Kürtösi, Katalin

To "hunger ... for wild sensations" : 'playing Indian' in Hungary

The Central European journal of Canadian studies. 2021, vol. 16, iss. [1], pp. 25-41

ISBN 978-80-280-0035-6
ISSN 1213-7715 (print); ISSN 2336-4556 (online)

Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/144903
Access Date: 17. 02. 2024
Version: 20220831

Central European Journal of Canadian Studies
Revue d'Etudes Canadiennes en Europe Centrale
volume 16 (2021) | (25–41)

To "hunger … for wild sensations"[1] – 'Playing Indian' in Hungary

« la gloire du Wild West » – « jouer à l'indien » en Hongrie

Katalin Kürtösi

Abstract
Karl May's Winnetou books have been available in Hungarian for a hundred and twenty years, and they are widely read even in the twenty-first century. This article, however, moves beyond the translations and innumerable publications of these books and focuses on the special cultural phenomenon of 'playing Indian' in Hungary. For nearly one hundred years, groups of Hungarian artists and their friends have been organizing 'Indian' camps in different parts of the country. Some of these camps were the targets of the communist secret service since 'Indian' meant resistance against oppression and deprivation as well as environmental consciousness for the participants of the camps. In 2021 a special exhibition was held about these camps, featuring several mentions of the 'Indian' by the best known poets and writers and accompanied by an anthology of contemporary short stories about the 'Indian experiences' of Hungarian writers and artists.

Keywords: playing "Indian," secret service reports, the "Indian" as metaphor in films and literature

Résumé
L'histoire de Winnetou présentée par Karl May n'a pas cessé d'intéresser le public hongrois depuis pendant plus de cent-vingt ans et même au vingt et unième siècle. L'article, néanmoins, va au-delà des traductions et d'innombrables publications de ces récits et s'intéresse au phénomène culturel de « jouer à l'indien » en Hongrie. Pendant un peu moins que cent ans, plusieurs groupes de Hongrois, artistes et leurs amis, ont organisé des camps indiens dans plusieurs régions du pays. Quelques-uns de ces camps ont été repérés par le service secret communiste étant donné que l'Indien voulait dire, pour la plupart des participants, la résistance à l'oppression et aux dépravations, mais aussi une certaine conscience écologique. En 2021, une exposition a été spécialement organisée, mettant en relief le sens « d'être indien » par un grand nombre d'écrivains connus, accompagnée d'une anthologie de récits courts représentant l'expérience indienne des artistes et écrivains hongrois.

Mots-clés : jouer à « l'indien », rapports des services secrets, « l'indien » comme métaphore dans le film et la littérature

1) James Joyce, *Dubliners*, 15

1. Introduction

Hungarian readers have had access to novels about North American 'Indians'[2] in their mother tongue since the mid-19th century: the first translation of James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* came out in 1847, translated and 're-worked' by Mária Csapó (i.e. Mrs. Vachott, using her husband's name).[3] After this first translation four others of the same book were published, the last one by László Gy. Horváth in 2019 (the first un-abridged version in Hungarian). During the past fifty years or so, *Nagy indiánkönyv*[4] [Big Indian-book], a collection of Cooper's novels, has been most popular among young readers; a new edition is dated September 2020. Interestingly, however, when it comes to stories about 'Indian' life, most Hungarians would first mention *Winnetou*[5] by Karl May. This adventure novel came out in Hungarian in 1902, and in another translation two years later. Other books by May followed, enjoying dozens of new editions, even in the new millennium, including audio and e-book versions, while in 2013 a series of his Indian stories was launched by Duna Könyvklub. Karl May became such a household name that some editions put 'May Károly' as author! Libraries in small villages and the capital city alike have many copies of books by the two writers checked out even in pandemic times. The majority of the young readers are boys.

Moving on from the data of first translations and publications, however, we find that very little academic writing is available about these two highly popular authors, the main reason being that children's and young adult literature is very

2) The "misnomer" (Younging, 56) term 'Indian' is used here to describe the use of First Nations history, etc., in the Hungarian context. The use is at times in line with Hartmut Lutz's designation for hobbyism: Indianthusiasm, "the problematic German [and European] infatuation with the Indigenous peoples and cultures of North America" (Lutz 3).

3) Mária Csapó (1832–1896) was a poet, writer and translator who had close family and friendly ties with leading intellectuals of her day (e.g. the poets Mihály Vörösmarty and Sándor Petőfi). Her husband, Sándor Vachott (1818–1861), was a poet and lawyer and secretary to governor Lajos Kossuth during the Hungarian war of independence against Habsburg rule in 1848. Apparently, Cooper's novels were so popular in the early 1840s that would-be novelist Mór Jókai decided to learn English so as to be able to read Cooper's and Dickens's novels in the original (while he started to learn French to read Victor Hugo).

4) The almost thousand-page volume contains *The Deerslayer*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers*, and *The Prairie*. The stories were translated by highly reputed Ádám Réz and Tivadar Szinnai, the illustrations were done by Ádám Würtz; it was published in 1976 by Móra Könyvkiadó, a company specializing in children's and young adult books. The impressive volume has had six editions by different publishing companies since then, proving that there is always a big demand for it.

5) Like in the case of other modern literary figures who have achieved mythical status (e.g. Romeo and Juliet, Don Juan), even people who have never read the works themselves do have some ideas about the characters. 'Winnetou' for Hungarians is the embodiment of courage and strength – perhaps the most bizarre example for this is "Stuffed turkey breast à la Winnetou" in the menu of the 'Fehér ló' (white horse) steak house in Siófok (the description says the filling is smoked sausage and cheese): http://www.feherlo.eu/ page 5.

seldom taken seriously among academics or reviewers: books by Cooper and May are classified as such in Hungary.[6] In Országh's monograph about American literature, Cooper's literary career is described in a subchapter of 19th-century writing (71–82). A significant part of the sub-chapter is about Cooper's non-Indian-related works. Országh introduces the 'Indian books' by pointing out that the author's "world fame relies on the classical Indian stories, which have been ceaselessly popular among young readers" (76). This labelling has apparently persisted to our days. Országh also mentions the 'national epic' qualities of these novels, which offer "a new type of American national hero, the fair, helpful and faithful friend, the person living in nature, who despises … noisy, quarelling society" in the character of Natty Bumppo (77). When summing up Cooper's achievement, Országh – once again – points out that "Cooper is still generally known as an author of exciting Indian novels, written for young readers, the main reason being due partly to the stronger and weaker points of his writing technique, partly to the slow transformation of literary styles and the historical change of the genre" (81). Cooper is mentioned in *Világirodalom* [World Literature], too, in the chapter about American Romanticism by Zsolt Virágos, who considers the Indian-related books "a sort of American national epic," stating that "Cooper was a creator of literary myth with the biggest impact in his century, one of the indirect founders of the tradition of the 'Western,'who definitely contributed to creating a specifically New World iconography." His conclusion to the passage is that through his story about Natty Bumppo "Cooper expressed not only the spirit of romantic escapism but also criticism of American society" (581). Without any doubt, the novels by Cooper and May are the best-known and most popular authors of 'Indian'-related books in Hungarian.

The Adventures of Sajo and Her Beaver People (*Két kicsi hód*) and two other books[7] by Grey Owl have also been widely read; the first one was also adapted for the puppet theatre with music (the score is available in the National Széchenyi Library – NSZL). Ernest Thomson Seton has altogether only fifteen books in the NSZL: three in Czech, five in Ruthenian and seven in Hungarian. Of these last, three were published in the twenties, three in the thirties, and one in 1960. Most are animal stories, but *Two Little Savages* (*Két kis vadóc*,1931) is the quintessential Seton book focused on 'Indians.'

This brief survey about the translation and publication data, together with the almost total lack of serious critical response, would suggest that although books about 'Indians' have been available for over 170 years, and the many editions attest

6) The oeuvre of Karl May has not received scholarly attention in Hungary. The only mentionable event is that the National Library (OSZK) offered an exhibition about the Hungarian translations of Karl May's works (curator: Andrea Fazekas) from 24 January to 30 March 2012.

7) *Pilgrims of the Wild* (*A rengeteg zarándokai*) had two editions (1941, 1997; the latter was reviewed), while *The Men of the Last Frontier* (*A vadon fiai*) came out in 1940 and 1994. All three books by Grey Owl were translated by Ervin Baktay, whose 'Indian-related' activities will be discussed later in this article.

to a wide readership, these books have not provoked much critical reflection, nor did they exercise mentionable impact on Hungarian culture. But going a bit deeper into the matter shows the complete opposite of this hypothesis: MATARKA, the online database of Hungarian journals (mainly monthlies or quarterlies, and a few weeklies) offers scores of titles even by contemporary poets and writers (e.g. Kornélia Deres, Gábor Gyukics, Attila Jász, Jenő Alföldy, Anikó Juhász[8]), who generally use 'Indian' as a synonym for freedom and a love of nature, as well as dozens of papers and articles dealing with 'Hungarian Indians' or playing 'Indian.' Besides these, in 2021 the Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest offered an exhibition with a catalogue featuring Indian games in the country.[9]

The present article will investigate the groups 'playing Indian', including their impact on culture and political implications. The Hungarian art of 'Indian' games can be divided into three groups: 'Indian' summer camps organized by/for children aged 8–14; 'Indian' camps of adults on the Danube-bend islands; and finally 'Indian' camps of mixed-age groups in the Bakony mountains.

2. Summer camps for children

In "The Encounter" Joyce writes about three boys who like playing 'Indians' and decide to skip a day from school to carry out an adventure. In the interwar period playing 'Indian' was an activity for school boys in Hungary, as well. In 2017, based on a diary his father had written in the 1930s, István Csupor reconstructed the concept and ideas of a group of children (mainly boys, but a few girls, too), aged between 8 and 12, who had started a series of 'Indian' camps in the thick forests near Kemence, a small village northeast of Budapest, close to the border with Slovakia. His 45-page article not only quotes and comments on the diary, but also contains several photos related to the group's adventures. The core 'tribe' consisted of six boys, most of them cousins, who were inspired by the books of Cooper and May, but apparently had not heard about E. T. Seton's 'Indian-related' movement and stories. An indirect source of their inspiration was the touring show of Buffalo Bill in June 1906 in Budapest, which gave a long-lasting experience to Lajos Csupor, father of one of the boys and István Csupor's grandfather (Csupor, 25).

In the diary itself, we can find a detailed description about the serious preparations of the boys to have a good camp. First they elected the writer of the diary, István Csupor senior – alias Big Snake – to be chieftain, then made a strong fence around the

8) Kornélia Deres (1987–) is a theatre historian and poet, Gábor Gyukics (1958–) is a Hungarian-American translator and poet, Attila Jász (1966–) is an editor and poet, Jenő Alföldy (1939–) is a critic and poet, Anikó Juhász (1952–) is a translator and poet.

9) The exhibition is discussed at the end of this article.

campsite, set up ten tents, had a pole for the flag, and a 'torture pole' with a skull on its top. However, when the camp was almost ready, a rival group of boys started to destroy it, and a battle developed. Next day the chieftain received a letter that read: "Highly Respected Mohican Chieftain, Last night we visited your camp and destroyed it a bit as a warning that it is not a good idea to provoke us … We could have destroyed your camp totally. … See you later, the Chieftain of the Sioux 18 July 1936" (Csupor, 34). The camp was officially opened by the Chieftain, who composed a short speech in gibberish (in Hungarian: *halandzsa*). In 1936 the camp was active for more than a month – at the end sport competitions were organized for the two teams of Mohawks and Apaches (altogether about 20 boys) including swimming, shooting with arrow, rope-climbing, shot putting. (Interestingly, the chieftain was always first or second.) The entry for 1937 contains a list of accessories: trousers, breastplate, knife, tomahawk, head-dress, and as extras boys could use shields, lances or arrows (Csupor, 46). Apparently, Csupor senior did not keep a detailed diary that year – and the following year, i.e. 1938, turned out to be the last one for this group. By that time, the boys were around 14–16 – some of them had to help their parents in the fields, those living in towns opted for reading or other adolescent activities: the carefree childhood years were over (Csupor, 51–52). Obviously, the children of the 'Indian' camp close to Kemence had not had first-hand experiences concerning Indian life. But their fascination with this exciting culture accompanied them in their adult life and some were reading books about the folklore of various 'Indian' tribes on the American continent. Two participants, István Náday and his sister, Ágnes, lived in Latin America in the late 1970s, then ended up in Calgary and had several First Nations friends there, but the article contains only a few lines about their experiences in Canada (Csupor, 61–62).

'Indian' summer camps for children were still popular at the turn of the Millennium: the experimenting primary school teacher Márta Winkler offered them for children aged 9–10 in district XI, Budapest. During the school year she organized week-end excursions as preparations for the summer adventures, at school the children chose 'Indian' names for themselves and could prepare 'Indian' accessories, or paint pictures of totem poles and learn 'Indian' songs. For the summer camps, she took the group to various locations in the country, ranging from the Zemplén mountains in the east to Szombathely in the west, but the top favourite was Visegrád along the Danube bend. These camps helped build small communities and could direct the children toward a respect for nature. More recently, summer day-time 'Indian' weeks have been offered for school children in Kecel, a small town of about 9,000 people in southern Hungary, which is the birthplace of Sándor Borvendég Deszkáss (his activities will be discussed later in this article): the programme is centred around environmental issues and 'Indian' stories (https://vira.hu/2020/07/ertekes-programokkal-vartak-a-fiatalokat-az-indian-es-kornyezetvedo-taborban/).

3. The 'Danube Indians'

The 1930s were a peak period of culture and modern arts in Hungary, and many writers and artists spent longer periods in Berlin and Paris, sharing the information about new approaches with their friends after returning home. The best writers were active as translators of contemporary works, e.g. poet and writer Frigyes Karinthy introduced the satirical stories of Stephen Leacock to Hungarian readers while Ervin Baktay specialized in the works of Grey Owl, translating his stories about the little beavers in 1937. Baktay (1890–1963) himself was a widely recognized specialist of the culture of India, translating classical works (including the *Mahabharata* and the *Kama Sutra*) from Sanskrit and from English. In his youth, he was interested in theosophy and yoga. As an escape from academic work, he initiated a summer gathering with the purpose of 'playing Indian' near the artist colony of Zebegény in 1931, moving on to uninhabited little islands in the Danube bend a few years later so that they could be 'out of sight.' Right from the beginning of the 'playing Indian' movement in Hungary, young men and women from different artistic fields joined the group: Mária Mirkovszky – alias 'Dancer of Stars' – followed the new concept of modern dance represented by Isadora Duncan (disseminated in Hungary by Valéria Dienes); the ceramist Géza Gorka, the painter Amrita Sher-Gil (the wife of Baktay's cousin Viktor Egan) and József Haranglábi Nemes (whose picture about a later camp can be seen at the end of "Fabiane") were all active participants of the group. Apparently, the 'Indian' camp in the 1930s was a gathering place for young intellectuals who found the new ideas about returning to nature and the natural – including 'natural' movements and nudity alike – and to a health-conscious life style worth following. Baktay claimed that

> North American Indians are the most genuine athletes of all nations. … The Indian never kills more wild game than he and his family would need … they have always been close to nature. … During the time we are spending in nature, let us leave our other, urban and civilized life behind: let us be like children in our soul, let us play and cherish beauty. This is how healthy physical sporting life can become a spiritually regenerating experience. (quoted by Fabiane)

Camp life meant a daily routine of getting up at 7. The morning hours were reserved for shopping and making lunch, in the afternoon group members could take a nap, swim, go fishing or hunting, and after dinner they would be talking and singing around the fire next to the totem pole. The activities and programmes were well documented by photos and amateur films and by newspaper articles from the mid-1930s on. Baktay was active in the 'Indian' camp for fifteen years, but others continued well into

the new millennium (some sources say that it is still functioning). His fascination with the culture of North American native people originated at the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show in Budapest in 1906;[10] that same year the 16-year-old Baktay organized a Buffalo Bill show of his own in Dunaharaszti, a popular resort place just outside Budapest. During the following years he immersed himself in the topic with the help of books his older brother had sent him from the U.S. His interest about the life and culture of 'Indians' was also inspired by popular films. In the 'Indian' camp of the 1930s, Baktay's name was 'Heverő Bölény' [Lazy Buffalo] – members of the group prepared accessories and things to wear as well as tepees and canoes using original motifs and methods.[11] In 1937 the American Indian Alliance recognized his activities and declared him a chieftain.

Baktay's 'Indian' camp served as a point of reference for similar activities in Hungary for several decades. In the 1930s Sándor Borvendég Deszkáss (1913–1988) joined the Danube Indians: he was fascinated by the stories of Cooper and May, and eventually became their Hungarian 'equivalent,' publishing novels and scout-guides for young audiences under the pen-name 'White Elk' in the early 1940s.[12] However, while the Winnetou stories and Cooper's book are still being published in Hungary, Borvendég's novels became a victim of the ravages of time. Still, recent research has been dealing with Borvendég's 'Indian' activities – in the framework of persecutions during communist years in Hungary. Apparently, the secret police considered Baktay's 'Danube Indians' politically 'innocent' – Borvendég, however, who actively supported the Scout movement,[13] was not only expelled from the Hungarian Writers'

10) In his historical survey, Gergely (288) mentions that in the early twentieth century, 'Indian fever' swept through most continents.

11) József Lorencz (alias 'Eagle Feather'), who later co-authored a 'Wild West' cookbook with Borvendég, joined the 'Danube Indians' in 1948, became an expert on their history and founded an 'Indian Museum' in Kisoroszi in 1989. (Gergely, 304). In 2014 the collection was moved to Dunaharaszti, Baktay's birthplace – the Ervin Baktay Indian and Cowboy Museum still functions as a permanent exhibition. https://www.google.com/search?q=lorencz+j%C3%B3zsef&tbm=isch&chips=q:lorencz+j%C3%B3zsef,online_chips:indi%C3%A1nok&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiav_6BsI7uAhUGbRoKHRhrAvEQ4lYoAXoECAEQGg&biw=1349&bih=657#imgrc=_HoWC2_ESTzNiM

Gergely (302) also mentions that an M.A. thesis was written about Hungarian Indians by Jogi Mirja (University of Tartu, Finland), who was able to interview Mr. Lorencz.

12) *A Sziklás Hegyek varázslója: magyar ifjúból indiánfőnök* [The Magician of the Rocky Mountains: A young Hungarian becomes an Indian chief, 1940] is the best-known, followed by *A Hajnalcsillag főnök: regény* in 1943 [Chief Morning Star: a novel], *Békepipa: kézikönyv a nyári indiántábori élethez* [Peace Pipe: a handbook for Indian camps, 1941], and *Hét fekete hold: beszélő levél a magyar ifjúsághoz* [Seven Black Moons: a talking letter to Hungarian youth, 1943]. The 'Indian' friendship between Baktay and Borvendég lasted only for a few years, until 1938 (Gergely, 291).

13) Gergely provides us with a detailed description about the overlapping of the Scout movement and the 'Indian' groups, present in several places in Hungary (Budapest, Székesfehérvár, Szombathely, Eger, Szeged, Mohács, Pécs and Győr) in the late 1940s; their aim was to re-shape and renew the Scout movement along 'Indian' lines (294). In 1946 and 1948 National Indian Days were organized in the mountains of Buda

Union in 1949 (the year following the communist takeover), but also 'warned' by the ÁVH [State Protection Authority], the infamous Hungarian secret police. No wonder that he could earn his living only as a labourer during the 1950s before starting to occasionally publish short articles with the pen name 'Spotted Elk' about 'Indian' traditions and skills for *Tábortűz* [Campfire], the journal of the Hungarian Pioneer Association in 1959. A year later he got a job at the Headquarters of Forestry but this promotion did not involve a stabilisation in his life: the Secret Police started to shadow him again and this activity developed into the 'first and last Indian trial' of the Ministry of Interior Affairs in Hungary.

A few years after the defeat of the 1956 revolution in Hungary, the new regime did not feel adequately strong and stable – they were trying to trace down any gatherings that were eager to keep the memory of the failed revolution alive. The secret police was collecting information about the possible leaders of 'Hungarian Indians' and concluded that "the whole Indian movement is nothing but a cover up, meaning 'the oppressed Hungarian people' when they speak about the 'oppressed Indian people'" (Kovai, 43). This suspicion was more than enough to lead them to arrest Sándor Borvendég Deszkáss, along with 'Indians' in Budapest and three more in Kaposvár.

Borvendég was arrested in the fall of 1962. In January 1963 he and four other suspects in his group were found guilty of "preparing a conspiracy to overthrow the state," but a few months later they were freed as part of a general amnesty (Kovai, 40). The process abounded in intricacies: 56 people were interrogated, on 16 occasions the premises were raided, and 8 people were arrested and 5 sentenced.[14] The whole undertaking resulted from various activities in the 1950s: since the Scout movement and religious education were banned, at some places in the country they were carried on under the guise of 'playing Indian.' Around 1960, the secret police investigated 'small religious communities,' at the beginning of 1962 they caught the letter of a 'chieftain' in Kaposvár to an 'Indian' in Budapest which summarized their aims as a striving "to perfect ourselves," a "fight for the oppressed Indian peoples and first of all our Hungarian people … If need be, we should fight for the interest of our Hungarian people and for the true cause with weapons … and we should live an Indian life" (quoted in Kovai, 42). The Kaposvár group was in close contact with Borvendég and his 'Indian' friends in Budapest.

---

and Pusztaszentjakab respectively. Gergely, a researcher of youth movements in Hungary, elaborates on the role of monks in this process – some of them were arrested and imprisoned (e.g. Pál Bolváry) (295)..

14) For the police, Indian activities were not a 'game' or 'playing' Indian, but a serious crime that in the late 1950s could have ended with long years in prison or even a life-sentence. In the present case, 'Indian' journals, moccasins, head-dresses, bows and arrows, and pictures served as evidence – but these were not satisfactory for the Public Prosecutor. As Kovai (41) suggests, the 'Indian affair' represented a mistake in the investigation and change the way power was exercised. After arresting these people, they had to be sentenced – and then released almost immediately with amnesty.

When Borvendég was first interrogated, the detectives made it clear to him that he had been arrested because of his 'Indian' activities. He admitted to having read books by May, Cooper and other stories about Indians, to later becoming an expert on Indian culture, as well as to exchanging letters with some leaders of the American Indian Alliance, who had sent him books and articles. He claimed he had not known other 'Indian' groups in Hungary. Borvendég cooperated with his interrogators.[15] He did not deny having talked about the possibilities of reviving revolutionary activities with his group – he even agreed to write a 'self-confession' in which he repented his activities during the 1956 events, and considered the idea of writing another book for young people explaining why 'Indian romanticism' was harmful. The documents of his case, however, contain another story-line: soon after his arrest, he had to share his cell with a person allegedly put in prison because of distributing counter-revolutionary leaflets – but that person was a secret agent reporting everything about his talks with Borvendég. The cell-mate was doing a good job: he suggested that 'White Elk' in reality was an American spy, the oppression of Indians in the United States was a 'cover phrase' for the Soviet occupation of Hungary! (Kovai, 47) Still, the real detective story ended with amnesty,[16] although Borvendég was found guilty – so the detective story contains elements of the absurd.

A follower of Borvendég, József Wisler, was active in re-organizing the 'Indian Scout Alliance' after the Second World War: within a few years, however, any activities that would make the American lifestyle popular became suspicious for the secret police – Wisler was first sent to a forced labour camp (Kistarcsa), then sentenced to five and a half years of prison in September 1953. Similarly to Borvendég's case, in May 1957 the sentence was claimed to be against the law because of formal mistakes during the process. Finally, Wisler was acquitted in August 1957 (Gergely, 296–298).[17]

15) In Gergely's view (301), Borvendég was not a hero: he cooperated with the authorities so that his son would not be prevented from studying medicine.

16) A few weeks after Borvendég could leave the prison, a detailed report was written about the lessons of the 'Indian case' May 22, 1962) – Kovai (50) quotes some interesting statements of the text: "… we can still find an attraction toward the mystic and fairy-tale like Indian world … The books of Sándor Borvendég Deszkáss, based on his creative fantasy, distort historical facts … and stimulate to follow this romanticism in practice … In 1948, our state banned the Scout organizations, which were based on a nationalistic-chauvinistic ideology … However, the aptitude for romanticism did not cease to exist … Indian practices had the same contents as the Scout movement … Abusing the romantic inclinations of young people, the aim of Scout and clerical influence on young people is to attract them in the service of inimical political concepts which hurt the interests of the state and of the society."

17) Gergely focuses on the 'Indian-Scouts' and Borvendég, relying on archival research, mentioning briefly in his last paragraph the Bakony Indians, and claiming in a footnote that "We know nothing about the motivations and possible impacts of Tamás Cseh's initiatives in the Bakony since no interviews or memoirs have been made available by him or other members of the group." He does mention *Apacsok*, the play by Géza Bereményi and Krisztina Kovács which served as starting point for the film with the same title (307). Gergely's article came out in 2011 – as the bibliography shows, the *anBlokk* special issue was published in 2009, while the conversations with Tamás Cseh appeared in 2007.

4. Bakony 'Indians'

Without any information about the 'Danube Indians' – and even less about the imprisonment and trial of Borvendég – in the summer of 1961 four young people, under the leadership of Tamás Cseh (1943–2009), who later became a very popular singer-songwriter, went to the Bakony mountains[18] and started 'Indian war games.' During the following years, dozens of young people joined them so they could organize separate camps for the 'tribes' representing various prairie Indian groups. They set up tepees, wore long black wigs, improved the kits of accessories year by year. Wearing 'Indian' costumes and make-up counted as 'suspicious' activities for authorities, but by the mid-sixties their approach was more tolerant – still, participants in the Indian camps (later on they were held both in the summer and in winter) felt they were protesting against the ruling regime (Horváth, 52). During the early years, their activities were similar to those held in the 1930s close to Kemence, but they gradually developed into a more elaborate system of organizing fighting tribes, mastering crafts, dances and songs. The age of maturity arrived in the emblematic year of 1968: in the early hours of 21 August 21 (the previous day was a national holiday in Hungary, so people were in a festive mood all over the country) the calmness of the mountains was disturbed by the loud noise of Soviet tanks heading for Czechoslovakia. It became evident that the Bakony mountains served as a 'hiding place' not only for the highwaymen of the early 19th century or the adolescent 'Indian' group, but also for the Soviet military divisions that had been 'temporarily' stationed in Hungary (as the official label had it) after 1956. In an interview, Dániel Erdély, a young 'Indian,' recalled meeting the Soviet soldiers who were having a breakfast break close to their camp: the 'Indians' were even allowed to climb into the tanks. When the Soviets set off, the 'Indians' asked them not to shoot. This episode may have contributed to Erdély's leaving the 'Indian' movement: "we felt that the ideal we were reading about in Karl May's books could not be upheld" (55). Cseh did not give up the regular 'Indian' camps, but for him, too, 1968 was a sobering year: "We had lived full of hope and a wish for freedom, and 1968 was a slap in the face for the whole young generation in Eastern Europe … No hope left, the tanks invaded Czechoslovakia … the Hungarians were also part of the invading forces" (Cseh, 82).

Although there were changes in the membership – which in its heyday numbered some 200 enthusiastic people, male and female alike – the Bakony 'Indians' were

18) The thick forests of these mountains southwest of Budapest have a special connotation in Hungarian culture: in the first decades of the 19th century they served as hiding place for famous highwaymen like Jóska Sóbri and Jóska Savanyú. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betyar. This idea is carried on by the symbolist poet Endre Ady, who called Paris his 'Bakony.'

active for almost half a century under the leadership of Tamás Cseh.[19] In the late 1960s and early 1970s he was a teacher of drawing[20] in a mainly working-class district of Budapest.[21] From a young age on, he had also been interested in shooting arrows, horse riding and playing the guitar.[22] Together with his schoolmates, books by May, Cooper and Borvendég served as starting points for their 'Indian war games' (Cseh, 288, 73) – even if "looking back, one can find explanations, create theories about a desire for freedom and a wish to march out of society, but at that time and there we only wanted to play. To leave behind the person who was hanging around in the outside world that was full of lies – and let the fighter step forward. Uncas, Winnetou and the others" (Cseh, 72). Close to the end of his life, Cseh (304) confided that "the main point is not the 'Indian,' nor the beaded shirt or the moccasin. These things mean only the path to find the way back to the earth."

The 'Indian' war games in the Bakony mountains had a choreography of their own:

> There is an exact time for the start. The games would set off at day-break on a given day. By that time everybody had to be ready. Consequently, they had to come to the camp-site a few days before, set up their tepees, furnish them the traditional way, have their Indian outfit ready, arrange the war-paints … By that dawn, everyone has to turn 'Indian.' The tribes prepare separately … ready for tough battles … Crows, Blackfeet, Hidatsas, Cheyennes, Sioux … Four tribes and their nations are present in the mountains. (Cseh, 273–274)

As time passed, Cseh invested more and more energy into his singing career[23] and the 'Indian' camps: he himself belonged to the Bakony Lakota tribe, his wife to the Arapahos. Cseh used his artistic skills when preparing buckskin bags, clothing and other accessories. Like the boys of the Kemence camp, Cseh kept a journal of their

19) Needless to say, the presence of devoted young people from the capital close to the remote village of Bakonybél raised the suspicion of local people, including the policeman and the secretary of the local council. But the villagers gradually accepted them, providing the group with food; the authorities warned them not to set the forest on fire (Cseh, 85). Some young villagers even joined the group. Now the village takes pride in this tradition, devoting a room in the local museum to the 'Indian' camp: https://bakonybel.hu/index.php?p=adatlap&kategoria=latvanyossag&id=86

20) A selection of his graphic work can be seen at https://csehtamasarchivum.hu/kepzomuvesz-grafikak#unnamed_filter=.indian

21) To the astonishment of the headmaster, Cseh wanted to create an 'Indian' Young Pioneer group in his class (Cseh, 85).

22) In these latter two capacities, he appeared in films directed by some of the best-known Hungarian film-makers like Miklós Jancsó and Péter Bacsó.

23) For Tamás Cseh, the singer Leonard Cohen was one of the idols: when the idea of a concert with over ten thousand spectators came up in the mid-1990s, Cseh suggested that Cohen be guest of honour (Cseh, 267), and wanted to meet him before the concert to discuss things. Cseh even considered composing a song dedicated to Cohen. The timing, however, was not ideal: Cohen's agent explained to the organizers that the Canadian singer was in a Zen monastery.

activities in the 1960s; later a well-known writer suggested that he expand it into a book. *Hadiösvény* [On the warpath], a sequence of stories about Indian life (using stories of North American tribes), was published in 1997 with drawings by the author.[24] After several years of their own Indian camp experiences he got information about Baktay's Indian camps, but there is no evidence that the two chieftains ever met in person.[25]

After becoming a celebrated singer in the 1970s (he produced altogether twenty discs, including a selection of songs), Tamás Cseh became a widely known and highly reputed member of 'underground' beat culture in Hungary, and in his dialogues with László Bérczes, which form a kind of memoir, he often refers to discussing 'Indian' matters with other artists.[26] In 2004 he toured in Canada, appearing briefly in Toronto; a second tour that was to include visits to First Nations reserves in Alberta was scheduled for 2007, but he was suffering from cancer and could not travel. Even during his last days, however, he was dreaming about visiting 'Indians': "I would love to go to Canada, and then down to South Dakota. I'd spend a month there, if possible, at a place where only Indians live. I'd just watch them, no matter what they are like, if they are alcoholics, drug addicts or respecting traditions. I'd be happy to make friends with an Indian of our days" (Cseh, 218).

Before 2005 we could have ended the story of the Bakony 'Indians' with this note – an average history of some people fascinated by North American 'Indian' culture and imitating it. But the story would have had to be re-written after the publication of a monograph unveiling secret police documents about well-known representatives of rock music in Hungary: Tamás Szőnyei's findings[27] triggered an avalanche of new research into the matter. A few years before his death, Cseh came to know that one of the Bakony 'Indians,' a student of anthropology – to whom he often turned for

24) Another member of the Bakony group, Tibor Húsvéti, under the pen-name Tomi Haszka also published an 'Indian' book, entitled *Sziú voltam: egy magyar fiú az indiánok között* [I was a Sioux: a Hungarian boy among the Indians]. Around 80 in 2016, the author wished to pass on his knowledge about Indians in a self-published edition, and added an appendix of key phrases referring to Indian activities.

25) "I knew nothing about our forerunners [i.e. the 'Danube Indians'] when I founded the camp in the Bakony … Then we wanted to know more about them. We tried to approach the big old ones [Baktay and his group; KK] but they refused. They were scared and I could not understand why. We could realize only many years later that the Danube group, as well as ours, was being spied on. … Also, it turned out that the manuscript of my book, [On the warpath], was given to an agent of the Interior Ministry to read." Comparing the main profile of the Danube 'Indians' and their own group, Cseh explains that "they don't have war games, they are more static. In the Bakony we have war games of rival tribes all the time: it functions better. … They can carry out a dance more beautifully, they are better at folk traditions …" (Cseh, 289).

26) A photo gallery about Tamás Cseh and the Bakony 'Indians' is available at https://csehtamasarchivum.hu/fenykepek#filter=&unnamed_filter=.indian

27) Szőnyei, Tamás. *Nyilván tartottak. Titkos szolgák a magyar rock körül 1960–1990* [Recorded. Secret agents around Hungarian rock 1960–1990], Tihany-Rév, 2005. 236.

information in the field – was leading a double life and reported everything to the secret police between 1964 and 1975.[28] László Borsányi's cover name was 'György Fung' – the absurdity of his situation was the dual activity as 'participating observer' in cultural anthropology and secret police 'observer.' As a student, he was already interested in the cultures of native North American tribes, and he was allowed to pursue post-graduate studies at the State University of New Mexico (a rare possibility in the 1960s for Hungarians: his 'services' facilitated getting permissions and passport to do so; see Rainer). Back in Hungary, he became one of the pioneers of cultural anthropology as a separate academic discipline, was a university professor and published a monograph about 'Indian' cultures in North and Central America (*Hontalanok a hazájukban* [Homeless in their country], 2001). He also published about the technical features of anthropological observation, highlighting the uses of 'simple observations without being noticed' (quoted in Horváth, 33). Borsányi was instructed to keep in touch with Tamás Cseh, try to get to know his 'Indian' group members and find out if they were together only because of the 'Indian' games or if there was another facet of their activities (Horváth, 38, Borsányi, 65). From the point of view of communist authorities in Hungary, 'Indian' games were suspicious activities: the 'innocent' imitations of 'Indian' lifestyle or war games took on a political aspect.

5. 'Indians' in films and painting

In view of the stories outlined before, it is not an exaggeration to say that they invite filming – and so it happened: in *Indián tél* [Indian winter], 1993, a film by János Erdélyi and Dezső Zsigmond, the hero (whose nickname is 'Indian') decides to leave the 'reservation' of Hungarian society in the 1980s and live in a wigwam in the forest like an 'Indian.' His knowledge about 'Indian' life is based on his childhood reading as well as film experiences about the Wild West and 'Indians.' Some documentaries compare the oppression of Hungarians during the communist era with that of the native peoples in America. The best-known example is *Apacsok* (2010; the title refers to both the Apaches and to ruffians), directed by Ferenc Török, the script adapted from a play by Géza Bereményi (writer of the lyrics for Tamás Cseh's songs) and Krisztina Kovács. The plot is based on the story of the Bakony 'Indians', with added references to the persecution of people with aristocratic background and activities in the 1956 events. Győri interprets this film as an embodiment of Foucault's theory of archives (103), showing the communist regime as a double grid in which there are "monitors

28) A police document from January 1963 reveals that Borsányi had been in contact with Borvendég and Károly Balázs of the Danube 'Indians' – at the police, Borsányi admitted his mistake and was reprimanded by authorities for having failed to report about the conspiring of Borvendég and Balázs (Horváth, 34).

and those monitore, intimidators and those intimidated, oppressors and those oppressed … in an allegorical sense, Indians … become … symbols of people longing for freedom in a half-colonized country" (102), adding that they had to be classified as political enemies in order to be able to efficiently attack them (103). Playing Indian is represented as a replacement of community experiences in communist society – he quotes one of the main characters as saying, "If there is no Indian, where can you go? You go to work, sit on a chair, look at the plain wall, then you go home … If there is no Indian, what is there instead of it? Nothing" (107). Playing Indian thus became a kind of compensation for people in a society of limited possibilities.[29]

Indián (2016), a short film by Balázs Simonyi, is about pioneer camps where one of the boys likes playing 'Indian,' based on his readings of 'Indian' stories. His father had left the country in 1956, and the boy wants to go to America, too, but he knows only stereotypes about life there. The voice of Tamás Cseh is present in an animated film of 2014: *Kojot és a szikla* [Coyote and the rock], a Sioux story, made by Áron Gauder. This last film is a bit of an outlier: in general, the 'Indian' topic in Hungarian films was an allegory of the wish for getting away from Hungarian reality (Beretvás, 45).

In another form of visual arts, István Fujkin (1953–) – a minority Hungarian self-taught artist who grew up in Serbia, then escaped to Hungary during the Balkan war, and finally emigrated to Canada in 1997 – was inspired by 'Indian' art both in his comic strips and oil on canvass paintings.[30] His own situation – a member of the Hungarian minority population in Vojvodina, then a 'foreigner' in Budapest, finally an immigrant in Canada, and an experimental artist everywhere – showed parallel elements with the 'Indians.' Based on his readings of stories by Cooper and May, Fujkin made comic strips showing stories of the Wild West – in a way, this guaranteed him an 'Indian' status within fine arts: comic strips were considered as 'outcast' within the hierarchy of arts, like the minority within a society or the 'Indian' in America. After emigrating to Canada, he made a point of going to see prairie 'Indian' tribes: from the very beginning of his artistic career, Fujkin had been inspired by music and felt an attraction toward the spiritual. The art of Natives fulfilled both attractions – Fujkin got immersed in their dances, ceremonies, symbols. He was devoted to the art of Métis rock musician Robbie Robertson and dedicated a series of paintings to contemporary Native music: he designed a 'totem-pole of music' for the Creative Team of the Metronome Canada Music Museum. In recent years, he has been regularly

29) The second part of Győri's papers deals with a semi-documentary film about the political harassments of presidents of agricultural cooperatives in the 1970s: they were regarded as 'enemies' of communism because the co-ops could pursue activities in a limited market economy (e.g. they could open a restaurant or offer repair services), while the industrial companies were not allowed such 'liberties.'

30) Krisztina Kodó presented an illuminating paper on Fujkin's art, entitled "Transcending Cultural Boundaries and Expressions of (Self) Portraits in the Artistic Presentations of Emily Carr and István Fujkin", at the 11th Brno Conference "Breaking Boundaries" on 13 February 2020.

visiting Hungary and his native Vojvodina, giving talks about Native life in an effort to reduce stereotypes about them (Péter).

6. Conclusion

The perception of 'Indians' in Hungary is far more complex than the numerous translations and publications of works by Cooper and May. These books have not lost their popularity among young readers – but beyond that, the 'Indian' has become a metaphor for political resistance as well as environmental consciousness.[31] For almost a century, Hungarian scholars and artists of the highest level have been cherishing 'Indian' culture, learning about native traditions, arts and lifestyle, particularly by organizing regular 'Indian' camps where participants would leave modern society behind and imitate 'Indian' life for weeks in summer (and occasionally, even in winter). The 'Indian' as image or character is present in both literature and the visual arts in Hungary.

A recent special exhibition at the Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest serves as a testimony to the fascination of artists in Hungary with their cherished image of the 'Indian,' based on the Winnetou figure. "Rézbőrű volt az alkony. A magyar indiánozás nyomában" [Twilight had red skin. In the footsteps of playing Indian in Hungary] was held between 22 February and 31 December 2021; it showed objects and artefacts used by the various 'Indian' groups in Hungary and offered an impressive collection of literary works by the most important Hungarian poets and writers. Starting in 1906 with a poem by Endre Ady and Ferenc Molnár's novel *A Pál utcai fiúk* [The Pál Street Boys], an internationally acclaimed masterpiece of literature for young readers, it continued with an impressive list throughout the twentieth century. The first part of the title of the exhibition was taken from "Gyerekkor" [Childhood, 1944], a poem by Miklós Radnóti, an ill-fated Jewish poet shot by Fascist Hungarian guards in November 1944.

The exhibition leaflet claims that as a metaphor the 'Indian' has been connecting different generations through their childhood memories. In Hungarian, it has become a term referring to friendship, heroic acts, moral excellence, loyalty, and respect for nature – but also to defeats, humiliation and being endangered, deprived of land and rights. "People who never abandoned the world of playing 'Indian' and Boy Scouting encouraged by the 'Indian' books of Sándor Borvendég Deszkáss written in the 1940s are still among us, the 'Indian'-cowboy camps started by Ervin Baktay in the Danube bend have not been forgotten, and the tradition of 'Indian' camps started

31) I am indebted to Don Sparling for drawing my attention to Holly Case's survey article in English mentioning the political implications of 'Indians' in the case of Viktor Orbán's rhetoric.

by Tamás Cseh is alice in our days,"[32] claims the exhibition flyer. The exhibition was accompanied by a photo gallery and a more than six-hundred-page anthology containing short stories by dozens of contemporary writers (male and female alike) who were influenced by the Winnetou-concept of their childhood readings.

Note: All translations of quotations and titles are the author's.

Works cited

Beretvás, Gábor. "Indiánok a magyar filmvásznon." *Korunk*, 2019/4, 41–46.

Borsányi, László. "Émikus perspektívából." a*nBlokk*, 2009/3, 64–67.

Case, Holly. "Hungary's real Indians." *Eurozine*, 3 April 2018.

Cseh, Tamás. *Cseh Tamás:Bérczes László beszélgetőkönyve* [Dialogues with Tamás Cseh, written down by László Bércze]. Budapest: Palatinus, 2007.

————. *Hadiösvény* [On the war path]. Budapest: Dee-Sign Kiadó, 1997.

Csupor, István. "A Börzsönytől Kanadáig. A magyar 'indiánok' történetének egy ismeretlen epizódja" [From the Börzsöny Mountains to Canada. An Unknown Episode in the History of Hungarian 'Indians']. *Új Forrás*, 2017/3. 23–66.

Fabiane. "Baktay Ervin és a dunai indiánok" [Ervin Baktay and the Danube Indians].

https://dunakanyarkult.blog.hu/2020/04/08/baktay_ervin_es_a_dunai_indianok

Gergely, Ferenc. "Ávósok az 'indián' ösvényen" [State Protection Authority people on the Indian path]. *Új pedagógia szemle*, 61/11–12. (2011) 288–307.

Győri, Zsolt. "Indiánok és téeszelnökök: két esettanulmány az államszocializmus 'boncasztaláról.'" [Indians and presidents of agricultural co-operatives: two case studies from the 'dissection table' of state socialism]. http://contactzones.elte.hu/wp-content/uploads/Gyori_Zsolt.pdf

Horváth, Kata. "Indiánok a Magyar Népköztársaságban" [Indians in the People's Republic of Hungary]. a*nBlokk,* 2009/3, 52.

————. "'Nehéz azon a borotvaélen maradni, hogy bele se dilizzek, és mégis valahogy megfejtsem a helyzetet.' Beszélgetés a bakonyi indiánozásról Erdély Dániellel" ['It is hard to stay on the razor's edge without becoming nuts, and still solve the situation somehow.' Talking about the Bakony Indians with Dániel Erdély]. a*nBlokk,* 2009/3, 53–56.

————. "A Borsányi név. A politikai és a tudományos megfigyelés határai." [The name Borsányi. The borders of political and scientific observation]. a*nBlokk,* 2009/3, 30–39.

32) The data of the exhibition and a slightly modified text of the flyer can be found at https://pim.hu/hu/kiallitas/rezboru-volt-az-alkony

Kovai, Melinda. "Az 'Indiánok' fedőnevő ügy." [The case under code-name 'Indian']. *anBlokk*, 2009/3. 40–51.

Lutz, Hartmut, Florentine Strzelczyk and Renae Watchman. *Indianthusiasm: Indigenous Responses*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2020.

Országh, László. *Az amerikai irodalom története* [History of American Literature]. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 1967.

Péter, László. "Kék Bagoly: egy délvidéki magyar indián Kanadában: Fujkin István" [Blue Owl: a Southern Hungarian Indian in Canada: István Fujkin]. *Aracs: a délvidéki magyarság közéleti folyóirata*. 2011/ 1. 98–104.

Rainer M. "nem jó, hogy a leleplezett ügynök celebbé válik" [It is not good if the agent becomes a celebrity]. *HVG* 2009. June 05

Rákóczi, Piroska. "Egy magyar indián" [A Hungarian Indian]. 2003.09.12. http://valasz.hu/kultura/egy-magyar-indian–8085.

Virágos, Zsolt. "Az amerikai romantika irodalmáról (1815–1865)" [On the Literature of American Romanticism (1815–1865)]. In Pál, József (ed.), *Világirodalom* [World Literature]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2005, 579–589.

Winkler, Márta. "Indián tábor – Gondolatok a táborozásról – Paál Zsuzsanna interjúja" [Indian Camp: Ideas about Camps – Interview by Zs. P.].*Új Pedagógiai Szemle,* 2018/7–8, 14–19.

Younging, Gregory. *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*. Edmonton: Brush Education, 2018.

KATALIN KÜRTÖSI / is Professor Emerita in comparative literature at the University of Szeged, Hungary, and current President of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies. She has co-directed two research projects for this regional association and has published widely in Canadian drama and theatre. She has authored three monographs dealing with various aspects of Canadian culture, including the issue of Modernism.