

Hungary ranging from the 15th century *Chronica Hungarorum* to modern Hungarian editions of his own works and those of his contemporaries. President Göncz, by his lively interest and appreciation, forged a personal link during his visit with the Hungarian section as with other departments of our Library. Let it be hoped that the closing decade of the 20th century, coinciding as it does with Hungary's new and courageously won political freedoms, will witness a corresponding and continuing investment of enthusiasm and vitality in the creative building up of this Library's Magyar collections which has up until now been apparent and at work.

Hungarian Section
Cambridge University Library

Lindesay Moffatt

DID MIKLÓS RADNÓTI KNOW THE WORK OF J. M. LEVET?

Marginal notes

In a recent issue of *Common Knowledge*, Vyacheslav Ivanov stressed the importance of the legacy of international symbolism in the poetry of Henry J. M. Levet (1847–1906)¹

Influenced by the new vision of poetry, the young Levet seemingly shaped his first works on the themes and inspirations of Baudelaire and Mallarmé. But in addition to these two—who had profoundly contributed to the change in European and American letters of the past two centuries—Levet's verse was also indebted to his readings of Jules Laforgue (1860–1887), a poet who made a great impact on T. S. Eliot and Boris Pasternak as well.

Ivanov, quoting Bakhtin, convincingly argues that Laforgue was a rare example of a lyric poet for whom dialogue and the speech of the "Other" was as important as for prose writers.²

Reading into the work of these poets, I was suddenly struck by their choice of topics and discourse familiar to me from the oeuvre of Miklós Radnóti. While Levet has not been mentioned by Emery George, the scholar who had investigated the influences upon Radnóti's poetry in greatest detail to date

does connect Laforgue's "Rustic Moon" to Radnóti's "Sky with Clouds" and "Rhymed Couplets on a Moonlit Night".³ According to George, Radnóti could have first read Laforgue's poem in the 1921 edition of Dezső Kosztolányi's collection of translations, entitled: *Modern Poets*.⁴ Like most post-symbolists, Radnóti too was eager to understand foreign languages and the specific imagery of other cultures. As is known, this led in the case of Kosztolányi and his contemporaries to the discovery of Chinese and Japanese poetry and art, and the same interest made Radnóti turn to African culture.

In the poetry of Levet and Radnóti the "couleur locale" is created by foreign words and proper names, thrown about with a pretended carelessness in the text. Telling examples of the use of this device are Radnóti's "Paris" and Levet's "British India."

Levet, a French diplomat, traveled extensively and thus a number of his poems convey real experiences, as do scores of Radnóti's poems, reflecting his memories of France, or of a still peaceful Yugoslavia. It is worth mentioning that Levet also used post cards as vehicles for his poetic message: his numerous "Cartes Postales" bear an uncanny resemblance to Radnóti's cycle of the same collective title as well as to his final "Razglednica" series.

This curious "Wahlverwandschaft" is further identifiable by the fact that in some of his poems, such as the "French Vignettes", Radnóti reproduces entire stories, almost drafts for future prose. Here even a connection with Laforgue's oeuvre can be established.

As is known, some episodes in Radnóti's *Gemini* (Ikrek hava) first appeared as individual poems. This too is surprisingly similar to Levet's working method. But Radnóti's characters, setting, and plot to his poems, are more pronounced and sharper relieved than Levet's. (See his tragic "Razglednica" quartet).⁵

The prevalence of personification in lyrical poetry—while a shared feature of all symbolists and postsymbolists—can be discerned in the textual comparison of these two poets. For those who know Radnóti's work, it suffices to be reminded of his "Hymn About Peace" (Himnusz a Békéről), "Hymn to the River Nile" (Himnusz a Nilushoz) or of his epitaph, "Federico Garcia Lorca." It is also interesting to note that just as Radnóti had used an imaginary friend in his *Gemini*, Levet too has created a fictitious friend as his hero, a young Englishman, and a Catholic to boot. It should be mentioned here that, coincidentally, both Levet and Radnóti were Catholic converts from Judaism. Lacking evidence of a direct influence, one may ponder whether it was the unified world language of modern poetry (Enzensberger's term) which had informed the discourse of both poets, or are there further clues to be tracked down about Radnóti's literary lineage even after, as one thought, Emery George had unearthed them all.

Notes

1. "Delayed Book Review: Henry J.-M. Levet and the International Legacy of Symbolism", *Common Knowledge*, Fall, 1992, 2: 161-71.
2. *Ibid.*, 163.
3. *The Poetry of Miklós Radnóti: A Comparative Study*, New York, 1986.
4. George, *op. cit.*, 9. Dezső Kosztolányi (1885-1936), poet, prose writer, essayist and translator, one of the most significant cultural figures of interwar Hungary.
5. Marianna D. Birnbaum, *Miklós Radnóti: A Biography of His Poetry*, Munich, 1983.

University of California

Marianna D. Birnbaum