

Millennium celebrations in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Millennium exhibition held in Budapest in 1896, highlighting the constructed nature of the celebration which put an end to the debates of historians by a legislative decision, as well as the functioning of the commemoration, the role of visual components and certain other aspects of the exhibition regarded as a central event. It also brings together undertakings from the fields of literary studies and fiction which relate to or capitalise on the period, and which are interesting from the point of view of functionality and popularity.

KEYWORDS

millennium, Budapest, exhibition, representation of a nation, spectacle, literary studies, authentication, social stratification, popular

The period following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 has often been referred to as the “happy era of peace”. One of the defining events of this era was the 1896 Millennium commemoration and exhibition intended to celebrate one thousand years of independent Hungarian statehood. The large-scale celebration linked generations and shed light on the present from the past as a community-building and legitimizing gesture. This call is reflected in the motto of the celebration, ‘Remembering the Old!’, which is also the motto inscribed in the coat of arms of the Hungarian Historical Society.

In Hungary in the second half of the 19th century historiography began to be regarded as an academic discipline in the modern sense, which went hand in hand with the establishment of its institutions (such as the Department of History at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the

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Hungarian Historical Society, the Transylvanian Museum Society or the provincial societies) and forums (such as the journal *Századok* [Centuries] or the Historical Congress). In 1867, historian Mihály Horváth defined historiography as a discipline “which, by bringing the generations of several centuries into contact with each other, by linking their material and intellectual, social and political life, by bringing the past to the knowledge of the present, and by reflecting the results of the labours of past ages for the benefit of the present and the future, actually constitutes the nation and proclaims its glory, and testifies that our nation is not an inferior, not a stunted member of the great family of nations” (Horváth, 1867, 10).

Analysing the link between world exhibitions and the urban development of Budapest, Dorothy Barescott discussed the architectural evolution of the second capital of the Empire within the context of preparations for the Millennium exhibition and various possibilities for national and imperial identification (Cf. Barescott, 2010).

As far as Hungary is concerned, the preliminaries of the 1896 exhibition were the 1885 national exhibition and the ensuing professional and industrial exhibitions organised on the regional level. The most sensational section of the 1885 Budapest General National Exhibition was considered to be the hall of “home manufacture”. Here, as the result of a thorough, nationwide process of data-collection, largely authentic, indigenous products of material folk culture were exhibited. The material was documented with the intention of making it known, since within the process of domestic economic development, Hungarian manufactured products appeared to be unknown on the national level, and were being increasingly substituted by goods exported from abroad. The event was significant primarily from an economic point of view, even though it also carried traces of a national narrative: “The new Hungary begins its new life with this felicitous shriek [sic!], proving it has reached economic maturity with the opening of the present exhibition. It is a magnificent feeling! It must have been depressing so far to live with the sense that we were lagging, in terms of economic life, behind the rest of the civilised world [...]. The exhibition presents an overall view of the productivity of our country. It is a living testimony to the fact that even if we do not currently produce everything that a civilised nation needs, our nation is capable of such production, nonetheless. The obstacles in the way are not at all impossible to remove” (Hazánk ünnepe, 1885, 1). The hall of “home manufacture” proved to be one of the most successful exhibition spaces, and this success lent sustainability to the idea of establishing an ethnographic village for the Millennium. The home manufacture section was a unit in its own right within the overall exhibition, where products, more precisely objects of everyday use, were not presented simply as such, but from a functional point of view, within a complex frame of scenes using movable manikins and stories resembling still-lives. Aiming for a contextualised demonstration, however, this way of presentation in fact robbed exhibited goods of their natural environment and tended to construe home manufactured products, considered to be valuable and representative, as museum exhibits in the eyes of visitors. The majority of them ended up in the ethnographic collection of the National Museum and were later presented as archived values to visitors of the 1896 exhibition. The material of the home manufacture section consisting of 15 rooms is highly varied from an ethnic and ethnographic point of view. The manufactured products and the environments created to interpret them, the furnishings and manikins meant to tell a story, represented the same narrative within the context of the national exhibition as was to be found in the literary endeavour signed by archduke Rudolf, chief patron of the exhibition and entitled *Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Images and Writing* [*Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia írásban és képen*, ed. Jókai, 1886–1901]. The rooms and still-lives



arranged in the home manufacture pavilion were meant to symbolise the peaceful cohabitation of a varied multitude of ethnic groups in Hungary. Local and foreign visitors to the exhibition were taken by surprise by this aspect, and this is actually how the exhibition itself turned into a token of self-discovery, an expression of a national and/or imperial identity beyond ethnicity, rendered all the more emphatic by the presence of a pavilion dedicated to the royal family. The exhibition thus presented an overall view of home manufacture. It was a representative collection, and a token of the ability to develop economically, while it also mirrored the dichotomy of traditionally manufactured and mass produced goods, and the link between folk culture and industrialisation. The home manufacture hall, creating an appearance of equality, presented the cultural objects of various regions, ethnic groups and ethnicities side by side, under the sign of self-sufficiency, singularity, originality and importance; while the entire hall functioned as a proof for a celebrated change in the function of material culture. The exhibits emanated a sense of homeliness in contrast to the imported goods, serving as a wider background and provided a lucky possibility for community representation and Hungarian or even imperial identification. By 1896, the economic interpretation of cultural objects was surpassed by a temporal perspective of the national past and the exhibits thus became a means of national representation. Hungarian and foreign visitors to the Millennium exhibition, as well as the jury itself, could judge this process and discover the past of the nation and its current spiritual and material powers through the presented images.

The celebration of the Millennium by means of an exhibition, as well as the timing of this celebration seem to be very exciting precisely from the point of view of the study of history. In 1891, the debate on the exact time of the Hungarian conquest was taking place on the pages of the learned journal *Századok*. No consensus was reached among historians, and some of them argued about dates bygone by more than a thousand years. Ferenc Salamon, for example, proposes the year 898, others 899. As a consequence, the question of rewriting school textbooks was also proposed, and then it was agreed that it was not so much the year, the day and the event that should be agreed upon, but rather the time for celebrating the idea. Finally, the celebration was sanctioned by a legislative decree, which inevitably gave it a political overtone. Moreover, Article II of 1892 sets 1895 as the anniversary of the Millennium, but the situation in Hungary was not suitable for an exhibition on the scale of the world exhibitions taken as models, so in 1893 at the initiative of the government the date was changed and 1896 was chosen as the year for the Millennium celebrations (Tarr, 1979). By this legal regulation, historical authenticity (and the doubts and debates surrounding it) were practically overridden, and the commemoration and celebration of the Millennium became the official position of the Hungarian state, departing from contemporary cultural policy issues. In this way, the state legitimized not only the time of the celebration and the functionality of the millennial exhibition, but also the Hungarian statehood and state. The construction of historical memory is thus an important problem in this respect, since, as Julianne Brandt has pointed out, there was no precedent for the Millennium as a historical celebration, i.e. the 900th or earlier anniversaries of the Hungarian conquest had not been celebrated (Cf. Brandt, 2002, 87–103). The Millennium celebrations of 1896 can also be interpreted as a so-called invented tradition, an occasion to reflect on a thousand years of civilizational development and to stage the historical image of the nation on a mass scale.

“A mighty fortress is our history”, was how historian Kálmán Thaly paraphrased the most popular Protestant hymn (a paraphrase of Psalm 46) at the annual general meeting of the



Hungarian Historical Society in 1869. Historians urged the general public to save and archive the relics of the past, to inspire a sense of history (by establishing museums, collections and national archives or naming streets after historical heroes), as these actions would show that the nation was not “an inferior, stunted member of the great family of nations”. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Millennium commemoration took place after the revival of this historical discourse, nor was the choice of motto for the celebration. The thousand years that had passed since the state-building act of the Hungarian nation after conquering their homeland extended to the present, and so the Millennium celebrations could become a commemoration of the community of the Hungarian nation – an act of self-affirmation.

While the desire to follow a model (for example, imagining Andrassy Avenue as the Boulevard St. Michel or the Champs Elysées in Paris, or the surroundings of the Millennium Monument as the Place da la Concorde) also highlights the shortcomings (the unfinished sewers and buildings, the lack of galleries and libraries) (Gerő, 1996). These shortcomings become relevant because the international and world exhibitions that followed the first national exhibitions (London, 1851, Paris, 1889 and Antwerp, 1893) serve as benchmarks for the concept of the Millennium Exhibition. While the National Exhibition of 1885 in Hungary, as well as and the line of subsequent exhibitions on the district level or in various vocational or specialist areas were intended to show the scientific and technological achievements of industrialisation to the general public, the Millennium Exhibition was divided into historical and contemporary sections. Visitors from Hungary and abroad, as well as the “jury”, were able to see the nation’s past and present intellectual and material strength in a spectacular form. The national event that accompanied the exhibition was highly constructive and historicising, representing the nation through its values, symbols and stereotypes, arguing that there are specific national values, and moreover that these values can be objectified and the resulting objects can be exhibited. Thus, sight becomes the medium of reception, while language and speech take on a secondary role; it is dazzlement that creates the celebratory behaviour.

The millennial exhibition, as a central event that constructed and showcased the nation’s historical and contemporary values, attracted the celebrators to the City Park in the capital. It is important to note that in the context of the millennium celebrations, the concept of the exhibition can be broadened or given multiple meanings, since Pest itself, as a city centre on the path of modernisation, was also meant to be the subject of an exhibition to some extent, if only because the delay in the development, transformation and urban planning work was the driving force behind the postponement of the celebrations. Even though Pest, Buda and Old Buda were joined in 1873, as spaces and backgrounds for the Millennium exhibition, they carry totally different meanings. Buda (the authentically built, ancient Buda castle rich in Turkish references or country celebrations was now pushed to the periphery) represents the historical past, while Pest is an epitome of the present, erected in the most modern spirit, testifying to the competitive quality of the Hungarian nation (Izsák, Boros eds., 1896, 13).

Like Pest, the new Parliament House, often referred to as the Fairy Palace, the Art Hall, the Museum of Applied Arts, the two new Danube bridges, the four hundred new public schools opened in 1896 or the Iron Gate on the Danube along with the Sip Canal were permanent works of remembrance and great creations that came to be seen as important memorials, but also as proofs of competitiveness. From the perspective of nations that envisage each other as analogous communities, the mentioning of competitiveness can also be interpreted as an external viewpoint, since in our case the Hungarian nation argued for its (historical) legitimacy by presenting



its millennial past not in relation to its own internal existence, but also in alignment with other nations. If we are looking for the antecedents of the aforementioned multiple meanings, it is important to mention the era of Habsburg absolutism after the Hungarian Civic Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849, when going to the theatre, religious festivals, balls (where the Csárdás was danced and where people were hostile to the German dance tradition), in addition to providing an opportunity for gatherings, also offered the possibility of expressing national feelings and celebrating together. Thus, the Kazinczy commemorations of 1859, which highlighted the writer's linguistic work, became both a legitimation of the language-based concept of the nation and a celebration of national unity, and provided an opportunity for identifying with the Hungarian nation. Here, we can also mention the Jókai jubilee in 1894, when the popular novelist was presented as a writer of the nation. The celebrations of the cult of the writer thus enforce a secondary system of references, just as the funerals of the nation's greats are celebrated with baroque and later with eclectic pomp. Historian Judit Lakner interprets the reburial of Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány in 1870 as a celebration of restored constitutionalism, the funeral of Hungarian statesmen such as Lajos Kossuth as a celebration of the nation, and the funeral of Ferenc Deák as an apotheosis of dualism since Empress Elisabeth of Austria herself knelt at the catafalque of that great statesman (Lakner, 1993).

This broader concept of the exhibition is also reinforced by the outfits worn by the celebrants. Hundreds of thousands of people wore Hungarian court clothes at the opening ceremony on 3 May 1896. It is important to mention here the role of the daily newspapers in this matter, as they regularly raised the issue of dress code and traditional Hungarian clothing in their reports on the celebrations. The issue of 30 April 1893 of the journal *Pesti Napló* even announced what celebratory outfits men and women were expected to wear at the May celebrations in Budapest. The colourful lanterns, green leaf wreaths, flags displayed on houses, illuminated streets and bridges, the three-day general window lighting at the request of Károly Gerlóczy, the Deputy Mayor of Budapest, were all intended to enhance further the festive colours, splendour and dazzle, and can be interpreted as an 'apotheosis' of Hungarians' existence as a nation. On 8 June, the Holy Crown of Hungary was celebrated as another testament to Hungary's millennial existence. A procession surrounded the crown as it was carried between the Royal Palace, the Coronation Church and the Parliament. The ceremony, described by Transylvanian historian László Kőváry, was reminiscent of the traditional mourning ceremonies of the aristocracy in the 17th and 18th centuries (Cf. Kőváry, 1897). The carriages of the aristocrats holding government office were followed by the crown guard armed with halberds and then the crown, the orb (*globus cruciger*), the sceptre and the mantle, i.e. the coronation regalia, arrived in a glass carriage drawn by six horses. This moment can be compared to the hearse carrying the coffin of the dead, or to the 'mobile' *castrum doloris* that came to be used later (cf. Szabó, 1989), only here it is not about the display of the corpse, but about a different kind of representation, namely the proof of the *raison d'être* of the millennial celebration. Ornate coaches were to follow, escorted by hussars, to the church, where the "entrée" took place with the fourteen archbishops and bishops, bells and organ music greeting the arriving crown. After the youth and the royalty had departed, the general public were permitted to view the relic placed on the altar. Contemporary reports refer to the Emperor Franz Joseph and his wife Elisabeth as king and queen rather than emperor and empress, as it is clear that the celebration of a millennium of statehood is not about the Monarchy and its relationship with the Austrians, but about the ideal of an independent, autonomous kingdom and its statehood, with an



emphasis on continuity. Moreover, taking the crown to the Parliament is meant to signify that the building has now become the embodiment of state and political power, which is authenticated by this historical evidence. Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austria, and King of Hungary is the main patron of the exhibition; he hammers the last nail into the Liberty Bridge (*Szabadság-híd*), and his wife Queen Elisabeth wears a Hungarian court dress at the thanksgiving church service to express her identification with the Hungarians. Her growing popularity also helps in what András Gerő calls the 'Magyarisation' of the Habsburg family, which, because of Hungary's patrimonial structure and the search for a powerful patron, became a psychological necessity of the time.

Returning to the Millennium exhibition, the remembrance of the ancestors becomes a remembrance of the national community, also because of the highly technicised nature of remembrance. The state-of-the-art exhibition, but also Godard's balloon equipped with a tarpaulin, the set of various panoramas, panoramic paintings, optical masterpieces and animato-graphic advertising are all means of the aforementioned bedazzling exercise. A report published in the *Pesti Napló* (Journal of Pest) on 5 May 1896 reveals that anyone was allowed enter their name and the date of their visit in the exhibition's Golden Book, provided they paid 10 kreutzers for the benefit of the poor in return. After the closing of the exhibition the book was to be transferred to the National Museum, where, in a hundred years or so, grandchildren would be able to find out whether or not their great-grandfather had visited the Millennium Exhibition. In this way, the act of creating a memorial was both a way of reaffirming a sense of belonging to the nation and a charitable act. At this point, it is also important to note the aspects of the celebrations that broke with the homogeneity that had emerged so far. These included, for example, social differences (the popular celebrations on the *Vérmező*¹ on 18 May 1896, where the lower classes of society had their parties, and the social-democratic demonstrations led to police intervention), as well as the speeches by the leaders of the nationalities of the empire calling for abstention, or the demonstrations by Romanian university students protesting against Hungarian national policy. In this context it is important to mention the Transylvanian Memorandum of 1892 which is the most important document of the period in the Hungarian-Romanian nationality debate. In this document, Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania criticised the repressive policies and assimilationist efforts of the Hungarian government. The document, which received a great deal of press coverage, elevated the issue to an international level, negatively influencing the foreign perception of Hungary's policy on national minorities. The debate was concluded by the so-called Memorandum Trial held in Kolozsvar [today: Cluj, Romania] in 1894. Romanian intellectuals from Transylvania who stood up for national demands were sentenced to prison. The memory of the trial was fresh enough for the Romanian minorities to stay away from the Millennium celebrations, and for their church leaders to excuse themselves from attending.

These unresolved social and ethnic problems also showcase the constructed nature of remembrance. The anachronistic and historicising discourse of the architectural complex erected in the City Park illustrates precisely this constructed quality. The gateway to the main church at the village of Ják which came to form part of the Castle of Vajdahunyad [today: Hunedoara, Romania] or a replica of the clock tower in Segesvár [today: Sighișoara, Romania] were

¹The *Vérmező* is a public park in Budapest where, on 20 May 1795, seven prominent Jacobins were executed.



juxtaposed at Budapest, in replica, as exhibition spaces, representing the whole as a part, as if detached from space and time. The image of a thousand years of Hungarian statehood was also displayed and became relevant through the moments which, suspending space and time, legitimised its existence at the national exhibition and celebrations. It did not reflect the problems of the present, the multilingual, multi-ethnic country, the dualist system, or earlier forms of the concept of nation lurking in everyday life, such as the ideas of '*Hungarus consciousness*' known at the time or Hungarian imperial identity.

The participation of Croatians living in Hungary was also problematic. They viewed the exhibition as a possibility to legitimise their national autonomy. In its relation to Hungary, Croatia emphasized its autonomy, while Hungary stressed its past of a thousand years and its independent statehood in its relation to Austria. All this shows the layered and hierarchical nature of identification. A few of the buildings and spaces of the exhibition designed to be permanent are still standing today, mostly owing to their representative quality and popularity (for instance the eclectic group of buildings known as the Castle of Vajdahunyad, housing historical exhibitions in the city park Városliget, Budapest), while other buildings were transient constructions and disappeared in time. The set of Croatian contributions underwent the same fate as did Hungarian displays after the national exhibition: they became parts of archives and collections as museal donations (Cf. [Damjanovich, 2015](#)). This tendency was already apparent after the 1885 national exhibition, and it also contributed to the establishment of new sections in various museums and to their further specialisation (eg. ethnographic or industrial museums). Owing to this process of museal preservation, the valuable artefacts that were made available for domestic and foreign visitors during the one year long Millennium celebration remained accessible to the public as parts of museum exhibitions.

The inventorying and presentation of valuable national artefacts and the related historicist discourse are also reflected in the way in which literature is viewed. Zsolt Beöthy's lectures at the University of Budapest given in the year of the Millennium were titled *A magyar irodalom kis tükré* (*A Small Mirror of Hungarian Literature*), in which he begins the history of literature with the image of the horsemen along the river Volga, lost in the mists of time. This gesture is a clear example of Péter Dávidházi's observation that the literary history writing, as a genre, has become a scholarly version of the representative story of collective origin (the *epos*) ([Dávidházi, 1999](#)). Beöthy is also one of the editors of the scholarly and educational work *A magyar irodalom története* (*The History of Hungarian Literature*) published in 1896, written in the same narrative spirit as the previous one. This tome has been to certain degree exempt from criticism, partly because of the noble purpose it served and partly because of the urgency with which it was published for the special occasion.

This 1500 page volume became a bearer of cultural memory (cf. [Assmann, 1999](#)), and in the absence of mythical history it has come to function as a national epic: "the history and heroes of the Hungarian spirit: our national force and academy." ([Beöthy, 1906](#)) In the *Introduction – Our Literature and Our Literary History, [Irodalmunk és irodalomtörténetünk]*– Zsolt Beöthy offers an explanation of the concept of literature, which sheds further light on the quotation above. According to his definition, literature is the manifestation of the national spirit, its poetry a reflection of the patriotic spirit and the nation's moral values. The patriotic spirit, according to the concept developed by Herder, evolves organically and manifests through language and literature, while the historically oriented presentation of the latter reflects this organic character, which can be recognised by the reader as a kindred spirit or a pattern to be followed. The studies



in the volume were written or shaped by more than forty scholars. On one hand, this shows the highly professional character of the compilation and of the issues discussed, but it also leads to inequalities and disproportionate distribution – which was duly signalled by the reception of the time. The unevenness of the work springs from the size of the endeavour and not merely from a difference between authorial voices, but also from a difference of views – a predicament which does little to assist a unified presentation of the evolution of the national spirit. Despite all this, however, readers of the time considered the list of contributors to grant the publication the desired professional standard. Nevertheless, they resented the fact that the bibliography was greater in length than cultural history, i.e. that the writer was placed before the literature (Latkóczy, 1896, 290). Viewed from this perspective, the volume was a series of individual biographies, and in this sense was analogous to the epical tool of the troop parade. The troop increases the aura of the hero, and that, sticking to our analogy, can be nothing else but national literature, defender and patron of the nation for so many centuries. The aspect of the troop parade is present in the endeavour itself. The presentation of authors partaking in the publication of these volumes can also be interpreted as a troop parade, as in the moment of signing their studies they incorporate themselves in the very history of the literature they are writing. Beside a series of past biographies, we are actually getting a list of contemporary names – a troop parade – that is, of persons involved in the discourse on literature and the writing of literary history. Moreover, the cult-like language of the studies also forms a parallel to the elevated epic style. There are aspects that weaken this epic analogy. Certain authors trace literary history all the way up to the year 1867, that of the AustroHungarian Compromise, while others go even beyond that limit and discuss writers, poets or literary phenomena of their own time. This goes against a principle of writing literary history whereby scholarship is supposed to discuss finalised and closed works or oeuvres; ages, currents and tendencies that are concluded or even obsolete (Cf. Szabó, 1901). Some of the pieces of criticism included approach the proper stuff of literary history with scepticism. For instance, they disapprove of discussing the first non-anonymous Hungarian poet, Janus Pannonius claiming that, being an adept of Italian humanism, he wrote in Latin and not in Hungarian, and is thus considered to be lacking the Hungarian spirit. Approached from the direction of the modern concept of literature, based on the language used, he cannot be viewed as a legitimate representative of Hungarian literature. On the pages of his review of the literary history, Imre Korda wonders whether the volume is a piece of home decoration or a useful manual, as he considers it too heavy for the lay reader, adding though that the notes completing the studies in the book make further inquiries and reading easier. He also considers that the limitation in length applied to the studies included, a consequence of the editorial concept, also limits the clarity of discourse. He likewise questions the degree of objectivity that the authors of the volume are capable of showing, and wonders whether they were able to distance themselves from the events of the time and to evoke the context of the ages they were writing about (Korda, 1896). The above-mentioned issue of Janus Pannonius proves the contrary, as critics musing over the matter fail to make any abstraction from the ruling modern concept of literature – they fail to adopt the position of the literary history of his own age when discussing the poet. Thus the project proves to be an element of ‘home décor’ in the context of the 1896 Millennium exhibition, meaning that it serves as a wonderful exhibit displayed to be admired. Its becoming a cult object was further enhanced, on the textual level, by studies such as one signed by Henrik Marczali under the title *The Evolution of Hungarian Historiography in the 19th century* [A magyar történetírás fejlődése a XIX. században]. While discussing Gyula



Pauer, an author who had played an important part in establishing the exact timing of the Millennium, and analysing matters of genealogy, Marczali quotes Pauer's motto, 'historia scribitur ad narrandum, non ad probandum'. Meaning: history is written to narrate and not to prove. Measured by this standard, the history of literature was written to justify the national past.

The volumes thus became objects of the Millennium exhibition presented to the visitors as museal pieces, and they fulfilled their primary function not by being read but by being seen in this celebratory context. They were discovered by the public not through reading, touching, holding or turning the pages, but through strictly regulated contemplation and viewing within the museum. As an exhibit, a collection of literary studies thus became part of the series of commemorations offered or prescribed by the millennial anniversary of the conquest of the Hungarian homeland and the foundation of the Hungarian state.

All considerations relating to content discussed above at some length thus become superfluous. Subscribers to the project saw it as a festive piece of scholarship published for a great occasion. It had a representational function, it worked as a pleasing object, moreover, it turned into an instant of memory, of commemoration impossible to separate from the historical moment it was published for, the celebration of the Millennium (Nora, 1986).

From the reader's point of view, in addition to evoking the literary historical undertakings and their functionality, some aspects of fiction also deserve to be noted. The previously mentioned metropolis on the course of modernisation created new public spaces such as cafés, which became the scenes of literary life at the turn of the century. In Gyula Krúdy's novel *Budapest vőlegénye* (*Budapest's Fiancé*), the author narrates/poeticises the city as it is rebuilt from the perspective of city builder Frigyes Podmaniczky's life story. In Adolf Ágai (Porzók)'s *Utazás Pestről Budapestre. 1843–1907* (*A journey from Pest to Budapest, 1843–1907*), previously published and more recent writings and articles presented varied aspects of the Hungarian capital, in the form of an autobiography overarching 65 years, using the topos of travel. Ferenc Molnár's youth novel, *A Pál utcai fiúk* (*The Paul Street Boys*), which was published in 1907 and has become a worldwide success, depicts a small slice, a peripheral area of Budapest under construction. An empty plot of land next to a wood processing plant, which the locals call the *grund*, represents an entire world – freedom and community life – for the adolescents in the novel: a story of school, friends, leaders, subordinates, enemies and life-and-death struggles.

A hundred years on, the Millennium still seems an exciting time, especially in the popular register of literature. As regards contemporary youth novels, we may highlight Ádám Dávid's *Millennium expressz* (*Millennium Express*) series, the first volume of which was published in 2013 and whose plot takes the readers back to 1896 in a fantastic train. A similar age group is addressed by Gyula Böszörményi's series *Ambrózy báró esetei* (*Baron Ambrózy's Cases*), which spans several volumes. The six full and two half volumes (Volume 2.5 and Volume 3.5) which the publishing house Könyvmolyképző has been bringing out since 2014 choose the squares of Budapest, a bustling cosmopolitan city at the end of the century, as the setting for the detective novel. One of the protagonists of the novel series arrives in the capital from the provincial town of Marosvásárhely [today: Târgu Mures, Romania] at the time of the millennium celebrations and is amazed by the splendour of the city. With his dynamic storytelling and incredible social historical insight, Ambrózy's narrator introduces his readers to the everyday life of the capital at the turn of the century, showing the social stratification of its inhabitants, from aspiring journalists through the aristocracy to the seasoned petty thieves of Tabán [a bohemian quarter of



Budapest]. It is also important to mention an earlier example, Péter Lengyel's book *Macskakő (Cobblestone)*, published in 1988, in which the author links the genre and narrative possibilities of the detective novel with the storytelling, the narrativity and the constructed memory of the Millennium celebrations. Although the book is considered by many as pulp fiction, arguably Lengyel has made a serious contribution with this novel to the renewal of Hungarian prose.

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