' tone is much more positive compared to Herczeg's. But could it be any other way? Ferenc Herczeg—as opposed to Zoltán Ambrus—wrote primarily for that part of the middle class that was soon to label itself "Christian" to express its rejection of the Jewish bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the two novels were similarly successful; the game appeared to end in a tie.

IV

After the quite years of the 1890s, antisemitism began to grow in the 1900s. Exacerbated by the sufferings of World War I and the traumas of the successive revolutions in 1918–1919, antisemitism dramatically entered the Hungarian stage with the pogroms of the White Terror in 1919 and the introduction, the following year, of the *numerus clausus* law. Naturally, antisemitism did not wait for the interwar period to draw a connection between urban civilization supposedly destroying the traditional values of the Hungarian *Volk* and the Jews, or more specifically the supposedly corrupt and licentious Jewish women considered to be the depositaries of all modern debauchery. As one of the most "talented" antisemitic pamphleteers wrote in 1899: "Everything, everything has degenerated. ... The national genius, the primordial force is unable to produce anything; our senses are numbed by street noise, the giggle of the salon, the heated atmosphere of the music-hall, the embrace of Hebron's roses. ... The family is taught the ideas of free love and union libre mostly by Hebron's butterflies winnowing on the wings of woman's emancipation. They are the ones who take open prostitution to the streets. ... Nothing else but their lecherous blood drove them there."⁵¹

The most spectacular expression of this perception is to be found in Dezső Szabó's novel titled *The Swept Away Village*. Published in 1919, the book, together with Gyula Szekfű's *Three Generations*, became the staple reading of a whole generation who identified with this extreme right "modernity" rejecting both traditional conservatism and leftist radicalism. A kind of reversed *Bildungsroman*, the novel follows the path of the non-Jewish writer Miklós Farkas from the beginning of the 1910s until the end of World War I. Farkas goes to Budapest to get to the top, he is picked up and then destroyed by an urban civilization represented as the materialisation of the Jewish spirit.

There is no Jewish woman among the main characters. There is no need for that, since she is everywhere: as the allegory of the depraved and depraving modernity, she is the discarnate metaphor of all temptation and evil. She is the tempting audience of Miklós Farkas ("Every slut of the Lipótváros has to be in heat with me"⁵²), she is the projection of Budapest literature ("And what is their literature? An eternal buzz around woman's pubes"), she is the one in whom the "pure man torn from his mother is lost and rots",⁵³ she is the city, "Pest the prostitute",⁵⁴ the "modern Sodom",⁵⁵ who corrupts Christian women by forcing them to become like her, "decadent, versatile, modern and hysterical".⁵⁶ She is the city that the author naturally contrasts with the chastity of the village community: "As if I have stepped back from the dirt, the hysterical poses and bored geniality into my virginity, the ancestral purity of my youth",⁵⁷ Farkas bursts out when he returns to his native village.

Sexuality is as strongly present in the novel as it was said to be all pervading in this modern literature *enjuivée* that Dezső Szabó so vehemently condemned. "Pest the prostitute", as opposed to the "virginity" of the village: the absolute opposition stems from the antagonistic nature of "Jewish" and "Hungarian" sensuality. Szabó contrasts the healthy, fertile, inartificial eroticism of village women with the lewd, egoistic, insatiable because unappeasable sexuality of the Budapest bankers' wives marching on the sidewalks "with eyes neighing at males".⁵⁸

To be able to seduce and destroy, the Jewess had to be temptation herself. The portrayal of a rich, young Jewish woman is so rich in phantasms that it is worth quoting the whole description:

In this lushly wealthy girl everything was love, the conceiving will of embrace. Her big, oriental eyes lay down in front of things as open loins and the watery warmth of conception steamed from them. Her generous breasts beleaguered her dress and invited desire. Her cushiony hair, as if in the heat of eternal embrace, fluttered loosely, her pelvis tilted in endless recipience, kisses rose from her thick lips as bees from the lips of the overswarmed beekeeper. This girl was the exuberating warmth of continuing life, the absolute embrace, the conceiving kiss.⁵⁹

While it seemingly calls for procreation, the irresistible temptation is a trap. If the man, the Hungarian succumbs, he rushes into disaster. Barren because she is insatiable, insatiable because driven by noxious desire, the Jewish woman, the city, brings about nothing but destruction, her kiss is deadly. The "hysteric Pester beasts, from whom ... every flash of male flesh was a secret, lusty expansion", volunteered as nurses to care for the injured in the war: "Foot-soldiers or heavily wounded could die as for them but they tussled for those emanating strong promises. ... The lunatics of the loins, the ones rushed by the blood needed love up to their chins, and ever-fresher waves of male flesh. The wife of a distinguished Jewish banker was secretly banned from the hospital because she was found with a semi-recuperated lieutenant in the rear during a quickie. The hot females buzzed in the heavy air of disease like giant blow-flies to sip the still remaining man from the victims of war in a vampire-like embrace, and the accursed, sick desire exposed its filthy nudity on the tragic bed of death".⁶⁰

The symbol is fundamental. The image of Jewry establishing its reign by feeding on the life-force of Hungary thereby led to complete exhaustion—by the end of the novel Farkas becomes impotent—found in this representation of the Jewish woman its ultimate expression.

Traditional anti-Judaism established the picture of the Christian child as the victim of the Jewish blood ritual. Economic antisemitism created the image of the haematophagous Jewish loan-shark—be it either a wandering merchant or a banker. Dezső Szabó's racial antisemitism offered the image of the vampire Jewess. A "*Femme fatale*" in the literal sense, she was, in that respect, definitely "modern".

NOTES

1. Revised version of the essay originally published in Zsuzsanna Toronyi, ed., *A zsidó nő* [The Jewish woman] (Budapest: Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, 2002), exhibition catalogue.
2. Maurice Gelléri, *La Hongrie millénaire. Le passé et le présent* (Budapest, 1896), 136.
3. Aladár Komlós, *Irodalmunk társadalmi háttere* [The societal background of our literature] (Budapest, [1948]), 73.
4. Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary 1825–1945* (Princeton, 1982), 114.
5. Quoted by: *A nő és a társadalom* [The woman and the society] (1910/1), 5.
6. Miksa Bródy–Árpád Pásztor–István Szomaházy, *Lipótváros* (Budapest, 1913), 27.
7. Ferenc Herczeg, *Andor és András* [Andor and András] (1903; Budapest, 1925), 48.
8. Ferenc Molnár, *Az éhes város* [The hungry city] (1901; Budapest, 1993), 286.
9. Ödön (Vilmos) Gerő, *Az én fővárosom. Képek Budapest életéről és lelkéről* [My metropolis: Pictures from the life and soul of Budapest] (Budapest, 1891), 4, 13.
10. Bródy–Pásztor–Szomaházy, 24.
11. André Duboscq, *Budapest et les Hongrois. Le pays, les mœurs, la politique* (Paris, 1913), 27.
12. Jenő Heltai, *Az asszony körül* [Around the woman] (Budapest, 1908), 26.
13. Bernát Alexander, “Zsidó problémák” [Jewish problems], in József Patai ed., *Magyar Zsidó Almanach* [Hungarian Jewish year book] (Budapest, 1911), 186.
14. René Gonnard, *La Hongrie au XXe siècle. Étude économique et sociale* (Paris, 1908), 72.
15. On the lifestyle and cultural characteristic of Jewish middle class see Viktor Karády, “A zsidóság polgárosodásának és modernizációjának főbb tényezői a magyar társadalomtörténetben” [The main factors of the embourgeoisement and modernization of the Jews in Hungarian social history], in Balázs Füzfa–Gábor Szabó Gábor, *A zsidókérdésről* [On the Jewish question] (Szombathely, 1989), 95–135; Gábor Gyáni, *Hétköznapi Budapest. Nagyvárosi élet a századfordulón* [Everyday Budapest: City life at the turn of the century] (Budapest, 1995); Gábor Gyáni, “Domestic Material Culture of the Upper-middle Class in the Turn-of-the-Century Budapest”, in CEU History Department, *Working Paper Series I*, (1994), 55–71; Panni Láng, “Egy budapesti polgárcsalád mindennapjai” [The everyday

- life of a Budapest middle class family], *Történelmi Szemle*, no. 3 (1985): 76–93; Poppné Mici Lukács, "Emlékeim Bartók Béláról, Lukács Györgyről és a régi Budapestről" [My remembrances of Béla Bartók, György Lukács and the old Budapest], in Ferenc Bónis ed., *Magyar zenetörténeti tanulmányok Kodály Zoltán emlékére* [Hungarian musical history essays in memory of Zoltán Kodály] (Budapest, 1977), 379–410.
16. Poppné, 398.
 17. Viktor Karády, "A társadalmi egyenlőtlenségek Magyarországon a nők felsőbb iskoláztatásának korai fázisában" [Social inequalities in Hungary in the early phase of women's higher education], in Miklós Hadas ed., *Férfiuralom. Írások nőkről, férfiokról, feminizmusról* [Patriarchy: Writings about women, men, and feminism] (Budapest, 1994), 181.
 18. Mihály Babits, *Halálfiái* [Deathwards] (1927; Budapest, 1984), 56.
 19. Karády, "A társadalmi egyenlőtlenségek", 187.
 20. Babits, 363–64.
 21. Gyula Farkas, *Az asszimiláció kora a magyar irodalomban. 1867–1914* [The age of assimilation in Hungarian literature. 1867–1914] (Budapest, [1938?]), 124.
 22. Gyula Krúdy, "Kiss József estéje" [The evening of József Kiss], in *Írói arcképek* [Writers' portraits], vols. I–II (1922; Budapest, 1957), vol. I, 478.
 23. Péter Kardos, "Mit ér a nő, ha férfi?" [What good is a woman if she's a man?], in Ignóty, *Emma asszony levelei. Egy nőimitátor a nőemancipációért* [Letters of Madame Emma: A female impersonator for woman's emancipation] (Budapest, 1985), 10.
 24. Zoltán Ambrus, *Berzsenyi báró és családja* [Baron Berzsenyi and his family] (1902; Budapest, 1906), 316.
 25. *Ibid.*, 103.
 26. Ferenc Molnár, *A hétágú síp* [The syrinx] (Budapest, 1911), 43.
 27. *Ibid.*, 9–10.
 28. Gerő, 10–11.
 29. Gyula Szini, "Fiataljaink" [Our young ones], in Anna Fábri-Ágota Steiner eds., *A Hét. Politikai és irodalmi szemle 1890–1907* [The Week: Political and literary review 1890–1907], vols. I–II (1905; Budapest, 1978), vol. II, 258.
 30. Marcell Benedek, *Naplómat olvasom* [Reading my diary], (Budapest, 1965), 181.
 31. Ambrus, 1.
 32. *Ibid.*, 169.
 33. *Ibid.*, 80.
 34. *Ibid.*, 133.
 35. *Ibid.*, 121–2.

36. Ibid., 248.
37. Ibid., 268.
38. Ibid., 34.
39. Ibid., 221.
40. Ibid., 29.
41. Ibid., 31.
42. Ibid., 128.
43. Herczeg, 32.
44. Ibid., 28.
45. Ibid., 35.
46. Ibid., 39–40.
47. Ibid., 41.
48. Ibid., 51.
49. Ibid., 135–6.
50. Ibid., 141.
51. Géza Petrássevich, *Magyarország és a zsidóság* [Hungary and the Jews] (Budapest, [1899]), 175–6, 173–4, 62.
52. Dezső Szabó, *Az elsodort falu* [The swept away village], (1919; Budapest, 1995), 38.
53. Ibid., 41.
54. Ibid., 38.
55. Ibid., 97.
56. Ibid., 85–86.
57. Ibid., 40.
58. Ibid., 156.
59. Ibid., 258.
60. Ibid., 165.

GENDER, MEMORY, AND JUDAISM

Edited by
Judit Gazsi, Andrea Pető,
and Zsuzsanna Toronyi

BALASSI KIADÓ · BUDAPEST
GABRIELE SCHÄFER VERLAG · HERNE

The publication was supported by
The Rothschild Foundation (Europe)

Text revised by A. T. Gane

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ISBN 978-963-506-742-8
ISBN 978-3-933337-55-9
ISSN 1586-3344

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Printed in Hungary

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