

THE HUNGARIAN MARKET OF 19TH CENTURY URBAN NATIONALISM AND THE RECYCLING OF THE URBAN MYSTERY NOVEL

ANNA MÁRTON-SIMON

Universitatea Babeş–Bolyai
marton.simon.panna@gmail.com

Following the success of Eugène Sue's serial novel *Les Mystères de Paris* a pattern emerges in the era's literary market. Sue's works provide a narrative, politico-cultural and economic model with a worldwide impact. These works created a new way of presenting a city, while also developing a type of narrative that sometimes precedes the actual urbanization of an area, thus offering ready-made panels when talking about often unfinished processes. Several Hungarian works following the same literary model were published that used the panels introduced by Sue in relation to a city early in the process of urbanization and promote a distinctly national image of Budapest. The popularity of Sue's works helped the kindred Hungarian novels become successful projects. This piece of research attempts to identify the ways in which these transnational patterns became adapted and domesticated by the earliest Hungarian urban mysteries and helped the emergence of a specifically urban nationalist sentiment.

Keywords: Eugène Sue, Hungarian literature, 19th century, urban mystery novel, nationalism

1. The urban mystery novel recycled

The incredibly fast modernisation and urbanization of Hungary's capital city in the nineteenth century not only transformed the architecture and infrastructure of Budapest,¹ but also brought along new social and political problems, as well as new models of communication² and perception. This extensive change seems to have happened simultaneously with the emergence of urban literature. But these wide and far-reaching transformations were preceded and domesticated by sharp, strong images and stereotypes on modern urban development; indeed a few urban literary trends even preceded the actual process of urbanization; Hungarian readers learned how to perceive and talk about the city before they could actually experience it.

The era's most popular and effective genre of urban literature that conquered the literary market was the urban mystery novel, most commonly associated with *Les Mystères de Paris* by Eugène Sue,³ a transnationally popular series that rev-

olutionized not only the narrative of urban living, but also transformed the novel as a genre by transferring it to a new medium. The *feuilleton-novel* created a new way of consuming (and writing) prose, it turned the novel into a genre issued in segments⁴ and enjoyed by a large public⁵. The newspaper was circulated, read and interpreted differently than books; its value lay in its up-to-date nature and the information it carried – these values were now transferred to the *feuilleton*, making it the literary genre framing novelty, sensation and debate. The novel published in this context had a very specific narrative structure, the main purpose of which was *to make itself open to concise summary*. Thus the formula “*to be continued*” emerged, replacing the role of the narrative core of the novel. Every chapter was designed to set up possible lines of follow-up stories, to introduce new tensions and new mysteries, new characters and relations, while sustaining the attention of the reader so that they would continue to engage with the story.⁶

The newspaper was inherently a business venture,⁷ its aim being to reach (and retain) the largest possible audience. In the severe competition of the era’s emerging literary market a successful serial novel was the most precious commodity. In the beginning, it was the newspaper that drew in readership for the novel, but Sue’s success turned the tables; the newspaper started to depend on the *feuilleton*⁸ – the popularity of the novel decided the popularity (and visibility) of the paper – thus having an impact on the circulation of political ideas. Sue’s decision about where he wanted to publish his next novel thus became one of the leading political issues of his time.⁹

Shortly after Sue’s novel started to gain a major reader base in France, the success of the “mysteries” triggered a transnational trend that reached Central and Eastern Europe, as well.¹⁰ These novels not only affected the literature and politics of France, but due to their transnational circulation and accessibility they started to create a powerful literary trend. A wide array of urban mysteries appeared throughout Europe and even farther afield¹¹. It was not only a popular literary trend, or a successful economical model, but also a question of prestige, a proof of the general longing for urban modernity. Soon after the original novel had been published, national variants and adaptations started to flood every book-market; every nation wanted its own mystery novel, its own urban literary success. The urban mystery had become a target and a tool of nation-building ideologies.¹²

The connection between 19th century Hungarian urban literature and nation-building efforts is rather ambivalent, and though powerful, also quite under-researched. The dominant literary tendencies that connected a specific space with nationalist imagery focused on the countryside, a rural, archaic scenery,¹³ specifically the Great Plain of Hungary (Hortobágy, Alföld, puszta). The divide between high- and low-brow literature seems to align with the distinction separating urban, metropolitan art from rural, vernacular art.¹⁴ However, this dichotomy is no less flawed than most polarized models. Mass urban literature in 19th century

Hungary created a parallel canon to the one primarily identified with nationalistic ideology, a different set of *classics*, seemingly springing from a radically different root than the one based on folklore. Nevertheless, this new canon is still attached to and very much founded on nationalism – but on a kind of nationalism that was new and uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century context: on *urban literary nationalism*.

This paper is an attempt to show how a transnationally popular literary genre of urban literary nationalism was appropriated¹⁵ (used, modified and domesticated) in a Hungarian context. This case study concentrates on the Hungarian rewritings of the successful serial novel by Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris*. Two of these works (*Hungarian Secrets/Mysteries – Magyar titkok* by Ignác Nagy¹⁶ and *National/Homeland mysteries – Hazai rejtelmek* by Lajos Kuthy)¹⁷ were published a few years after the success of the original series; the third (*Mysteries of Budapest – Budapesti rejtelmek* by József Kiss –Rudolf Szentesi)¹⁸ appeared thirty years later, in 1874. Reading these novels in the context of the century's nationalism not only sheds light on the workings of transnational patterns in creating a nation's unique and distinct image,¹⁹ but also reveals interesting mechanisms in the period's literary market, such as the subscription system popular in the era, the dominance of the newspaper over the traditional book market or the effects of transnational reading and publishing trends.

Though the first two novels have been analysed before in the context of the urban mystery novel,²⁰ and read in the light of Sue's original,²¹ the relevant piece by Kiss has not only been excluded from this narrative, but also disbarred from the writer's canonical works. It has been omitted due to the disapproval of the era's literary critics who upheld a certain ideal of national-vernacular art and considered this novel a shameless example of industrialized literature.²² In order to compensate for the distortion that this omission created in the general understanding of the model's circulation, this paper will concentrate on the different uses of the model in the two separate decades they appeared in. There are more Hungarian novels that build upon the genre of urban mysteries, but they are either more connected to the already adapted and nationalized rewrites than the original novel²³ or they don't showcase the connection as clearly as the selected novels²⁴ (which reference Sue's mysteries even in their titles). While it would be important to see the evolution of the genre and the afterlife of the all-encompassing success of the French model in a Hungarian setting, this paper aims to take a closer look at the beginnings of the genre's nationalized equivalent, and also to connect the Hungarian Budapest-trope²⁵ to a transnational matrix and even to imagine the urban prose of the fin-de-siècle as part of a continuous evolution of the genre²⁶ – thus historically extending modern urban Hungarian literature.

Although Kiss' novel is not as close in time to the original, its structure and use of the assets of the literary market and the genre itself are most visible.²⁷ It is jus-

tifiable to include this novel in a discourse concerning the emergence of this type of text because it showcases the discovery of how marketable the urban mystery novel really was in the half century after Sue's works had reached and conquered Hungary. *Les Mystères de Paris* arrived in Hungary in two waves: in the 1840s when the original French version started to circulate along with German translations; and in the 1870s, in three simultaneous Hungarian translations.²⁸ These two timeframes differed quintessentially; and through their cultural, social and economic differences they used, accepted, and adapted Sue's work in utterly different manners. The transnational trend was *nationalised* differently in each period.

At the time when the early signs of urbanization were only beginning to show, before the legal union of Buda, Óbuda and Pest,²⁹ that is, before the administrative emergence of the modern Hungarian capital city, the first Hungarian readers saw Sue as visionary and utopian. Since Buda and Pest were hardly metropolitan cities, the readers did not interpret Sue through the lens of urbanization, but rather they understood and used his popular novel series as a herald of future possibilities. On the one hand, the metropolis was an enthralling pattern to be followed, on the other hand, by reading the novel before the actual modernization of the twin cities began,³⁰ readers saw a way of preventing the mistakes made in Paris (or at least the ones Sue attributes to Paris) from happening in the Hungarian capital. In other words, the *Mysteries of Paris* was read as a reference point, a guide and a manual for designing the best possible capital city, a scheme to be recycled and reinterpreted from a *national* Hungarian perspective.

Considering the uproar of positive reception that surrounded Sue's imported works, it is not surprising that a need for a Hungarian variant, the nation's very own mystery novel, soon became felt (long before a translation was published).³¹ Due to Sue, there was a new eagerness and urgency in the press for a specifically Hungarian mystery novel. The arguments were of two sorts. The first came from a vindicatory standpoint: Hungarians had to prove that their literature was capable of reaching every segment of the literary field³². If the *more developed* nations have urban literature, then "*we have to have our own*".³³ The second argument originates from the general attitude of Hungarian readers who consumed and understood Sue's work as a depiction and exposure of the *rotten* and problematic side of the metropolis and as a cautionary tale for the times to come – these readers recognised and urged a need for a specifically Hungarian version of this social critique.³⁴

2. Parody as a call for change. Pest-Buda is a long way from Paris

The first author to seize this opportunity and publish his own version of the mysteries was Ignác Nagy. A well-known and widely read journalist, translator and writer of the 1830s and 1840s, Nagy was already a celebrated and beloved fig-

ure of the era's literary public. His interest and involvement in foreign trends (through his translations and light-hearted critiques) had made him a sensitive and responsive advocate of modernity and especially of early urban literature. He came from a literary background of theatre, journalism and petit-genre (él-etkép)³⁵ and was fascinated by western cultural fashions. By the time he started to publish his own mystery-novel (choosing to release it in sequels, but opting for a pamphlet form instead of the feuilleton), he had already gained a devoted readership. So the success of his novel was equally based on his earlier fame and the excitement of having a nationalized urban mystery novel.³⁶

Magyar titkok (Hungarian Mysteries) heavily referenced an earlier series of Nagy, *Torzképek (Caricatures)*,³⁷ a series within a petit-genre that aimed to portray the everyday nuances of urban living (from poking fun at the inadequate infrastructure and road network of the so-called modern capital city to describing typical urban figures, like the newsie, the reporter, the capitalist, the procurer, etc.). In the introduction to the new series Nagy purposefully highlighted this connection³⁸ (thus making sure that the avid readers of the caricatures continued to follow his work to this new genre and setting) by claiming that the following stories were the escapades of one of his most popular figures, *Szürke Zsák (Grey Bag)*, from a petit-genre about the criminal underground of the city. This gesture interlocked the two separate works and not only ensured a given audience before the actual publishing of the novel, but also helped to nationalize the narrative model he chose and included Sue's mysteries in an already existing national narrative.³⁹

The series was widely successful, so much so that Nagy had to expand on the plot he had originally planned and double the intended span of the story. This not only changed the arc and pace of the narration, but also allowed for significant changes to the plotline – in constant and repeated response to the critiques he received.⁴⁰ The interactive nature of this genre was not specific to Nagy, Sue's novel had also been heavily influenced by the countless letters and readers' suggestions he received throughout the writing process.⁴¹ The impact of these is clearly visible in the narrative structure of the novel; he brought back beloved characters because of reader demands, he changed the course of action and explained complicated connections (at the end of the series he was forced to write long explanatory detours due to the overcomplicated nature of the story)⁴² and he ended up writing a series more than twice the originally intended length stated in his contract with the editor.⁴³ Similarly, Nagy literally wrote for the public taste and the readers' demand; the finished novel was double the planned and promised length, he often responded to criticism directly in the text – either by disguising it as a simple shift of the narration, or plainly reacting to the accusations and demands.⁴⁴ The narrative frame introduced at the beginning of the novel (attributing the novel to Grey Bag and posing it as recollections of true events)⁴⁵ was abandoned by the epilogue where Nagy chose to respond to his accusers and critics and to announce his next

project – thus preparing the reader base for the new book, using the accumulated literary currency as a starting capital for his next venture.

Nagy referenced Sue's mysteries often and clearly, but approached them from an ironic stance⁴⁶ which was already known as his signature style from his previous works. This humorous, yet critical manner allowed him to build creatively on the success of the original without trying to recreate it. This is what allowed him to transform the novel from a simple adaptation of a foreign trend (trying to nationalize an international sensation by copying it), to an innovative, autonomous work rooted in his own (and thus in national) writing. Thus he managed to create a national alternative to the original⁴⁷ which was read and labelled as successful, but also pessimistic, frightening and morally questionable. *Magyar titkok* used an ironic attitude that challenged the original novel's moral, literary and also political stance,⁴⁸ while also showing the Hungarian city as a not-yet equal counterpart to Paris. He compared the roads, the public spaces, the crowds of people and the political and cultural practices, and demanded a faster, more effective infrastructural and societal modernization. This sentiment clearly resonated with his readers, who found the metropolitan life broadcast to them to be foreign and futuristic, but also necessary for modern national development. Even though the tone of *Magyar titkok* was satirical and humorous, parodying the urban mysteries for their serious use of wild romantic narrative and descriptive tropes, it clearly and loudly announced this critique of the French metropolis as an important ingredient of nation-building. It shifted the focus from the nostalgic praise of the natural landscape to an active interest in modern urban life – in other words connected the image of the nation to the *future* instead of the past.

3. Global vs. national. The mystery novel as a critique of cosmopolitanism

Paris was not only seen as the universal capital city, the centre of modern culture, but also as a symbol and monument of freedom and revolutionary thought.⁴⁹ Given this context, it is not surprising that the mysteries of the city of revolution were received with open arms in a political climate that was bursting from restless, rebellious energy. The novels of Kuthy and Nagy capitalized on a readership impatient for change and disgruntled by contemporary political and cultural conditions. They presented their novels as Hungarian suggestions for revolutionary, modern urban literature. When the newspapers announced that Lajos Kuthy was writing a new novel, they clearly presented it as a Hungarian, national variant of the French series, that advocate for political change.⁵⁰ They introduced it using a nation-building rhetoric. The French readers had needed these mystery novels to unveil the horrors and sins of modern, urban life in order to create a viable solu-

tion for the future and to be able to revolutionize the current system – so it was evident and necessary to write a Hungarian novel that exposes the city and the role it plays in holding back the nation from real change and freedom in order to purge it from these influences. And for the benefit of the nation it is important to select a suitable, talented and devoted patriotic writer for this task: Lajos Kuthy. It is not surprising, given his patriotic and sometimes nostalgic poetics, that Kuthy built on a significantly different ideological foundation and shifted this intrinsically modern genre in an *antimodernist* direction.

Kuthy, already read and praised by a devoted readership, set out to write a Hungarian mystery novel. His novel was relying on (1) the overwhelming interest in this genre, (2) the success of his literary progenitors, Eugène Sue and Ignác Nagy, (3) the need for an urban exposé-novel and (4) his previous success. This was a diagnosis of the era's political and cultural despair concealed by a detective story.⁵¹ The story itself read like an excuse to write a novel about the contrast between the sinful, foreign city and the idyllic, national countryside; the mystery is solved early on, the narration is heavily packed with detailed, expressive tableaux of the Great Plain and chaotic, sinister descriptions of Király street in Pest; while the dialogue is essentially a dramatized analysis of the era's political dilemmas. Characters are used as plot devices to voice certain ideological views,⁵² their actions confirm certain stereotypes,⁵³ the relations between them are analogous to the perceived political tensions between social classes.⁵⁴

Thus the novel became a simplified microcosm of Hungarian society itself, as it attempted to explain – through a binary model – how this new, modern, increasingly urban national space was divided and arranged.⁵⁵ Kuthy wrote a diagnosis of sorts, providing a *map* of the nation, and he clearly isolated the problem, the new economic system and what came with it – new money, new power and new influence, a less visible structure, where power was always shifting and changing hands. The message was distinctly stated: the nation cannot have a true national capital if Pest-Buda is populated by foreigners. The carefully hidden underworld that controls the Pest-Buda of this novel is ruled by Jewish and Austrian agents – the hero is a foundling, an orphan whose gentility is unjustly concealed, and who is thus left powerless and at the mercy of these foreigners.⁵⁶ This simplified tale of unjust, foreign oppression versus true patriotism is at the core of the novel, making it a tale about injustice and the dangers of cosmopolitanism. The capital city appears as a demonic, dark hub of foreign influence, an enemy of the nation. Out of the novel's four locations, Pest-Buda and the moors of Beszterce are shown as polar opposites. The former is a conglomerate of sin and corruption (it is often described in the book as a tumour, an alien object wedged into the nation's body),⁵⁷ the latter in an almost biblical⁵⁸ state of purity, the unsoiled essence of national value. The novel often sports a preaching, didactic tone that justifies the presentation of these horrors as a necessary start for the general edification of

the national capital. It juxtaposes Pest with a truly national landscape to further emphasize its corruption and its need for reform.

This imagery and the problems these tropes highlighted were essentially pointing to the question whether a capital city could truly be national or it belonged by default on the global scale. Paris was a global, international capital, it did not simply belong to France, it seemed to have become the metropolitan hub of the western world, an exchange point of cultural, political, ideological and economical value.⁵⁹ It was the true cosmopolitan city that transcended national thought. Choosing Paris as a model to be followed unavoidably posed the question about Pest-Buda's future metropolitan status: was it going to be a national capital or a cosmopolitan one? Kuthy seems to have proposed an urgent nationalization (or re-nationalization) of the city – his brand of urban literary nationalism was choosing Paris' international position as a desirable but dangerous counterpoint and proposed the necessity of a truly national capital city, a Hungarian city, free of “foreign power”.⁶⁰

Kuthy's novel was immensely popular at the time of its publication. It is tell-tale that *Hazai rejtelmek (National/Homeland mysteries)* had more subscribers than the new publication of Vörösmarty's collected poems,⁶¹ the work of one of Hungary's most celebrated literary figures, whose canonical presence has outlived Kuthy's soon forgotten sensational success⁶² and who is still remembered as a literary giant of this era.⁶³ The sudden demand for this type of literature cannot simply be explained by the popularity of the original French novel. By conveying a strong nationalist perspective, this series has domesticated the model of *Les Mystères de Paris* in a paradigm of urban literary nationalism and also used its immense success to build a new, recycled vision on urban modernity.

4. “A kaleidoscope of life in Budapest”.⁶⁴ Legitimizing the new capital city as a metropolis

Though the name *Budapest* was introduced into the Hungarian language in the 1830s,⁶⁵ the official union of Pest, Buda and Óbuda did not take place until 1873. This union was the legal and symbolic birth of Hungary's capital city. Unlike other European capitals such as Paris or London, Budapest has developed inorganically, not through a concentric expansion but through a forced merge and the coalescence of clearly disparate townships.⁶⁶ Though the merger had been expected due to the close proximity of these areas, their development and history had varied and did not form a coherent, continuous narrative.⁶⁷ Pest, (the area which all of the novels discussed here focus on) had undergone the most drastic modernization and urbanization throughout this century. Following the flood of 1838, an inevitable bout of modernisation ensued, which, however, still could not compare

to the urbanization that was to take place during the dualist era. Pest now became completely transformed, donning the image of a modern, European metropolis – modelled after Paris, not only symbolically, but in architecture and infrastructure, as well.⁶⁸ The borders of the city shifted – what had once constituted the outskirts now became part of the new centre (especially Király street, which in Nagy and Kuthy’s narrative represented the ominous borderline between “inside” and “outside”; a busy, lively and thus important pathway that happened to be outside of the perceived centre – outside of the city walls – thus constituting a dangerous twilight-zone between centre and periphery). The city was constantly changing, construction areas were a permanent presence, districts were constantly developing and disappearing, the texture of the city had started to become more and more complex, fluid and saturated.

The new wave of the Hungarian urban mystery novel emerged from this rapidly changing and shifting urban scene. Compared to the new book market and press of the 1840s, the professionalization and institutionalization of the literary field had progressed and the new forms of media and publicity had become acceptable and necessary parts of urban life. Following the codification of mandatory primary education,⁶⁹ the number of potential readers increased exponentially. A new, industrialized book market, geared to mass-production emerged, making it increasingly important for *pure, real* literature to insulate itself as much as possible from the factory-like production of mass-literature.⁷⁰ In this simplified equation that divided high-brow from low-brow (or more precisely elite from mass) literature, urban literature ended up in the less desired, even detested *popular* realm, while the *elite*, canonical status was reserved for the folkish, vernacular art that clearly stated its devotion to the national cause. This assumed parallel between the theme of a work of art and its production and distribution had eclipsed a very important and influential portion of the era’s patriotic literature – making it seem as if urban literature had emerged at the *fin-de-siècle*, abruptly, and belatedly following the success of Baudelaire. However, if we leave behind this presumed dividing line, we find the origins of modern Hungarian metropolitan literature in the realm of mass-produced, sensational novels and more specifically around the second appropriation of the urban mystery novel.

This time, Sue’s sensational, gruesome novel was received not as a revolutionary, futuristic curiosity, but as a titillating read of familiar, yet improbable events, and more importantly as a historical novel depicting probable, yet thrilling scenarios. This reading of the mysteries was in close proximity to the previous understanding of it as an *exposé-novel*, but this time it was not a cautionary tale, but rather an expressive, sensationalized reflection of the world the readers lived in.⁷¹ The difficulties of urbane living were no longer a remote threat, but a common and unexplored sensation, the vocabulary of which was created by the domestication of sensational novels such as *Les Mystères de Paris*. The press often

referenced Sue in this era's news reports as a comparative basis for improbable cruelty and transgressions, proposing the mysteries as a necessary and common read for modern urban living.

In the difficult economic climate of the 1870s, the book market was also affected by the recession, making translation (the cheapest and easiest way to make money) the main literary currency to keep the publishing companies afloat.⁷² So what made the Deutsch Brothers, a publishing house on the brink of bankruptcy, sign up a young, talented, but not yet recognized poet as the writer of a new, original urban mystery novel? They had only recently terminated one of their more promising periodicals, *Képes Világ* (*World Illustrated*), the editor of which, József Kiss stayed on as a contracted writer and translator. The prospectus promoting the upcoming novel claimed that *Budapesti rejtelmek* (*Mysteries of Budapest*) was going to give an acute and merciless description of the dark side of metropolitan life.⁷³ This advertisement referenced the transnationally successful urban novels as a source of inspiration and expressed a need for original Hungarian equivalents – not only as a substitute for imported novels, but also as a necessary educational and fashion requirement that every modern reader needed. The novel was supposed to give a kaleidoscope-image of the new metropolis. I find the choice of word significant here. Compared to the panoramic view⁷⁴ which the previous two novels used, *Budapesti rejtelmek* could not promise an overall description or a simplified model of the city – it had become so intricate and impenetrable, that only a sporadic, broken, but still all-encompassing metaphor could describe its polychrome complexity.

Kiss kept the promise of the prospectus: his lengthy series provided a whole line of glimpses into the lives of the different social classes from seemingly unconnected parts of the city. A complete map never emerges, the reader can never connect the dots in the case of locations, and certainly not in the case of characters. Complex interwoven storylines and a multitude of characters ensured that the story's production would not come to an end too soon. Both the writer and the publishers used every available technique to ensure that the novel could be continued as long as possible.⁷⁵ The first instalment was offered for free to potential readers – the chapter ended with an abrupt and sudden cliff-hanger, forcing the readers to subscribe for the follow-up – after this, every chapter ended with a twist, a new mystery waiting to be uncovered; every chapter introduced new characters and the tone and style changed with each storyline. This novel did not simply use a detective story as its narrative core, but blended together as many popular genres and tropes as possible. From gothic ghost stories to family sagas, from romance plots to intricate adventures, the series catered to the widest possible readership. The only constant that binds these plots and characters together is the city itself. The many mysteries of Budapest really do give the impression of a kaleidoscope. The complexity of the city was described, analysed and thus

simplified through a literary form already familiar to the readers thanks to the multitude of translations.

The prospectus gave the novel a moral and patriotic purpose: the Hungarian readers who were more familiar with the boulevards and fashionable streets of Paris than their own national capital needed a novel that showed and praised the Hungarian urban landscape. The advertisement argued that since Budapest held just as much beauty as any western metropolis, it was complex, mesmerizing and significant enough to be compared to Paris. An ambitious comparison, but also an obvious one considering the role that Paris played not only in the design of the modernized city, but also in the nascent discourse of modern metropolitan life that could not be imagined without Paris and without the literature that mediated the image and myth of Paris⁷⁶ to the outskirts of modern Europe. We can say then that the choice to not simply translate but fully appropriate the genre of the urban mystery was an inherently nationalist thought, and made this product of mass-publishing a vehicle of nation-building ideology.

The novel not only tried to make the city legible for the people who lived in it but also presented it as an exotic view. The narrator describes the red light district as a specifically Hungarian variant of Japan's legendary Yoshiwara; Király street at the time of Purim as a one-of-a-kind experience; shopping in Váci street as equivalent to the services found in any Parisian boulevard; the Museum district as equal to Saint Germain, etc. Budapest is always compared to an emblematic western metropolis and unlike in Nagy's novel, is never found to be wanting; Budapest is a metropolis worthy of being compared to the biggest cities of the globe. Published right after the legal union of the twin cities, the novel served as a guide to navigate this new, foreign situation. It promised a glimpse into the obscured parts of the city, a coping aid for people not only amidst the accelerated pace of urban life, but also in their desperate financial situation. The sensational stories of forgery, theft, fraud, bankruptcy and loan shams clearly indicated a curiosity about the new, fundamentally capitalist nature of the city and cemented the readers' knowledge and understanding of the consequences and circumstances of this change. The novel – a product of the literary market, written for short-term success and out of economic desperation – can, ironically, be read as a critique of a new value system which places monetary success above all else. However, contrary to the previous two novels Kiss doesn't paint a binary picture of the metropolis. Although Budapest is at the hub of these toxic economic endeavours, its complexity makes it a place of contradictory values and interests. Its most emphatic trait is its ever-changing nature – its capability of bettering itself and outgrowing itself. The novel chooses a faux-historical perspective. The starting point of the story is in 1863, a decade before the union of the twin cities, in a different political climate. However, this temporal distance is only illusionary – a tool to emphasise the rapid and constant change that forms and reforms the city's

image. The novel describes Budapest as an endless construction site, where new mansions are built right next to crumbling huts, where the streets are constantly changing, where temporality is the only constant. This is a very contemporary and very modern view of the city. The value of the city is placed not in the past or the future as we have seen in the case of Nagy or Kuthy, but in the *present*; the novel takes ownership of the city by placing it in the now, and merging this representative image of a modern metropolis with the reality lived and experienced by its readers.

Conclusions

As we have seen throughout this comparative analysis, the three Hungarian appropriations of Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* offer completely different solutions for domesticating the successful transnational model and pattern. What they *agreed in* was the importance of this formula as a means to legitimize not only the genre of the novel but also Budapest as a European metropolis that had similar (or hopefully better) representative literature than Paris itself. While Nagy tried to write a critical caricature of the genre and of urban life itself, thus proposing the importance of a modern, better capital city that could compete with the western metropolises, Kuthy expressed fear of the potential and probable loss of the nation's capital, and used the format as a familiar model of fearmongering, embedding it in an antimodernist rhetoric. By contrast, when Kiss published his series, the context had already changed. Urban life was not a futuristic scenario anymore, but a lived-in situation – so the novel was not trying to introduce a foreign but upcoming condition, but showed instead a representative tool, both symbolic and cognitive in nature, to talk about and even experience a foreign situation. It tried to replace the well-known foreign models with a domestic, vernacular, *national* example.

Reading these novels as mere replications of the original model is not only overly simplistic, but also inaccurate. They are persuasive cases of how the national idea could be made marketable, how the literary market, which is so often presumed to have been entirely separate from the nation-building process, was using precisely the popularity and necessity of the national idea as a selling point. And vice versa, the inescapable market was used to spread and propagate ideas of a national capital. As the cognitive map of the nation was slowly becoming centralized, making Budapest a commercial, political and also cultural hub (and by the time Kiss published his novel, the only significant centre),⁷⁷ popularising the capital city and its role in the nation's representative web had become inescapable. Readers and writers – advocates of the national idea – were forced to consider the city's representation. These novels created the foundation for this discourse, introduced and successfully propagated an image of Budapest, and

made it not only a significant (if problematic) metropolis worthy of comparison with Paris, but also an important part of the nation-building discourse. This new rhetoric was clearly an example of *national protectionism* – an attempt to salvage Hungarian literature from the harmful, yet inescapable effects of the worldwide success of Sue and his contemporaries. By nationalizing a transnational model, these works had domesticated and recycled the potentially harmful genre (the moral, aesthetical and political aspects of which were thought to pose a threatening influence on their freshly developed and impressionable readership and thus the nation itself). These novels can (and should) be read as examples of national protectionism and the very beginnings of the under-researched, yet impactful wave of *urban* literary nationalism that dominated certain literary fields in the mid-nineteenth century. This framework could help establish a more nuanced and complex view of the era's nationalist literature and the transnational circulation of nationalist imagery and thought.

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Notes

- 1 This most grandiose constructions of the era attracted a group of talented and excellent architects from Hungary and abroad to plan and construct the new, modern image of the city. – Gyáni, 2008, 114.
- 2 The most important shift being the development of mass media, which facilitated a wider and more controlled spreading of information and ideas, while also playing a central role in the development of the market itself. – Hansági, 2014, 76.
- 3 Sue, Eugène, *Les Mystères de Paris* in *Le Journal des débats*, 1842–1843.
- 4 This affects the novel's narrative structure, as well. It allows not only for a simulation of mystery, but also a nuanced system of foreshadowing and references – an array of different modes of cataphoric and anaphoric allusions. – Keresztúrszki, 2002, 748–750.
- 5 Hansági uses Ludwig Pfeiffer's definition of the performance-web as a concept to articulate how the new medium of the feuilleton affected the attitudes of its recipients: instead of silent reading (the usual manner of receiving a novel), the feuilleton simulates a live performance by making the readers engage with the story. It was read simultaneously by large audiences, which made it a matter of public interest, and transformed the genre's originally solitary reading experience into a collective experience that required constant interaction with fellow readers and the author himself. – Hansági, 2009, 306–308.
- 6 "Serialization added the drama of anticipation to each addition. The *cliff-hanger* was born, a predecessor to the modern soap opera, and crowds would gather at the doors of the publishing houses on release day to be the first to receive the next edition." – Landwer, 2011, 8.
- 7 It appears to be independent from any political or literary authority, it is an acutely capitalistic system, which seems to allow for ideological freedom but is locked inside a material, commercial logic. – Kálai, 2015. An important exception was represented by small periodicals which appeared as an answer to (and stance against) the mainstream newspaper industry.
- 8 "Sue usually serialized his novels in *La Presse*, a rather progressive newspaper. However, Charles Gosselin, Sue's publisher, who had only lately realized that prepublication serialization

could be a good way of promoting a book, had antagonized *La Presse* during the serialization of Sue's *Mathilde*, in 1840–41." – Parfait, 2004, 140. The paper it was finally published in was *Le Journal des Débats*, "a semi-official daily, which received government subsidies and was read primarily by middle- and upper-middle-class conservatives." – Parfait, 2004, 141. This created a tension between the feuilleton and the contents of the newspaper – Sue advocated for social change, whilst the other content of the paper was aimed at upholding the status quo. This tension divided the readers of the paper between those who subscribed for Sue and those who read it for the political analysis and reports. "If some congratulated Sue for succeeding in having his message conveyed in what they called »the paper of privilege«, others complained about having to subscribe to a paper they disagreed with just to read the serial." – Parfait, 2004, 143.

- 9 This is evident in the Hungarian press, as well. The daily and weekly papers talk about the tension Sue's editorial decisions created. For example: "If Eugène Sue gains 25,000 subscribers for every paper he writes for, why wouldn't he reach the conclusion to keep these subscribers for himself instead of sharing them with Molé or Thiers? Let's assume that Eugène Sue wants to start his own paper, Dumas another, Balzac a third and Soulié a fourth. Is there any doubt that these gazettes wouldn't gain 100,000 subscribers? This would mean that the novel would start to dictate politics." – *A hírlapok viszonyai Párisban (folytatás)* in *Nemzeti Újság*, 1844 November 29., translated by M. S. A.
- 10 Among other cities such as Marseille, London, Berlin, Lyon, Napoli, etc., Bucharest and Budapest also had several adaptations of their own. For example: *Misterele din București* by I. M. Bujoreanu, *Misterele Românilor* by Gr. H. Granda, *Mistere ale Bucureștilor* by G. Cretzeanu or *Misterele Bucureștilor* by George Baronzi. – Câdea, 2008.
- 11 For example Sue's novel had a great impact on North American literature, along with various translations of his works flooding the American book market, novels like *The Mysteries of Chicago* or *The Mysteries of New York* started to get published. – Armbruster, 2014. Furthermore it acted as a basis for emancipatory literature in several other national literary fields; for example, Juana Manso's *Misterios del Plata* clearly references it, building a representation of Brazil on this European model. – Josiowicz, 2018.
- 12 "Literatures are therefore not a pure emanation of national identity; they are constructed through literary rivalries, which are always denied, and struggles, which are always international. [...] [N]othing is more international than a national state: it is constructed solely in relation to other states, and often in opposition to them." – Casanova, 2004, 35–36.
- 13 "The gap between »capital« and »province« (which is to say between past and present, between ancient and modern) is an aspect of the world of letters that is perceived only by those who are not quite of their time. This gap is not merely temporal and spatial; it is also aesthetic (indeed, aesthetics is simply another name for literary time)." – Casanova, 2004, 95.
- 14 Császtvay, 1997.
- 15 Charrière, 2016, 2.
- 16 Nagy, 1845.
- 17 Kuthy, 1846.
- 18 Kiss, 1874.
- 19 "The rise of nationalism and of national consciousness-raising was, to an important extent, a transnational process." – Leerssen, 2011, 257.
- 20 Their connection being so strong that they are canonically mentioned and read together (later published as connected parts of a series, *Magyar Regényírók Képes Kiadása* in 1901).
- 21 Kálai, 2014, Kálai, 2015, Imre, 1996, Laczkó, 2003.
- 22 The author himself disowned the novel after he had gained better publicity in Hungary's established literary and cultural circles.

- 23 For example: *Budapest* in 1901 by Kóbor Tamás, *Fehér éjszakák (White Nights)* in 1905 by Kabos Ede, or *Az éhes város (The Hungry City)* in 1901 by Ferenc Molnár.
- 24 There exists an early analysis of Sue's influence on Hungarian literature which mentions the works of Nagy and Kuthy and also attributes some works by Jósika and Jókai to this trend. – Kovács, 1911.
- 25 A trope that lived through the twentieth century and is still visible in contemporary Hungarian literature.
- 26 Hites, 2011.
- 27 This is understandable. At the time when the first two novels were published, the market was only beginning to take shape, and even in the 1870's competition with the Austrian press was still stringent. – Hansági, 2009, 311.
- 28 In 1872 the novel was published by no fewer than three major Hungarian publishers: Vilmos Lauffer brought it out in 15 volumes with the title *Párisi titkok (Parisian Secrets)*, Vilmos Mehner with the same title in 6 volumes, and Ferdinánd Pfeifer in 4 volumes entitled respectively *Párisi titkai (The Secrets of Paris)*, *Páris mélységei (The Depths of Paris)*, *Páris rejtelmei (The Mysteries of Paris)* and *Párisi titkok (Parisian Secrets)* – Hansági 2014, 87. –footnote No. 1.
- 29 In 1873 – Vörös 1973, 113.
- 30 There was an earlier wave of modernization – a forced urbanization after the flood of 1838. – Gedeon, 1937, 57.
- 31 Although the act of translation is a nationalist gesture in itself: Casanova calls translation the most common and effective means of cultural circulation. – Casanova, 2004, 23. Armbruster sees the American translations of Sue's novel as attempts to nationalize the text and appropriate it from a nationalist angle. – Armbruster, 2014, 28.
- 32 Adapting an existing, successful novel can be a means to legitimizing the novel itself as a new and yet not canonical genre. – Kálai, 2015.
- 33 This is linked to an educational standpoint: we need to teach the nation to read using Hungarian texts, and also an economic explanation: if there's a market for foreign texts, it is very probable that readers would also invest in a Hungarian equivalent, possibly even more so, since it is a product of national pride and talent.
- 34 Casanova argues that Parisian art is read in Europe as revolutionary, since nineteenth century Parisian culture is seen as the product of the French revolution. – Casanova, 2004, 24. This political potential is recognized and utilized in the Hungarian context as a means to achieving systematic change.
- 35 These are predominantly descriptive texts, pieces of shorter prose or poetry, that depict a characteristic trait, event, phenomenon or figure of society, using a predominantly satirical or humorous tone. I chose to use the term *petit genre*, terminology used in art history to describe visual art with a similar function. As of now, I am going to use this terms to refer to the genre.
- 36 The era's nationalist efforts are clearly linked to the widespread fear of the disappearance of small nations. Herder's impact on the Hungarian cultural actors can be seen not simply in the flourishing of folk literature and the efforts to establish a specifically Hungarian poetic and narrative approach, but also through the nationalization of traditionally western genres and texts.
- 37 Nagy Ignác, *Torzképek*, Budapest–Hartleben, 1844.
- 38 Nagy, 1908, 516.
- 39 What makes this even more interesting is the point of connection: the two genres are linked through their distinct urban setting. This further emphasises the metropolitan nature and origins of the genre: it is displayed not through the particular semantics of sin or the narrative of the investigation, but through its mediation of the urbane.
- 40 For instance he changes one of the characters' motivation and morals. Móricz, a Jewish character, whose ethnic and cultural difference is used to prove him guilty, later appears as a victim of

- discrimination and an unwilling participant in the era's debates on assimilation politics. – Nagy, 1908, 481. In the epilogue, Nagy even apologizes for the tone of the early chapters. He feels that a plea and an explanation are necessary.
- 41 Sue kept more than 300 of the letters he received – these were mostly private letters that he usually responded to either in a letter form or through his novel. – Parfait, 2004, 128.
- 42 Parfait, 2004, 129.
- 43 Parfait, 2004, 132.
- 44 He makes some minor characters discuss the politics of the Jewish emancipation and includes popular – but varied – public opinions about it. He even makes his Jewish characters talk about the issue and explains their moral decisions based on the current political situation.
- 45 A clear gesture of parody making fun of high-brow novels that use this type of alienating technique.
- 46 This led to some scholars reading his novel as a parody instead of an adaptation. –Laczkó, 453.
- 47 He even includes typically Hungarian tropes – for example he evokes Jóska Sobri, a beloved outlaw whose theme dominated the era's popular stories and folk tales. He not only references Sobri, but makes him one of his main villains.
- 48 At one point it even names Sue as a stylistic inspiration for a particularly melodramatic segment. – Nagy, 1908, 213.
- 49 “On the one hand, [Paris] symbolized the Revolution, the overthrow of the monarchy, the invention of the rights of man – an image that was to earn France its great reputation for tolerance toward foreigners and as a land of asylum for political refugees. But it was also the capital of letters, the arts, luxurious living, and fashion.” – Casanova, 2004, 24.
- 50 Csatáry, Ottó, *Irodalmunk jelen állapota* in *Életképek* 1845, 378.
- 51 Laczkó argues that reading this novel merely as a crime mystery is misleading, since most of the mysteries are solved relatively early, leaving a great chunk of the story to shift away from the investigative approach. – Laczkó, 2003, 450.
- 52 For instance, a whole chapter is dedicated to the subject matter of the city's understaffed and overcrowded orphanages. – Kuthy, 1906, I, 119–122. – It is more akin to a proposal for social change than a descriptive passage necessary for the development of the plot.
- 53 Kuthy makes his Jewish characters confess to being the enemy of the nation and wanting to sabotage national growth. The novel not only suggests this idea through the workings of its power dynamics, but instead includes several explicit speeches by Jewish characters confessing to these crimes. – Kuthy, 1906, II, 194.
- 54 There is a morally corrupt aristocrat in the novel who manipulates one of the Jewish characters – at a time when Jewish emancipation is only starting to be discussed, when the Jews are still somewhat outside the law, invisible from the viewpoint of the official, institutionalized moral authority and are used as devices through which the *ones already in power* can hack the system and manipulate it.
- 55 “Cities can be very random environments, I said, and novels try, as a rule, to reduce such randomness. [...] Most urban novels simplify the urban system by turning it into a neat oppositional pattern which is much easier to read.” – Moretti, 1998, 107.
- 56 As Charrière notes in connection with the success of Sue's novel in Greece, the idea of the orphan with misplaced ancestry, a trope present in the original mystery and almost all the re-writes, “appealed to an audience that often felt that it lived among the very ruins of a glorious »national« past.” Charrière, 2016, 9.
- 57 Kuthy, 1906, I., 136-137.
- 58 Laczkó discovers and analyses the prominent Biblical imagery present in Kuthy's descriptions of the rural or natural landscapes and the lack of it in his urban tableaux. – Laczkó, 2003, 441–450.

- 59 Casanova finds that in the nineteenth century readers saw Paris “as a miniature version of the world.” – Casanova, 2004, 27.
- 60 This is emphasised by the constant comparisons to Vienna – the other capital city of the monarchy (the one officially appointed by the state) which is seen as corrupt and evil – the novel warns of Pest-Buda becoming similar to it, or a helpless puppet of Vienna.
- 61 It had 8000 subscribers, and Kuthy received 6000 Forints for completing it – an amount clearly without precedent at that time. – Laczkó, 2003, 438.
- 62 His shifting and declining public image is analysed thoroughly by Orsolya Völgyesi. Among other things, she finds his political stance – after the revolution he became an agent of the re-established power – and his rocky public image to be the source of the public’s dissatisfaction with Kuthy. – Völgyesi, 2007.
- 63 By contrast, Kuthy is basically the quintessential model of what Bourdieu calls the *writer for the short term*. All of these novels value a popular, all-encompassing (but passing) fad above the longevity and autonomy of the work of art – “writers who bow to the canons of a tested aesthetic.” – Bourdieu, 1995, 143.
- 64 Előfizetési felhívás [Advertisement for subscriptions], „*Képes Regénytár*” *czim alatt f. é. október 1-ével...*, in The Poster and Small Print Collection of the National Széchényi Library, Budapest, Kny. D. 6. 27–28.
- 65 Széchényi introduced it in his work *Világ [Light]* in 1831. – Gyáni, 2008, 27.
- 66 Vörös, 1973, 113. and Gyáni, 2008, 42.
- 67 Vörös, 1973, 33.
- 68 Gyáni, 2008, 114.
- 69 In 1868. – Császtvay, 1997, 249.
- 70 Bourdieu, 1995.
- 71 The Greek reception can be understood similarly: „Paris and its »mysteries« as described in the works of Sue and his followers could thus appear as a phantasmagorical projection of the world in which [the readers] lived.” – Charrière, 2016, 8.
- 72 Although by this time copyright laws had already been ratified, they were rarely enforced, especially in the case of translations, since these regulations were inherently problematic. – T. Szabó, 2011.
- 73 Előfizetési felhívás [Advertisement for Subscriptions], „*Képes Regénytár*” *czim alatt f. é. október 1-ével...*, in The Poster and Small Print Collection of the National Széchényi Library, Budapest, Kny. D. 6. 27–28.
- 74 Kálai, 2015.
- 75 So when the production came to an inevitable end, the storylines seemed to end abruptly, switching the usual slow and meandering flow of the narration to a staccato pace, where some characters are forgotten, most of them receive but a brief mention or are simply killed off to end their storyline.
- 76 Casanova argues that the frequent use of mythical and biblical imagery to describe Paris correlates with the attitude towards the metropolis: it is slowly becoming a myth, its image outgrows the actual city itself. – Casanova, 2004, 27.
- 77 Gyáni, 2008, 29.