

History or Fictionalized Truth in Fenyő's Diary Az elsodort ország (A Country Swept Away)

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Recommended Citation

Young, Judy. "History or Fictionalized Truth in Fenyő's Diary Az elsodort ország (A Country Swept Away)." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17.3 (2015): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2690>>

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Volume 17 Issue 3 (September 2015) Article 13**Judy Young,****"History or Fictionalized Truth in Fenyő's Diary
Az elsodort ország (A Country Swept Away)"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/13>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.3 (2015)**
Thematic Issue **Life Writing and the Trauma of War**. Ed. **Louise O. Vasvári and I-Chun Wang**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/>>

Abstract: In her article "History or Fictionalized Truth in Fenyő's Diary *Az elsodort ország* (A Country Swept Away)" Judy Young examines Miksa Fenyő's diary as an example of life writing with particular emphasis on the intermingling of the documentary, testimonial elements with the self-reflexive, literary, and fictive ones which give this diary its particular flavor. A founder of the literary journal *Nyugat* (The West), Fenyő was at home in the literary world, as well as in economic and political life. His diary covers the period from 1944 when nazi Germany occupied Hungary and Fenyő had to go into hiding to 1945 when Budapest was liberated by the Soviet army. After an analysis of the contents and narrative techniques of the diary, Young explores the diary's relevance today and discusses its significance as historical source material and/or literary text.

Judy YOUNG

History or Fictionalized Truth in Fenyő's Diary *Az elsodort ország* (A Country Swept Away)

Miksa Fenyő's diary, *Az elsodort ország. Naplójegyzetek 1944-1945-ből* (A Country Swept Away: Diary Entries from 1944-1945), first published in 1946, was republished in Hungary in 2014 (an English translation of the new edition is being prepared by Mario Fenyő to be published by Helena History Press. The diary covers the period from 19 March 1944 when Nazi Germany occupied Hungary to 19 January 1945 one day after the Pest side of Budapest was liberated by the Soviet Army. Fenyő was forced into hiding during that whole period because of his well-known liberal, anti-Nazi views, as well as his Jewish origin. Fenyő (1877-1972) was born into a non-religious Jewish family in the village of Mélykút near the border with Serbia and started his education in the village school. He attended the historic Lutheran High School of Budapest (Budapesti Evangélikus Gimnázium) where half his classmates were also Jewish. Following his high school education he studied law. Fenyő was co-founder, editor, contributor, and, at a certain period, financial manager of the most important Hungarian literary periodical of the first half of the twentieth century, *Nyugat* (The West). He remained associated with and supported the journal for most of its existence 1908-1941. At the same time he started working for and in 1915 became Executive Director of GYOSZ (Gyáriliparosok Országos Szövetsége / National Federation of Manufacturing Industries), a position which placed him in the forefront of Hungary's economic and political life. From 1931-35 he was also an independent Member of Parliament. Thus his writing and publishing activities, as well as his friends and colleagues were from these two different but sometimes overlapping spheres: the literary and the economic/political.

Fenyő's diary is a first-hand account of the events as they unfolded at the close of World War II in Hungary and specifically in Budapest. However, Fenyő frequently recounts events from before the war to provide historical or personal context. In this study I examine the Fenyő diary as an example of life writing with a particular emphasis on the intermingling of the documentary, testimonial (that is, factual) elements with the self-reflexive, literary, and fictive ones which distinguish this diary from many other examples of life writing in wartime. Marlene Kadar draws attention to the dual nature of the term life writing as both genre and critical practice and finds the latter particularly useful in analyzing the ambiguous boundaries between fact and fiction in autobiographical writing such as diaries, letters, memoirs (12). Fenyő himself is conscious of this aspect of his diary and he claims that he is writing source material for history, but also that his work is closer to literature than history. In his entry of 7 July 1944 he asks "Why am I writing all this down in so much detail? Who is going to be interested in this other than Ria (his wife) or perhaps Mario (his son) ... It's very hard to believe that what is happening to me is of no interest to the whole world. I am sure it is of interest; so I must record everything exactly. This is source work" (47; all quotations are from the 2014 edition; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). On the one hand, his diary could serve as source material and on the other the very act of writing requires him to take on a pose: he must select, discard ideas, and consider the effect of what he writes.

Life writing as a term in literary theory has been in general use since the 1980s to characterize or define autobiographical narratives, most commonly memoirs and diaries. Diaries by their nature are autobiographical: they are accounts of events and experiences enhanced by or filtered through the viewpoint of a particular individual and usually a specific cultural frame of reference. Diaries can claim to be accurate historical accounts and sources of factual information for the historian, although traditionally historians have tended to "defend the clarity of their discipline's frontlines" (Tamm 463) while at the same time they are texts consciously or unconsciously colored by the life experience of their authors. They may contain descriptions of events as they happen, but intertwined with personal commentary or even intentionally fictive elements. Fenyő's diary fits these characteristics of life writing: documentary evidence is coupled with background commentary and analysis providing the political, historical, or cultural contexts, but also personal reflections, recollections, aphorisms, and irony which together add up to an expansive, particular literary style.

In the preface to the diary Fenyő claims he is not writing history, but "recording experiences" (12). Nevertheless, as a witness to history he feels the imperative of historical accuracy. Conceding there may be inaccuracies in the diary, he writes: "I must change nothing in these diary entries; not even for the sake of historical truth for they do not belong to me but to all victims" (10). At the same time, he feels the need to express his personal reactions and feelings. He chides himself for lack of passion in his earlier work (8) and appropriates for himself a line from Madame Roland's prison diary written during the French Revolution about the necessity of combining the depiction of public events with personal feelings (12). Louise O. Vasvári explores the significance of the personalizing of individual fragmentary histories especially in victim authored examples of life writing in her essay on women Holocaust survivors' testimonies. Such works make a contribution to social history by rescuing what would otherwise remain obscure. Fenyő's diary can be considered a case in point.

Since in Hungary the last ten months of World War II coincided with the Holocaust and a considerable part of the Fenyő diary reports about this, the views of Holocaust historians on this form of life writing also provide valuable insight. According to Michael Marrus, Holocaust diaries offer evidence that historians can use in their work. He mentions the "web of meanings" and the "abundant evidence" in diaries, ghetto memoirs, and post-war accounts by survivors from which historians gain a more "mature" understanding of the Holocaust (118-21). Raul Hilberg attaches importance to contemporary diaries even if they are not reliable, because they help to provide context for our understanding of the multiplicity of events in which the Holocaust is embedded (Hilberg qtd. Berenbaum and Peck 10). Saul Friedländer's *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution 1933-1939* and *The*

Years of Extermination 1939-1945: Nazi Germany and the Jews represent a departure from earlier historical work on the Holocaust. In these volumes about the evolution and implementation of Nazi policy on the extermination of the Jews, extracts from diaries, letters, and memoirs form an integral part of the unfolding historical account. Friedländer explains that histories too often exclude the voices of the victims, leading to an abstract view and misconceptions about what actually took place and considers their inclusion "historically essential" for a full perspective on the Nazi genocide (*Nazi Germany and the Jews* 2). In *The Years of Extermination 1939-1945* he goes further and argues that the history of the Holocaust cannot be limited to the recounting of decisions, policies, and measures taken by a wide range of actors who led to genocide, but must integrate the testimonies of the victims, their surviving families, perpetrators, and bystanders to get at "the totality" of what we call the Holocaust (xv). Such testimonies are crucial, especially in representing extreme historical events: they confirm and challenge the "smugness of scholarly detachment and 'objectivity'" which crush the individual voice in "business as usual historiography" (xxvi). Viktor Klemperer's diaries written between 1933 and 1945 are frequently used by Friedländer to confirm facts and add the human dimension because they describe in detail everyday experiences as they affected Klemperer's life and survival. In comparison Fenyő is constantly reaching beyond the everyday through imagination and humor.

Fenyő's is not a typical Holocaust diary whose writer was experiencing and describing the horrors of the camps or chronicling life in one of the ghettos. He was "merely" hiding in a series of apartments in Budapest where friends were willing to take the risk of putting him up. He also had to find a hiding place for his eight-year old son Mario and for his wife Ria. Fenyő left his house in a wealthy, upper middle-class section of Buda on 19 March 1944 and regained his freedom when the Pest side of Budapest where he was hiding during the last weeks was liberated by the Soviet army on 18 January 1945. The first diary entry is dated 22 June, but he recounts the first few weeks of hiding in a long entry for 7 July. The last entry is written the day after liberation on 19 January 1945. Fenyő starts writing the diary in order to occupy his mind, especially since he cannot go down to the bomb-shelter during air raids for fear of being discovered. Writing is also a way of keeping himself busy during the long months of captivity. Besides, writing is second nature to him as his whole career had been based on his ability to express himself through the written word. While much of the diary recounts the events and experiences of the ten months, the larger part is personal reflection, reminiscences, commentary, and interpretation of the events and personalities described. A careful reading of the first two diary entries demonstrates typical features of the diary as a whole. We uncover detailed factual information about the evolution of the war and the Holocaust (including Hungarian government policies and participation) and we learn about Fenyő's personal situation. However, as a detailed review of these two entries shows, we also gain an understanding of how most of the diary entries are constructed and what stylistic elements give the diary its characteristic flavor.

The first entry dated 22 June offers much detailed information about the state of the war in Budapest. We hear about the author's search for a safe hiding place for himself and his wife Ria including the difficulty of obtaining the right papers for her. Next he mentions how far the British army has advanced in Italy. Then he writes about the government order for Budapest's Jews to move into Yellow Star houses and the news that several hundred thousand Jews from the countryside had already been deported to concentration camps in Poland squeezed into cattle cars with seventy or eighty people per car. One such train stood for days at one of the Budapest railway stations with the people inside screaming for help. He comments that neither the British nor the Russian armies are moving fast enough to stop the complete extermination of the Jews so that millions of Jews are already dead. In the entry of 23 June the list of tragic events continues: Jews are trying to escape their captors while bystanders are indifferent or worse, full of *Schadenfreude*. Rumors spread by Hungarians accuse the Jews of sending radio messages to the British who are now bombing the city. The Swiss are not giving refuge to those fleeing persecution and the International Red Cross does not raise its voice against the setting up of an internment camp for Jews right next to the most dangerous armaments factory complex in Budapest. These are the basic facts in the order in which they are chronicled by Fenyő, but if we take a closer look at the commentary and personal reflections, the wit, sarcasm, and the seemingly helter-skelter narration, a different picture emerges. The first entry starts dramatically in *medias res* and significantly not with the war, but with literature: "I read a volume by Maugham. Or rather: I leafed through it" (13). Fenyő also "leafs" through a series of lectures by Freud adding that this was the sum total of his intellectual output for the day. Right away, with these observations an atmosphere of tension is created, showing that while Fenyő's normal occupation might be reading or some other intellectual activity, now there is no time for this. The terse staccato of the first sentences, especially in comparison with his usual expansive style, sets up a sense of expectation and urgency. He then mentions that other matters are more important right now, such as where he can hide in case of a police raid or that Ria must go to the police to obtain papers which would allow her more freedom of movement, but that she is afraid to go. They are asking various friends to hide her at least for a few days, but of course they understand that this could cause their friends trouble. He wonders what he would do in the same situation admitting that probably he would be too afraid to help. A proposal the British army reaching Perugia, he is envious and wishes he were there to enjoy the scenery with Ria and Mario as in the past. Next he remembers Hitler's attack on Russia three years earlier and feels that Hitler is winning the war against the Jews, now with a large segment of the Hungarian middle class helping him in this endeavor.

Fenyő moves on to the new government order to relocate the Jews of Budapest into Yellow Star houses. But here too, he goes beyond the basic facts: the government realizes that some Jews were allocated houses with gardens and that four people to a room is too generous so the new order increases the number to five or six. The government decides that no ghetto should be set up nor should the Yellow Star houses be too close together because the Allies might avoid those and drop their

charge elsewhere in the city, which elicits one of Fenyő's typical ironic comments: "as if the British had nothing better to do than shelter Jews" (14). Similarly, after mentioning the terrible screaming from the trainload of Jews, he laments that the Allies are too slow to save them and that neither their fellow humans nor god have come to their aid. Besides, he says, only god is neutral in this war. He ends by stating that Ria was unable to achieve her goal: it is hard to escape from the murderers who will probably do a better job when it is their turn to run (14). In the second entry there is less new information about the events of the war and more of Fenyő's own reactions to what is happening: á propos the horror of the deportation scene described the day before, he wonders which is worse, the terrible things happening to the Jews or the dehumanization of ordinary people who sometimes sneer when an unfortunate victim is caught while trying to flee. To indicate the reactions of ordinary people, he adds a couple of snippets of conversation overheard by his wife. One person blames the ungrateful Jews who always try to go around the laws of the land which had taken them in and given them a good life. Fenyő asks: if the propaganda of a mad group of people can wash away in an instant two thousand years of Christianity, where is the power of the Word of God (recalling his previous day's comment about god's neutrality). In the second snippet Fenyő reflects with irony on a conversation between two women about the rumor that Jews are sending secret radio messages to the Allies noting especially the women's conclusion that Hungarians have been too nice to the Jews (15).

He then introduces a recurring feature of the diary: in many entries he chooses a theme for discussion and proceeds to elaborate on it or returns to the designated topic later. Such topics keep his mind active and usually deal with the ongoing war situation. Frequently they develop into debates with imaginary partners and in this entry he raises a subject that occupies him throughout his captivity: what were the causes of the catastrophe of World War II and the Holocaust and how did Hungary reach this low point. In his view, some blame certainly rests with the Allies who had accepted Hitler's anti-Jewish policies and actions by using the excuse that they could not interfere in the internal affairs of other states. He notes that this international legal principle has already caused the death of twenty million people, a critique that Fenyő repeats several times in the diary, for instance in his analysis of the failed Hitler assassination attempt of 20 July (160). In the same entry he develops a second theme which is the role of Switzerland in the war. Although the Swiss at least did not kill those who managed to cross their border, they did their best to keep refugees out. In this context he recalls André Gide's remark that all Swiss carry their glaciers in their hearts. Hence, he continues, it is not surprising that the International Red Cross makes no complaint about the Hungarian internment camp at Csepel located right next to the armaments complex being bombed by the Allies meanwhile continuing negotiations with the Hungarian government about organizing the upcoming Olympic Games. Or so the Hungarian newspapers report, he adds. His final cryptic observation on this day is that Cherbourg and Ancona are about to fall to the Allies (15).

From these two short diary entries we acquire much accurate information about the war and the Holocaust we can corroborate from history books. The reference to Cherbourg is just one example of many throughout the diary of how well informed and up-to-date Fenyő is: the U.S. army started its attempt to take Cherbourg on 18 June 1944 and a general assault was launched on 22 June (the day before Fenyő records this comment) and by 26 June the Germans were routed. However, to obtain some of the other details we gather from these two entries or the particulars Fenyő's family situation, one would have to consult several different sources and most likely none would convey the atmosphere or the sense of the lived experience we find in these diary pages. In the entry above and throughout the diary, in addition to the imparting of facts Fenyő provides personal commentary and critical analyses of events often accompanied by irony or other forms of humor. Importantly, the telling of facts usually includes the conversations and responses of ordinary people, missing in most traditional accounts of historical events. As a result, the narration moves forward in stops and starts, not a linear fashion, interweaving commentary and opinions with the factual description. The narrative techniques and stylistic features I exemplify above are characteristic aspects of the whole diary and one can find them in almost all entries whether long or short. Clearly, in some there are more detailed and longer descriptions of events and less commentary and others are nothing but commentary, yet others are recollections from the past or imaginary conversations and a few contain long passages copied from his reading. Most diary entries are longer than the two analyzed above and deal with a prodigious variety of topics, although naturally the largest number relate to the progress of the war, the Holocaust, Hungarian government policies (and politicians), and international relations and politics during and immediately preceding the war. A fair proportion of the content, especially the authorial commentary and analysis, contains general discussion on the themes of democracy, Hungarian or German responsibility in the war, the future of Hungary and Europe all interspersed with literary and historical references and allusions. Interestingly, only a small percentage of the content is devoted to Fenyő's personal situation or that of his family, friends, and colleagues although the latter are frequently mentioned, but almost always briefly and factually.

All major wartime events of the months Fenyő spends in hiding can be found in the diary, many of them described and analyzed in detail and with remarkable accuracy. Some examples include the movements and advances/retreats of the Allied and Axis armies, the battles on both fronts after the Allied landings, the bombing raids in Budapest, the attempt on Hitler's life, Romania's withdrawal from the war in August 1944, the various Hungarian government changes during 1944, the speeches and actions of key politicians, government decrees, lies, and propaganda, the deportation of Jews from the countryside between April and July 1944, the relocation of the Jews of Budapest into Yellow Star houses in June 1944, various attempts by individuals or the Swedish embassy to save Jews, the attempt by Horthy in October to extricate Hungary from the alliance with Nazi Germany, the setting up of the Arrow Cross government on 15 October 1944 and its brutality in the rounding up and murder of Budapest Jews, the setting up of the Budapest ghetto in November 1944, and the siege and liberation

of Pest from late December 1944 to mid-January 1945. These events are set against the complex situation of the last year of the war and the final phase of the Holocaust. Fenyő's information sources seem to be excellent and even include personal meetings. For example, he ventures outside a few times in September and October before the Arrow-Cross takeover with the wives of deported friends and colleagues such as journalist Károly Rassay (281) and politician Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky (338).

Fenyő often obtains information about events soon after they take place as, for example, in the entry of 4 July 1944 where he writes about the saving of a trainload of Jews, the so-called "Kasztner train" which left Budapest with about 1600 Jews on 30 June as a result of secret negotiations between the Nazi authorities and the Hungarian Zionist leadership, giving opportunity for this wry comment by Fenyő: "is it possible that £1000 can wipe out the racial difference between Aryans and Semites?" (49). On 7 July 1945 Fenyő "hears" that his close friend the industrialist Baron Ferenc Chorin, arrested on 19 March by the Gestapo, may be in Portugal having bought his family's freedom (49). On 11 August 1945 he mentions discreetly that he is no longer worried about the Chorin family making it clear that he has been informed early of the escape of forty-seven members of the family whose armaments and industrial complex was bought by the Nazis after secret negotiations on behalf of Himmler (177). Since the deal had been kept from the Hungarian and German governments until after the agreement had been signed, it is surprising how well informed Fenyő is relatively soon after the arrangement becomes known at the end of May (see the story in detail in Braham, *The Politics* 517; Ránki 225; and more recently in the memoir *I Kiss Your Hands Many Times* by Marianne Szegedy-Maszák, great-niece of Ferenc Chorin).

Not only is Fenyő well informed about events soon after they take place, he often seems to have advance information about impending events. A case in point is Romania's exit from the war on 24 August 1944 about which he hears rumors already on 13 August. He considers this news important and explains why Hungary would do well to beat them to it (181), using this potential event for a digression on Voltaire, Burckhardt, Macaulay, and world history in general. On and after the actual armistice agreement between Romania and the Allies, he analyzes in detail its meaning for the war's outcome and for Hungary. In another example of advance information about events, he perceives signs of the impending Arrow Cross takeover of 15 October 1944 well in advance of that date (232). As early as the end of August and again at the end of September he is forewarned about a possible putsch by the Arrow Cross and of secret talks with the Soviets (306). According to these entries, the murderous intentions of the Arrow Cross with respect to the remaining Jews of Budapest are evident to many Budapest citizens. This is an important piece of evidence missing from some historical accounts and is still sometimes denied today. Perhaps the briefest entry of the diary on 30 September 1944 carries the terrible rumor that former Prime Minister Imrédy has reached an agreement with Ferenc Szálasi (the Arrow Cross leader) who will form a government with the express mandate of exterminating the remaining Jews and some Hungarians. The gendarmerie and the Gestapo are ready and in waiting to which Fenyő comments: "Perhaps just a horrible rumor today; tomorrow the terrible reality. Time is moving slowly" (314). The menacing news of the takeover by Szálasi is followed unexpectedly by a short paragraph about the Fenyő's satisfaction at polishing the copper doorknobs of the apartment he is hiding in. The contrast between the two paragraphs is shocking to the reader and Fenyő himself admits that his tone is flippant and insincere (314).

Having examined two diary entries about the characteristic admixture of factual accuracy and imaginative-literary aspects in Fenyő's work, I now discuss the relevance of the diary for today when Hungary's government and population are moving towards an increasingly anti-democratic, nationalist, and exclusionary political agenda. Every once in a while Fenyő reminisces about his childhood, his friends from his literary past, or describes his current reading and favorite authors, occasionally including lengthy excerpts. While some of these entries read like literary texts which offer escape from reality, in others, true to his custom, Fenyő blends the personal with the political. Thus he cannot resist the opportunity to ridicule a bogus literary talent: he copies three pages from a novel by the then popular Transylvanian writer József Nyíró to render this devastating literary judgment: the book in his opinion is shrewdly conceived, sentimentally told, and completely phony -- adding slyly that Nyíró probably realized his own literary failings and, to atone, went to Berlin and became a Nazi writer (157). It is interesting to note how different Fenyő's judgment of Nyíró is from that of the current Hungarian government's which has recently rediscovered Nyíró and found his work appropriate (along with the writing of other former pro-Nazi writers such as Albert Wass, caricatured elsewhere in the diary) for inclusion in the national educational curriculum, apparently because it fits their nationalist ideology. Another example of the diary's relevance is provided by Krisztián Ungváry who lists Fenyő's diary among the sources used for his seminal work, *The Siege of Budapest* thus confirming the diary's documentary value. In a 2015 article in *Népszabadság* Ungváry draws attention to the paucity of historical analysis, particularly in Hungarian, about many aspects of the last few months of the war in Budapest such as the sequence of events during the last days of the Budapest ghetto (<<http://nol.hu/kultura/a-megmenekules-napja-1510243>>). He quotes from Fenyő's diary to illustrate the typically ambivalent attitude of Hungarians to the rumors circulating about the destruction of the ghetto which many thought was imminent in November-December 1944. On the one hand, people felt sorry for the ghetto's inhabitants and on the other they said that their demise would at least make it impossible for the Jews to take revenge. Ungváry uses this story to illustrate how the lack of detailed knowledge about the ghetto contributed to the radically divergent interpretation of the same historical event by Budapest's Jewish and non-Jewish population.

Such divergent views about the events of the war are still prevalent in today's Hungary and Hungarians continue to be deeply divided on Holocaust history with unresolved questions around responsibility for the deportation and murder of more than half a million Hungarian Jews in the last year of the war. Mária Vásárhelyi notes the lack of honest public discourse about a shared history and reports

the results of a survey which shows that Holocaust remembrance is not part of the national historical consciousness. Miklós Hernádi's view that Hungarians have failed to come to terms with the events of the Holocaust is confirmed in several contentious 70th anniversary Holocaust projects promulgated by the government in 2014: the Monument to the German Occupation in Szabadság Tér (Freedom Square), plans for a new Holocaust memorial museum to be called Sorsok Háza (House of Fates), and the appointment of controversial historian Sándor Szakály to head the newly established national historical institute named Veritas. The vexatious public debates engendered by these projects suggest that witness testimony such as Fenyő's remains important in interpreting this part of Hungary's past. Perhaps coincidentally, but more or less simultaneously with the above mentioned controversies, a number of publications appeared on the historiography of the Holocaust in Hungary. For example, in their 2013 *The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide* Zoltán Vági, László Csósz, and Gábor Kádár observe that since the relatively harmonious 2004 public commemorations, knowledge about the Holocaust has progressively diminished with the rise of the extreme right; in 2014 Vasvári summarizes some of the recent literature on the Holocaust in Hungary within the context of the official politics of memory ("emlékezetpolitika"); also in 2014 Randolph L. Braham published an update of his earlier work of 1999 on the falsification of historical memory of the Holocaust in Hungary which, according to him, has been manipulated by successive governments to serve political interests; and in 2016 Ferenc Laczó raises the question of the political uses of Holocaust history and claims that contrary to the generally accepted view there were many memoirs and historical publications soon after the war, but that these have been conveniently forgotten or ignored leading to misrepresentations about Hungarian responsibility. Among the early testimonial writings thus overlooked Laczó mentions Fenyő's work together with Sándor Márai's diary of 1943-44. Despite significant differences in their style and personality, the two wartime diarists have many similarities in their questioning and interpretation of how Hungary could sink so low, although while Márai's work is serious, austere, and self-important, Fenyő's is light, informal, and journalistic. Not concentrating as much as Fenyő on political matters, Márai is also frequently concerned with the tasks awaiting the country once the war is over and on how Hungary must make amends.

One of the most wide-ranging examinations of life writing in the context of the politics of historical memory is Péter György's discussion of survivor testimony in his 2012 book *Apám helyett* (Instead of my father). György attempts to understand his father's "impossible" story: his stashing away of the diary he wrote about his experiences in the Bor forced labor camp in 1944 which he never mentions and refuses to remember. György investigates the intricacies of dealing with the past as if it had not happened taking into consideration the institutionalized silence of the Kádár years (1956-88), the role of memory in national history, and the lack of consensus about Holocaust remembrance in Hungary. According to György, the many diaries and personal testimonies from and about those years help to produce a constantly evolving and more complete narrative. Evidently Fenyő, in contrast to György's father, wanted to be heard: he wrote for history and for the future. His diary is an example of György's view that historical events and the narratives of historical memory in diaries and memoirs form a coherent whole and taken together reflect the multifaceted reality that once existed. From this point of view, the re-publication of Fenyő's diary against the background of Hungary's official 70th anniversary commemorations may prove to be significant in stimulating further scholarly and public debate. Some of this debate has already taken place in book reviews of the work, for instance in newspapers such as *Népszabadság*, *Magyar Narancs*, *Élet és Irodalom*, *168Ora*, and at the 2014 Budapest Book Fair where the diary was featured. Almost all reviewers comment on the timeliness of the Fenyő diary with reference to the 70th anniversary and express the hope that the publication can contribute to uncovering the "manipulations of the past" (Balogh 17). The magazine *Élet és Irodalom* selected the diary as its book of the month in August 2014 and László Márton, after referring to the "terrible monument," defines the book's relevance for today as coming to terms with the past and finding a way to raise Hungary from the moral and existential void it was in at the end of the war (21). Sándor Szénási adds to the debate by asking whether the occupation of Hungary by Germany on 19 March 1945 was indeed occupation or a helping hand.

My exploration of the diary's relevance for today may assist in answering the question raised at the beginning: is this diary to be viewed more a historical source material or an example of literary life writing? As I note, many facts or events described in the diary can be confirmed in the work of historians such as Braham, Ungváry, György Ránki, and Géza Komoróczy, but rounded out by personal experiences and commentary through which Fenyő frequently offers more in-depth information than the historians. Komoróczy, Ránki, and Ungváry use the Fenyő diary among their sources and Komoróczy actually quotes from it in his history of the Jews of Budapest (358, 419). I argue that diaries such as Fenyő's provide documentary source material whose value lies in enhancing archival materials which help to re-evaluate this aspect of Hungarian history. As primary source material, the diary provides much factual information and a tangible context for the historian. As a personal account, Fenyő's work adds color and realism to the impersonality of the historical writing on the war. Last but not least, an examination of Fenyő's diary as an example of life writing makes a contribution to the discussion about diaries as historical documents or literary texts: "the diary has often been traditionally excluded from both history and traditional literary studies because of its presumed looseness and lack of rigor" (Vasvári 60). However, it is the "looseness" that keeps this diary interesting, lively, and more entertaining than mere reporting would be. This is also the aspect of the diary that renders it valuable as "thick description" (see Geertz) or mediated history. James E. Young uses the term "literary historiography" to describe the conjuncture of historical and literary elements in personal narratives of the Holocaust for "when we turn to literary testimony of the Holocaust, we do so for knowledge, not evidence of events" (1).

Fenyő considered the task to record his experiences a serious responsibility. On the one hand, he attaches great importance to honesty and truthfulness in telling his story and on the other he is fully aware of the difference between facts or events and a writer's attempt at recreating them from a particular perspective. He writes about the need to be truthful, but reaches the conclusion that there is truth and validity in the autobiographical account even if it has fictional and subjective features. Writing about the diary many years later (*Önéletrajzom* [My Autobiography] 22-23) he suggests that in the final analysis everything that a true writer creates is autobiographical: a "fiction" of the events which happened to him. In this respect he considers his diary to have been his best work. This may be an acceptable answer to the question about why or how a diary such as this one can provide useful source material for historians while it is, simultaneously, a literary text (life writing narrative) and a good read.

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