

Bálint Gárdos, Ágnes Péter, Natália Pikli, and Maté Vince, eds.
Confrontations and Interactions- Essays on Cultural Memory. Budapest:
L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2011. 390 pp. Illus.

Reviewed by Marguerite De Huszar Allen, Center for International and Comparative Studies, Northwestern University

The majority of these twenty-four essays began as presentations at an international conference in Budapest, organized by the Department of English Studies at Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE), at which faculty and students, past and present, participated along with their British guests. If this volume is any indication, the Department of English Studies at ELTE has much to offer. As the editors elaborate in the nuanced "Preface," the articles in this volume deal in one way or another with "confrontation" - defined as the boundary between two different cultures or between past and present - as well as with "interactions" between two (or among more) cultures and between the collective and personal memories of the past.

The most striking feature of this collection is the sheer diversity in subject matter and critical approaches. Nevertheless, to this reader, the essays fall into two groups. One continues the interdisciplinary and theoretical traditions of comparative literature and comparative studies. The other group tackles the catastrophic events of the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe: the two world wars, the 1944 Nazi occupation, the 1956 Revolution in Hungary, along with decades of state censorship and repression under the Soviets. It is no wonder the essays in this group deal mostly with trauma and its long-lasting effects.

In the first group, readers will find fascinating articles about English and Hungarian literature and art, too many to mention them all here. The authors consider issues regarding translation or influence and offer literary criticism and comparative analyses. For example, Géza Kállay compares Shakespeare's depiction of Lady Macbeth to János Arany's Goodwife Agnes, while providing his own new English translation of the latter; Eglantina Rempert traces the efforts made by Gordon Craig, Sándor Hevesi, and William Butler Yeats at the turn of the twentieth century to restore the supremacy of Shakespeare's poetic language over elaborate stagecraft; Ágnes Péter discusses Mór Jókai's *Milton* in light of the eighteenth century John Milton cult; Géza Maráci investigates *Nyugat* contributor László Cs. Szabó's take on Charles Dickens; Péter Dávidházi compares how two Hungarian translators of "The Waste Land," poets Sándor Weöres and István Vas, handle T.S. Eliot's allusion to Ezekiel; Éva Péteri, using illustrations, compares Lajos Gulácsy's painting *Lady Playing on an Ancient Instrument* with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *La Ghirlandata* and *Lady Lilith*; Veronika Ruttkay questions the feasibility of translating certain works, such as Burns's "Tam o'Shanter: A Tale"; and Natália Pikli gives detailed critiques of available Hungarian textbooks covering Shakespeare for use in the classroom. John Drakakis's analysis of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's tragedy about "memory and



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.



This journal is published by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press

forgetting," and Elinor Shaffer's overview of the historical process of reception are noteworthy, but do not discuss Hungarian literature.

Still in the first group, Gabriella Hartvig argues convincingly that Laurence Sterne's witty plotting of *Tristram Shandy* influenced Ferenc Kölcsey's whimsical *Előbeszéd* (*Foreword*), referred to by his contemporaries as "a Foreword without a book." Therefore, Hartvig notes, "it must stand on its own, self-consciously calling attention to its presence" (128). Kölcsey's *Foreword*, published in 1826, consists of three different narrative voices: the first, "Andor Dörgényfalvi Dörgény," writes most of the text; the second, "Cselkövi" (an anagram of Kölcsey's name), writes an ironically "anti-critical" critique of Dörgény's work; the third, "A Redactio" (presumably the editorial board), signs a footnote casting doubt on the narrator's credibility. This reader wonders if Hartvig could extend her comparison. In 1921 Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky wrote the following about *Tristram Shandy*: "By violating the form, [Sterne] forces us to attend to it; and, for him, this awareness of form through its violation constitutes the content of the novel" (*Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965), 30-31). Similarly, the violation of the literary form of the foreword in *Foreword* appears to constitute its content as well. This would place the great reformer of the Hungarian language not only among the early Hungarian humorists, but also among the forerunners of the modern Hungarian novel.

Turning to the second group of articles, dealing with the cataclysmic events of the twentieth century, Alistair Davies studies memories of WWI as embodied in British poetry, fiction, music, and film, but does not deal with Hungarian manifestations of this phenomenon. János Kenyeres presents the memory of 1956 as portrayed in literature, covering a wide range of writers and poets, from Milán Füst, Miklos Hubay, Tibor Déry, and Gyula Illyes, whose work appeared in the 2 November 1956 issue of *Irodalmi Újság* (a "Literary Journal" reflecting the writers' movement toward more artistic freedom), to György Konrád, Géza Ottlik, and Péter Nádas. Zsolt Czigányik's essay on state censorship under the Kádár regime examines reader reports written after 1956 about George Orwell and Anthony Burgess.

András Papp and János Terék's controversial play *Kazamaták* (*The Dungeons*), Maté Vince writes, dramatizes the events that took place on 30 October 1956, when 500 armed insurgents killed twenty-five Communist Party members and soldiers on Republic Square, lynching twelve of those who had already surrendered. The play, published and performed in 2006 (the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1956 Revolution), thus challenges the "ways in which the Revolution is remembered" (315) and seeks "to reintegrate the suppressed event into the broader memory of the Revolution" (313). Historians and literary critics distinguish three contending narratives in the play: the propagandistic "Kadar narrative" depicts the Revolution as an upheaval incited by anti-democratic, fascist forces aiming "to restore the pre-war regime" (299); a second left-leaning narrative presents "the Revolution as a struggle for a reformed socialist democracy"; while a third narrative, giving a "romantic representation of freedom fighters," sees the Revolution as a return to "the ideology of the nationalist, anti-communist right wing movement before and during the war" (300). In addition, the action in the play's nineteen scenes is contingent, governed by coincidences rather than causality. Moreover, through obvious anachronisms and allusions, the play provocatively asks to be read referentially. Vince finds several "postmodern tricks" in the play and cites the *Kazamaták's* last two lines as an example: "The one single story falls / to 1956 pieces." These lines are meant to echo Ferenc Gyurcány's relativistic, if not nihilistic quip: "There are as many [1956s] as we are" (295). Will this play

become part of the theatrical repertory? If not, it is not because Vince did not give it a fair assessment.

Using photographs, László Munteán discusses the memorial for the victims of the 1944 bombing of Budapest, just as Vince ponders the monument memorializing the 1956 Revolution. The starting points for Munteán's investigation are his mother's memories of the April 1944 Allied Forces bombing of Budapest and the painted white arrows he finds on the facades of old buildings, pointing to bombproof shelters, which, as he states, are now signs "bereft of their signifying power." Using Roland Barthes' concepts of "spectrum" and "punctum," Munteán presents his photographs of buildings marked by white arrows as the visible spectrum, whereas the punctum "points to something ... left invisible in the photograph": "the spectator's knowledge of a past of which the photograph speaks as a future" (51). Hence the spectral feeling of the uncanny. In Barthes' words, "we observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake" (51). Such quests are always unfinished, because we can never fully recover the past.

This collection is of importance to Hungarian and central European studies in that it brings to the surface the many literary and cultural ties existing between English and Hungarian literature, or rather the influence of the former on the latter. In addition, it presents the myriad concerns and voices of contemporary Hungarian literature and art as shaped by the past century's momentous events and expressed in modern, postmodern and trans-national innovative modes that we more often attribute to the West.