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De l'exotisme à la modernité: Un siècle de voyage français en Hongrie (1818–1910). By Catherine Horel. Montrouge: Éditions du Bourg, 2018. 225 pp.

Catherine Horel, an outstanding French historian whose research touches on the history of Central Europe from an array of perspectives, is rightly considered one of the finest international scholars of Hungarian history. She has published a great deal of articles based on her impressive research on topics including the Hungarian Holocaust and the history of Central Europe. Not long ago, she won acclaim for her scholarly biography of Miklós Horthy. In her most recent book, she offers an exhaustive presentation and penetrating analyses of the texts of French travel writers who journeyed to Hungary between 1818 and 1910. The antecedents to this topic in her work stretch back relatively far. In several earlier articles, Horel dealt with this subject, so her new book can be seen as a synthesis of the findings of a longer research endeavor.

In the introduction, which is comparatively long, Horel defines the theme and outlines her methods. The period in question could be called, just for the sake of simplicity, “the short nineteenth century,” which began with the travels of the famous French geologist François Sulpice Beudant to Hungary and came to a close with the first decade of the twentieth century which bore witness to the birth of the automobile which revolutionized travel (the visit to Hungary of a tourist by the name of Pierre Marge, who traveled by car, offers a symbolic end to the era). The period, which lasted essentially from the end of the Napoleonic wars until the outbreak of World War I, was remarkably varied from the perspective of both French and Hungarian history. It was an era of reforms and modern ideals, as well as the emergence of modern nationalisms, revolutions and freedom fights, and the various compromises with which these events often drew to a close. It was also a time in which, alongside the shared interest felt by the two nations in each other’s culture and plights, fundamental differences began to appear, as well as the distorting effects of false images. The authors of the travel accounts came from numerous layers of the intelligentsia of the era, including scholars, members of the nobility who were performing either military or diplomatic functions, conservative representatives of the Church, émigré aristocrats, and enlightened journalists. The quantity and, of course, the nature of the information they left for future generations were shaped by the variety of backgrounds from which they came. Travel at the time was still part of a lifestyle that was accessible only to the social elites, the aristocracy, the nobility, the upper

middle classes, and the intelligentsia. In her monograph, Horel attempts to call attention to the distinctive features of the travel writings of the French authors who journeyed to and through Hungary by presenting the most characteristic texts in her body of source material.

In the first chapter of the book, Horel examines the stereotypes which were prevalent in the era (some of which persist to the present day). Alongside the romantic image of the blue Danube and the “Puszta,” she focuses on the cities, the dynamic development of which can be seen as one of the signs and symptoms of urbanization in Hungary at the time. In the second section of the book, Horel discusses another group of stereotypes, the elements of so-called Hungarian national character. Her discussion touches on ideas concerning the origins of the Hungarians and the cultural history of the idea of Hungarian hospitality, as well as religious and political questions. As a kind of counterpoint to the notions of Hungarian national character, Horel also presents the images given by the French travel writers of the national minorities and the larger religious and ethnic minorities living in Hungary, including the Croats, the Romanians, the Slovaks, the Germans, the Serbs, the Ruthenians, the Jews, and the Roma.

The protagonist of the second chapter is Budapest, the capital of the Kingdom of Hungary as of 1873 and a city which rivaled Vienna as a political and cultural center. As Horel has already published a very successful monograph on Budapest in French, it is hard to offer the French reader something new about the city, which was one of the most dynamically changing metropolises of Europe, so we are given more of a sample of the nineteenth-century French sources. Horel likes to let the sources speak for themselves, as they are. She uses copious citations, which she complements with insightful notes and useful explanations. In this central part of the book, we bear witness to the birth of the Budapest mythos, which is still very alive today for the average French tourist.

In the last chapter, Horel uses a structure which resembles a triptych to present the French mirror image of political relations in Hungary. In the first section, she discusses the great patriots (primarily Lajos Kossuth and Ferenc Deák) of the Reform Era and the *Vormärz*. The second section offers an examination of the problems of the 1848 Revolution and War of Independence from the perspective of France. Here, Horel draws attention to the failure of the approach and policies adopted by the Hungarian independence movement to the national minorities and also to social problems in Hungary at the time. Horel presents the era of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy created by the

Compromise of 1867 by examining shifting sentiment among the travel writers. On the one hand, Horel offers her reader glimpses of outbursts of sympathy for Hungarians in some of the narratives, but at the same time, in her summary of the geopolitical realities of the period leading up to the outbreak of World War I, she notes the failure of the attempts by France to pursue a pro-Hungary foreign policy. In the summary of the book, she continues this line of thinking, presenting the changes which are discernible in the images of Hungarians in the narratives of French travel writers over the course of this short nineteenth century. Among the major fateful shifts in these images was the fundamental transformation of the romantic notion of Hungary and the Hungarians and the change which took place as, when it came to reports on the peoples of Central Europe, the narratives of travelers and discoverers, which were largely literary in nature, were replaced towards the end of the era by the descriptions given by French geographers and Slavophile journalists and writers. An array of carefully selected illustrations and the detailed bibliography also make Horel's book an enjoyable read.

This captivatingly written and persuasively argued work of scholarship has numerous merits, but there are perhaps a few minor shortcomings which also deserve mention. Horel's use of the term "French" may be a bit confusing for the reader. In the case of most of the travel writers in her account, the term refers simply to France as country of origin, but in the case of the Swiss authors, it means "French speaking." It might have been worth clarifying this minor ambiguity in the introduction. Also, though she makes very precise use of an exhaustive range of sources, one or two important sources are still missing from her account. It made have been worth including, for example, the travel narrative by Cyprien Polydore, a parish priest from Périgueux (*Voyage en Allemagne, en Autriche-Hongrie et en Italie*. [1888]) who traveled through the country by train and who offered a fascinating example of a travel narrative by a deeply religious pilgrim. It also would have been useful had Horel offered some reflection on works in the secondary literature on the subject written in the recent past by Hungarian scholars, for instance the works by historian and literary scholar Géza Szász, a member of the faculty at the University of Szeged.

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