

Szabó's Colonel Redl and the Habsburg Myth

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**Abstract:** In his article, "Szabó's *Colonel Redl* and the Habsburg Myth," Peter G. Christensen examines issues that stem from the fact that Hungarian film director István Szabó has made a film whose protagonist departs in many respects from the real-life Alfred Victor Redl, who betrayed military secrets of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire to the Russians just before the First World War. The Redl in the film is clearly an outsider, but his ethnic, class, religious, and sexual identities are not clearly established. Although Szabó expressed in interviews hostility for the character of Redl created in the film, the Redl portrayed by Klaus Maria Brandauer is considerably more sympathetic than the director would allow. In the film, the heir to the Habsburg throne, Franz Ferdinand, is presented as an evil and conniving man who has Redl framed, thus creating sympathy for Redl, who remains true to the ideals of public service only hypocritically represented by the Archduke. While not subscribing to the Hapsburg myth of a "golden age" under Emperor Franz Joseph, the film does, nevertheless, create some nostalgia for it, even as it fails to bring into the open the actual options that were available for expanding democracy and taking steps for ethnic equality.

**Peter G. CHRISTENSEN**

### **Szabó's *Colonel Redl* and the Habsburg Myth**

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, István Szabó (1939-) has directed two films centered on central European history in the twentieth century, *Taking Sides* (2001), adapted from the eponymous play by Ronald Harwood, and *Sunshine*, co-written with Israel Horovitz (1999). Neither of these films has been as successful as the historical films that Szabó made in the 1980s with Klaus Maria Brandauer. While continuing his concern with history, Szabó has moved in a new direction. In *Taking Sides*, the audience needs to know what exactly Wilhelm Furtwängler actually did during the Nazi era to reach a verdict concerning his degree of guilt. Thus, finding out the truth about a historical figure is crucial. In *Sunshine*, a representative fictional family, the Sonnenscheins, are used to bear the burden of the presentation of historical forces concerning fascism and Jewish assimilation (on this, see, e.g., Suleiman). One family stands in for many. In these two recent films, Szabó has found alternatives to the use of history he employed before 1989 in his famous trilogy. In *Oberst Redl* (in the following referred to by the English-language title of the film, *Colonel Redl*) and *Hanussen* he took historical figures and then created films in which these figures played by Brandauer bore only slight connections to their originals, thus mixing fact and fiction in an unsettling way. A similar effect was achieved in a different manner in *Mephisto*, where the subject of Klaus Mann's novel of the 1930s was already known to be partially inspired by Gustaf Gründgens. If this change in direction since 1989 in Szabó's work has not been noticed, it is probably because the earlier films never received the analysis about their historical representations that they deserved. *Colonel Redl*, the second of the film trilogy, won the Jury Prize at Cannes for 1985 and was nominated for the Academy Award for best Foreign Language Film. Furthermore, an issue of *L'Avant-Scène du Cinéma* with an essay by Jean-Pierre Jeancolas (1986) and the screenplay by Szabó and Péter Dobai was devoted to it. Yet, since Dagmar C.G. Lorenz's 1994 "Ethnicity, Sexuality, and Politics in István Szabó's *Colonel Redl* and *Mephisto*," Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's discussion of the film in his 1998 book *Comparative Literature* (89-91), Hildegard Nabbe's 1999 paper in *Modern Austrian Literature*, an analysis in Sandra Theiss's 2003 book *Taking Sides. Der Filmregisseur István Szabó*, the more recent 2004 article by Katherine Arens, "Central Europe's Catastrophes on Film: The Case of István Szabó," József Zachar's *Áruló vagy áldozat?* (Traitor or Victim?), and earlier overviews of Szabó's career by David Paul (1994) and Jean-Pierre Jeancolas (1989), this once highly visible film has almost disappeared from the critical map (there is also the 2002 Hungarian-language book by József Marx, *István Szabó* and in Marx's 2005 *Fateless: A Book of the Film*, there is a brief analysis of Szabó's films including *Colonel Redl*, 40-59). Whereas Lorenz found Redl to be presented as a "proto-Fascist military type" (272), Paul (1985) felt that Redl was presented as a sympathetic character. This strong difference in opinion about the nature of Redl and his sympathies stems from Szabó's treatment of central European history. Of primary importance is this question: is Redl a sympathetic character or not? From here many other questions follow, relating to issues of ethnicity, class, religion, and sexual identities. For example, how does our understanding of Redl's character guide us to view the presentation of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, a political entity with which he sympathizes? Is Redl an unreliable consumer of contemporary social views and a person with a poor understanding of the Dual Monarchy, and, if so, is it so because his low class origins blind him to the empty formalities which members of higher society can see through? Furthermore, is Redl an outsider not only for his lower economic class background but also because he is meant to be taken as a Jewish surrogate in the film? Or is Redl an outsider primarily because of the same-sex attraction (although he never discusses it and never points to the repression of it), and if so, is his "fatal attraction" to the spy with whom he has sex, to his childhood friend Kubinyi, or to the incarnation of the domineering man in uniform Archduke Franz Ferdinand? If Redl is actually Jewish and actually predominantly same-sex oriented, then how do we tie this representation of a gay Jew to Szabó's stated hostility in interview material for his protagonist?

As Nancy A. Lauckner points out, "one of the most fascinating elements in the portrayal of the Jew in the postwar novel is the use by some authors of a non-Jew to fill the role of the 'Jew' in their works" (133). She calls this character the "surrogate Jew" and uses Wetschy, a Hungarian Calvinist in the third version of Hermann Broch's *Der Versucher* as one of her examples. It could be that Szabó, who has Jewish background, is using this technique as well. In the world of the film, Jewish background is generally something to conceal. In *Colonel Redl* Jewish self-hatred as well as anti-Semitism is a motif. For example, the Jewish tavern keeper/merchant in Lemberg, who is on the margins of society, has no visible self-hatred, but the Westernized Jewish military doctor, Sonnenschein, who has a position to maintain, does (see Gilman 298-300). However, in my view, since Redl may actually be Jewish, he does not really seem to fit the category of "surrogate Jew." His class is clearer than his ambiguous ethnic, religious, or sexual identity. As I see it, Szabó has turned his "Redl" into a sympathetic character whose support of the Dual Monarchy has to be recognized as sincere, meaningful, and plausible. Because of the sympathy generated for Redl and because of the oblique way in which the ethnic clashes of the nineteenth century are presented, we are led to take a generally positive view of the stability of the Dual Monarchy, thus in part asking us to support the so-called Hapsburg myth of better days under the good old Emperor. Without going so far as to make the period of the Dual Monarchy idyllic, Szabó implies that it was better than what succeeded it. Szabó presents a picture of the Dual Monarchy in which Redl backs up the Emperor Franz Joseph's half-century of promotion of a policy of peace (1866-1914) in the years after two different wars had lost Austria her possessions of Veneto and Lombardy. In order to understand what I see as the film's sympathy for Redl, we need to pay attention to 1) Redl's life, 2) the ethnic politics of Austria-Hungary and Archduke Franz Ferdinand's involvement in them, 3) Szabó's odd insistence in interviews that his Redl figure is not sympathetic, and 4) European nationalism and its discontents.

First, sympathy is created for Szabó's Redl by the simple fact that he is not the reprehensible real-life Redl. The title card claims at the beginning of the opening credit sequence that *Colonel Redl* is not based on authentic documents. Rather it was inspired by John Osborne's play *A Patriot for Me* (see Hinchcliffe 77) and historical events of the time period. Szabó uses Osborne's play for a visit to a brothel, a duel, and two ball scenes, but he strikingly transforms all of them. Osborne's play created a scandal when it was first produced because it bluntly treated homosexuality, but today it is little performed since it is generally considered anti-gay. Szabó's film treats the events leading to the suicide of Colonel Alfred Victor Redl (1864-1913) in the early morning of Sunday, 25 May 1913. However, the filmic Redl's life is not closely based on the real Redl, despite the suicide at the end of each one. The climactic event of the film dispenses with the generally accepted but to a large degree unverifiable account of Redl's trip to a Viennese post office to pick up under an assumed name his pay-off from Russia for espionage (a stratagem in which "Opernball" was used as a code name) and his subsequent ride in a taxi when he opened the envelope containing the money and left behind a telltale letter opener. The War Ministry's Military Review notice of 29 May 1913 indicated that Redl had committed suicide for homosexual affairs and sale of secret information to agents of foreign powers. However, the case was too embarrassing to the government to be investigated adequately and presented to the public. Despite the government's wish to bury the affair, which led to questions about the extent of the damage done to military intelligence, there was no question of Redl's being innocent of spying and treachery (contrary to the film). The historical Redl spent thirteen years (1900-1913) giving away the Dual Monarchy's major military plans to Russia, Serbia, and Italy. He did it to support an extravagant, debt-ridden lifestyle by which he tried to maintain his same-sex relationships, buying affection with material goods. Szabó's Redl neither lives beyond his means nor keeps male lovers. He seems indifferent to material goods, and he has a long-term mistress, Katalin, who is married. It does not seem that he is primarily homosexual. Szabó's Redl is not guilty of betraying military secrets to Russia; instead he is framed in a sting operation set up by the Archduke. Franz Ferdinand assumes that Redl will go to trial and say nothing about how he was framed. Refusing to do so, Redl shoots himself, presumably (although it is not clear, as Redl does not say why) to spare the Dual Monarchy the scandal that the Archduke plans to create with his trial. Franz Ferdinand wants to scare the Army into

feelings of shame and weakness strong enough to get a preemptive war started in the Balkans. The sting operation involves homosexuality, but Franz Ferdinand is not interested in blackmail, the hold that the Russians presumably used to get the real Redl to reveal his first military secrets in 1900. Instead, the plan seems to be -- although it is never stated directly -- to trick Redl into revealing limited classified information to a male lover and then get him tried and humiliated for it. After meeting Redl at the Vienna New Year's Eve masked ball, a young man, Alfredo Vellochio, becomes his lover for the night. Redl catches on (we have only his facial expression to tell when), and he dismisses him the next day at gunpoint, while telling him (for reasons that are not clear) either true or false (we do not know which) information on the number of troops and artillery on the Russian border in Galicia and the strength of the three military fortresses in that region. Since Redl left no known detailed confession of the activities of his final days, the so-called "accepted account" has followed from the contentious and perhaps sensationalized account of Egon Erwin Kisch ("Der Fall des General-Stabschefs Redl" 15-21; "The Case of the Chief of the General Staff Redl" 167-73), the first reporter on the case. Kisch (1885-1948), "der rasende Reporter" and future Communist, through sheer luck, found evidence of espionage activities and homosexual liaisons in Redl's Prague apartment the day after Redl was told to commit suicide by Army officers. The real Redl's homosexuality became a scandalous part of his public image for posterity when his liaisons were exposed just after his suicide through the discovery of his correspondence. As a Jew from Prague and champion of the workers, Kisch would have well realized the importance of the value of the Redl case as propaganda against the Dual Monarchy. Kisch criticized the system of training for war college cadets, accused Lieutenant Field Marshall von Urbánski of leading a cover-up of Redl's activities, and claimed that the General Staff was contemptible (*The Raging Reporter* 202). In contrast, at the end of *Colonel Redl* army officers propose to Franz Ferdinand that they deliberately plant damaging information in Redl's apartment, counter to the Kisch version. Given governmental cover-up of Redl's role as spy, Kisch's book of 1924 on the Redl Affair has influenced everyone after him. We see its account accepted by such liberal Austrian Jewish writers as Stefan Zweig in *Die Welt von Gestern*, for example (202-06). It also passes with less moralizing and muckraking into standard popularizing histories of the Habsburg twilight by writers such as Sarah Gainham (144-47) and Frederic Morton (63-76). Whereas Kisch regrets that the army was so independent of civilian control that Urbánski not Franz Ferdinand was at the core of the problem, Szabó makes Franz Ferdinand the villain of his film. As there is no full-length biography of Alfred Redl (there are partial biographies by Robert Asprey, Georg Marcus, and Heinz Rieder), Szabó was relatively free to depart from the historical record and earlier novelizations of the story (see Haensel; Kelly).

The second issue, the Dual Monarchy's approach to ethnic minority issues, is as obscured by the film as the real Redl's life. Although we hear in the first half of the film allusions to the Hungarian revolution of 1848, the repression under Haynau in 1849, and the Compromise of 1867, it is unclear how far in the past 1867 is (see Palmer 55-57). In the second half of the film, we have only a few vague markers. We find no clear indication either of the year in which Redl meets Franz Ferdinand, who tried to muster popular support for the Hapsburgs around himself, or the length of time that they have contact before Redl's suicide. When Redl first meets Franz Ferdinand, he has recently become heir to the throne. Prince Rudolf died at Mayerling in 1889, so when Franz Ferdinand's father, Charles Ludwig passed away in 1896, Franz Ferdinand became the heir. At first it seems as if their initial meeting must be a few years after 1896. However, other details indicate that the encounter is much closer to 1913. The film's fictional General von Roden mentions Field Marshall Conrad in a position of power. So at this point we must be in 1906 or later since Conrad von Hötzendorf became Army Chief of Staff in 1906. Franz Ferdinand mentions to Redl the Dreyfus Affair (1897-1899) and its aftermath. He twice refers vaguely to the Balkan Crisis -- over which he is willing to wage what he thinks is a limited war, presumably with Serbia, although Serbia is not mentioned. Franz Ferdinand expresses fear of a South Slav union of peoples. Here he probably means the crisis around the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, also unmentioned. There is no reference to the accession of the anti-Austrian Karageorgevich dynasty in Serbia in 1903, Russian interest in the Balkans after 1905, the Dual Monarchy's "pig war" with Serbia in

1906, or of the First Balkan War of 1912. Without such markers, we cannot understand the Balkan Crisis. Further, instead of criticizing a situation in which a constitutional monarch, Franz Joseph, had in effect too much power, and giving a clear picture of the way minority ethnic groups were not being represented in the parliaments, Szabó paints a simplified picture of the Dual Monarchy, one in which the characters never discuss options of reorganization and federalism. No distinction is made between complaints by nationalists for rights within the Empire's structure and a desire for total secession. Since only the Russian revolutions and the US-American entry into World War I set up the circumstances for the dismembering of the Empire by spurring on Czech secessionist hopes, the comments that Redl hears and overhears express others' paranoid fears and cause us to sympathize with his more rational perspective. According to John W. Mason, Alan Sked notes in *The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918* that before the War "no national group had any desire to destroy or break away from the Monarchy" (43). The many grievances were all practical ones about access to voting franchise and government administration (Mason 43). In the film, however, disintegration seems imminent, even before World War I. In the two ball scenes, the first in Galicia, and the later one in Vienna, guests express their contempt for the Dual Monarchy, but the audience fails to get any picture of the option that was available to create a more equitable federal state.

In *Colonel Redl* there are two groups: those who are wise enough to see a multinational state can bring increasing prosperity for all with progressive reforms, including Redl and his old friend Dr. Sonnenschein, the Jewish Army doctor; and those, headed by Franz Ferdinand, who find the Empire a degenerate country headed by a senile old man. Yet, since in the film Franz Ferdinand, who actually had no close real-life connection to Redl, is portrayed, one might say, libelously, as framing Redl and masterminding a cover-up of the Redl affair, our sympathy goes out to Redl and by default to Franz Joseph. Redl is associated with Franz Joseph from the opening credits onward. Franz Joseph owed the survival of the Habsburg dynasty to the army when he came to power in 1848. We hear a non-diegetic use of Johann Strauss, Sr.'s famous Radetzky March, composed for a victory celebration in August 1848 for the campaigns of General Radetzky in Italy. When the music returns at the end of the film to counterpoint black-and-white images of World War I, the march seems to be closing out the long reign of Franz Joseph from 1848 to 1916. Franz Joseph, who appears only in portraits and as a figure once seen from the back by an admiring Redl in the Vienna Woods, is made an offstage hero, since the villainous Franz Ferdinand is always presented as his archenemy. The film steps beyond the accepted historical record when it attributes to Franz Ferdinand sympathy for Hötendorf's desire to start a war against Franz Joseph's wishes, and further makes him into a conspiratorial figure. Even as he sees the Archduke's plot to destroy him, Redl tells his mistress Katalin Kubinyi that Franz Ferdinand is plotting to overthrow the monarchy by a military coup. Contrary to the idea that one would get from the film, Franz Ferdinand at the time of the 1908 Annexation Crisis made it clear to Hötendorf that he did not want a war (see Cassels 88-89). Furthermore, although in *Colonel Redl* Franz Ferdinand is presented as supporting a limited war in the Balkans in 1913, some historians such as S.R. Williamson do not feel that this is what he wanted. By showing Franz Ferdinand as going along with a cover-up of the forced suicide of Redl, Szabó rather confusingly opens up the question of whether in 1913 the real Redl was framed -- confusingly, I say, since Szabó's Redl is innocent and the historical Redl was guilty. Furthermore, Franz Ferdinand had no part in getting Redl to commit suicide. When he was told of Redl's forced suicide, he was upset that a Roman Catholic should have been forced to put his immortal soul in such jeopardy (see Cassels 158). His response was to think that the General Staff of the Army was "sloppy and incompetent" (158), and he was furious at Hötendorf for months afterward (Cassels 158; see also Palmer 319).

A key element of the film that creates sympathy for the Dual Monarchy is the presentation of Franz Ferdinand as a bigoted, evil man working against the Emperor's liberal regime. When the film ends with his assassination and black-and-white scenes of the Monarchy's World War I soldiers retreating, we feel that a worse world is to come. Franz Ferdinand seems to be an example of Walter Benjamin's "destructive character" from his essay of 1931. The "destructive character sees no image hovering before him. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will re-



place what has been destroyed" (Benjamin 541). Thus it is fitting that we view black-and-white footage of the assassination of the Archduke as the closing image of the future that he could not imagine. In *Colonel Redl* we never get any clear sense of the problems between Czechs and Germans in Austria. In the Adriatic scenes, when Lt. Jaroslav Schorm is told that he must leave the Army for writing attacks on the Army under the name "Senior" in newspapers, there is no mention of the failure of Austria to create a federal state in 1871, thus improving the status of the Czechs. Instead, Schorm's hostility is expressed against the Hungarian Jew Sonnenschein, who feels insulted when Schorm throws at him part of his military uniform, while reluctantly agreeing to resign. Schorm's anger at the Army and at Sonnenschein is self-defeating, especially since he himself has a Jewish grandmother. Through the figure of Schorm, the film implies that the Army corruption and inefficiency are major causes of problems in the Dual Monarchy, switching the issues away from the Czech-German bitterness and severe problems in implementing parliamentary government. The role of Hungary within the Dual Monarchy is obscured in the film through the treatment of Redl's friend Kristóf von Kubinyi. Because Kubinyi is a Hungarian aristocrat friendly to Franz Ferdinand, the Archduke's well-known antipathy to the Hungarian ruling class is concealed. Although Kubinyi remains a character throughout the film, his presence does not give any access to the way that the Magyar aristocracy kept hold of power in Hungary, especially after 1906, when Franz Joseph unsuccessfully tried to get universal suffrage legislation passed there. At the first ball, in Lemberg, Galicia, Redl jumps on Kubinyi for anti-monarchial comments, and it is certainly possible that later, in Vienna, Kubinyi is helping Franz Ferdinand in his plot against Redl. Or else he may be working for the Russians, since, when punished for dereliction of duty in Lemberg, he is glad to be sent off to St. Petersburg. Later, investigating the contacts of the traitor Viktor Ullmann, who was dealing in secrets sold to the Russians, Redl finds a letter in Ullmann's apartment which concerns Kubinyi and the Archduke. If Kubinyi did plot against Redl, the irony falls back on Kubinyi, who is very upset to be the one who has to deliver the revolver to Redl for the suicide. Although Szabó may have meant the subplot between Redl and Kubinyi to show that Redl was naïve or even stupid as to how far he could enter the world of an aristocrat like Kubinyi, to most viewers Kubinyi will come off as an arrogant aristocrat whose non-professional behavior threatens the very Army that he thinks the Emperor has allowed to fall weak. Redl seems the better man.

Turning to my third topic, given the sympathy that is created for Redl by the film, one can only be struck by Szabó's misleading antipathy to Redl in interviews given while the film was still being shot. His statements appeared in somewhat different forms in *Hungarofilmbulletin* (Szabó, "I'd Like to Tell a Story"), *Film und Fernsehen* (to Tamás Koltai) and *Cinéaction* (to Ioan Davies). He claimed that the character in the film is a "fictitious character," yet he had to admit that his character's "life story is, to a certain extent, identical with that of the Redl in the film" (Szabó, "I'd Like to Tell A Story" 15). Szabó insisted that Redl does not deserve our sympathy. He claimed, "We want to present a protagonist who wants to be somebody else, who wants to be a different person from what he actually is" (15). Szabó considered Redl's life as "no other than a succession of petty lies told in an attempt to get himself accepted by people on higher rungs of the social scale, in a craving to belong somewhere else" (Szabó, "I'd Like to Tell A Story" 15; see also Davies 68; Koltai 22). However, as Redl is never presented, in contrast to Henrik Höfgen in *Mephisto*, with such a strong desire for acceptance, it is possible to see him as following a political course from a range of less reprehensible motives. In an interview with David Paul given after the release of the film, Szabó expressed indirectly some sympathy for the Monarchy. He said, "I believe that events in this part of the world, even today, are still influenced by World War I and the fall of the Habsburg Monarchy. Everything that has happened since is a consequence of that period. The process that started with the crumbling of the Monarchy led to an economic crisis and the Second World War" (Paul 4-5). Paul, not surprisingly, told Szabó that he sees the film about Redl as being about "the instability of politics, in the dirtiest sense of the word, about the triumph of deceit, in which a man with simple values is bound to lose" (5). However, Szabó would not accept Paul's view of the Redl of the film as "innocent" and called Redl a man with an "inferiority complex" (5). Nowhere in the film does Redl speak of such an inferiority complex, except by implication in one brief moment, when as a child at the Cadet School he calls himself a peasant and a traitor. However, it is hard to take

this self-denunciation seriously. It comes when the school's Colonel Feldhauer is investigating the disruption of a music class taught by an old man and calls little Alfred into his office for information. When Feldhauer tells Alfred that it is his official duty to reveal who caused the incident and then adds that the instigators will be dismissed, Alfred says that Kubinyi did not instigate it and names another boy. Since it is impossible to tell who started the problem in the brief music scene, it also becomes impossible to tell what Alfred knew and whether he lied or not. Nor is it at all clear that he is defending Kubinyi in order to make inroads into Hungarian nobility. The ellipsis in the narrative works in Redl's favor in the eyes of the audience. Szabó's belief that Redl spends his life betraying people does not appear true. He acts with finesse not duplicity. For example, in the Adriatic sequence, although Redl is the one who tells Lt. Schorm that he must resign from the Army, he appears to do it in a decent fashion. He tells Schorm that since he is not being thrown out, he can sign up again in a few years. After Schorm is killed in the duel, Redl denies to Roden that he was Schorm's friend, but it does not seem as if they were actually friends. Redl is also fair to Dr. Sonnenschein, to whom he is very friendly, conveying to us that he is not anti-Semitic, and thus aligning himself with the liberalizations of the Emperor. Szabó believed that Redl has a clear identity that he denies (see Koltai 22). However, we are never given adequate presentation of his background or inner life to feel he has made this betrayal. It is true in the film that he has no contact with his family. However, no quarrel is presented, and no reason is given. The film does give us three short scenes in which it is clear that Redl's family is not his chief concern. He decides not to go to his father's funeral from Cadet School because he wants to take part in the Emperor's name day celebration. Perhaps conceptually for Szabó this is a very wicked act, but there is no character in the film to voice such a view. Nothing is said any more about his family one way or another until his sister Sophie arrives in Lemberg where he is on duty, and he anxiously gives her money to go away. Later, his car passes in front of the house where he grew up, and he does not stop. However, the sketchiness of his relations with everyone in the film, from his mistress to his wife (who is not even given a name), does not serve to call attention to family matters. Szabó implies that Redl is guilty of class disloyalty, betraying his railway clerk father's background to rise to a high level of success, yet we never see Redl desiring any success for its own sake. He is doing everything in his career selflessly out of his devotion to Franz Joseph and the monarchy, whereas the world around him is deserting liberalism for petty nationalism. Szabó said of Redl that his "tragedy is in his endeavor to conceal his own self" ("I'd Like to tell a Story" 16). In order for this theme of self-concealment to come across in the film, we would have to see Redl gaining some satisfaction, however tenuous, of making it into another class where he is accepted. However, the film suggests that his only consistent happiness is found in his romantic sexual affair with Katalin, the married sister of Kubinyi. She loves him despite the fact that he comes from a social class beneath him. Redl is not presented as scheming, his character is never given that degree of interiority that Szabó in his statements continually wishes to grant him. For Szabó, what he calls Redl's "blindness, his fanaticism, his 'loyalty,' his long-lasting stupid gratitude, are but the consequences of his mixed identity" (Szabó, "I'd Like to Tell a Story" 16). However, the audience sees the Dual Monarchy's army, despite all its faults, as the one place where a person of talent can rise in a world filled with prejudice. Given the ethnic hatreds around him, the Army does seem to merit loyalty.

In the interviews Szabó avoids talking about any of the most interesting features of *Colonel Redl*. Here we should note that in the course of the film, Brandauer, an unlikely choice for the 5'3" Redl, never ages as the adult Redl. Brandauer, who was forty at the time of the film, never looks younger than thirty even when he is supposed to be in his twenties. In the film Redl as a very small child, before he goes to cadet school, is never seen. We get point-of-view shots from his absent self that indicate his presence. The film is founded on this absence, a gaze without a boy behind it. When this unseen child reads his poem in praise of Franz Joseph to his elementary schoolmates, he is given the chance to go to military school. Szabó has his Redl plunged into military school at about the age of nine, or about six years before the real Redl went there. Thus he deliberately creates a Redl whose whole life has been in a military environment. After the cadet school scenes, the ten-year-old boy actor is replaced by the thirty-plus Brandauer, leaving what looks like



a gap of twenty years. No attempt at psychological development of Redl can be made through such an ellipsis, and the strategy leaves Redl a character without a center. Szabó wants to attribute this lack of identity to social forces, but it is actually achieved by his narrative slight-of-hand. Szabó admitted that he had too much material for a normal film running time, and because of cutting, one assumes, the film presented a different Redl than the director had originally envisaged. In order for a person to betray himself, we must get a sense of who he is, but Redl has no one to whom he reveals any real self, not even Katalin. Furthermore, since it is his mother who tells him as a small child at the beginning of the film that he should be eternally grateful to the Emperor, by being loyal to Franz Joseph, he does maintain a link with his family's set of values. He did not become corrupted by military school. As no other values of the family are presented, there is no possibility of our feeling that other family ideals have been betrayed. Apparently, the film was supposed originally to use more ideas from Péter Dobai's novel on Redl (*A birodalom ezredese*, 1985; *Oberst Redl. Roman über die Donaumonarchie*, 1991), which is a long and detailed book, but for reasons not mentioned in the interviews, these plans changed.

As we try to understand the reign of Franz Joseph and Szabó's depiction of it in our fourth topic, we are confronted with issues of nationalism and the Hapsburg myth. It is important to be able to separate nostalgia for the Empire from a desire for an equitable federalism that the Empire never attained and which many historians feel it could never have attained, based on the dual agreement of 1867. While the film does not propagate the Habsburg myth, it does allow some undue nostalgia for it. Franz Joseph pursued a peace policy for almost fifty years, and, for Alan Palmer, he "continues to attract more personal sympathy than any other ruler in continental Europe since the Napoleonic upheavals" (349). Palmer mentions that Joseph Roth, a Galician, openly admired the Emperor in his novel *Radetzkymarsch* in 1932 and further idolized him during his Paris exile in *Die Büste des Kaisers* and *Die Kapuzinergruft*. Like Robert Musil, he attacked the decadence of the Habsburg Empire but saw the Emperor as a preserver of values (347). As a tonic to these views Steven Beller, who is indebted to the earlier groundbreaking work of Claudio Magris's *Il mito asburgico nella letteratura austriaca moderna* (1963), discusses the general nature of the Hapsburg myth as follows in his *Franz Joseph*: "As Central Europe plunged into the abyss of first 1920s fascism, then Nazism and finally Cold War communism, it is hardly surprising that the image of Francis Joseph as 'the good, old emperor' increasingly gained in currency, until today [1996] he is almost seen as the embodiment of the sort of tolerant and equitable Central Europe which so many would like to see come about, as a sort of revamped Habsburg Monarchy. Yet the currency in which the image is traded is the currency of nostalgia and masks the way in which Francis Joseph's legacy was not so much an ideal of tolerance and national equity as a major cause of the very problems which prompted such nostalgia" (226). Beller discusses four negative aspects of the reign of Francis Joseph overlooked both in *Oberst Redl* and by the various supporters of the Habsburg myth: 1) a hierarchical, very bureaucratic state structure based on the Emperor's skepticism to constitutionalism; 2) a preference for centralism rather than federalism; 3) a civic education which promoted the Emperor as the person responsible for the people's achievements, thereby hindering political maturity as participatory citizenship; and 4) adherence to a dynastic principle that discouraged Central European cooperation between the wars among the region's nationalities. Films such as *Oberst Redl*, which vaguely allude to but actually skirt these four political issues, create an aura of fatality about historical events, since we never get to see concrete situations in which decision makers confront actual issues. One would hope that is possible to make a film that, while showing support for the multi-national state, could present the problems of Habsburg policy, and thus less easily slip into too much sympathy for the Dual Monarchy. John W. Mason, for example, gives examples of major events that led to the collapse of the Dual Empire, none of which is broached by Szabó (90). Perhaps the accumulation of events in central Europe was beyond anyone's management: Franz Ferdinand, despite his opposition to Franz Joseph's policies, had no more viable alternatives to suggest. For Robert A. Kann, Franz Ferdinand's ideas on reforming the empire into a federal state were filled with contradictions, and in his reactionary methods were combined with some liberal hopes. He wanted a reduction of the Magyars' status with elevation of the Croats, Slovaks, and Romanians. Possibly, this policy would have involved trialism, the crea-

tion of a third, Slavic, unit within the Monarchy, a proposal more designed to reduce the power of the Hungarian aristocracy than to indicate support for the South Slavs. Because he knew that the Magyar aristocracy would not agree to it, he contemplated an imperial decree and suspension or abolition of constitutional institutions, even considering military intervention to get his way (see Kann, 2 192-93). As Keith Hitchins writes, he was "convinced that the Magyar aristocracy and gentry, unless unchecked, would eventually destroy the Monarchy either through the dominance of it or outright succession" (x). The film never suggests that the Magyar aristocracy was a major opponent to peaceful compromise, since Kubinyi is never given clear reasons for disliking Franz Joseph.

In conclusion, in the film the nation appears as an invented tradition and imagined community rather than the product of the development of an ethnosymbolism over a *longue durée* (see Smith 62). The Radetzky March at the beginning and end of the film is the marker of Central European common destiny, consolidated in 1848, and fragmented at the end of the film, leading to the horror of World War I and its equally dreadful aftermath. It would be unrealistic to expect *Colonel Redl* to resolve questions about the nature and viability of the Habsburg Dual Monarchy about which historians themselves cannot agree. For example, Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky's optimistic view is at odds with that of the prominent Ukrainian scholar and expert of Central and East European studies, Iaroslav Isaievych. Peter Alter quotes Kreisky's statement in his 1986 memoirs *Zwischen den Zeiten* that "the disintegration of the old empire took us backwards in three respects" (Kreisky 47 qtd. in Alter 196). First, it could have been in economic model for a Central European community. Second, disintegration led to an exaggerated feeling of nationalism which led to undemocratic governments in successor states. Third, it put an end to a supernational cultural community (Kreisky 55 qtd. in Alter 196). Such sentiments seem to buttress Szabó's film. Yet, in contrast, Iaroslav Isaievych says, "Perhaps in the Empire as a whole an illusion that national conflicts could be solved in the framework of the Habsburg state was due to the fact that the national conflicts had not yet reached their critical point" (43). By making a quasi-historical film with an as elusive protagonist as he did, Szabó probably created too much sympathy for the Dual Monarchy. With the entry of Hungary and nine other countries to the European Union in May 2004, a new opportunity opens for Central Europe for a "supernational cultural community," and perhaps Szabó's approach to the historical film will change from that of the period from 1989 to the present.

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