



Hungarian Studies Association of Canada
Association canadienne des études hongroises
Kanadai Magyarstudományi Társaság

40th annual conference jubilee sessions

June 13th and 14th, 2026

St Elizabeth of Hungary Church, 432 Sheppard Ave East, Toronto

Saturday, June 13th

17:00-17:10 Arrival

17:10-17:15 Welcome Words by HSAC President Agatha Schwarz

17:15-18:00 Round-table about the 40 years of the HSAC and the *Hungarian Studies Review*. Oliver Botar, Mária Palasik, Steve Jobbitt

Moderator: Katalin Kürtösi

Oliver Botar was recipient in 2022 of the prestigious Moholy-Nagy Award and in 2023 of the Henszlmann Prize in art history (for his work with The Salgo Trust). He is Professor of Art History and Associate Director responsible for graduate studies and research at the School of Art. His Ph.D. (University of Toronto) was on Biomorphic Modernism and Biocentrism. The nexus of Biocentrism-Modernism, the Hungarian avant-garde, László Moholy-Nagy and the origins of new media art have been research focuses. He has lectured, published, and curated exhibitions in Canada, the US, Europe and Japan. He is author of *Technical Detours: The Early Moholy-Nagy Reconsidered* (2006), *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (2014) as well as of numerous articles, book chapters and exhibition catalogues. He is co-editor of *Biocentrism and Modernism* (with Isabel Wünsche, 2011), *Cannibalizing the Cannon: Dada Techniques in East-Central Europe* (with Irina Denischenko, et al., 2024), and *telehor* (with Klemens Gruber, 2013). Botar also works on Canadian art, including an exhibition and catalogue on Eli Bornstein (“*An Art at the Mercy of Light*” *Recent Works by Eli Bornstein*, 2013), and is

currently working on a monograph of Winnipeg as an art centre and on a book on settler art in Winnipeg from 1913 to 1950.

Mária Palasik, (PhD, dr. habil.) is a historian, retired head of Research Department at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security. She had been professor at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics for over twenty years and has been Jean Monnet Professor for European Studies since 2004. Her field of research is Hungarian History after World War II. Author and co-author of several books, presenter at academic conferences and coordinator of scientific projects. Her book *Chess Game for Democracy: Hungary between East and West in 1944-47* (Montreal–Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011) is about the dramatic struggle for power in Hungary after the Second World War.

Steve Jobbitt is Associate Professor of History at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. His research focuses primarily on the history of Hungarian geography and conservative-nationalist identity politics, and he teaches courses on Eastern European and Soviet history, the history of revolution, neoliberalism, and the history of fascism and resistance to it. Steve received the Nandor Dreisziger Medal for Outstanding Contribution to Hungarian Studies in Canada in 2024.

18:00-18:15 Break

18:15-19:15 Reading: **Anna Porter** (author of *The Storyteller: memory, secrets, magic and lies*, 2000), **Joseph Kertes** (author of *The Afterlife of Stars*, 2014) and **Endre Farkas** (author of *Never, Again*, 2016)

Moderator: Katalin Kürtösi

Anna Porter is the award-winning author of twelve books, both fiction and non-fiction, including *The Storyteller* and *Kasztner's Train*, winner of the Writers' Trust Non-fiction Award and the Jewish Book Award for non-fiction, *The Ghosts of Europe*, winner of the Shaughnessey Cohen Award, and *Buying a Better World, George Soros and Billionaire Philanthropy*. *Gull Island*, a psychological thriller, is her 6th novel. She co-founded Key Porter Books, an influential publishing house she ran for more than twenty years. She is an Officer of the Order of Canada and has been awarded the Order of Ontario.

Joseph Kertes fled Hungary as a child with his family in 1956. He founded Humber College's creative writing and comedy programs and was the recipient of several awards for teaching and innovation. He was for many years Humber's Dean of Creative and Performing Arts. His first novel, *Winter Tulips*, won the Stephen

Leacock Award for Humour. His latest, *Last Impressions*, was a finalist for the same award. His third novel, *Gratitude*, won a Canadian National Jewish Book Award and the U.S. National Jewish Book Award for Fiction. His novel, *The Afterlife of Stars*, was a *New York Times* Book Review Editor's Choice. His forthcoming book is called *Sirens*. Kertes was the recipient of the 2017 Harbourfront Festival Prize for his contribution to literature and to the literary community.

Endre Farkas was born in Hungary. His family escaped during the 1956 Hungarian uprising, and settled in Montreal. He has collaborated with dancers, musicians, actors, and other poets. He has published two novels, eleven books of poetry and two plays. His work has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, and Slovenian. He has read and performed widely in Canada, the United States, Latin America, and Europe, and has created performance pieces that have toured across Canada and abroad. His book *How To* was nominated for the AM Klein poetry award in 1983. He is the two-time winner of the CBC radio Poetry "Face Off" Competition. His collaborative book and videopoem *Blood is Blood* was the winner at Zebra's International Poetry Film Festival (Berlin) 2012. His two novels *Never, Again* and *Home Game* were published by Signature Editions in 2016 & 2019 respectively. *Home Game* was shortlisted for the Hugh MacLennan prize for Fiction. He won the Balasi Balint Translation prize 2025. His first novel *Never, Again* is being translated into Hungarian and will be published in *Freeside* magazine in Hungary. His work has also appeared in *Tiszatáj* monthly.

19:30-21:00 Dinner with live music

Sunday, June 14th

10:00-10:50. Session 1: Memories of 1956 in works by Hungarian-Canadian authors

Chair: Agatha Schwarz

Katalin Kürtösi: Escape Stories in Works by Hungarian-Canadian authors

The paper will focus on how characters in works written around half a century or more after the authors' escape remember crossing the border from Hungary to Austria. The case studies will be autofictional books by authors of Hungarian descent, active in Canada: Béla Szabados representing those who used to live in provincial cities, while Erika Gottlieb and Zsolt Alapi were from Budapest.

Although details differ, there are moments that are mentioned in each book. The descriptions of the escapes offer a reliable topography of the most frequented stretch of the border with Austria. The presentation will be centered around *In Light of Chaos* by Béla Szabadi (1990), *Becoming My Mother's Daughter* by Erika Gottlieb (2008) and *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Zsolt Alapi (2020).

Katalin Kürtösi is Professor Emerita of the University of Szeged and at present Vice-President of HSAC. She has been researching the cultural flow between Canada and Hungary since 1983. She has published about this topic in Canada, England, Germany and the Central European region. She served as President of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies (2018-2024) and was co-director of regional research projects on the translations and reception of Canadian literature in the eight countries of the Central European area.

Krisztina Kodó: Writing from Exile: Diasporic Ethics and Hungarian Memory in George Jonas's *Beethoven's Mask*

This paper examines *Beethoven's Mask* (2011) by Hungarian-born Canadian writer George Jonas as a work of diasporic life writing that articulates an ethics of memory shaped by exile. A Holocaust survivor who emigrated to Canada after 1956, Jonas writes from a position of geographical and moral distance that profoundly structures his narrative voice. Rather than offering a linear autobiographical account, *Beethoven's Mask* unfolds as a reflective memoir in which personal memory, ethical inquiry, and cultural observation intersect.

Through close literary analysis, this paper argues that exile functions as a source of narrative authority in Jonas's life writing. Hungary appears not as a recoverable homeland but as an absent yet structuring presence, and as a remembered moral landscape marked by violence, loss, and ambiguity. Jonas's recollections of childhood Hungary are fragmentary and associative, emphasizing ethical formation over national belonging. This distancing allows the narrator to resist nostalgia while maintaining a sustained engagement with the moral questions raised by survival, responsibility, and witnessing.

Canada, by contrast, operates as a tacit but crucial narrative position. Although rarely foregrounded, it provides the conditions for retrospective moral reckoning, enabling Jonas to transform lived experience into reflective narrative. Writing from exile thus becomes an ethical practice rather than a gesture of return, allowing

Jonas to interrogate both personal and collective histories without the imperative of reconciliation.

Situating *Beethoven's Mask* within theories of life writing and diasporic memory, this paper contributes to scholarship on Hungarian Canadian literature by foregrounding Jonas as a key figure in transnational Hungarian life writing. The theme demonstrates how memoir written from exile reflects on Hungary's past while imagining ethical modes of remembrance for the future.

Krisztina Kodó is currently Full Professor and Chair of the Department of English Studies at Kodolányi University, Budapest, Hungary. She has an MA (1992) in English Studies and PhD (2002) in English and American Literatures focusing on Canadian literature, culture, and the visual arts. Her two distinctive research areas focus on Canadian Studies (eco-criticism, multicultural and transcultural identities, the Northern myth, Native literatures and humour, Indigenous storytelling, contemporary Canadian drama and poetry, regional literatures) and Irish Studies (multicultural theatre, cultural identities, contemporary Irish theatre, Irish humour, mythology, and storytelling). She has taught within the sphere of Hungarian higher education since 1995 and has continuously published academic articles, reviews, interviews, podcasts within her field of research. She has been editor-in-chief of *Freeside Europe Online Academic Journal* since 2009.

11:00-12:10 Reading: Oliver Botar, Zsuzsa Man, Rita Soltesz.

Moderator: Anikó Antal

Zsuzsa Man, writing under the pen name Z. S. Man, lives in Toronto. Her short stories and narratives have been published in numerous online journals, and she has also performed readings of her work on various podcasts. A collection of her selected stories, titled *The Magicians* was published in 2024. Her favorite genre is “sketch”, where the boundaries between memoirs and fiction blur. In these works, a blend of women's destinies, the supernatural and free will captivates the reader in a search for strange secrets. She currently works as a teacher.

Rita Soltesz was born in Miskolc. After her high school years she studied theology in Budapest at the Pentecostal Theological College. Her creative process focuses on setting her poems to music, transforming written verse into melodic experiences accompanied by her guitar.

Anikó Zsuzsanna Antal, was born in Nyíregyháza. She graduated from the University of Nyíregyháza with a degree in Hungarian and French language and

literature, obtained a master's degree from the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Miskolc, and pursued doctoral studies in old literature in Debrecen. Her studies, poems and short stories regularly appear in literary journals. So far, four independent volumes have been published under her name.

12:15-13:00 Lunch

13:00-14:30 Session 2: Untold stories and buried memories. In Memoriam of the 70th anniversary of the 1956 revolution

Chair: Mária Palasik

András Szécsényi: The Role of *Oral History* in Researching the Hungarian State Security Services of Socialist Hungary: Examples, Methods, Outcomes

Historical ego documents – including oral history interviews with victims of Communist Hungary (1945–1989) surveilled by state security authorities – have been one of the core points of contemporary history research for the last decades in Hungary. Due to the lack of archival materials relating to the history of everyday life (Alltagsgeschichte) and personal memory of Socialist Hungary, interviews conducted with observed/surveilled people by the political police services are not only crucial, but sometimes became the single historical sources in this field.

The communist state security (political police), (such as the State Protection Authority, ÁVH, and later the State Security Department of the Ministry of Interior) monitored and surveilled not only political affairs but also the activities of civilian citizens, groups or individuals. By analysing the interviews and personal stories of Hungarian citizens controlled and monitored by the communist political police we not only gain information regarding the dictatorship itself, but also about the everyday life history of socialist Hungary and, above all, about the often traumatized individual past.

I conducted or supervised dozens of „in-depth interviews” (narrative interviews) and half-structured interviews with Hungarian citizens persecuted by the political police after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 (under the Kádár-regime) and also with Jews who were persecuted in Hungary during WWII, and forced to labor service or deported to various German concentration camps in 1944/1945.

The first part of my presentation gives an overview on the oral history interview techniques. The second (main) part focuses on the motives, strategies, and self-narratives presented in these interviews in the context of everyday life, political pressure. The interviews now are preserved in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (ÁBTL) that manages the records of the former state security services. I analyze the similarities and differences about the patterns of

storytelling, including the “silence” behind the narration. I highlight a few examples, family histories on how political pressures have influenced everyday life after the fall of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and affected the later life of the people observed and interviewed.

The presentation is dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

András Szécsényi is a research fellow in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (Budapest) and holds a Ph.D. degree from Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest). His researches cover the history of Hungary in the 20th century. He is the author or co-author of four books, co-editor of six books on the Holocaust in Hungary and everyday life history of Communist Hungary.

Márta Novák: Untold Stories - Memories Untold

To continue with the theme of oral history and memories, we can also wonder: what happens when the stories are untold?

What is the - often - tragic faith and consequences of untold stories?

The talk aims to highlight some considerations, how untold stories affect us on the personal, interpersonal, societal and global levels. We will discuss how personal, family, intergenerational, collective traumas can be rooted and connected to untold memories. These include not only conflicts, wars and human-made disasters but also natural catastrophes. Recent memories of the Covid pandemic reminded us of 911, just as the invasion of Ukraine brought back memories of Russian tanks in the streets of Budapest in 56.

We will review symptoms of acute stress response, trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We also discuss grief, role transitions and changes in interpersonal roles which often follow traumas. We also consider “layers” of traumas on individual and collective, societal levels as we review consequences of trauma.

Comprehensive understanding the consequences of untold stories needs to be considered for appropriate processing of trauma and traumatic memories. We plan to discuss what history can teach us about telling stories we would rather wish to bury. Furthermore, what can psychotherapy teach us about exploring and processing traumas? We hope to generate an interdisciplinary discussion and discourse of ways traumatic stories can be explored with sensitive approaches to decrease risks of re-traumatization.

Márta Novák, MD, PhD, med. Habil, is an Associate Professor of Psychiatry, University of Toronto. She is also closely involved with the Institute of Behavioral Sciences, Semmelweis University, Budapest, Hungary, where she has been developing brand new undergraduate and graduate courses in medical education in Hungary. She is the founding member of the European Association of Psychosomatic Medicine. Her main interests are holistic medicine, psychosomatic medicine, medical psychiatry, psychotherapies and sleep medicine. Her work with severely ill patients turned her attention to the role of traumas in health and disease.

Frank G. Sommers: “Lived Experience: A psychiatrist looks back on his childhood in Hungary, 1943-1956”

As a child survivor of the Holocaust, and former refugee, personally torn by World War II, life under brutal communist dictatorship, traumatic escape after the failed 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and very frightening days of the ‘Cold War’, he has indelible emotional scars, buttressing his interest, motivation and resolve to mitigate the devastating physical and psychological damage inflicted by war, terrorism, or disaster from any source, that can turn lives upside down, sometimes in an instant.

These experiences motivated Dr. Sommers to pursue the field of medicine. Life in medicine and psychiatry has provided meaningful opportunities to provide relief of suffering in his daily work, and to find ways to contribute, with others, to keeping our world safe from violence, especially the ultimate catastrophe of nuclear annihilation.

Dr. Frank G. Sommers’s (MD FRCPC DLFAPA DF CPA) career has included family medicine, hospital psychiatry, psycho-sexual therapy, school consultant psychiatry, and military psychiatry in Afghanistan. He is Honorary and Founding President of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War – Canada, winners of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize. He has also served as an advisor to Prime Minister Pierre E. Trudeau and to the Canadian Ambassador for Disarmament. Dr. Sommers initiated, and now serves as founding chair of the Section of Disaster Psychiatry in the Canadian Psychiatric Association, and of Disaster Psychiatry Canada in the Department of Psychiatry, Temerty Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.

Dr. Sommers is Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and Distinguished Fellow of the Canadian Psychiatric Association. He has received the Presidential Award 2019 from the Ontario Medical Association, and the Alumni Volunteerism Award 2017 from University of Toronto Psychiatry. He

is recipient of the APA's Bruno Lima Award in Disaster Psychiatry, and the Indo-Canadian Psychiatric Association Luminary Distinction Award. In 2023 he was honored to receive the President's Commendation from the Canadian Psychiatric Association.

Steve Jobbitt: Hungarian Refugees in Portugal: Navigating the Politics of Salazar's *Estado Novo*

When the Hungarian Revolution erupted in October 1956, António Salazar's right-wing regime celebrated Hungarian revolutionaries as martyrs and pledged full support for those who had been forced to flee their country. Relative to other countries who accepted Hungarian refugees, however, few refugees were actually taken in by the Portuguese, and of those only a very small number remained in the country after 1957. This presentation explores the reasons why only limited numbers of Hungarians found refuge in Salazar's *Estado Novo* (New State), focusing not only on practical limitations like lack of funding and adequate institutional support, but also on political considerations. Though the Salazar regime justified support for Hungarian revolutionaries on ideological grounds and glorified the revolution as a fundamentally Christian struggle against Soviet barbarism, they were in reality deeply suspicious of Hungarian refugees themselves, fearing that they may be communist infiltrators or that their very presence might encourage the Portuguese people to rise up against Salazar's authoritarian state.

14:30-14:50 Introducing Hungarian Professional Associations in Toronto – Márta Novák

14:50-15:00 President's Closing Remarks – Agatha Schwartz

15:00-15:10 Coffee break

15:10-16:00 Book launch (in Hungarian) and socializing with Anikó Antal and Agatha (Ágota) Schwartz. Moderator: Ilona Sándor.