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## World War I in Hungarian Motion Picture History, 1914 to 1945

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# WORLD WAR I IN HUNGARIAN MOTION PICTURE HISTORY, 1914–1945

*Márton Kurutz*

## *Film During the Great War*

World wars always leave a considerable mark on a nation's motion picture history. The characteristics of this phenomenon are relatively easily traceable with respect to changes in both quantity and quality. Specifically, among many other aspects, the number and caliber of films about war are the two most important factors by which the shaping of history, the alternation of military victories and defeats, are accurately traceable on the homogeneous body of cinematographic art. Besides the statistical data of economic trends, art can be one of the most authentic gauges of the eras of wartime economic upturns and declines. While those who are interested can get a relatively complete image of the European film industry during World War II through surviving movie productions, the film production conditions of the years of World War I are significantly more difficult to judge because of the substantial lack of material. Approximately ninety-three percent of Hungarian films made in that period were lost, and little survived of the documentation related to movie filmings. We can still undertake an authentic exploration based on the filmography collected

and enriched for decades by motion picture historian, Gyöngyi Balogh,<sup>1</sup> which describes, by means of the surviving sources, the data of the roughly 600 Hungarian fiction films produced in the period between 1901 and 1930 with systematic accuracy.

The Hungarian feature film industry was born during the few years preceding the breakout of the war. Therefore it was a relatively new profession and art that immediately came face to face with history. There was not much time for hesitation. Because of the increasingly slow commercial routes, then the gradually closing borders, and eventually the boycott of international markets, the film industry was forced to produce by itself the program quantity that its audience had become used to during the times of peace. The statement “the muses are silent during war” is not true for cinematographic art, since there were never as many filmings in the studios of various nations as during the years of the two world wars.

Hungarian film producers reacted with great enthusiasm to the news of the breakout of the war and the first military operations. Zsigmond Gere, who fought on the front himself, wrote one of the very first wartime dramas, entitled *Őrház a Kárpátokban*<sup>2</sup> (*Guardhouse of the Carpathians*), in 1914. Its hero is a patriotic railway-man, who himself becomes the victim of Russian incursions along with his family. However, before he dies, he conveys crucial information to the Hungarian camp. In a manner characteristic of the optimism in the first years of the war, satires and parodies quickly appeared, the main target of which was the enemy. Imre Pintér, the famous seasonal actor, wrote and directed

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1 Gyöngyi Balogh, *Hungarian Filmography / Feature Films (1901–1929) / Hungarian Silent Feature Films* (manuscript).

2 *Guardhouse in the Carpathians/Őrház a Kárpátokban*, directed by Gyula Zilahy (1914).

the three-act comedy entitled *Ágyú és harang*<sup>3</sup> (*Cannon and bell*), in which the people of the "dwarf king," meaning Italy, waged war against Mihály Magyar (Michael Hungarian) and his compatriots. Among the characters of the story—which relies on the instruments of chauvinism—was the famous Italian author, Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was celebrated as a hero on the other side of the front, and the "Piccolo King" on the other; for the role, the director used a circus dwarf.

The 1914 comedy *Szerbia hadat üzen!*<sup>4</sup> (*Serbia declares war!*) is an even more ignoble film: In the spiteful story, the screenplay writer distorts the events preceding the breakout of the war. The main character of the film is the king of Serbia himself, the alcoholic Peter I, who is so indecisive that all those who surround him abuse his weakness. In an empire built on corruption, even the Serbian telephone network is sold to the royal court's supplier Khonovits, a junk trader. The royal palace is depicted as a dilapidated shack, the front gate adorned by a pig-head trade sign; in the course of the story, even the royal crown is pawned, so the monarch can acquire money for waging war. When the war breaks out, the king secretly flees to the "*Poloskavác*" (Bedbug-Ville) spa and watches his country's increasingly hopeless situation from there. The scenes, sinking into burlesque, are eventually ended by Hungarian soldiers arriving in boats on the bank of the Danube in Belgrade, swiftly routing the Serbian army.

It is already quite evident from these few films that the motion pictures produced in the era, dealing with the new war as the fundamental experience, were made along the lines of diverse genre concepts. Based on the surviving sources, roughly four

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3 *Cannon and Bell/Ágyú és harang*, directed by Imre Pintér (1915).

4 *Serbia Declares War!/Szerbia hadat üzen!*, directed by Aladár Fodor (1914).

basic genres can be differentiated: pathetic propaganda, chauvinist propaganda, romantic drama, and comedy. The plots can also be called rather stereotypical. In the stories about heroic military virtues and self-sacrifice, women play important roles, and the path-seeking of single or lonely women is a recurring motif; this is one of the earliest forms of the appearance of melodrama in Hungarian films. The bored wife or girl flees toward a more exciting, richer, and more exotic world. And this world is to be searched for somewhere in eastern Europe, and specifically in the Orpheum or musical theater of a Russian or Polish city. Our heroines become dancers in every case, and instead of shine and splendor, they are victimized by the enemy's army officers and blackmailing civilians. In every case, absolution for them is represented by returning to the family home, forgiveness, or death. During the war, three such films were produced, and of these, two have survived. Both were made in 1917, one of them in Budapest, the other in Kolozsvár, in today's Romania. The latter, entitled *Az utolsó éjszaka*<sup>5</sup> (*The last night*), is a surprisingly captivating drama, in which the World War seemingly does not even play a significant role. However, the breakout of the war is still the event that reverses the plot in the middle of the story and rearranges the characters' relationships with one another. Its heroine is the wife of a landowner who escapes to the Russian theaters. She is unable to control oppression by the people surrounding her and is dragged into such danger that she does not survive. Another film, *A föld rabjai*<sup>6</sup> (*Prisoners of the land*), also shows little of the events of the war, although they are still emphasized in the story. The Hungarian peasant girl who escapes to Russia, and whose fate takes her from the theater to a castle in Tashkent, is confronted

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5 *The Last Night/Az utolsó éjszaka*, directed by Jenő Janovics (1917).

6 *Prisoners of the Land/A föld rabjai*, directed by László Békeffy (1917).

with her duty and the patriotism of Hungarian prisoners of war, a group that includes her own father. The third film is lost. It was entitled (*Attack*),<sup>7</sup> and it was produced three years earlier, in 1914. The heroine of this film is also a *vengerka* gone astray, meaning a Hungarian dancer who moved to the east, whose career is derailed by the breakout of the war. She is also rescued by a compatriot, her former suitor who takes her home, back to her village. This time, the plot is set in a castle in Galicia, where the majority of the scenes of the not excessively complex story take place. The selection of this location provides a good opportunity for the director, Alfréd Deéry, not to produce a feature film of the story in its traditional interpretation, but rather make a so-called sketch film, a genre that was becoming increasingly popular at the time. This film, which was the first of this genre<sup>8</sup> according to its director, differed from traditional films insofar as its writer was allowed to insert a multitude of musical and dancing scenes into it, which were performed by actors live in the interior spaces of the castle, that is, on a stage below the screen.

The movie sketch genre was born, and flourished, during World War I. One of the reasons for this was that it somewhat replaced the theater experience, which was increasingly rare at the time. The other reason was that the performing actors could hope to escape the draft by citing their appearances. However, they often did not succeed, and before long the movie copies were taken to various appearances with actors who only looked similar to them. Besides the sketch genre, comedies and operettas were also living their heydays on the screen. The reason for this is that audiences turned away from sorrowful dramas and desired ecstatic

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7 *Attack/Attak*, directed by Alfréd Deéry (1914).

8 Alfréd Deéry, *In the Circus Ring, on the Stage, on Movie Screen. Recollections* (Budapest: Magyar Filmintézet, 1992), 116.

entertainment. They were not particularly curious about what was happening on the front, since they could see reality in the motion picture reports played before feature films; up-to-date news was shown in cinemas increasingly often. However, original front footage shot by Austrian and German cameramen was not only shown in the side programs. Sometimes documentary sequences were also integrated into fictional films, creating an impression of authenticity. The sole surviving example of this kind of directorial concept is the anti-war propaganda short feature film entitled *Jön az öcsém* (*My Brother Is Coming*),<sup>9</sup> which was directed by Mihály Kertész<sup>10</sup> in 1919. Kertész was peculiarly attracted to this directorial method; at least, this is evidenced by the surviving documentation of his two films produced in 1917. Moreover, he elevated the captivating nature of his war drama entitled *A magyar föld ereje*<sup>11</sup> (*The Strength of the Fatherland*) to such a level that, beyond the combat scenes edited from the news, he also took his actors to locations suffering from original war damage. Thus, despite the difficult wartime transportation conditions, his crew reached Sofia and Constantinople, as well as besieged cities that resembled the destroyed Russian village of the story. The story of the feature film, the production of which was commissioned by the Hungarian Red Cross, is rather bizarre and completely contrary to the fates and motivations of the characters in other Hungarian films. The hero of Kertész's film is a Russian man who fled the despotism of the Czar and found a new homeland in Hungary. He becomes a Hungarian citizen. The magic of Hungarian land gives him strength to start anew. His son, who was already born on this

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9 *My Brother Is Coming/Jön az öcsém*, directed by Mihály Kertész (1919).

10 Michael Curtiz.

11 *The Power of Hungarian Land/A magyar föld ereje*, directed by Mihály Kertész (1917).

land, volunteers to go to the battlefield and fights in the Hungarian army against the Russians, among whom he even encounters his own grandfather. Perhaps Kertész did not consider this film to be among the main achievements of his life, but rather similar to his other wartime work entitled *A béke útja* (*Peace's Road*).<sup>12</sup> The latter was a 300-meter propaganda film that served the success of war-bonds, and of which very few sources survived. Kertész could not pay much attention to the plot, because most of his film consisted of edited documentaries of battlefield events. His attention was rather focused on his romantic adventure films produced in the same year, which he made mimicking American movies that were boycotted at the time. Such is the surviving *Az utolsó hajnal* (*The Last Dawn*);<sup>13</sup> both the content and environment clearly relates to America.

*Hotel Imperial*,<sup>14</sup> which debuted in the autumn of 1918, was undoubtedly one of the most significant pieces of Hungarian film production during World War I. It was made in Jenő Janovics's motion picture factory in Kolozsvár and was based on Lajos Bíró's theater play, which appeared in the same year. He directed the six-act drama himself, involving many actors and a large number of extras in numerous Transylvanian cities. Even the 51st infantry battalion of the Imperial and Royal Army, still shared with Austria, provided assistance in the course of the filming, during which Russian soldiers were played by Russian prisoners of war working at the farmstead in Gyalu. The lead role was played by Mihály Várkonyi,<sup>15</sup> later of worldwide renown, who was serving as a soldier in the army himself in those months. Critics reviewed

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12 *The Path of Peace/A béke útja*, directed by Mihály Kertész (1917).

13 *The Last Dawn/Az utolsó hajnal*, directed by Mihály Kertész (1917).

14 *Hotel Imperial*, directed by Jenő Janovics (1917).

15 Victor Varconi.



the play with these words: "Bíró wrote the play with the spirit of a wide-eyed war correspondent and a brave pacifist journalist."<sup>16</sup> In the following decades, *Hotel Imperial* was adapted for the movie screen several times all over the world. It is a great loss to Hungarian motion picture history that a mere few photos survived of this work. *Lyon Lea*,<sup>17</sup> adapted from Sándor Bródy's 1915 theater play, an important production in the list of Jewish-themed films in Hungary, was also lost. The producers of the film, which was also shot at the beginning of the war, included Sándor Korda,<sup>18</sup> who participated in directing as well as the writing of the screenplay beside Miklós M. Pásztory. The achievement of their work is that they succeeded in producing a film that was more substantial and spectacular than the theater version. They even diverged from the original drama on several points, and they inserted scenes into the screenplay that would've been unimaginable displayed on a stage. In the film, all those events that were only recounted in the play became visible, and the scenery is enriched by bustling crowd scenes and decorative open air shots. The surviving photos prove that it must indeed have been a spectacular movie, in which significant attention was devoted to presenting contemporary everyday Jewish culture and religious liturgy. The story follows the tribulations of Jews squeezed between the Russians invading Galicia and the Hungarian army returning, through the relationship between the beautiful daughter of a miracle-rabbi and the Russian grand duke who is courting her. The Russian commander conquering the village wants to possess Lea, who, if she resists him, may risk the lives of the village's inhabitants. However, she

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16 *Nyugat/West* (1918/5 edition); Aladár Schöpflin: *Hotel Imperial*.

17 *Lyon Lea*, directed and written by Miklós M. Pásztory and probably Sándor Korda (1915).

18 Sir Alexander Korda.

is afraid of death; thus, despite the fact that her father disowns her, she chooses the shame. The Duke, witnessing the girl's heroic stance and pride, falls in love with her, and Lea also is not without feelings for him. However, their love cannot be fulfilled, because the Hungarian counterattack drives the Russians out of the village. At this point Lea is unable to choose. The Duke lifts her on his horse and flees with her. While galloping away, Lea is killed by a stray bullet fired by her former love, and the Duke voluntarily follows her into death. The film was played in cinemas throughout the duration of the World War, but in 1919, in the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, it was banned by censors. However, it was shown in Berlin and Vienna; in the latter city, it was introduced as an Austrian film.<sup>19</sup>

That the war was increasingly prolonged and sank into hopelessness also had a disheartening effect on the Hungarian motion picture industry and cinematographic art. The producers no longer believed in victory, and during the last two years of the war, even audiences did not know what to make of the optimistic films that they had been watching enthusiastically in 1914. Even *Károly bakák* (*Károly soldiers*),<sup>20</sup> produced in the last year of the war, did not have any freshness, anything encouraging. The pattern of the film's simple story is found in the motion picture history of almost every warring nation, and in Hungary several times.<sup>21</sup> The village story begins with false news of a fatality at the front. Receiving the news, the bride of the alleged

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19 *Mozgófénykép híradó* (Motion picture News), 1916/22.

20 *Károly Soldiers/Károly bakák*, directed by Miklós M. Pásztory and Zoltán Korda (1918).

21 For example, *The Swapped Man/Az elcserélt ember*, directed by Viktor Gertler (1938); *Brothers in Arms/Bajtársak*, directed by Ágoston Pacséry (1942); and *Under Barrage/Pergőtűzben*, directed by Lajos Ágotai (1937).

fallen warrior mourns her love and marries someone else. The soldier believed to be dead unexpectedly returns right before the wedding, and upon seeing the happiness of his former love, returns to the front in his sorrow. Before long, the young husband is also drafted, and the abandoned groom eventually overcomes his hatred toward him at the edge of a bomb-crater, as a brother in arms, when he saves his rival's life by sacrificing his own. The author of the story was Nándor Korcsmáros, the editor of a patriotic-spirited newspaper, whose most well-known work is perhaps this writing. It is a pity that the film did not survive; it is possible that its principal value would have been the realistic view it painted of military life, the everyday experiences of soldiers at the time, since the author was also a devoted explorer of army slang.<sup>22</sup>

The feature film entitled *A métely (Infection)*<sup>23</sup> was produced in Kolozsvár during the last weeks of the war, at the initiative of the government and with considerable state subsidy. It was the counter-propaganda of syphilitic diseases that were rampant at the time. The screenplay was based on the drama by Eugène Brieux, entitled *Les Avariés*, which the author wrote in 1901. The drama was banned by French censors at the time, because it was forbidden to discuss syphilitic diseases, especially in the presence of women. In 1905, a permit was still granted for the debut and the play proved to be a huge success. Its first film version<sup>24</sup> was produced in America in 1914; the movie shot in Kolozsvár was the second. The Hungarian film version shot in 1918 based on the powerful dramatic fundamental work was undoubtedly very

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22 Nándor Korcsmáros, "Data for Hungarian Military Language," *Magyar Nyelvőr (Hungarian Language Guard)* 54 (1925): 94–96.

23 *Damaged Goods/A métely*, directed by Mihály Fekete (1918).

24 *Damaged Goods*, directed by Tom Ricketts (1914).

convincing, since the director, Mihály Fekete, who also played one of the leading roles, produced the hospital scenes at the Kolozsvár dermatology clinic. During the years of the war, besides Spanish flu, syphilis claimed the most lives; thus it affected a great number of already weakened people, as well as their families. The shocking story presents the disintegration of a marriage, in which medical assistance represents the sole escape.

This film was the symbolic conclusion of Hungarian motion picture production in the lost World War I, of the immense stream, which started with burlesques and satires pointing beyond irony, and of which the valuable Hungarian film drama evolved in the span of a few years. In its entirety, the whole situation ended with a demoralized, lethargic, financially bankrupt motion picture industry in 1918. Despite all of this, after the conclusion of the war, the history of Hungarian motion picture was allowed another short-lived period of enthusiasm. The obvious reason for this was the suddenly commenced peace, the civic-democratic transformation, and the declaration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. This was the place where film production was nationalized for the first time in the world; thus, numerous productions could be completed by the end of the decade. However, none of the newly produced films emphasized the war, even though the few short films, striving to do away with the destructive cataclysm permanently, were significant. One of these is the single-act propaganda film entitled *Őfelsége a király nevében* (*In the name of his highness the king*),<sup>25</sup> the creators and actors of which are unknown. The sole surviving copy of the film was later placed in the police archive, as criminal evidence, along with the news films shown in the weeks of the communist regime. A roll of film also survived here, which was presumably the last work of Mihály Kertész produced in Hungary.

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25 *In the Name of His Highness the King/Őfelsége a király nevében* (1919).

This was the previously mentioned *My Brother Is Coming*,<sup>26</sup> which was originally a version of the story of a poem published in newspapers. It debuted in Budapest, on April 3, 1919. Kertész and his wife, who also played a role in this film, were already in Vienna the following month. Oszkár Beregi, who played the lead male character, because of the attacks against him, followed them a few months later. The euphoria of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was followed by the shock of the Versailles peace treaty, in the course of which Hungary lost two thirds of its territory and along with it, one of the bastions of its culture, the Kolozsvár motion picture factory.

### *The Great War on Film*

Starting in the beginning of the 1920s, the number of Hungarian films slowly declined. From 1925 until the end of the decade, the number of great Hungarian feature films produced annually did not reach ten; in the last three years, only two to three feature films were produced. The reason for this was the increasingly intensifying economic crisis and the reopening of borders, across which American and Western European movies practically flooded the Hungarian market. The absence of Hungarian film professionals, many of whom had emigrated abroad, primarily to Austria and the United States, was a significant factor in Magyar motion picture factories. Not only their most talented directors, but also a great portion of their actors, received much more favorable offers in foreign Eldorado locations of international silent film production than they did in Hungary. The actors who stayed home, besides the little work they had, were experimenting with “sketch versions” of previously successful films, which meant the

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26 *My Brother Is Coming/Jön az öcsém*, directed by Mihály Kertész (1919).

re-editing of movies produced during the golden age. The newly produced films made at this time, in their genre, show the extreme difference between life in the cities and in villages: They shot folk theater plays, or adventure stories with scenes overseas, mimicking American movies.

The “film-novel” entitled *A kis hős* (*The little hero*),<sup>27</sup> which debuted in the spring of 1927, stands out from this set of productions. The screenplay was written by a ministerial advisor, Henrik Kőrösy, based on a book<sup>28</sup> that was published around that time. The end result of the filming, which started under the working title “Accusatory Graves” (*Vádoló sírok*) is a rather didactic student story, in the center of which is a young Subcarpathian Hungarian student called Pista. During his school years, he chooses Petőfi, the poet symbolic for the Hungarian nation, as his role model, and he escapes to the war after his father and grandfather, where he avenges their deaths on a Russian army officer. Finally, a Russian bayonet is stabbed into Pista’s heart, and he dies just as his role model. His teacher holds a eulogy at his grave; the effect of which is his students again dream of Hungary growing to be great. The screenings of the eight-act film were preceded by a live actor prologue, which was performed by students. The production was supposed to be a preparation for the commemorations of the tenth anniversary of the war, however culture politics did not wish to remember it in this way, because of the dramatic losses still alive in everybody’s hearts.

Two exhausted prisoners of war are trudging home along the dusty highway; the drama known as the first Hungarian sound film, which was in reality one of the last Hungarian silent films, opens with this symbolic picture sequence. *Csak egy kislány van*

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27 *The Little Hero/A kis hős*, directed by József Letzter (1926).

28 Gyula Pekár, *The Little Hero* (Budapest: Singer, 1927).

*a világon* (*There is only one girl in the world*),<sup>29</sup> produced in 1929, and at the time still soundtracked with music, is actually about love, not about the spiritual destruction that the four-years-long war caused in the lives of its characters. On the twentieth anniversary of the breakout of the war, the making of a truly good film commemoration was not successful either. The productions<sup>30</sup> of the time primarily reminisced about the happy years of peace, a tranquility from which the heroes of the stories were awakened by the mobilization. This motif appeared in numerous other sound films that were in some way connected to the war. The world had changed a great deal in the meantime: A new generation grew up, and the war seemed so distant that its previous significance began to fade. In the story adapted from an operetta to the movie screens and entitled *Az iglói diákok* (*The students of Igló*),<sup>31</sup> the war only appears in an incidental way, when at the end of the story the lazy high school student hero is hardened into a real man by the war. The first serious drama that deserves mentioning, and which takes place during the world war in its entirety, debuted in cinemas in the beginning of 1936, under the title *Café Moszkva* (*Café Moscow*),<sup>32</sup> and was directed by István Székely,<sup>33</sup> who later became popular in Hollywood. This story also takes place in Galicia, in Limburg and is reminiscent of the story of *Hotel Imperial* on several points, as well as Mihály Kertész's *Casablanca*.<sup>34</sup> This film is also set in an entertainment spot of a small town located on the

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29 *There Is Only One Girl in the World/Csak egy kislány van a világon*, directed by Béla Gaál (1929).

30 E.g. *Purple Locust Tree/Lila akác*, directed by István Székely (1934).

31 *The Students of Igló/Az iglói diákok*, directed by István György (1935).

32 *Café Moscow/Café Moszkva*, directed by István Székely (1936).

33 Steve Sekely, S. K. Seeley.

34 *Casablanca*, directed by Michael Curtiz (1942).

frontline, where the heroes meet each other as citizens of nations at war. Love is the central theme here as well, and the heroes save each other's lives because of it. This melodrama was a great success in its own time, even though it did not manage to cross Hungary's borders, thus unfortunately it did not become an internationally known production.

One year later, three films about the World War were produced<sup>35</sup> at the same time. However, only one deserves emphasis, which by itself also stood out from the Hungarian movies of the era. *Két fogoly* (*Two captives*)<sup>36</sup> was produced based on the work of a world war veteran, Lajos Zilahy. It was directed by István Székely, and the setting is again the Russian front. Its heroes are separated lovers, who slowly give up on each other due to the long duration of imprisonment and war. After news of the husband's death is received home in the hinterland, his wife finds happiness beside her gallant suitor, and—the other way round—the husband beside a Russian village girl during war captivity. The happy ending of the film is unusual: the former lovers' new life is the positive note of the movie.

One year later, in 1938, another masterpiece was born, inspired by a novel written immediately after the war.<sup>37</sup> The author also adapted it to the stage in 1930; in his work, he was the first to address the mental trauma<sup>38</sup> caused by war injury. The heroes of *Az elcserélt ember* (*The swapped man*)<sup>39</sup> are Hungarian army officers who resemble each

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35 *Sound of the Heart/A szív szava*, directed by Alajos Bihari (1937); *Under Barrage!/Pergőtűzben!*, directed by Lajos Ágotai (1937).

36 *Two Captives/Két fogoly*, directed by István Székely (1937).

37 Adorján Bónyi, *Swapped Life* (1920).

38 The second one was produced in 1940, entitled *Belated Letter/Az elkésett levél*, directed by Endre Rodriguez (1941).

39 *The Swapped Man/Az elcserélt ember*, directed by Viktor Gertler (1938).



perfectly in every way, one of whom dies on the front, while the other survives but loses his memories. When he wakes up, he accidentally begins to continue the personal life of the other, and as he slowly realizes this, he is also faced with the thought that he must not conceal himself in front of his friend's wife and son.

In the period of Hungarian sound film that lasted until the end of World War II, there are practically no further significant, remarkable productions. Most of the stories that touch on the war are either only connected to history by a weak thread, or only use the living conditions created by the war.<sup>40</sup> Films aiming to insult other nations appear again; in this case, their targets are the countries that were the winners of the Versailles treaty.<sup>41</sup> Endre Tóth,<sup>42</sup> who became famous in Hollywood, was also shooting an adventurous spy story based on the novel entitled *Toprini nász* (*Wedding in Toprin*),<sup>43</sup> rather than a film about the world war. Beside his multitude of Hungarian masterpieces, Arzén Cserépy,<sup>44</sup> who is mostly known in German speaking countries, produced an expressly poor film under the title *Gorodi fogoly* (*The captive of Gorod*),<sup>45</sup> about the escape of Hungarian prisoners of war from Russia.

The last significant film about World War I, *Sarajevo*,<sup>46</sup> was produced in 1940; the title reveals its fundamental theme. The

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40 For example: *Belated Letter/Az elkésett levél*, directed by Endre Rodriguez (1941); *Magdolna*, directed by Kálmán Nádasdy (1942).

41 *Hungarian Resurrection/Magyar feltámadás*, directed by Ferenc Kiss and Jenő Csepregyhy (1938-39).

42 André de Toth.

43 *Toprin Wedding/Toprini nász*, directed by Tóth Endre (1939).

44 Arzén von Cserépy; Konrad Wieder.

45 *The Captive of Gorod/Gorodi fogoly*, directed by Arzén Cserépy (1940).

46 *Sarajevo*, directed by Ákos Ráthonyi (1940).

love story commencing at the moment of the breakout of the war leads all the way to Russia, where the Hungarian girl arrives as a bride. However, she is not welcome in the castle of the Czar's army officer, and while her fiancé is fighting on the front, she realizes herself that she is attracted to her former love, a Hungarian soldier who is injured on the nearby front. Seeing this, the Russian army officer gives up on the girl with a noble heart; he secretly leads them across the border and surrenders himself. The final outcome of the excellently directed film is also reminiscent of the story of *Casablanca*, and in its other motifs also those of earlier silent films. It is evident from this that the world war theme was not infinitely variable in the film language medium of the era.

For a long time, no further films were produced about the Great War at all, since one year later Hungary entered another world war, which soon made the memory and significance of the first one fade. People needed new films, new stories, and while they received them, the exact same processes occurred in the motion picture industry as a few decades earlier. The upswing of Hungarian films was again followed by failure and collapse, but in a much more severe way than before. Not only film production, but also everyday life, had to be reborn from the ruins, and before long, this is what served as the fundamental theme of new films.

