

NEW  
HUNGARIAN

# CRIME

FICTION

*Crimes  
Local  
and  
Global*

TWENTY TWENTY-ONE

Petőfi  
Cultural  
Agency



NEW  
HUNGARIAN  
**CRIME**  
FICTION

*Crimes  
Local  
and  
Global*

*editor-in-chief*

Dániel Levente Pál

*editors*

Enikő Sándor

Viktória Stift

*selected by*

Sándor Kálai PhD

*graphic designer*

Dániel Németh L.

*photo*

Máté Bach 6, 22, 30, 34, 38, 42

Ivette Frank 18

Szonja Hegedűs 46

Lenke Szilágyi 10

Birgitta Zoutman 14

*translation*

Thomas Cooper

Éva Cserhádi 14-15.

Paul Olchvary 26-27.

ISBN 978-615-6244-06-2

*responsible publisher*

Zsóka Mihály

*printed by*

Pauker Holding Kft.

**4**

*Katalin*

BARÁTH

**8**

*László*

CSABAI

**12**

*Éva*

CSERHÁTI

**16**

*Róbert*

HÁSZ

**32**

*Eszter*

T. MOLNÁR

**20**

*László*

KOLOZSI

**24**

*Vilmos*

KONDOR

**28**

*Ágnes*

MÉSZÖLY

**36**

*Zoltán*

N. NAGY

**40**

*László*

RÉTI

**44**

*Judit*

SZLAVICSEK

# UNARMED WOMAN TRACKS DOWN COLD-BLOODED KILLERS

## Katalin BARÁTH

Katalin Baráth's novels take her reader back in time to rural Hungary at the beginning of the twentieth century. The protagonist of the stories is a young girl named Veron Dávid, the daughter of a prosperous farmer. Strange things are always happening around Veron, and naturally, she always wants to be the first one to unravel these mysteries.

The title of Baráth's novel *The Black Piano* is an allusion to the title of a famous poem by Hungarian poet Endre Ady, and the poem plays an important role in the story. Veron becomes part of a group of investigators in her hometown which struggles to catch a cold-blooded killer, and she finds herself compelled to choose between two men.

The second volume, *The Turquoise Violin*, takes place not in Ókanizsa, the small town of the previous novel, but in Budapest. Borrowing from the palette of the spy novel, the story offers a tangled tale in which, ultimately, the future of the Monarchy is at stake. The next two volumes, however, put the protagonist back in Ókanizsa and among the small-town characters who have gradually become familiar. In *The Ivy Harp*, Veron, who has returned for a friend's wedding, finds that Ókanizsa is in a state of upheaval, and she too has fallen under suspicion. The fourth volume, *The Golden Cimbalom*, is set in 1914, on the eve of war, but unlike the earlier novels, it interweaves tales set in different moments of history. We find ourselves following the fates of the characters in the fateful year of the outbreak of war, but we are also taken back to the 1860s and acquainted with Sándor Rózsa, an infamous Hungarian highwayman.

The charming and often humorous portraits of the world of a small town give the reader a sense of what it must have been like to have grown from a girl into a woman and a mother in rural Hungary at the turn of the century. The novels touch again and again on the social predicaments which women faced through both the sensitivity of their characters and the ways in which they dramatize their fates. For instance, during her time in the capital, Veron even works as a member of the staff at the feminist periodical *Woman*.

*author*  
Katalin Baráth

*title, year of publication*  
The Black Piano, 2010  
The Turquoise Violin, 2011  
The Ivy Harp, 2012  
The Golden Cimbalom, 2014

*publisher*  
Agave

*number of pages*  
304, 290, 318, 448

*rights contact*  
Katalin Baráth  
<https://www.facebook.com/barathkatalinkonyvek>  
barath.katalin@tatk.elte.hu





## KATALIN BARÁTH

*Katalin Baráth was born in 1978 and grew up in Magyarkanizsa. In 2003, she graduated from Eötvös Loránd University with a degree in hungarian and history. She has published articles in journals and collections of scholarly essays since 2002. She has also been working for various advertising agencies since 2003. Her novels are published by Agave.*



The day had faded into a night that was crystal clear and cold to the bone. The stars were glittering with a white glint against the dark firmament, and the lobe of the moon spread a surprisingly bright sheen over the city of Ókanizsa.

The moonlight was not just surprising, it was also unpleasant, at least as far as Veron Dávid and her brother Jóska were concerned. They had managed to cross paths with only a few possible eyewitnesses in the streets, which were slick with snow, and most of these hapless souls were drunk anyway (who apart from the inebriated would bother ambling out into the cold after 10 at night?). But now that they were standing in front of Vica Shroom's house trying to figure

out how to break in, the bright sheen of the errant moon was decidedly unpleasant.

"Easy enough," Jóska said, looking the black gate up and down as he shivered from the cold. "I'll give you a leg up. Get one foot firmly in my hands, and I'll toss you over."

"You'll toss me over?" Veron hissed. In honor of the occasion, she had proudly worn one of her brother's old pairs of pants, one with stains on the back pockets. "I'm not trying to break my ankle! I just want to figure out who finished off the grass lady."

Jóska frowned.

"Though if you broke your ankle, then you wouldn't go rambling around pointlessly in search of half the city of Ókanizsa," he grumbled.

Veron gave her older brother a sisterly nudge in the ribs with her elbow and then took a step back and gave the gate another look.

"Fine," she said, giving in. "Then give me a leg up!"

"And toss you over?" his brother said hopefully. His ears were stinging from the cold.

"Don't even think about it!" Veron whispered. "Just lift me up. As slowly as you can. I think I can climb up high enough to get one of my legs over, and then I'll jump into the yard."

"And how will you get out?" Jóska asked. "I'll still be out here. I won't be able to give you a leg up."

"I'll find a chair or something inside," Veron replied, squinting at the gate. "I can stand on it and climb out, just like I got in."

"Let's do it," Jóska nodded. "But keep in mind, if I see a cop, I'm getting the hell out of here."

Veron looked at him with a mocking smile.

"You know perfectly well that the only cop on the beat at night in our city is currently standing guard in front of the town hall."

"But I have children to provide for!" Jóska protested. Veron wasn't sure whether he was serious or not.

"I know you have children," she replied, trying to calm him. "And as you recall, I promised that in exchange, you can dump them on me for a whole Sunday sometime."

"How kind of you to remember them," Jóska said, with a modest bow. He then clasped his hands together to give Veron a leg up.

Veron heaved a quick sigh, lifted her left leg, put the sole of her boot into her brother's interlocking fingers, and pushed.

And it worked. When Jóska looked up, he saw his little sister straddling the top of the gate almost as if it were a throne, her left leg still dangling on the outside, but the right leg already over.

"Can you see anything?" Jóska whispered.

"Shh!" Veron hissed, giving a hasty wave of her hand and then turning her gaze back towards the yard. "Not a thing," she whispered back.

Suddenly, the smaller wing of the gate swung open. A gentle woman's voice greeted the would-be burglars.

"Good evening, children."

A middle-aged woman with a pudgy nose and a warm smile was gazing on them from the gate. Her gray hair was glittering in the moonlight.

"Or is it perhaps a bit late to be wishing anyone a good evening? Should I perhaps bid you good night instead?"

Veron and Jóska stared at each other in almost dumbfounded amazement.

"Vica Shroom?" Veron stammered.

"Vica Plume," the woman said, nodding. "True, most people call me Shroom. Because of the mushroom and the herbs and all that. But if your majesty knows my name, then I imagine you know that too."

Veron launched into an admittedly somewhat confusing but nonetheless very convincing explanation as to why they had chosen such an unusual way of paying their respects. What with all the cases of poisoning, she explained, they had come to fear for Vica Shrooms' life.

"Well then goodnight indeed, my dears," Vica said, dismissing them with a wave of her hand. "For as you can see, I am safe and sound and in the best of health, so you can trundle on home and be off to bed."

"Wait," Veron said from her perch on the top of the gate, where the hastily sanded plank was beginning to dig into her fanny. "Just answer me one question! Did anyone buy any

Jimsonweed from you about a week ago?"

Vica Plume put her hands on her hips and gazed up at Veron with a quizzical look in her dark blue eyes. There was a touch of suspicion in her glance.

"Someone did, as it so happens."



# László CSABAI

Árpád Schiffer, the protagonist of the *Sindbad* series, is an extremely talented detective. The novels present the reader with both an array of different kinds of crime and roughly 40 years of major historical events. Thus, we are given an illuminating portrait of an era stretching from the 1920s to the tragic defeat of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

In the novel *Sindbad, the Detective*, our protagonist, who has recently gotten his diploma, returns to Nyárliget, his hometown in eastern Hungary, to serve as a detective. There are all too many crimes to be solved, ranging from minor thefts and cases of fraud to murders, but there is one case that is utterly absurd. Someone has been killed with an animal pumped up on black coffee. Sindbad begins to recall the years he spent in Baghdad, and the story of his life gradually unfolds. He is one of the many, many people whose lives are changed by the Second World War, and at the age of 45, he is taken to a labor camp in Siberia after the Soviet occupation of Hungary.

In *Sindbad in Siberia*, Sindbad manages to survive by obeying the unusual laws of the camp. When he solves a crime which has been committed in the camp, the police take him out of the camp so that he can help the local guards do their work. As we learn of the many crimes waiting to be solved, we are given a kind of introduction, through the fates of the characters, to the various tools used by the Stalinist dictatorship (mysterious disappearances, wiretapping, denunciations, and the like). Meanwhile, the focus shifts, and we come to know the fates of other characters and are even given glimpses of the everyday life of Papa (Stalin). Sindbad learns to adapt to the system, but after losing Sonya, with whom he has fallen in love, he decides to return to Hungary, and he even finds an opportunity to do so.

In *Sindbad the Revolutionary*, Sindbad returns to Nyárliget and is forced to confront the sad fate of his homeland under a communist dictatorship. The exciting shifts of perspective offer portraits of important figures of history, such as Mátyás Rákosi, the head of the communist party, and his wife, but they also present us with the brutal acts committed by a psychopathic serial killer. After the defeat of the 1956 Revolution, Sindbad must decide whether to flee or remain in Hungary. We will only learn of his decision, however, in the next novel in the series.

*author*  
László Csabai

*title, year of publication*  
*Sindbad, the Detective*, 2010  
*Sindbad in Siberia*, 2013  
*Sindbad the Revolutionary*, 2017

*publisher*  
Magvető

*number of pages*  
380, 596, 878

*rights contact*  
László Csabai  
csabailaszlo@mailbox.com



REGIMES  
COME AND GO  
BUT CRIME  
IS A CONSTANT



## LÁSZLÓ CSABAI

*László Csabai was born in 1969 in Nyíregyháza. After finishing his studies at college, he found a job as a German teacher. In addition to writing, he works as a librarian at a local vocational high school. He received the Pál Békés Prize in 2014 and the Artisjus Literature Prize in 2018.*



Putrid camp worm!” Dog said, spitting on Sinbad. “So, you thought we’d trade places? You get out of the camp and you toss me in?”

He took a slug from the bottle of vodka with visible delight, dangling it in front of Sinbad’s nose.

Oleg Terechuk interrupted his impassioned round of air boxing to watch the scene. But once he felt their gazes falling on him again, all of them, Dog, leaning back on the straw, Brass, who was sitting cross-legged, and his little brother Sergei Terechuk (who was keeping watch over Sinbad, who was standing in the middle of the room with his hands tied behind his back and his feet bound together), he continued his speech.

“When Lokomotiv Krasnoyarsk invited Dynamo Dnipropetrovsk for a ‘friendly boxing celebration,’ everyone knew no one was coming to make friends. Wasn’t the Russians and the Ukrainians who were furious at each other...”

“Yes it was!” Sergei roared. “Olinyuk, the flyweight, said in the Krasnoyarsk Pravda that he was going to knock Bazanov right out of the ring on the homecourt for having broken the rules and landed blows to his kidneys at the national championship in Moscow.”

“Yeah, yeah, just a lot of mosquitos buzzing. Till you reach the welterweights people just think of the matches as warmups. A flyweight or a lightweight has to talk trash to get people to pay attention to him. Everyone was just waiting for the match between Balakian, who’s an Armenian even if his papers say he’s from Krasnoyarsk, and Agiyev, who’s Azerbaijani but who was wearing the colors of Dnepropetrovsk. The two of them always bust each other up so good they have to take the winner out on a stretcher too.”

“They took Balakian in on a stretcher once, when he was still in the youth league, in Lenakan, at the championship for his age group.”

“The gong sounds. Balakian and Agiyev fall into the basic position.”

Oleg fell into the basic position.

“They get a taste of each other’s fists.”

Oleg stretched out his arms with his fists clenched.

“Then Balakian lets his hands fall and takes a step backwards. Both his gloves are at his thighs. He’s blocking Agiyev’s blows with quick motions of his upper body, as if hardly paying attention, and the audience in the meantime is muttering, ‘what the hell is he doing?’”

“Agiyev was the first one to come up with that! Balakian stole it from him!”

“Everybody knew that! That’s why the audience roared. They were screaming. And when Balakian decides he’s had enough of the little game, he lifts his right hand, not to fend off the blows, but rather to land a hook. Which Agiyev blocks, of course, and then he responds with a left straight punch, which Balakian dodges with a step to the left, and he uses his momentum to land a devastat-

ing left straight. Balakian again lets his hands fall, and while Agiyev staggers around, he looks indignantly at the audience, as if offended that they’re not yelling louder. He puts his hand to his ear to indicate that he can’t hear them. Except that Agiyev has pulled himself together in the meantime.”

Oleg Terescsuk was dancing and taunting his imagined foe, even fighting off several opponents at once. and then suddenly he turned and landed a real blow on Sinbad’s very real head.

Oleg relaxed his fist, so the blow was more of a smack than a punch, but the detective’s neck still throbbed pretty bad, because his head couldn’t swing to absorb at least a little bit of the blow, since the other Terescsuk had his hands pressed firmly to Sinbad’s temples. As if offering up his head for sacrifice.

“A right straight, a left straight, a right hook, a left hook, a block, change of pace, another left hook, boom, boom, boom,” the colossus of flesh continued his live commentary.

\*\*\*

When Brass and Dog, who had been laughing in the straw, stood up and looked intently towards the entrance to the cellar, Sinbad followed their gaze.

A man wearing chrome boots, green jodhpurs, and a gray hunting vest was standing in the doorway. He was holding a rifle with a Zeiss scope. Sinbad couldn’t see his head, because it was hidden by the top of the door.

He gave a wave of his hand, and Dog, Brass, and Oleg scampered towards him.

“Take this,” he said, offering the gun to Dog, who eagerly grabbed it. “The three of us will go, the two of you will stay here,” he told Oleg. Then he points at Sinbad. “You can have a little more fun with him.”

Sinbad could tell from their gestures what they were talking about, though he understood almost nothing of their words. His head was still throbbing from the last blow. But he could sense that he had met this stranger somewhere before. He might

have been able to recall just who the guy was if the lout had just spoken a little louder, or if Sinbad could have tied a face to the voice. But with the top of the doorway blocking the man’s head, he couldn’t even catch a glimpse of his snout.

He only saw the man’s back as he turned and left, with Dog and Brass in his wake.

Oleg was annoyed to have lost his audience. He wasn’t in the mood for shadow boxing anymore. Instead, he grabbed one of the thick beams running across the roof of the cellar and started doing pullups.

\*\*\*

“Boom,” one more hard blow landed on Sinbad’s face. Sergei snickered in an oily voice. Oleg gave himself a contended round of applause. Then he started to rummage through the cutting tools, but he couldn’t find anything quite to his liking. He took out his own pocketknife, which had a nice, long blade. He pressed the tip to Sinbad’s throat. Sinbad didn’t take a breath, as the slightest move might have pushed the blade into his throat. He tried to look the part of the hangman’s victim. Oleg put his knife away. Sinbad’s eyes shone with the joy of breathing easy again. But he had no reason to rejoice. Oleg took out a brass knuckle. He fiddled with it for quite some time. Finally, he decided the best spot was just under the knuckle of his pointer finger. He looked his prey in the eye. He relished the look of fear, so he waited a little before delivering the blow. He straightened Sinbad’s head with his left hand, and he told Sergei to hold it in place. He took one step back. Sinbad scrunched himself up in fear, and since Sergei was holding him firm, Sinbad’s feet rose up from the floor. One last twitch, and then Oleg’s fist came pounding down.

Sinbad went flying into the straw. Sergei tumbled backward. Oleg fell on Sergei. Then Oleg climbed off Sergei. Sergei’s hands were free, and he could examine his face, which had been bashed formless.



# HAUNTED BY THE DECISION OF AN ABORTION COMMITTEE

## Éva CSERHÁTI

In her writing, Éva Cserhádi aims to give voice to the silenced “herstory” of women under socialism and explore how women have been affected by the transition to a (more) democratic system. In 2019, her novel *The Mermaid’s Secret* (Prae), the first in a planned series of crime novels, was published to glowing reviews in Hungary. *First Case of the HAND*, her second novel, is set in 2015. The communist past has been scraped from the country’s surface, but it still shapes people’s lives. Three murders have been committed in town squares where communist memorials once stood. Clues suggest that the crimes involve members of the Greek community, who arrived in Hungary as refugee children in 1948. When the investigation leads back to the beginning of the Cold War, the different generations of detectives struggle with their different visions of Hungarian history. The new team is a center-piece of the police force’s public relations campaign, but the legacy of the state security services casts a long shadow over the investigation.

In Cserhádi’s third novel, *Escape Room – The Second Case of the HAND* (Athenaeum, 2021), six women are sitting in the waiting room of a small-town hospital in 1974. They are waiting for the local abortion committee to issue the decisions on their cases. One of them disappears on her way back to the canning factory where they all work, and she is never seen again. In 2016, a group of young activists who are just about to form a new opposition party are relaxing in an escape room. The game turns deadly when one of them, who was to be future leader, dies of an allergy attack. He is the grandson of the woman who was last seen in 1974. And only a week before his death, he had hired a private investigator to look into his grandmother’s disappearance.

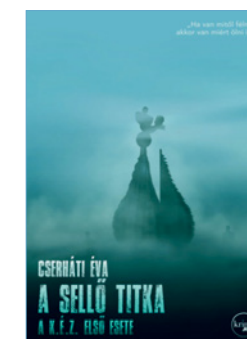
*author*  
Éva Cserhádi

*title, year of publication*  
The Mermaid’s Secret, 2019  
Escape Room, 2021

*publisher*  
Prae  
Athenaeum

*number of pages*  
416, 350

*rights contact*  
Prae Publishing – Endre Balogh  
endre@prae.hu  
Viktória Dian Phd  
dian.viktoria@lira.hu







## ÉVA CSERHÁTI

*Writer and literary translator Éva Cserhádi was born in 1975 in Budapest. As a literary translator, she has published more than thirty books translated from and into Spanish, English, and Hungarian. Since 2005, she has been promoting Hungarian literature abroad in collaboration with the Translation Office, and she received a ministerial award for her work. In addition to writing and translating, she teaches creative writing and feminist translation practices. She is a member of the British Crime Writers' Association and the Society of Authors, and in 2019, she won a prestigious grant from the Arts Council England.*



He could have killed for Grandma. With a capital G: Grandma. She used to say the same: 'I could kill for my grandchildren'. And this wasn't an empty phrase. Grandma would indeed have been able to kill. He now had the evidence in front of him. It wasn't conclusive, it wasn't black-and-white, but it was more than a vague possibility. It was Grandma's life squeezed into a folder. And now he was entrusted with this life. Him alone.

The chances that anybody would find the letters of complaint were remote, and that they would make a big deal out of it after forty years were even smaller. However, the blogging world was prospering and amateur researchers and self-appointed journoes were hunting down

those who could be vilified for everything that had happened during the forty years of state socialism. And he couldn't allow Grandma's history to be accessed by a simple click. He could still prevent others from passing judgement on her.

She had sat on the committee and decided about people's lives. About whole families. She might have been bribed, she might have blackmailed some of them. In those years it couldn't have happened otherwise. Was she asked to fulfil this role? Did she accept voluntarily or was she designated and forced to do it? Nobody would ever know. And even if they did, would it change the facts? Grandma had been part of the regime and she had never denied it. Maybe she would have talked about it, if he had asked. But who would have thought that she had taken part in such things?

Who should decide if Grandma was a good person? Good enough to be cared for by society in her old age? By that society in whose improvement she had believed and believed absolutely. He had learned from her that what counted was not the individual but the community. Sometimes this truth was painful. That's why he had asked her so many times: if this was the case, did it matter that Grandma's grandchildren were them, not somebody else, not everybody? Grandma's reply was always the same:

'Blood ties do not count. You're my grandchildren because I wanted you.'

The knowledge of having been chosen had helped him through so many low moments. Only romantic passion chooses with such assurance, but that fades away after a couple of months or years. But Grandma's love had never faded. He was her Grandchild and he could have killed for her love.

1.

'A member of the Hungarian aristocracy was found dead in his kitchen,' Detective Chief Inspector Telki-Nagy said. 'The SOCOs has been and gone, if I am not mistaken,' she managed a weak smile.

The detectives from Team C from the Special Division of Crime Against the Person gathered around the body of the nobleman. A long carving knife was sticking out from his chest.

'I wonder what was he doing in the kitchen if he was an aristocrat?' DS Köteles asked lifting his eyebrows.

'Plus, he was a man,' said Data who was the informatician in Team C but thanks to DCI Telki-Nagy, she was allowed to take part in meetings and even in the investigative work.

'He was celebrating International Women's Day, I bet,' DI Vasvári guffawed and Köteles joined him. 'You get it, don't you?' he said, slapping the back of the young DS.

Köteles blushed. His wife Réka would kill him if she heard him laughing at this joke with the old man. To make up for it, he tried to show willingness.

'Maybe he wanted to talk to the staff.'

'In the middle of the night?' Data asked and lowered her ample body down onto the bench alongside the wall. She didn't think the kitchen stool looked sturdy enough.

They all looked at the narrow bed. Above it, a small cross and a young soldier's picture was hanging on the wall, probably a portrait of the maid's fiancé.

'Maybe he wanted to talk about tomorrow's menu, change it or add something,' Köteles made another effort to show some enthusiasm.

'That must have been the wife's job,' Data replied, slipping her feet forward until the toe

of her shoe touched the edge of the pool of blood.

'Then why did he come into the kitchen in the middle of the night?' Telki-Nagy asked again.

'Perhaps for a glass of water?' Köteles wondered aloud.

Involuntarily, Telki-Nagy exchanged a look with Data. Köteles's innocence sometimes verged on stupidity. The Chief Inspector had regularly asked herself whether the DS would ever become a good detective. At the same time, she thought that his naïve approach to the world made it possible for him to have a fresh view on events. And more than once, this had proved very useful.

'Not for a glass water, my son, but for the maid's favours!' Vasvári was laughing again.

In the name of male solidarity, he took young Köteles under his wing from time to time. And more often than not, his good intentions were disappointed.

'He was killed by the drawer,' Data rumbled, grasping the knife shaped handle of the kitchen cabinet.

Vasvári dropped onto a stool and took out a flask from his pocket.

'I hate being confined. My brain just doesn't work.'

'I'm glad to see you have something to oil the wheels,' Telki-Nagy snapped at him, because she had resolved to never let his drinking habits pass without comment. 'Come on, people, let's get to work!' she clapped her hands half-heartedly.

Everybody looked at her gobsmacked. The Chief Inspector never clapped, and this sort of exhortation was definitely not like her. Team-building brings out the worst in everybody, Data thought, and looked despairingly around in the escape room.



THE  
DETECTIVE  
UNRAVELES  
HIS OWN  
PAST

# Róbert HÁSZ

Róbert Hász's novel *Thirteen Days in the Life of Marcell Fábián* is a historical detective tale. Published in 2017, it is the seventh novel in Hász's spectacular career as a writer. The story is set in 1902 in the rural town of Zombor, where our protagonist, the young, successful detective Marcell Fábián, is trying to solve a mysterious series of murders. As he pursues his investigation, he uses an array of new technological tools. He succeeds in the end, though he does not realize that he will unravel the question of his own ancestry. He is not spared danger, however. He is hit by a bullet, and though he survives his wound, he is compelled to take time off from his job. His adventures continue in Hász's 2019 novel *Marcell Fábián and Dancing Death*, which begins with what seems like an idyllic vacation in Croatia, but soon Fábián finds himself embroiled in crime-solving again, and he ends up putting the leader of a group of anarchists behind bars. When he gets back to Zombor, the cases have piled up. His maid Julika has vanished, and there has been a string of suicides committed under the strangest of circumstances. These bizarre events compel Fábián to get back to work. In the case of the three suicides that form the main story, it turns out that each one had something to do with the individuals' private lives, but as Fábián soon learns, they all have one odd thing in common. Just before committing suicide, each of the victims had begun behaving strangely, dancing and singing as if delirious.

The tale offers glimpses of small-town life in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the everyday struggles of the people of different nationalities (Hungarian, Serbian, German) who lived side by side, as well as the everyday strivings of people who lived in the more distant villages and homesteads.

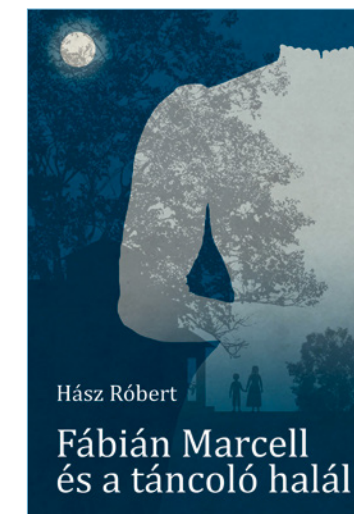
*author*  
Róbert Hász

*title, year of publication*  
Thirteen Days in the Life of Marcell Fábián, 2019  
Marcell Fábián and Dancing Death, 2020

*publisher*  
Kortárs

*number of pages*  
357, 332

*rights contact*  
Róbert Hász  
hasz.robert@gmail.com





## RÓBERT HÁSZ

*Róbert Hász was born in 1964 in Doroslovo in northern Serbia. He attended school in Sombor, where the Marcell Fábrián novels are set. He has been awarded the Sándor Márai Prize and the Attila József Prize, and he serves as the editor-in-chief of Tiszatáj. In 1991, because of the civil war which broke out in Yugoslavia, he emigrated to Szeged, a city in southern Hungary where he lives today.*



That way,” the assistant said, pointing. They went around the counter, pushed a curtain to the side, and down a short corridor. The double-door at the end was open onto the courtyard. Csavojác was chanting without pause.

“He’s out there.”

They went out into the courtyard, which was surrounded on all sides by the high walls of the buildings. It was cluttered with empty boxes, discarded chairs, even a ripped couch leaning against the wall on the far side. In the middle, in the little remaining empty space, stood Csavojác.

He was dancing or at least doing something which resembled dancing. He hopped from one foot to the other, twirling around all the while, and from time to time he clapped his hands together and let out a yelp. Sometimes he lifted his gaze to the sky, sometimes he hung his head

low, almost as if he were doing a folk dance, but not quite. People dance when they are happy. Joy and contentment radiate from them. But Csavojác’s face was contorted with suffering. He was a strong man with a thick neck, like a bull, broad shoulders, and arms as thick as most men’s thighs. Marcell had once seen him carrying half a hog on his shoulder when a delivery had come in, and Csavojác hadn’t struggled in the slightest. Hadn’t even been breathing hard. But now Iván Csavojác seemed on the verge of utter exhaustion. He was gasping for air, and his big, round head was bright red. His gestures were weary, broken, and he moved like a man who had summoned the last bit of his strength to dance his dance. He was chanting incomprehensibly all the while, like some pagan shaman uttering prayers to his god. His white shirt was drenched with sweat. One of his suspenders had come unclipped, and he was wearing neither shoes nor socks. His naked feet slapped against the dark cobblestone of the courtyard, which was still wet with rainwater, and it sounded almost as if he were beating time with a song that only he could hear.

For a moment or two, Marcell and the assistant simply stared in wonder. The assistant said something to Marcell, but Marcell paid him no mind, for he was quite unable to take his eyes off the dancing butcher. The assistant then took a step or two closer and repeated himself in a louder voice.

“I found him like this.”

“Did you try to stop him?”

The assistant shook his head.

“Do you try to speak to him?”

“Certainly not. Look at him! He’s lost his mind.”

Marcell took a few steps towards the butcher.

“Iván,” he said, “can you hear me? Iván?”

Iván said not a word in reply, but he was looking at Marcell out of the corner of his eye, or at least so it seemed to Marcell. The chanting had gotten a little quieter, and if he paid close

attention, Marcell thought he could actually catch a word or two here and there from the otherwise incomprehensible spluttering.

“How is he not dizzy?” he wondered.

“Iván!”

He took another cautious step forward and was standing but an arm’s length away from Csavojác. He stretched out his arm and placed his hand on the butcher’s shoulder. Csavojác’s response caught him so off guard that he leapt back as if he had been bitten by a snake, and he almost tripped and fell. Iván had struck Marcell’s hand from his shoulder with a single, quick gesture, as if fearing a murderous attack, and it was only thanks to a bit of good luck and perhaps Marcell’s reflexes that the butcher’s wildly flailing fist did not land square on his forehead. Csavojác then continued twirling, as if nothing had happened, and never once did he stop his yowling.

“We have to get him to stop,” Marcell said, but the assistance just shook his head.

“He’s mad! He’ll bash our heads in!”

A woman then appeared in the doorway. Holding her skirt up a bit, she ran out into the courtyard and shouted Csavojác’s name. She would have run directly over to the twirling butcher had Marcell and the assistant not stopped her.

“Oh dear, my husband, what has happened to him?” she asked, her face struck with horror and her gaze darting back and forth between them and the insanely dancing butcher.

“Iván’s lost it,” the assistant replied.

“Get her out of here!” Marcell snapped, and the assistant dragged the protesting woman out of the courtyard.

Marcell was left alone with Csavojác, who was still immersed in his dance, apparently undisturbed by this little interlude. Marcell observed him like a scientist would observe a natural phenomenon on which he was writing an article. He took a few cautious steps closer again, but he was careful not to get within range of the flailing arms.

“Iván,” he said again. “Iván, I know you can hear me!”

“What the hell’s wrong with him? Is he drunk?”

Marcell heard Milorád’s voice behind him. He was standing next to Mr. Winter, and the two of them were watching Csavojác as if he were some kind of apparition.

“I don’t think he’s drunk,” Marcell said.

“Then his brain’s gone soft,” Winter said. “But give me a sec and I’ll fix him.”

Before Marcell could stop him, Winter walked over to Csavojác and, without saying a word, landed an impressive smack across his face. He hit him not with his fist, but with his open palm, but as one would have expected from a former boxer, he struck him with so much force and follow through that a normal man would have collapsed on the spot. Iván, however, just wobbled for a moment, suddenly jarred from the rhythm of his dance, and indeed for a moment he stood motionless, as if utterly taken aback by what had just befallen him. He was struggling to catch his breath, and he seemed almost as if he didn’t have the strength to remain on his feet, which was why everyone was quite shocked by what happened next, particularly Winter, as he was the hapless victim. Iván spun around and struck Winter in his chest with both fists, at which Winter, his heavy, bear-like frame notwithstanding, collapsed like a rag doll. Csavojác then lumbered forward and pushed Marcell to one side, and as he fell to the ground, Marcell saw that a similar fate was awaiting his boss, Milorád. Csavojác was moving so unbelievably quickly that he caught Milorád entirely off guard, even though Milorád had been a good three paces distant from him. Csavojác landed a blow with his left hand, and Milorád went flying to one side, his hat floating for a brief moment in the air where, a moment earlier, his head had been and then falling to the ground. Csavojác lumbered forward, still making a tremendous clamor, into the store.



# HIDDEN CONNECTION BETWEEN A DIARY FROM WWII AND A PANDEMIC

## László KOLOZSI

László Kolozsi's first two novels (*Who Spat in the Cream* and *What is Under the Cassock*) are set in the city of Szeged in southern Hungary and are inspired in part by crimes which were committed in the period following the regime change in 1990. In contrast with the historical detective stories which were becoming fashionable at the time in Hungary too, Kolozsi's novels represent a much harsher genre which draws on crimes which were committed in the recent past.

In the two novels, two young journalists from Szeged investigate criminal cases. As one might expect, given the codes of the hard-boiled criminal novel, our journalist-investigators are interested not only in the case, but also in women and drinking. The first novel deals with one of the most infamous brutal crimes of the 1990s, the story of the massacre of a confectioner and his family, but the threads of the tale also lead to the events of the civil wars which broke out with the collapse of Yugoslavia. The second novel draws on scandals which erupted in church circles. While the narrative offers disturbing depictions of acts of cruelty, the novels are characterized at times by an ironic tone.

The third novel (*In the Wolf's Stomach*), which was published in 2014, is different. First, only one of our two detective protagonists is pursuing the case, and second, we find ourselves in a different setting, though the city of Szeged continues to play a role. In this story, Kolozsi offers a narrative concerning recent events. The main plot of the novel was inspired by crimes infamously known in Hungary as "the Gypsy murders" and scandals concerning university student groups, as well as the stories of Hungarian girls who were sent abroad to work as prostitutes.

Kolozsi's fourth novel (*The Flight to Beirut*), which breaks away from the world of the first three, offers a family story which spans three generations, drawing on traumatic events from the Hungarian past. The grandfather's story takes places during the Second World War. He was one of the doomed soldiers in the Hungarian army fighting on the Don River Bend. In 1975, his son, a biologist, boards a Hungarian plane which disappears on its way to Beirut somewhere over the Mediterranean Sea. Today, his grandson finds himself growing up in a world devastated by an unknown virus.

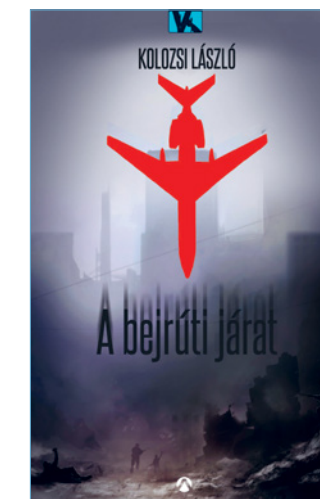
author  
László Kolozsi

title, year of publication  
Who Spat in the Cream, 2011  
What is Under the Cassock, 2012  
In the Wolf's Stomach, 2014  
The Flight to Beirut, 2016

publisher  
Jószöveg műhely  
Athenaeum

number of pages  
313, 308, 516, 424

rights contact  
László Kolozsi  
laszlo.kolozsi@gmail.com  
Viktória Dian Phd  
dian.viktoria@lira.hu





## LÁSZLÓ KOLOZSI

*László Kolozsi was born in 1970 in Szeged. He studied law and worked, both while pursuing his studies and after having completed his degree, as an unskilled laborer and a shepherd. He then took to writing for various periodicals in his hometown. He has written novels and short stories, and he is also active as a film critic, film writer, screenwriter, RTL Klub dramaturg, and showrunner. He teaches in several institutions of higher education.*



Lackó never went out to the outhouse in the night. He just peed on the wall of the hut, hoping and trusting that no one would catch him. He didn't realize that everyone could tell from the splotches left in the morning where he had done his business.

That night, he had slipped a puffy jacket over his shoulders. He hadn't turned on the lights at the back. He could see well enough from the sheen of the thin layer of snow. He had noticed the rumble of the engine in the distance. The car was pretty far away, maybe some two hundred meters, by the path at the edge of the forest. He could only see the outline: a black jeep. Probably a VW Touaregre. He leaned back against the thick wall, pressing his palm against a loose chunk

with strands of straw sticking out of it. His every muscle was taut. He heard the rustle of their pants and the crunch of the snow underfoot in the night as clearly as he would have heard his own name in a conversation. The people who were approaching were strangers, of that he was certain. If they had been people he knew, he would have recognized them by their footfalls. Their shadows were getting longer. Where he was, by their house, there were no streetlights, and further down there was just one bare bulb burning under a piece of tin at the top of the tall pole, a few feet from the frozen stream, which shimmered white in the night. He could only make out their faces when they were standing right under the light. The rustle of their pants was getting faster and faster, as the men had almost broken into a jog.

The Kancsár family had heard all about the murders. They had heard about how Gypsies had been killed in Zsolca, not all that far from where they lived. They had heard about how the people who had been murdered hadn't done anything to anyone, just they had been Gypsies. Lackó was almost certain that the strangers who were approaching, crunching the snow under their feet, were not coming in search of friends. He remembered how everyone had been talking about how there were murderers in the area, but it never occurred to him that anyone would ever want to hurt them. His father was a good man, he thought. Wouldn't hurt a fly. Two men, he thought, taking firm steps forward, excited, faster and faster, and clearly coming towards their home. It was as if his fear had taken him by the throat, but he was still sure that they hadn't come to murder his family, they had come to kill Rádai and his brood, because they were always stealing stuff from people in the village. They had stolen old Mrs. Kómya's geese, and they broke into the houses, sometimes just to steal a few cans of fruit or a bite to eat. Or the family across the way, a bunch of noisy good-for-nothings. The people in the village were more afraid of them than they were even of the aggressive, unpredictable Rádai brothers. But the crunch-crunch of the snow underfoot was getting louder and louder.

When the flash of light burst from the muzzle of the gun and lit up the yard, he was still certain that they weren't shooting at him, at his family. He gasped in terror. Trembling and leaning against the rough wall, he shuffled over to the corner of the house and cautiously tried to see if he could catch a glimpse of anyone.

He saw a man standing in front of the gate with a gun slung under his arm, pointing down at the ground, rigid, like a hunter. Don't shoot, he screamed, but only in his head, without making a sound. He could see his own breath. Three houses down, Sultan was barking, the dog who was always filthy with mud. Lackó recognized his bark.

More shots rang out, and Lackó heard his mother scream. Everything was suddenly sharp and crisp around him. He could see and hear every-

thing clearly. He heard his mother pleading and then falling silent after another shot had been fired, and then he heard one of the men inside speaking in a voice that sounded like a television announcer: she pissed in her pants, the slut. His little sister ran towards the window. He saw her press her face to the glass, he saw her look at him for a moment. And he saw the mad fear in her eyes, a fear that blinded her, that overwhelmed her when the man in the black jacket with the television announcer voice grabbed her by her hair and pointed his gun at her face. Then he saw the blood splattering all over the window. And he saw himself through his sister's eyes, his mouth still hanging open, his eyes wide, staring frozen at the flashes of fire from the barrel of the gun.

If Lackó hadn't let out a scream, if the sight of his sister's face being torn apart by a bullet hadn't terrified him into emitting a maddened gasp, they never would have realized he was there. But he immediately realized that they had noticed something, and he could hear one of them saying to the other that fuck, there were two of them in that bed, go check and see if there's anyone outside. What the fuck do they have so many kids for anyway if they don't have enough beds?

"Mirka," Lackó shouted, "Mirka!" And he ran towards the coop, threw open the gate, and sprinted across the vegetable garden and into the forest, the snow crunching beneath his feet, ever deeper into the woods, where at last there was no light except for the sheen of the snow. A thick chunk of snow fell from the trees onto his neck, and his feet sank into the slush.

He could hear them coming after him. He ran in a zigzag. He had reached the edge of the forest when the first gunshot rang out, and he heard the first bullet go whizzing past. It was like some tiny animal had raced passed him at an unbelievable speed. Lackó was wearing slippers, and when he reached the edge of the forest, he took them off and continued running, clutching them in his hands and ignoring the cold. He'd been putting on the same pair of thick socks every night before going to bed, so he was able to keep running in them. He stopped for a moment, panting and unable to see a thing through his tears. He knew he didn't stand a chance. There were two of them, and they were going to surround him. He considered running across the border, into Slovak lands, or maybe trying to make it to the cave, or maybe even going back to the village in the hopes that they wouldn't dare open fire in a place where they were surrounded by houses and people sleeping. But they were using silencers, so he could hardly hope that the sounds of the shots would actually wake anyone up. Sultan was still barking. But Sultan barked almost every night. Sometimes he woke them up with his angry howls. No one would bother to come out into the streets just because of a yapping mutt.



# AZ ÉST

Előfizetési árak:  
Egy évre előfizetés... 40.000 K  
Keddi szám ára 3000 K

Politikai napilap  
FŐSZERKESZTŐ: MIKLÓS ANDOR

Járulékosági  
Cik. kérés: Székhely: Gt. 64.  
Kiadóhivatal:  
Cik. Szerkesztőség: 19-20, az  
1919. évi évi törvények  
19. évi évi törvények  
D. Vilmos császár út 14. sz.  
VII. Rákóczi út 66.  
Szerkesztőség: Székhely:  
14. Kétharmad 1.

## Bábel

könyvének a felépítésénél sem  
szédült fel olyan hangzavar,  
mint amilyen most itt nálunk a  
titkos társaságok leépítése  
körül kavargja fel az édes ta-  
vaszi levegőt. Megszólal most  
itt ebben a kérdésben minden-  
féle hang, a jámbor optimiz-  
mustól a méla rezignációig az  
egész skála. — Osupán egy hang  
nem zendül és nem harsan  
föl: a mennydörgés, a lesújtó  
harag, amely erőfesz villámok  
cikázásával semmisítse meg a  
titkos társaságokat. Hivatalos  
Zeűzeink — úgy rémlik — jég-  
ra tették hatalmas villámaikat  
és inkább — nyilatkoznak.

## A titkos társaságok a pártközi értekezleten Bethlen az összes pártok támogatását és adatait kívánja a kormány akciójához A tizenhét meghívott közül csak nyolc jelent meg a bizalmas értekezleten

— Az Est tudósítójától —  
A csütörtöki pártközi értekezlet,  
mint ismeretes, napirendjének csak  
első pontját tárgyalta, azaz teljesen  
a Ház munkarendjének megállapí-  
tásáról határozott. A napirend má-  
sodik pontját, a titkos társaságok  
ügyének tárgyalását hétfő délelőtti  
10 órára halasztották.  
Ma délelőtt fél tíz óra körül  
ültek össze a parlament előtti fo-  
gadóban Seitovszky Béla elnök-  
lével és a pártközi értekez-  
let, amelyen a kormány részéről  
Bethlen, Rakovszky és Csáky je-  
lent meg, a pártok részéről pedig  
Andrássy László, Wolff Károly,  
Hauer István és Bémeht Károly,  
mint a kormánytámogató pártok  
két elnöke, Ugaron Gábor, Szilágyi  
László, Forster Elek és Gömbös  
Gyula, mint ellenzéki képviselők.  
A meghívott pártvezér kö-

sül tehát mindössze 8 jelent  
meg.  
mert az ellenzéki vezetők már a  
csütörtöki ülésen kimentették tá-  
volmaradásukat.  
Apponyi Albert gróf, aki a tit-  
kos társaságok ügyét a parla-  
mentben, a frankvita során szóba-  
hozta és akinek felszólalása alap-  
ján a miniszterelnök a pártközi  
értekezlet egybehívását kezdemé-  
nyezte.  
erre az ülésre sem jött el,  
mert Gyöngyösapáti, vasmegyel-  
ben tartózkodik. A pártérte-  
kezleten résztvett még Zsitvay  
Tibor, a Ház egyik delegéje is.  
Az értekezletet  
szigorúan bizalmasnak nyilvá-  
nitották  
és ezért a képviselők semmitféle  
tájékoztatást nem adnak a sajtónak.

szól tehát mindössze 8 jelent  
meg.  
mert az ellenzéki vezetők már a  
csütörtöki ülésen kimentették tá-  
volmaradásukat.  
Apponyi Albert gróf, aki a tit-  
kos társaságok ügyét a parla-  
mentben, a frankvita során szóba-  
hozta és akinek felszólalása alap-  
ján a miniszterelnök a pártközi  
értekezlet egybehívását kezdemé-  
nyezte.  
erre az ülésre sem jött el,  
mert Gyöngyösapáti, vasmegyel-  
ben tartózkodik. A pártérte-  
kezleten résztvett még Zsitvay  
Tibor, a Ház egyik delegéje is.  
Az értekezletet  
szigorúan bizalmasnak nyilvá-  
nitották  
és ezért a képviselők semmitféle  
tájékoztatást nem adnak a sajtónak.

### Bethlen tetszólalása

A pártközi értekezlet Seitovszky  
megnyitászavai után azaz kezdő-  
dött, hogy gróf Bethlen István mi-  
niszterelnök kijelentte azokat az  
okokokat, amelyek véleménye szerint  
szükségesek lettek, hogy pártközi  
értekezleten beszéljék meg a titkos  
társaságok ügyét.  
A kormány a Házban az eszt-  
endői munkarendjéről, majd meg-  
felelő kérdésekre az értekezleten  
szükségesnek tartotta, hogy a  
titkos társaságok ügyét a Házban  
is tárgyalják.  
Bethlen gróf előtábornagy per-  
ce értekezlet a parlamentben An-  
drásy Gyula, aki csütörtökön az-  
napra tette ki távolmaradását a

pártközi értekezletről, hogy más  
irányú elfoglaltsága miatt nem  
vehet részt azon. Andrássy a In-  
lyosora ment és munkatársunk-  
nak kijelentette, hogy a mai párt-  
közi konferencián sem fog részt-  
venni.  
Munkatársunknak arra a kérdé-  
sére, hogy igazak-e azok a hírek,  
amelyek szerint Andrássy telefo-  
non mentette ki távolmaradását,  
így felelt:  
— Ez megfelel a tényeknek. Kü-  
lönben az én álláspontom tilja:  
Bethlen nem tartom alkalmas-  
nak a titkos társaságok ügyének  
szármására. Neki al kell mennie,  
amiat én már kifejeztem.  
Csak új kormány tudja megszűntet-  
ni a titkos társaságokat.

### Az ellenzék vitarendező bizottságát alakít

A Ház mai ülésének napirendjén  
a költségvetés vitája szerepel és  
pedig nyomban.

nyelőségi ülésen  
Az ellenzék nagy felkészüléssel  
indul a költségvetés vitájába. Pa-

B U D A P E S T,  
B U D A P E S T  
Y O U  
C R I M I N A L L Y  
B E A U T I F U L

# Vilmos KONDOR

Vilmos Kondor's novel *Budapest noir* was published in 2008. The story, which is set in 1936, captures an important moment in Hungary's history with the death of Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös. One sees, in the backdrop, a country drifting towards rightwing ideologies. Kondor's novel, which was a huge success among readers and critics alike, brought the American hard-boiled detective story into Hungarian literature and revived the genre of crime-story drama, which had fallen a bit by the wayside in the early 1990s. The protagonist of the series is a journalist named Zsigmond Gordon, who has the kind of commitment to justice that is reminiscent of the major figures of the most famous American detective stories. In *Budapest noir*, Gordon investigates the death of a Jewish girl.

The later volumes of the series, which also met with great success, similarly take place at turbulent moments of Hungarian history. *Guilty Budapest*, published in 2009, is set in 1939, the year in which the Second World War broke out. *The Budapest Spy* takes place in 1943, when the Hungarian government was trying to negotiate with the English and withdraw from the war. *Budapest in Ruins* is set in the postwar chaos of 1946. *Budapest in November* offers a depiction of the days of the 1956 Revolution. The novels consistently draw on the conventions and mood of the hard-boiled detective story genre, but one finds elements from other popular genres too (the war novel, the spy novel, the sentimental novel, even the Western). In the last novel, the story of journalist Zsigmond Gordon stops, but Kondor's later novels delve into his backstory. *The Imposter Budapest* takes us back to the world of the Hungarian capital in 1930, where our young journalist, who has recently returned from the United States, is compelled to go undercover as part of a gang of swindlers. *Budapest Gangster* takes us back one year earlier, to Philadelphia, where Gordon comes into contact with some of the most ruthless criminals in America.

The novels in Vilmos Kondor's series have been translated into dozens of languages, and the first volume of the series has also been made into a film. The novels offer subtle depictions of everyday life in Hungary during the various periods of its history in which they are set, and they provide engaging tales rich with detective-story drama set against a carefully sculpted historical backdrop.

author  
Vilmos Kondor

title, year of publicaion  
Budapest noir, 2008  
Guilty Budapest, 2009  
The Budapest Spy, 2010  
Budapest in Ruins, 2011  
Budapest in November, 2012  
The Imposter Budapest, 2016  
Budapest Gangster, 2019

publisher  
Libri

number of pages  
194, 299, 256, 397, 320, 607, 433

rights contact  
Sarkozy & Co. Literary Agency  
(Mr) Zoltan Pap  
Zoltan.Pap@kolibrikiado.hu





## VILMOS KONDOR

*Vilmos Kondor was born in 1954. He pursued studies at the University of Szeged and then in Paris, at the Sorbonne, where he completed a degree in chemical engineering before returning to Hungary. He currently teaches mathematics and physics at a grammar school in western Hungary. He lives with his wife, daughters, and dog in a small village near Sopron.*



Gordon turned around.

"It's for you."

"Who is it?"

"He says his name is Kalmár."

Gordon ran over to the phone.

"How did you know I was here?" he asked.

"I didn't know, but I thought it wouldn't hurt to try."

"So, what is it?"

"The usual. Your beat. We found a girl."

"What sort of girl?"

"What do you think? A dead one."

"Who have you told?"

"I always start with you," the cop replied.

"That I believe. Were you on the scene, too?"

"No, I'm calling from headquarters. You've always paid my five pengős, so why wouldn't you pay me now?"

"What's the address?"

"You'll be grateful for this, Gordon. It's right in your neighborhood."

"Don't go telling me the tram ran down some maid out on the main boulevard."

"I won't. You'll see the cops out front at the start of Nagy Diófa Street, standing around the corpse of a very lovely and very dead young woman."

"Did she swallow a bunch of match heads? Jump out the window?"

"How should I know? But I think you should get moving if you want to see her. The coroner left for the scene ten minutes ago."

Gordon put on his trench coat, slammed his hat on his head, and grumbled something to Valéria on his way out.

Within a couple of minutes, he'd arrived at Nagy Diófa Street. As soon as he turned the corner from Rákóczi Street, he saw the black hearse and, beside it, a few uniformed officers and two plainclothes ones. Gordon looked at his watch. It was past ten. Usually, he avoided murder scenes. He'd seen quite enough of them, and after five years with the Evening there wasn't much that could surprise him. And yet he hurried now, for Kalmár had called him first. Tomorrow, every paper in the city would be writing about this, regardless of the prime minister's death. But he was the only one on the scene so far, and that was worth more than five pengős.

As the crime reporter at the Evening, Gordon knew the countless ways of dying far better than he ever would have wanted to. Maids drank ground-up match heads to poison themselves and flung themselves in front of trams. Barbers dismembered their lovers. Divorcees slashed their veins with razors. Tradesmen's apprentices leapt from the Franz Joseph Bridge.

Jealous civil servants cut their wives to shreds with butcher knives. Businessmen shot their rivals with revolvers. The possibilities were endless, and yet there was an oppressive monotony to it, for the final result was always the same.

He went toward the guarded building, but one of the plainclothes officers stepped in his way. Gordon called out to detective Andor Stolcz, who waved to his colleague to make way. Notebook in hand, Gordon stepped over to the body, which was lying facedown in the doorway like some discarded rag doll. Her face was tucked into her shoulder, and her dark hair was cascading down her back.

"When did she die?" Gordon asked.

"She's still warm," Stolcz replied. "The coroner hasn't seen her, but I figure she's been lying here for an hour. It's amazing the telephone call came in so quickly."

"Sooner or later a gendarme or a police officer would have seen her."

"Assuming no one else did."

"What did she die of?"

The heavysset, veiny detective shook his head. "How should I know, Gordon? We've only been here a couple of minutes. I don't see any blood."

"Nor do I. Who is she?"

"Now that's the thing," Stolcz said, sticking his hands in his pockets. "We didn't find anything in her purse. Just a few shreds of paper and a Jewish book."

"A what?" Gordon fixed his eyes on Stolcz.

"A Jewish prayerbook." Stolcz reached inside the open back door of the car waiting on the sidewalk. "This," he said, producing a thick little book wrapped in a piece of white fabric. He unwrapped it and held it out toward Gordon.

"Is anything particular written inside it?"

"Nothing. A few pages with the corners folded over. That's it."

"Nothing to identify her."

"I'll look at missing persons list back at headquarters," Stolcz said with a shrug, "but I doubt anyone's reported her. And besides, we just found her. Maybe in a couple of days someone will report her missing. You know as well as I do that girls come to Budapest every day and wind up in this neighborhood. She won't be the first streetwalker to end up in an unmarked grave in this city."

Gordon nodded. But this case seemed exceptional all the same. A Jewish girl lying dead on a street with such a dubious reputation. He took another look at the corpse. One of her feet was wedged under her body, and on the other foot he saw an ungainly, cheap, high-heeled shoe. Her skirt had slipped to the side, and there was a run in her brown stockings. He could see her peach-colored blouse underneath her jacket, which was high-end but threadbare.

"She wasn't exactly overdressed," Gordon remarked.

"Let's just say that given what she was up to, she didn't need to be," Stolcz replied. The left sleeve of the jacket had slipped above the elbow. Gordon leaned closer in the scant light and knelt down. He took the girl's wrist and turned it toward the light. Just below her elbow was a birthmark the size of a two-pengő coin. His stomach churned, as if suddenly in the grips of a long-forgotten childhood fear.

Gordon glanced up at Stolcz, who was talking with the other plainclothes detective as the three uniformed officers listened in. He reached inside his pocket and took out a fountain pen. Carefully, he brushed the girl's hair from her face with the pen. Her eyes were open, opaque, the irises dull. And green.

For a couple of seconds Gordon stared at those green eyes, the bloodless face, the slightly curly locks of dark hair. It wasn't in the slightest bit hard to recall the sad, defiant smile he'd seen in Gellért's photographs.



# A LITTLE MURDERER AMONG FRIENDS

## Ágnes MÉSZÖLY

Ágnes Mészöly's novel tells a story set in Hungary today of several members of a generation born in the early 1970s and finishing high school right around the time of the fall of socialism. Fourteen former classmates, each of whom will be the narrator of one chapter, meet every year to spend a long weekend together. In October 2017, however, something goes wrong. The morning of the day after they have gathered, one member of the group is found dead. Gradually, it becomes clear that he has been the victim of a murder, and the murderer is among them. The first case is soon followed by the second, and the characters find themselves struggling to survive.

The novel draws on many of the elements of the classic crime story. We are given an array of information about the timing of the events and the characters (at the beginning of the novel, one finds a list of characters with a brief description of each), and we can even study the crime scene on the basis of the floor plan of the house. The crime, which was committed among a closed circle of acquaintances each of whom is now a suspect, also conjures some of the great classics of the detective story genre.

However, the novel not only presents the relationships among the characters, it also touches on the problems of today's Hungary (and Europe): domestic tensions and violence, loneliness, weight problems, drug use, prejudices, past traumas left unresolved, sexual problems, and extremist political views.

There are lives which seem successful and lives which seem mired in failure. The basic question of the novel is simply whether it is possible to find solutions to shared problems the roots of which lie in the past.

*author*  
Ágnes Mészöly

*title, year of publication*  
Rókabérc, Death Hike, 2018

*publisher*  
Prae

*number of pages*  
274

*rights contact*  
Prae Publishing – Endre Balogh  
endre@prae.hu







## ÁGNES MÉSZÖLY

*Ágnes Mészöly was born in Budapest in 1971. She is a writer and pedagogue. She has written several books for children and young adults. Her 2018 novel Rókabérc, Death Hike is her first work for adults. She is also the author of the five-volume Hanga and Várkony (2015-2017), a series of crime stories for young adults.*



A post-party landscape painting and silence. One torch burning on the terrace, illuminating a figure slumped over the table, asleep. An empty bottle of brandy next to him, the light from the torch shimmering on a beer can lying sideways. I find a clean glass in the kitchen and fill it two or three times from the tap, and it occurs to me to wonder in the meantime how the hell does this place have water and electricity. Aren't these luxuries a little out of place in the middle of a forest? I prop my elbows on the counter. I drink my third glass of water. I can see Zozó through the kitchen window. His body, flopped on the table, is a big, undeniable threat.

"That moron's going to catch cold," Toni says, coming up behind me. Startles me so bad I leap up.

"What's wrong," he asks. "Guilty conscience?"

"Now that you mention it, maybe," I reply. "I just can't quite imagine what he's going to do when he wakes up."

"Ah ha, familiar situation," he says, referring to the Events of Last Time. "But we've grown out of the smash-stuff-up phase, haven't we?"

"Right, just don't forget to tell Zozó."

I spot a cigarette on the table, no filter. One of Ricse's, if I've got any luck. I grab it and set out for the terrace. I can hear Zozó snoring quietly as I pass. I climb up onto the railing and try to light the joint.

"Let's at least toss a blanket or something over him," Toni shouts. I shrug. Be the good Samaritan if you like. I don't feel like bothering with it right now.

After the third drag I start to loosen up a little. Doesn't bother me that the rain is falling on my back, though after thirty seconds or so my shirt is soaked. I thank the heavens above that, as a prosecutor, I got put in the crimes against life and body slot. I'd suffer a little cognitive dissonance if I had to prosecute some sixteen-year-old kid for smoking pot.

"I can't find a blanket, but I got this," Toni says, yanking me back into the moment. He spreads his own jacket over Zozó's shoulders. A red baseball cap slips out of one of the sleeves. He picks it up and puts it on Zozó's head.

"Idiot!" I hiss. "He'll wake up."

"This lunk?" Toni says, shaking his head. He sits down next to me on the railing and makes it very clear, with unmistakable metacommunicational signs, that he regards the joint as common spoils.

"He drank what was left of Géza's brandy and then had another three or four beers. He'll be out till noon. And if you're lucky, he won't remember a thing. I'm hoping that's not true of you," he says, nudging me with his shoulder. I give him a grimace instead of a smile and then ask him to give me back my consciousness-altering tool.

The last torch finally gives up. There's just a little bit of light from the kitchen. As

the darkness descends, the noises get louder. The sound of the rain would be fine, and the wind too, but the creaking of the trees is pretty oppressive.

"I'm cold," I say, and I get up and go inside. I close the window and flop on the bed. If I had my way, I'd sleep till noon on Tuesday.

"Your clothes are wet, you're going to catch cold," Toni says, and I can feel his hand on my back. He pulls off my shirt, covers me with a blanket, climbs into the bed next to me, we curl up together, and I'm just about to fall asleep when a phone rings in the other room. Doki sputters the usual fountain of cuss words and then finally everything's quiet.

I wake up feeling ok, no headache, no hangover, in an all-around good mood, at least until the sound of the raindrops on the window and the kind man snuffling beside me remind me of the events of the night before.

I cautiously poke out my nose, but everything's cool. Tibor, Pisti, Doki, and Ricse are sitting at the table, and none of them is the kind of guy who would butt in or rat on anyone. Outside, Zozó is still asleep on the table, just like we left him in the night, except that someone has put a checkered blanket over him too.

"That poor wretch is still out on the terrace?" I ask, taking a few steps towards the table. "Maybe someone should bring him in."

"Let him sleep," Ricse says. "He's wrapped up good. He'll be fine."

"I don't think he's going to get off that easy," Doki says. "He'll have a cold at least. He was drenched to the bone when he dragged him back inside. If Vica hadn't come out and given him a little heart to heart talk, he would have smashed the place up like he did back in the dorm in the third year."

"Was nice of you to put a blanket on him," Ricse says.

"Wasn't me. But if he really got wet, we should probably bring him in."

"Don't think it makes much difference at this point," Pisti chimes in. "He's been out there so long he might have cooled down."

"You've got a point," Tibor nods. "He's been out there for at least six hours, right?"

Toni makes a show of infinite heroism. He takes a deep breath, stands up, and sets out for the terrace. I'm starting to think he's going to take on the Task of Waking the Lunk.

"Anybody want a last cigarette?" he asks from the doorway. The smokers all get up and follow him, Ricse, Tibor, and me. "If we make a lot of noise, he'll wake up anyway," Toni adds, stretching his arm towards us with an open pack of cigs in his palm.

We're not the only ones, Toni and me, who are worried about how Zozó's going to react. Everyone is.

"For real? You want us to breathe this mountain air?" Ricse says, getting picky at the sight of Toni's orange Pall Malls. He reaches for the filterless Gauloise on the table, stretching his arm out over Zozó's head, and as he straightens out, he knocks the checkered blanket, and it slips and falls to the ground. I bend over and grab it and try to spread it over Zozó again. I brush against his skin, just the tip of my finger, but I immediately know something's not right. I let go of the blanket and it slides off him and falls to the ground again.

On Zozó's neck, right next to the artery, there's a tiny contusion, just a pinprick.

The cold certainty fills me like rage or desire might fill me. A normal woman would scream. I would scream. But the normal woman who finally spent, if not a whole night, then at least an hour asleep next to a man is gone, and in her place, I am here again, the woman who spends 50 hours a week dealing with murders as her profession, who is not surprised by anything, and who will stop at nothing to find out who murdered the Big Love of her Teenage Years.

"I'm afraid we have a problem," I say in a completely calm voice. "Someone wake up Zsófi."



# Eszter T. MOLNÁR

As writer Eszter T. Molnár has mentioned in interviews, her novel *Freefall* is based on real events. Walter Becker, the famous Heidelberg scientist, is killed by his young wife, Magdalena, who claims to have murdered him in self-defense. Peter Brenner, her lawyer, believes her and decides to try to save her.

Brenner is the narrator of the tale, and his relationship to the crime and strivings to discover the truth may seem reminiscent of the determination and cunning of some of the famous investigators from American classics in the genre. As the story unfolds, he finds he must take care to protect not only his client, but also himself, and the story becomes increasingly suspenseful. Brenner is pursuing the investigation with remarkable skill and success, but his life in the meantime is collapsing around him. He finds himself compelled to reevaluate his relationships with women, and he gradually realizes that his family life and professional career are in crisis.

The mysterious Magdalena, however, also becomes one of the protagonists of the novel, though we know her story only through Brenner's account. Through her fate, the world of Eastern Europe appears in the novel. She is the Romanian child of a Hungarian mother and a Saxon father who has grown up in Eastern Germany.

The social background of the German city is also an important element of the narrative: Brenner is a member of a social elite in this world, in which the secret to lasting success is to play by the rules. Through his story, the novel exposes the various problems of a society that seems to be running all too smoothly.

Eszter T. Molnár's novel, which is written in Hungarian but set in Germany, confronts the reader with problems which are familiar across Europe.

MURDER  
IN THE LONG  
SHADOWS OF  
THE PAST

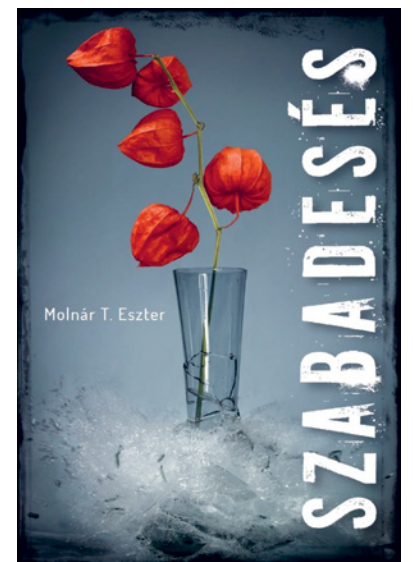
*author*  
Eszter T. Molnár

*title, year of publication*  
Freefall, 2017

*publisher*  
Prae

*number of pages*  
352

*rights contact*  
Prae Publishing – Endre Balogh  
endre@prae.hu





## ESZTER T. MOLNÁR

*Eszter T. Molnár was born in 1976 in Budapest. She is a writer, poet, and biologist. She has written several novels for younger readers. Her 2017 crime novel Freerfall is her first work for an adult readership. Her youth and children's novels are published by Pagony, while her works for adults are published by Prae.*



I woke up to the smell of my own sweat. The sense of panic hit me somewhere in the no man's land between dreams and wakefulness, much like some 20 years ago when I smashed up my father's Volkswagen one drunk night, but the sense of shame and the fear or, rather, certainty of getting caught only hit me the next morning. The images swirling in my head gradually came together to form a story. It wasn't a car that I had smashed up the previous night. I got up and looked out the window at the motionless gray of the early morning, and then I found my shoes, which I had left turned on their sides beside the bed just before sunrise. Good thing Laura hadn't come into my room that day to wake me up and announce her plans for our ski trip. I took off the wrinkled clothes I had been wearing the night before and hopped in the shower, hoping that the

stream of water on my back would help wake me up, but in vain. I wrapped a towel around my waist and looked at myself in the mirror until I began to shiver from the cold. I looked to see if I could find something different in my face, a new wrinkle by the corner of my eye, some unusual sternness in my gaze, but it was the same old stupidly handsome man looking back at me. I put on a clean shirt and started to shave.

The moment that Webber had gone tumbling out the window, I had known I would have to vanish without a trace, as if I had never even been there. I wanted to get as far away as possible so that the little space that my body had taken up in the lab would again fill with a mix of air and radioactive gases. I would have had trouble explaining just what I was doing at the department in the middle of the night in the first place. That alone would have been enough to ruin me professionally and have me banished forever from the field, but in addition to the simple fact that I had crossed an ethical boundary there was also now a very real corpse.

My phone rang in the laundry basket. I hissed as the razor cut into the skin under my chin. I pressed some toilet paper to the cut and started digging through the dirty clothes, spluttering a jumble of swear words. As always when I'm in a hurry, I answered without checking to see who was calling.

"Peter, get to the office as fast as you can," I hear Schwer say.

"Good morning," I mutter in the sleepiest voice I can muster. "It's a bit early. What's up? Do we have a new case?"

"Not exactly. Does the name Thomas Webber mean anything to you?"

I felt as if my legs were going to give way beneath me.

"Might have heard it somewhere before, though I can't remember where."

"He was one of Walter Becker's men."

"Then that's where I heard it. They introduced him to me when I was in the lab the day before yesterday. Why? What's up with him?"

"He's dead."

"Oh!"

"It's a very unpleasant case. He fell out of one of the windows at his workplace in the night. The murder investigation team is already on it, since there are indications that it wasn't an accident. Someone else may have been in the place."

"You don't say," I thought to myself, though I was breathing a bit easier. Apparently, I wasn't a suspect, at least not for the moment.

"This is definitely going to slow down the Becker case. I talked to Pichler this morning. He says they're not going to close the investigation until they've figured out if there's some connection between the two."

"I see."

"My other phone's ringing. We'll talk when you come in."

Schwer's efficiency was astounding. It was just a little after seven and he had already spoken with Pichler, the chief criminal advisor, and indeed, he seemed to know the most important details concerning the state of the investigation, even though the case only tangentially touched on the legal office. With such powerful friends, it was hardly surprising that he was always disturbingly well informed. I was sitting on the toilet with the phone still in my hand, listening to the place wake up around me. Laura had made coffee and drawn herself a bath. Kathy and Steffi were bickering about something on the ground floor. On the other side of the door to my room, intimate annoyances were waiting for me. I wasn't sure I would be able to deal with them right now.

I had killed a man. I was pretty sure that Thomas Webber's death was no great loss for mankind, and a moment before he died, he would have shot me without batting an eye if I had let him, but still, it hadn't been entirely necessary for him to fall from that bridge... I hadn't

done it on purpose, though under the circumstances, it hadn't necessarily been the best call to yank his ankle. Though I hadn't even yanked it all that much, just grabbed it... but not like the details mattered! I didn't have to explain myself to a judge, not yet at least. In that brief moment when I had stood, four stories up, leaning out and waiting to hear the dull thud of Webber's body below, something had irrevocably changed. Until then, small events had built up, layer by layer, like the tar building up on the walls of my lungs, the person into whom I had become, creating the false impression that if I were not satisfied with myself, I could always return to some earlier version. The drama, my father's death, the birth of my first child, I had watched them all passively, from the sidelines, and I had received both the sense of mourning and the glory as a kind of bonus, but that night, I had reached out, I had grabbed Webber's ankle, and with that single gesture, I had crossed from the society of the immaculate into the throngs of the fallen. If I had done as a decent, law abiding citizen would have done and immediately called the ambulance, by the time morning had come, I would have been at the police station explaining my motives, and Schwer standing next to me as my legal council would have angrily wrinkled his brow. Instead, I had hurried home to continue playing my role in my own life. I didn't feel any remorse, but I also didn't know what the hell to do.

As I opened the door to the bathroom, the hot steam hit me. Laura was in the tub leafing through a magazine. Her toes with their toenails painted bright red were poking out of the thick layer of bubbles covering the water. It was no longer an effort to focus on her face, her eyes half closed, the lids swollen and heavy, and the beads of sweat on her forehead.

"Close the door," she said. "You're letting out the heat."

As I stepped back into the hallway, she told me not to forget to close the main door.



# Zoltán N. NAGY

The first scene in Zoltán N. Nagy's novel *Vulture* takes place in 1960 in the city of Salgótarján, in a foster home. The opening offers a sense of the elements to come: the role of childhood traumas in crime, the significance of different layers of the past, including the socialist era, and, in connection with a poem by Mihály Babits, the ways in which the plot of the novel will involve allusions to works of literature.

In 2014, Zalán Szigeti, a perfectly average denizen of Budapest, has his life turned upside down when, on his way home, he discovers the corpse of a man burned to death. As a witness to the incident, he becomes increasingly involved in the investigation, and he gradually realizes that the events deeply touch on him and his family.

The other thread of the novel involves the investigative team which has gotten the case. The team is led by László Budai, a seasoned lieutenant colonel. Budai is convinced that Richard Vulture, who before the fall of communism was the most dreaded serial killer in Hungary and who essentially vanished in 1989, is up to his old, cruel tricks again.

For Mónika Steinhardt, one of the members of the team, the investigation will be a personal matter. Her task is to unravel the thread involving the citations from the poetry of Babits, as various signs seem to suggest that there may be a connection between the serial killer and one of the most famous Hungarian poets of the twentieth century.

The plot of the novel is ingeniously complex, and the details of the work of the investigative team give the story a persuasive authenticity. One can see in the backdrop some of the very distinctive features of Hungary today, and the interweaving into the story of citations from Babits will make the tale particularly entertaining for lovers of literature (and literary riddles). Many of the questions raised remain unanswered, however, and thus this first novel, which has met with tremendous success, offers the promise of a sequel.

THE  
POETRY  
OF  
MURDER

*author*  
Zoltán N. Nagy  
*title, year of publication*  
*Vulture*, 2019

*publisher*  
Twister Média

*number of pages*  
414

*rights contact*  
Értékes Christos  
TWISTER MEDIA  
christos@twistermedia.hu





## ZOLTÁN N. NAGY

*Zoltán N. Nagy was born in 1979 in southern Hungary. He pursued studies as an economist, but he has been writing since he was a teenager. His breakthrough came in 2018, when Vulture was among one of the winners in a writing competition held by Twister Media.*



Zalán stepped closer to the fire for the first time. He drew back for a moment when he felt the heat of the flames. He was surprised at how hot it was around the bonfire, and he noticed the drops of sweat on the older policeman's forehead.

*How did he get so sweaty so fast?*

As he looked at the man's square face, he realized that his forehead was not sweating from the heat of the fire. He looked pale, and he was stroking the handle of his handgun. He seemed frightened.

Suddenly, the transceiver crackled.

"Pest County 073. This is the Pest County Police Headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel Budai speaking. What's going on?"

"József Tóth, Chief Ensign reporting."

"József, is that you?" The voice suddenly had a much friendlier tone.

"It's me, Lieutenant Colonel."

"Thank God they didn't send some rookie, we've got more than enough of them," said the crackling voice. "Radnai and Kardos are on their way." They'll be there in about five minutes."

"Message received. The crime scene has been secured, the guy who called it in is standing right next to me."

Tóth glanced at Zalán, who was about 190 centimeters tall and was quite clearly tense. A red car from disaster relief had just arrived, along with two blue and white police cars, sirens blaring. A few seconds later, the whole place was swarming with people wearing uniforms with yellow vests. They were herding the curious onlookers further back. The dancing yellow flames of the fire and the spinning blue lights on the cop cars filled the narrow street with a haunting glow.

"Good thing you're there, Jósika, and I don't have to explain, but you know why I called the on-site patrol, right? Even though that's not by the book."

The voice on the transceiver sounded grim, and Zalán could hear tones of grave concern in it. Suddenly, he had the feeling that the police were afraid of something. He looked at the sergeant, and the sense of some unseen menace only seemed stronger.

"Yes, I know," Tóth said, heaving a long sigh.

"We haven't seen a murder like this in 27 years."

"I was on the crime scene at the time, sir."

"So, the question is, is this the same kind of pyre?"

"I don't know for certain, sir," the sergeant said, staring grimly at the flames.

Zalán could tell that he was simply trying to soothe himself and the lieutenant colonel on the other end of the transceiver, but the look on his face revealed everything. It was indeed the same kind of pyre.

"Are Radnai and Kardos there yet?"

A dark-blue Skoda was just pulling up behind the crowd.

"They just arrived, sir."

"Good. They weren't policeman back then, when that case went down."

Zalán could hear the lieutenant colonel pause as he spoke the words "that case," and his voice was heavy with distress. It was clear even over the static on the transceiver.

"Take a look around before they get there. You know what you're looking for, right?"

Tóth nodded slowly.

"Message received."

The sergeant walked slowly around the fire, as if he were stepping on eggshells. Zalán watched him restlessly. The fear which he had sensed in the policeman was beginning to wear off on him. He was tired, and he wanted to go home. He didn't want to walk circles around the corpse of someone burnt to a crisp with the members of a police patrol who are clearly tense.

"Is there something wrong, Chief Ensign?" Zalán asked, trundling in József Tóth's wake.

The Sergeant walked away from the raging fire. He was no longer standing in its trembling glow but rather had set out for two of the little jungle gyms in one of the darker spots on the playground.

"Stay where you are," he said to Zalán, and then he took a flashlight from his pocket and began to shine it on the jungle gyms, the newfangled kind, made with aluminum pipes that had been painted green and covered with kid-friendly plastic.

Zalán did not stay where he was, however. He wanted to know what it was that the police had seemed to find so dangerous, so menacing that they had reported it to a lieutenant colonel in the middle of the night using the local patrol's transceiver. The glow from Tóth's flashlight danced back and forth over the jungle gyms and then ran slowly over the green stretch of grass between them.

"There!" Zalán spluttered in an excited whisper. The beam of the flashlight had flickered on something dark at the foot of one of the jungle gyms.

"I told you to stay where you were!" Tóth hissed without bothering to look back. He shone his flashlight on the object again. Zalán held his breath and leaned closer. On the ground lay a simple, rotting wooden board with a rag and a little piece of white paper in the center. Zalán could hear Tóth's labored breathing. He cast a cautious glance at the ensign. Tóth was squatting next to the piece of wood, and his face looked as pale as the face of a dead man. Zalán took a few steps towards him and then screamed in terror. He felt his stomach cramp, and as he leaned a bit closer, the glow from the flashlight fell on the board and the knots in his gut tightened even more.

For on the board lay not a rag, but a human heart, half burnt and cut from the body it had once filled with life. Next to it was a business card on which a total of eight words had been written in italics using a typewriter. Zalán could just make out the letters.

A silent man among sinners is an accomplice.

"Pest County 073!" the radio suddenly crackled.

Tóth walked slowly towards the microphone.

"Pest County 073!"

"Reporting, sir," Tóth said, almost in a whisper. His eyes were dark against his pale brow, which was gleaming with beads of sweat.

"Did you find what we were looking for?"

Tóth slowly stood up straight. He gave Zalán a wave of his hand to tell him to back off.

"József, say something! A yes or a no at the very least!"

Tóth stared at fire. He pressed the button on the transceiver and then spoke, his voice trembling with unease.

"He's back, sir. He's back."



# SUICIDE OR ASSASSINATION?

## László RÉTI

Some of László Réti's novels are set against distant backdrops. The main character in his series entitled *Chameleon*, for instance, is the American detective Cameron Larkin. But his stories are often connected to Hungary. His most recent novels are detective stories which are set in the near future. *Budapest Boulevard*, which takes place in the early 2020s, takes the reader behind the scenes and into the hidden worlds of politics and law enforcement, while his novels *Europe Behind Walls*, which is set in 2033, and *The Death of Europe*, set in 2050, address the issue of migration in a European context.

In 2020, László Réti published *To Kill Teleki*, his first historical crime fiction. The fictional narrative of the death of Pál Teleki, who served for a brief time as prime minister of Hungary, was originally written as a script, but years later, Réti turned the story into a novel. The events take place in 1941, a pivotal and calamitous year in Hungarian history. Hitler is preparing to attack Yugoslavia, which means that the German army will cross through Hungary, but Pál Teleki does not want to give his consent. Meanwhile, homicides and suspicious deaths are on the rise in Budapest. Someone is killing men in high-ranking positions, and as a kind of finale, the murderer always shoves a potato into the victims' throats. The plot of the novel involves several cleverly intertwining threads, and the reader is presented with numerous crimes seen from shifting perspectives. We learn of the planning and execution of an assassination attempt against the prime minister. Captain Max Ringe, one of the essential cogs in the Nazi war machine, is given the task of traveling to Hungary and murdering Teleki, but the murder should appear to be a suicide. The motivations which guide this serial killer gradually come together like a mosaic, and slowly we come to see that they are linked to a case from 22 years earlier. The threads of the plot all lead, eventually, to Károly Debrődy, a temperamental detective who must both solve the cases and serve as Teleki's bodyguard. The many moral dilemmas and action-packed scenes make the novel a captivating page-turner.

*author*  
László Réti

*title, year of publication*  
To Kill Teleki, 2020

*publisher*  
Művelt Nép

*number of pages*  
590

*rights contact*  
László Réti  
info@retilaszlo.com





## LÁSZLÓ RÉTI

*László Réti was born in 1962. For 20 years, he worked as a detective, chief investigator, and deputy head of department. He has been publishing novels regularly since the early 2000s, first under a pseudonym (Marcus Meadow) and then under his own name. He intermixes into his crime stories elements of the adventure novel and thriller.*



“Share on you, son!”  
 “Yes indeed, mother.”  
 “You drink this foul concoction as confidently as if you were an absinthe connoisseur.”

“Practice makes perfect.”  
 “Wonderful. And now I have that to worry about that too. You disappoint me, Károly. And for the love of God, would you quit this detective nonsense!”

“A bit odd that my mother is more frightened by the prospect of me working as part of the Detective Corps of the Royal Hungarian Police than she is by the thought of my drinking absinthe.”

“Stop your nonsense!”  
 “I can’t,” he said, raising his arm and glancing at his watch. “I’m afraid I have to go.”

“Why do you bother coming if you already have to scurry off?”

“Listen mother,” he said quietly, “I don’t come here to argue with you.”

“And yet that’s what we always end up doing.”

“And why? Forgive me, but I don’t want you to talk about the task I have been given. I might say something ugly, and I don’t want to do that.”

She looked him up and down.

“You remind me of your father, Károly.”

“Watch what you say, mother,” he replied, and then he leaned over, gave his mother a kiss on the cheek, and turned to leave.

“I’ll drop in tomorrow.”

“Get out of that place, Károly. It’s nothing but a bunch of clowning around.”

He closed the door. She always got in the last word. You could perhaps kill her, his father had always said, but you could never shut her up.

Tivadar was standing barely three meters from him.

“How did it go, sir?”

“She didn’t slit my throat. So it went well.”

“I’m glad, sir.”

“Tell me, Tivadar,” Debrődy said, scratching his head, “you mentioned that my mother was wheezing a little bit. Something seems to be making her restless.”

“Yes?”

“She was unusually lively today.”

“Oh! Really?”

“Was the doctor here?”

“He came by yesterday.”

“And did he prescribe anything for her?”

“Yes.”

“And did you fill the prescription?”

“Of course.”

“And you gave it to my mother?”

The butler gazed at Debrődy with a blunt look in his eyes and cleared his throat.

“But less than the amount prescribed.”

“Show me the pills, Tivadar.”

The butler reached into his pocket, pulled out a vial, and gave it to Debrődy. Debrődy turned it in his fingers so that he could browse the letters on the label.

“Heroine?” he said, raising his eyebrows.

“As a cough suppressant. Bayer makes it.”

“Bayer? Bayer makes it?”

“As far as I know.”

“Bayer used to make it. It was banned in 1913. 28 years ago.”

“Really, count?”

“Tivadar!”

“I beg your pardon! Really, sir?”

“Really. But you know that! Where did you get this?”

“The doctor prescribed it.”

“But it hasn’t been available for purchase for 28 years.”

“The doctor told me where to go, which pharmacist.”

“And this pharmacist had it?”

“Indeed he did, as you can see for yourself, sir.”

“And how was this possible? What do you think?”

“He must have had quite a bit of it set aside,” the butler replied, shrugging his shoulders.

“Quite a bit? Enough for 28 years?”

He looked at the label again.

“Which drug store was this? It’s not on the label.”

“The one in Prohászka Ottokár Street. On the side with the uneven numbers.”

“Alright,” Debrődy said, tucking the little jar into his pocket. “I’ll just keep this for now.”

“But what should I give the countess for her cough?”

“Toast with butter, Tivadar. Toast with butter.”

Debrődy picked up his hat and stepped out of the main entrance. The sun had peeked out again from behind the heavy, leaden clouds. Debrődy put his hat on and walked to the Opel in the gray of eventide. From the corner, however, there came a shout and the sound of something rumbling.

Debrődy sluggishly lit his thin, dark brown cigar and blew a puff of smoke into the air. He knew what was causing the clamor. One street down, an impoverished physician rented out the basement of his villa to bring in a little money. Thus, when evening fell, couples and groups of friends, sometimes even street performers would stop in the place on their way from the park to the old city to have one last round. There must have been some difference of opinion among them.

Debrődy took the cigar out of his mouth, looked at it with a frown, and then walked slowly toward the corner. As he turned into the narrow street, he was a bit surprised. The noise from the brawl was coming from the basement entrance to the Blue Duck, much as he had expected. What he had not expected, however, was to find two policemen standing by the entrance and watching the melee inside.

Debrődy walked towards them. The older of the two, who must have been about fifty and had a handlebar moustache, turned around at the sound of Debrődy’s approaching footsteps and measured him up and down.



# Judit SZLAVICSEK

Judit Szlavicsek's novel *Be/There* was published in installments online under the title *West Coast*, where it met with remarkable success and caught the attention of thousands of readers. The version which has now been published in print is an expanded adaptation of this tale.

The novel has the subtitle *Lake Balaton Crime Story*, and Lake Balaton and the surrounding settlements (Keszthely, Hévíz) play an important role in the story.

The tale focuses primarily on female characters. The most important suspect, Csilla, the wife of Gábor Szendrei, comes to realize that she doesn't really know the man she has been living with for decades. Though they belong to the society of wealthy people who live around Lake Balaton, behind their lives of luxury lie secrets of which she never guessed a thing.

One cold February day, the body of Lili Somodi washes up on the shores of the lake. Lili, who was the girlfriend of Szendrei's son Márk, was a troubled girl who was struggling to get out of a situation in which she was being exploited. The threads of the story lead to the wealthy and politically influential elite and a criminal organization which specializes in using the girls of the area as prostitutes.

Júlia Kardos and László Horváth, two detectives from Keszthely, get the case. Julia can be considered the protagonist of the novel. A single woman with no children, she comes to Lake Balaton from Budapest. In the course of the investigation, she is compelled again to confront a trauma she has suffered, a trauma which is something of an open secret among her colleagues, but about which she nonetheless never says a word to anyone.

The case becomes more and more complicated, and our determined investigators get valuable leads in the bustling cities of Budapest and Pécs as well. The story comes to a climax in a duel between Júlia and the perpetrator.

The novel, which is set against the backdrop of one of Hungary's most famous natural landmarks, inveigles its reader with an exciting plot, an immensely complex tale, and a sensitive portrayal of the problems and fates of women.

DARK  
SECRETS  
BEHIND  
GILDED  
GATES

*author*  
Judit Szlavicsek  
*title, year of publication*  
*Be/There*, 2020

*publisher*  
Erawan

*number of pages*  
302

*rights contact*  
Fejős Éva  
Erawan Kiadó  
fejoseva@fejoseva.com







## JUDIT SZLAVICSEK

*Judit Szlavicssek was born in 1974 in Kaposvár. As a university student, she first majored in literary history before studying law. She then worked in an array of areas in which she drew on her training in law, including government administration and law enforcement. Be/There is her first detective story to be published in print. In the summer of 2020, her short story Paranoia won first place among more than one hundred entries in the “Detective Stories Today” competition held by the PRAE Publishing House.*



Even Carson Coma doesn't make running bearable.

In vain was the singer in her favorite band howling, “never suffered any pain, not for anyone or anything,” and in vain did it remind her of how, at the concert in November at Akvárium, Tamás had shouted in her ear, when he passed her a screwdriver, that she had the best ass in the place, and in vain did she recall how he had grabbed it while he spoke. None of it helped a bit.

Because running sucks.

It sucks in gym class when you have to run laps, and it sucks when you decide you're finally going to lose those 10 kilos and you force yourself to tromp at least a few kilometers down the city streets every evening.

The route she usually took resembled a tiger python which was just digesting its most recent prey. It wound down from Vörösmarty Street to the path in the protected forest just above the indoor spa so that by the time she started the slog back up all her momentum would be gone and the whole jog would become a stroll on the steep, well-worn path that cut across the woods.

It was barely half past five, but little did it matter that the calendar, at long last, was approaching March, she still had to make do with the gray dusk which arrived every afternoon according to schedule.

Every time she took a breath, she felt like she could almost sink her teeth into the thick, damp mist which was drifting up from the lake, and the medicinal waters which, presumably having worked their magic, were being set loose again from the hotels on high were gushing through the channels and omitting an oppressive stench of sulfur.

She ran at a strikingly gentle pace past the Corner Coffee House and did her best not to notice the yearning gazes of the men in the conspicuously Russian assortment of people in their fifties who were sitting at the little tables in front of the place.

She then turned off onto the path lined by sycamores and cypresses and was immediately struck by the damp, acrid sadness of the trees. She slackened her pace a little more and gave herself a proud pat on the back in her mind for again having done the minimum.

The man was sitting on the third bench.

He was wearing black Martens boots, dirty dark gray jeans, and a black fake leather jacket. The motionless waiting had cut deep trenches into the material of the jacket.

She wasn't in the slightest bit surprised to find him sitting there. It was quite hard to go down that path without happening across him.

She had heard of him. That he was a dealer.

And that he sometimes waited for stuff here. She never paid much attention. It didn't concern her.

But his eyes. There was something different about them. Watery, but almost swimming in nothingness. In longing.

For a split second, their gazes met as she ran past him, and that was enough for her to switch to a higher gear. The sense of panic made her muscles taut, and the adrenalin raced through her veins. At the end of the straight stretch, the path forked. She could go left and down to the safety of Petőfi Street or right and take the steep footpath that led into the thick of the forest.

For a moment, all the images from those awful horror movies flashed through her mind, the scenes in which the stupid chicks always run in the wrong direction instead of picking the path that very clearly leads to safety. If she weren't running for her life, she might even have chuckled at the fact that lo, she had just done the same thing herself. She instinctively followed the usual route, thus cutting herself off from what would have been a soothingly rapid resolution to her predicament.

She looked back over her shoulder to see if the man was actually chasing her, and as she turned her head, she tripped over a root. She struggled desperately to regain her balance while taking very clear note of the fact that the man had reached the footpath and was coming after her at a fast, regular pace.

Stumbling forward, she struggled up the ever-steeper path. She could feel the panic-stricken throbs of her pounding heart in her throat. She had reached the straight stretch that led to Kossuth Street. There were only a few trees lingering on either side of the path, and she could see the row of unimaginative blockhouse villas that had been built back in the 60s. If she could just push herself a little harder, perhaps within a matter of seconds she would be safe.

When she reached sidewalk beside the empty street, she had to stop. She put her hands on her knees and struggled to catch her breath. The spasm that had tightened her lungs quickly subsided, and she could tell that her pulse was rapidly slowing with every breath she took.

She was still young, in perfect cardiovascular health. It only took a minute for her pulse, which had been racing a moment before, to return to its normal pace.

She was still young, her faith in the world still strong. And why should she fear? That black X7, which was just slowing down, was going to come to a stop beside her. She knew the car well.

“Good evening,” she said after the window slid open just a crack. She did her best to hide the last tremors of panic from her voice. She didn't want to seem ridiculous.

“You're Petra, aren't you?” a calm voice asked from the darkness inside the car. “You go to school with my son. You seem a little shaken. Is something wrong? Can I give you a ride somewhere?”

She tried to remember the face of the man who sat day after day in his car in the parking lot in front of the school waiting for his son.

“I'm very grateful you're here. I was pretty frightened a minute ago. There was a man sitting on one of the benches on the path above the spa. He's always sitting there, but this time, he got up and chased me through the forest. I was sprinting the whole time. I'd be very grateful if you could give me a ride home.”

As she got in the car, she did not notice that the man wearing the Martens boots had also reach the end of the path and was staring in disbelief at the car as it vanished in the distance.

And, of course, she had no idea what he was thinking.

He was thinking you sure as hell shouldn't have gotten in that car.



# PETŐFI LITERARY FUND

THE AIM OF PETŐFI LITERARY FUND IS  
TO PROMOTE CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY  
HUNGARIAN AUTHORS' WORKS ABROAD  
AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE  
PUBLISHING OF HUNGARIAN LITERATURE.

## GRANTS

- \* Grants for foreign publishers  
for translation costs
- \* Grants for foreign publishers  
for publication costs
- \* Grants for agencies for excerpt  
translation costs
- \* Grants for theatres  
for translation costs

## INFORMATION CENTRE

- \* Contacts of authors, translators,  
publishers and agencies
- \* Information concerning authors,  
books, rights

PUBLISHED BY



### address

Petőfi Literary Fund  
1053-H Budapest  
Károlyi u. 16.  
Hungary

### web

[www.plf.hu](http://www.plf.hu)

### facebook

[facebook.com/petofiliteraryfund](https://facebook.com/petofiliteraryfund)

## CONTACT

### DÁNIEL LEVENTE PÁL

GENERAL DIRECTOR -  
DIRECTORATE OF LITERATURE  
[daniel.pal@plf.hu](mailto:daniel.pal@plf.hu)

### ZOLTÁN JENEY

PROJECT COORDINATOR  
[zoltan.jeney@plf.hu](mailto:zoltan.jeney@plf.hu)

### MÁRIA HAJBA

APPLICATION COORDINATOR  
[maria.hajba@plf.hu](mailto:maria.hajba@plf.hu)

### more info

[applications@plf.hu](mailto:applications@plf.hu)

“

*A silent man,  
among sinners,  
is an accomplice.*

*Mihály Babits*

”

ZOLTÁN N. NAGY: VULTURE