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HIGHLIGHTS

László Garaczi

LÁSZLÓ GARACZI was born in 1956 in Budapest. He is a writer, poet, dramatist and screenwriter, a cult figure of new writing in Hungary. His autobiographically inspired „Lemurian trilogy”, recounting first the childhood, then the youth, and finally the military service of a young man, has gained him critical and popular appraisal nationwide.

ARC ÉS HÁTRAARC (FACE AND ABOUT-FACE)

Novel, 2010, 173 pages

„Well seasoned with soldiers’ slang, the book with it’s colloquial language and smooth, easy-going style is a real treat to the reader.”

Kulter.hu

Face and About-Face is the story of the army: a boy is called up for compulsory military service. He is supposed to do something no nineteen-year-old boy could do and remain of sound mind and body: that is the essence and undeclared goal of military service. It is an education. It breaks you in, and what it breaks you into means the order of the golden years of socialism, the mid 1970s. The narrator, nicknamed Bones, talks about himself sometimes in first person, sometimes in third person. He is capable of doing anything in order to be hospitalized and to nurse his hopes of discharge, even breaking his own arm.

Face and About-Face is not a nostalgic soldier’s story. Neither is it an incitement against inhumanity. The world is horrible, brutal and inhuman as it is, as if inhumanity were trickling from the world’s core, as if gravity itself were the most outrageous act of inhumanity, as if the physical laws of the world could not bear to have man grow up in it, as if matter itself rejected any kind of moral. Everyone uses and abuses everyone else without really wanting to, and everyone humiliates everyone else without being driven by any particularly brutal instinct or insidious goal. Yet we are well-versed in the tricks of the trade, as least as far as humiliation is concerned. How can people be humiliated? The military is the site of this ingenuity.

Even before beginning his military service the boy is familiar with similar settings. The school works just the same, it is a precursor of the army. Bones is like Camus’s Meursault in many respects, except that he does not commit a murder, though it could have befallen him as well. It is little more than a matter of chance that he does not become a murderer, if not of another human being than of himself, so much does he long to flee. Not because of any longing for freedom. He is guided by more nebulous, concealed sentiments. Or if he does know his mind, he is incapable of putting his wishes into words. Although he collects words

and records strange and unknown expressions in folders, he remains mute. He collects words because utterance, naming and eventually writing may relieve this paralysis, as if the horror uttered might lose its true force by having been voiced.

Rights sold to:

Austria, Droschl

Also in the Backlist:

MetaXa (Novel, 2006, 164 pages) In this story of a cellist crushed between two women, Garaczi provides the reader with a view of the eternal experience of human foolishness that shapes all our lives. The reader develops as the plot progresses and although you may become no wiser, the plasticity and perfection of his prose will get you in the end.

Krisztián Grecsó

KRISZTIÁN GRECSÓ was born in 1977. He works as an editor for *Élet és Irodalom*, the most prestigious literary magazine of the country. Grecsó has written five books and won the most prestigious Hungarian prizes. He lives in Budapest. <http://www.grecso.hu>

ISTEN HOZOTT (LONG TIME NO SEE)

Novel, 2005, 319 pages

“His wandering motifs and marvellous depiction, cast in his own personal ‘Grecsó idiom’, with everyday miracles familiar from the works of magic realist authors, propel the author to the forefront of younger fiction writers in Hungary.”

– Népszabadság

Grecsó's first volume of extended fiction is a coming-of-age novel; a singular detective story which brings unusual events in the life of a provincial village in Hungary. An orphan, Gergely has to leave the village as a young boy to pursue his studies, marking the break-up of the Ede Klein Club. He returns as an adult to explore his roots and starts to ask questions about his past and village history.

He suspects that Ede Klein, the man after whom the children's club is named and who was expelled from the village in 1948, may have been his father, although in the end that does not prove to be the case. However, a blood libel case actually did occur in Szegvár in 1948 resulting in the expulsion of one of its residents. The Klein diaries, written to Aunt Panni (who may be Gergely's mother), occupy an important role in the village: although they don't know anything about it for certain, everyone has their own interpretation, whether they think it contains prophecies of the future or reveals dark secrets from the past.

Mystical matters play a major role in the novel with threads of superstition and local lore weaving their way through its fabric, the roots of which stem back to an unusual religiosity, pagan belief, and frequent drunkenness: shadows without their owners appear on the streets and the hair of young girls turns grey overnight.

Masses of marvellous subsidiary stories about the strange residents of the village, their lives both tragic and comic, provide the reader with an insight into the realities of rural Hungarian society.

Rights sold to:

Croatia, Fraktura – Italy, H2O – Czech Republic, Kniha Zlin – Germany, Claassen – Slovenia, Didakta – Turkey, Acik Defter

Also in the Backlist:

Pletykaanyu (*Mother Gossip, novel, 2008, 194 pages*) The twelve short stories of the book are loosely linked as all the characters inhabit a closed community where everybody knows everybody else and like nothing more than to badmouth one dear neighbour to the next. *Mother Gossip* is set in the unruly world of the Hungarian lowlands where however fresh the fruit, its roots burrow deep into the way things have always been.

Tánciskola (*The Dance School, novel, 2008, 304 pages*) A young lawyer finds himself in an unfamiliar town where he is forced to confront temptation, the sublime, the ridiculous, the wonder of women, and the horror of death. He doesn't know whether the devil is toying with him or the endless struggle of everyday life has pushed him to the limit. Chance love affairs and a selection of exotic drugs provided by his uncle make everything too confusing to handle.

Szilárd Rubin

SZILÁRD RUBIN was born in 1927 in Budapest and died in 2010. He has written five books, two of which have earned him a late, but worldwide recognition: his unique and concise writing, mixing sentimentality with cruel self-examination has been compared to works of Marcel Proust, William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

CSIRKEJÁTÉK (CHICKEN PLAY)

Novel, 1963 / 2004, 214 pages

“It is really rare to read such a detailed examination of self-ugliness in Hungarian with a lack of sentimentalism and the cold fire of dispassionate curiosity. It is a naked, pagan look, not objective but straight and outright. Rare indeed. Calmness. Calmness after defeat, or even in shame; calmness in hysteria: you get what you got. It’s the calmness that makes this book unique; a meteor, a Martian – but still.”

– Péter Esterházy

The title refers to a game where players have to hold out sitting on rails as long as possible despite a train rushing near. The novel is the story of two young lovers in post-World War II Hungary. Attila is a poor, aspiring writer, and Orsolya is the descendant of a rich bourgeois German family. Attila felt drawn to Orsolya since they were children, but he dares speak to her for the first time only after the war, when she returns from burned down Dresden to her former home town near Budapest, still marked by her recovery from Typhus. Because her family is German, their former riches are all gone, and they have to rebuild from scratch their pharmacy which they had once owned. In contrast, Attila seems to emerge as a winner under the new socialist rule – so the two form an unlikely coalition turned upside down. But the obstacles Attila and Orsolya face are strikingly similar to the old days: Orsolya’s family objects to the relationship, and they quite openly point out to Attila that they don’t consider him a good match for Orsolya.

Soon, Attila and Orsolya start hurting and humiliating each other despite their love. Orsolya wants to end their relationship, but Attila keeps harassing her until she agrees to marry him. However, on the first night of their honeymoon he finds out that she only agreed to the wedding so that she could take up a job in Budapest, and she insists on getting a divorce as soon as possible.

Attila’s obsession with Orsolya and his refusal to let go of his childhood dreams becomes overpowering, and it loses him all his friends who try to reason with him. In the finishing chapter, Attila watches Orsolya and her new husband through an opera glass at the airport twenty years after they first fell in love, but this time he has no one waiting for him at home.

Rights sold to:

Germany, Rowohlt – Slovakia, Slovart – Spain, Backlist

RÓMAI EGYES (ROMAN NUMERAL ONE)

Novel, 1985 / 2010, 130 pages

„Roman Numeral One is full of beauty, with exceptionally touching and memorable parts, inviting the reader to return to this book time and time again.”

– Élet és Irodalom

Originally published in 1985 and republished in 2010 with great critical acclaim, *Roman Numeral One* is a poetic recollection of an impossible love story between a middle-aged writer who „has grown old but has never managed to grow up”, and an enigmatic, fiercely independent and frivolous dentist called Piroska. As the narrator waits for the long hoped-for return of his lover in a provincial thermal bath, he recalls in carefully ordered fragments his youth in war-torn Hungary, the poor but glamorous life of artists in the seventies – including his long therapeutic stay at Karlovy Vary during the film festival – and the curious events of his love with Piroska, constantly changing between sheer hopelessness and ruthless joy.

The novel can also be read as a *roman à clef*, since in the two friends of the protagonist, one can easily identify the world-renowned poet János Pilinszky and internationally acclaimed Hungarian film director Miklós Jancsó.

Called „one of the most mysterious love stories of Hungarian prose” (Litera.hu), *Római egyes* is a sort of sequel, or sister-book to Rubin’s *Csirkejáték*, despite its concise size, this short novel gives a unique panorama of after-war and socialist Hungary, and presents a deeply touching story of ageing, of giving up on our greatest hopes and finding redemption in silence and simplicity – all this in a beautifully weaved prose that mixes the melancholy of Proustian recollections with the grotesque images of Central Europe’s kafkaesque experiences.

Rights sold to:

Germany, Rowohlt

György Spiró

GYÖRGY SPIRÓ was born in 1946 in Budapest. He is a writer, a dramatist and a translator and scholar of Polish literature. He is one of the most frequently played contemporary playwrights of Hungary.

TAVASZI TÁRLAT (SPRING COLLECTION)

Novel, 2010, 288 pages

(Sajtómondatt)

“It’s not a bad idea for a man to get admitted to hospital a couple of days before a revolution breaks out, stay in until it’s been quashed and recuperate quietly at home during the ensuing purge.” These are the opening lines of György Spiró’s latest novel, *Spring Collection*, that presents the reader with a shocking picture of the 56 Hungarian Revolution. The main protagonist is an engineer by the name of Gyula Fátay who, like so many other qualified professionals at that time, is trying to get along first as a simple worker before the Second World War, and after it as a communist party member, an idealist, and leader of planning in a newly founded factory. Just days before mass protests begin in October, he is admitted to hospital for an operation for haemorrhoids. He returns home after the fighting to be faced by a Soviet-occupied Budapest.

This novel commemorates the unbearably absurd machinations of the dictatorial regime in which not even those innocent could feel safe. When Gyula’s name appears in a newspaper article alongside some conspirators against the state, he finds himself ostracised by his best friends and closest colleagues virtually overnight. It no longer seems to matter that he was in hospital for the duration of the revolution and that the charges are false. Just as in Kafka’s *Trial*, history marches mercilessly towards an excruciating outcome.

Gyula’s situation is made all the more difficult by the fact that his wife, Kati, a tough communist, seems not to understand a thing because she is so wrapped up in herself and her role in organising an art installation known as the Spring Collection.

This novel recalls the purges that came after 56 with touching authenticity. At the end, on May 1st of 1957 the whole nation, the majority of which had revolted against the system half a year earlier, submitted to the new communist leadership that did not understand that Hungary had been defeated for decades. Our hero’s life hangs by a single thread, and there is a special twist in the story that makes it possible for him to survive. The false charge and ensuing expulsion from society mark the beginning of the process which eventually led to the trial and execution of Imre Nagy. The impossibility of family life provides a dramatic parallel to the historical parody of a failed, conquered country and it is from this double story that one of György Spiró’s most exciting novels is born.

FOGSÁG (CAPTIVITY)

Novel, 2005, 770 pages

„Ethically as well as historically, this parable of grand proportions [...] can get its feet under any literary table you care to mention...”

– Élet és Irodalom

Spiró's fourth major novel has become the literary sensation of 2005 in Hungary. Set in the first century after the birth of Jesus Christ, the new novel is set in the Roman Empire when Christianity was first emerging as a religion. The hero, Uri (Gaius Theodorus), is a Jew who is born and grows up in Rome's Jewish community. He is a puny, unprepossessing, short-sighted, young man, whom his father, in return for risking his entire tiny fortune as a loan to a high imperial official, gets instated as a member of the delegation that takes the ritual tax for the Jewish community of Rome to Jerusalem every year. Travelling through the eastern half of the Roman Empire, the first great global economy in history, Uri spends time in Judea and Alexandria before finally making his way back to Italy. Along the way, he is imprisoned by Herod's officials for a week in Jerusalem (being joined by two thieves and, it would seem, Jesus himself shortly before their crucifixion) before dining with Pontius Pilate. He is then forced to work among peasants in the Judean countryside before making his way to Alexandria in Egypt. There, he wins a place for three years at the city's elite grammar school, indulges in the pleasures provided by the local prostitutes, and lives through a pogrom with the erection of the first ghetto in history. Uri returns to Rome to find his father has died during his absence and that he is now obliged to take on repayment of the money his father borrowed. He works first as secretary to some of the richest Jewish dignitaries and later as a labourer on a palace for the Emperor Nero, before he is unjustly labelled as being a Nazarene and exiled from his birthplace as a penniless outlaw.

Although he eventually acquires a family, he dies a lonely, neglected figure in wretched circumstances. The very last sentence of the book runs: "I still want to live, he thought to himself, and was lost in wonder." He therefore leads an exciting, varied, and truly adventure-packed life, which offers him the opportunity to become versed in a dozen or more very different occupations. During the course of events, he transforms himself into a true intellectual of his time, reading widely, learning a clutch of languages, acquiring first-hand knowledge of a thousand and one things, and honing a first-class intellect. Despite finding himself in peril on several occasions, but blessed with luck, he ultimately fails to make anything of his life.

Rights sold to:

Italy, Ponte alle Grazie – Russia, Inostranka

Also in the Backlist:

Az Ikszek (*The X-es*, 2007, 542 pages) Set in a fractured Poland at the end of the 18th century, this novel tells the story of struggling theatre director Osiński and the return of a legendary actor long past his prime, whose pursuit of popularity is disturbed by mysterious critical articles signed simply with „x-es”.

Messiások (*Messiahs*, 2007, 646 pages) In the Polish émigré community of Paris in 1840, a mysterious figure appeared and established a religious sect, claiming to be the Lord himself, and seducing such literary greats as Mickiewicz and Słowacki. This gripping novel tells the story of their social and political machinations.

Feleségverseny (*Brideride*, 2009, 337 pages) An utopian vision of what Hungary may become in the near future, this satirical novel recounts the events of a country where the communist king elects

Krisztina Tóth

KRISZTINA TÓTH was born in 1967. She has written two books of short stories, and is one of Hungary's most highly acclaimed young poets. She has won several awards, and her poetry has been translated into many languages. She lives in Budapest where, apart from writing and translating (from French), she designs and produces stained-glass windows. www.tothkrisztina.hu

VONALKÓD (BARCODE)

Short Stories, 2006, 186 pages

„In Vonalkód she takes the reader on a wild ride, alternately provoking bursts of laughter and gasps of horror, often in the span of a single page.”

– Rachel Miller

This is the first work of prose from a remarkable poet. It contains fifteen short stories, each having subtitle containing the expression line/bar.

The seventh story, Warm Milk, has the subtitle “Barcode” – it is about an American girl, Kathy, who visits her friend in Budapest in the early eighties. Kathy disrupts her host's life, edges her out of her room, and unravels her relationship with her boyfriend, Robi. The young girl eventually begins to consider suicide. Barcode acts as a metaphor for Western goods and therefore symbolises an unreachable world faraway from Hungary.

The narrator of the stories is either a young girl or a young woman, depending on the reader's interpretation of each story and some may see her as the same person all the way through. However, every action is seen from a woman's point of view: childhood acquaintances, school camps, love, children, deceit, and journeys set against the backdrop of the Kádár era towards its close.

The body, especially the body in pain, carries a central position in the work. Tóth often links the ailing human body to the wounded bodies of animals and the structures of buildings. And she also does a fair share of humoring the body. Directly alongside moments of the absurd, Tóth peppers her stories with the brutal and the grotesque. She builds a narrative world which is both tragic and comic. Her world is at once unsettling and invigorating as she leads the readers on a romp through everyday existence distilled to its extremes, with all of its attendant traumas, serendipities and vagaries in the spotlight.

Rights sold to:

Bulgaria, Ergo – Czech Republic, Agite/Fra – Czech Republic, Tympanum (audio book) – Germany, Luchterhand – France, Gallimard – Finland, Avian – Serbia, B92 – Spain, El Nadir

Miklós Vajda

MIKLÓS VAJDA was born in 1931 in Budapest. He is a writer, essayist and translator: his works include a great number of translations from British, American and German authors, and about five dozen plays for the theatre. He was the editor of the review *The New Hungarian Quarterly* until 2005. *Portrait of a Mother in an American Frame* is his first novel which contains his own family story and the fatal history of Hungary in the 20th century.

ANYAKÉP, AMERIKAI KERETBEN (PORTRAIT OF A MOTHER IN AMERICAN FRAME)

Memoire-novel, 2009, 207 pages

„Elegant, reserved but not unemotional. Ironic, but not cynical. So this portrait, or this fragment of an autobiography is the triumph of good taste and the sense of proportions. But above all, it is touching. And we can also add, without further ado, that it's beautiful.”

– Litera.hu

Vajda grew up in a rich family in the first half of the century. His father was a lawyer who represented the Hungarian investments of the Habsburgs. His mother was born into a noble family. Because of the special family background they were fugitives during the WWII and after that in the communist era alike. His father died right after the war and his mother spent years in prison than moved to America immediately after her release. Their son stayed in Hungary because he fell in love with somebody else's wife. Since that time mother and son lived their lives far from each other.

The key figure of the family's hard years was a beautiful woman, the most famous actress around the middle of the century, Gizi Bajor – the godmother of Miklós Vajda. Gizi Bajor also died tragically in 1951, murdered by her husband. She, as the favourite actress of the two dictators Horthy and Rákosi, tried to do everything to save her friend, Vajda's mother and her godson. She hid the whole family during the war and then frequently wrote letters to the dictator Mátyás Rákosi pleading for her friend's release (those letters are the supplement of the book).

The three of them are the protagonists of the novel – the antagonist is the History itself. Vajda as narrator tries to tell the memories of the mother and understand her years in America as well as the death of his godmother. The novel is a confession of a son who couldn't tell how thankful he is to these women.

FRONTLIST

Éva Berniczky

ÉVA BERNICZKY was born in 1962 into the ethnic Hungarian minority population of the small Trans-Carpathian (or Ruthenian) town of Beregszász, then part of the USSR but now in Ukraine, close to the border with Hungary. She has previously published two collections of children's stories and two short-story collections in her native land before joining Magvető with her two collections of short stories and her novel.

VÁRKULCSA (CASTLEKEY)

Short stories, 2010, 192 pages

„Éva Berniczky can write fiction into reality, and turn reality, absurd in it's own right, back into fiction, while establishing her very own version of magical realism, filled up with exquisite flavours of the Transcarpathian.”

– Prae.hu

„Before I could start making up the Chief Laundry Master, I happened to meet his real-life version. Unfortunately I have the bad habit of doing this too early, I tend to breath life into my imaginary creations with a pathological impatience”, confesses Éva Berniczky at the beginning of one of her stories, although it is not easy to decide wether she's telling the truth or just plays one more of her intricate narrative tricks with the reader.

We are in Ukraine, in Transcarpahia, to be more precise, where the absurd is not as far from reality as you might think. It is a traditionally impoverished and deserted part of the world, remote from any centre, and nowadays a devastatingly run-down, oppressively Eastern-European, ex-socialist land, inhabited by a mix of ethnic Hungarians, Russians and Ukrainians. But the author is at home in this ambivalent world, and knows every little corner of it, recounting the most unbelievable events with such a natural charm that even the reader feels familiar with the setting. The passionate rooster-merchant is immersed in fornication with the stiching girls among the textile bales, the cystitic chimney-sweeper's soul gets drunk to match his body, and the man who was born in the river falls back to it while he's peeing, the coffin maker marries his own daughter who was raised in a different household – all under the storytelling gaze of the narrator, watching from her attic room from the castle high above the river Ung.

The twenty short stories contained in the book are all beautiful and horrifying, ridiculous and touching at the same time, slowly building up a whole world of intriguing, funny and loveable oddballs from the peripheries of everyday life – and everyday reality.

Also in the Backlist:

A tojásárus hosszúnappja (*The Egg-seller's Day of Atonement, short stories, 2004, 193 pages*)

The seventeen short stories recount the lives of people in Transcarpathia: luckless, penniless figures devoid of material ambitions, whose desires and emotional worlds are nevertheless just as complex and rich as those of their more fortunate fellow men.

Méhe nélkül a bába (*Midwife Bereft her Womb, novel, 2007, 202 pages*) Two women, both of whom live in Transcarpathia, have never met – but when one of them falls for the light-eyes book collector Szvitelszki, she sets off after the other woman, recreating her from the fabric of her own diary who emerges from her cocoon like a butterfly that flutters away, leaving her love behind and nothing more than a memory.

László Csabai

Szindbád, a detektív (Szindbád, the detective)

György Dragomán

A fehér király (The White King)

Péter Farkas

Kreatúra (Creature)

Also in the Backlist:

Nyolc perc (Eight Minutes, 2007, 110 pages)

István Kemény

Kedves Ismeretlen (Dear Unknown)

Noémi Kiss

Rongyos ékszerdoboz – Utazások keleten (Shabby Jewellery Box – Journeys to the East)

Also in the Backlist:

Trans (Trans, 2006, 166 pages)

Júlia Láng

Párizs fű alatt (Paris-juana)

Also in the Backlist:

Egy budai úrilány (A Lady of Buda, 2003, 260 pages)

László Szilasi

Szentek hárfája (Saints' Harp)

Géza Szócs

Limpopo (Limpopo)

Pál Závada

Idegen testünk (Our Alien Body)

Also in the Backlist:

Jadviga párnája (Jadwiga's Pillow, 1997, 448 pages)

Milota (Milota, 2002, 700 pages)

A fényképész utókora (The Photographer's Legacy, 2004, 413 pages)

BACKLIST

Éva Bánki (1966): *Esőváros* (Raintown, 2004, 301 pages), *Aranyhímzés* (Golden Stiches, 2005, 182 pages), *Magyar Dekameron* (Hungarian Decameron, 2007, 365 pages)

Kriszta Bódis (1967): *Kemény vaj* (Hard as Butter, 2003, 372 pages)

András Forgách (1952): *Zehuze* (Zehuze, 2007, 644 pages)

Tamás Jónás (1973): *Apáimnak, fiaimnak* (To My Fathers and Sons, 2005, 232 pages)

András Nagy (1956): *A Bang-Jensen ügy* (The Bang-Jensen Case, 2005, 400 pages)

Centauri (1972): *Kék Angyal* (Blue Angel, 2008, 342 pages)

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Éva Berniczky: Várkulcsa (Castlekey)

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László Garaczi: Arc és hátraarc (Face and About-Face)

(MetaXa, 2006, 164 pages)

Krisztián Grecsó: Isten hozott (Long Time No See)

Pletykaanyu (Ma Tittle-Tattle, 2008, 194 pages)

Tánciskola (Dance School, 2008, 304 pages)

István Kemény: Kedves Ismeretlen (Dear Unknown)

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Szilárd Rubin: Csirkejáték (Chicken Play)

Szilárd Rubin: Római egyes (Roman Numeral One)

György Spiró: Fogság (Captivity)

György Spiró: Tavasz tárlat (Spring Collection)

Az Ikszek (The X-es, 2007, 542 pages)

Messiások (Messiahs, 2007, 646 pages)

Feleségverseny (Brideride, 2009, 337 pages)

László Szilasi: Szentek hárfája (Saints' Harp)

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