

## On the Track of a Cosmopolitan

Der mediale Fußabdruck. Zum Werk des Wiener Feuilletonisten Ludwig Hevesi (1843–1910). By Endre Hárs. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2020. 428 pp.

Christiana Gules 

Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies, University of Szeged, H-6722 Szeged, Egyetem street 2–6; [christiana.gules@gmail.com](mailto:christiana.gules@gmail.com)

Ludwig Hevesi (1843–1910) was a Hungarian journalist and author of Jewish origin who published in well-known Budapest and Viennese papers from the 1870s onwards. From 1875 onwards, having moved to Vienna, Hevesi corresponded in, among others, Pester Lloyd and Fremden-Blatt, and reported on national and international art exhibitions and theatre performances, as well as his travel experiences from the North Pole to Greece. The essence of Hevesi's art-critical and cultural-historical legacy can be seen even today, most obviously in the form of a golden motto on the façade of the Vienna Secession Building: “*Der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit*” [To every age its art, to every art its freedom]. This modern viewpoint implies a deep knowledge of the impact of the art and culture of history on the given present, and points to a rational, intellectual attitude towards the ever-changing evaluation of progress and quality. It is not for nothing that Hevesi is still regarded today as perhaps the most important art critic that Austria–Hungary produced.

Interestingly, in 2020 fate brought about the publication of two extensive and academically demanding monographs on the life's work of Ludwig Hevesi. At the beginning of the year, Ilona Sármany-Parson's work *Bécs művészeti élete Ferenc József korában, ahogy Hevesi Lajos látta* [Viennese Art Life in the Time of Franz Joseph, as Experienced by Lajos Hevesi] was published about the author's art-historical side, and Endre Hárs's book *Porträt eines Wiener Feuilletonisten. Ludwig Hevesi (1843–1910)* [Portrait of a Viennese Feuilletonist Ludwig Hevesi (1843–1910)] appeared at the end of the year. The latter is a media-historical and press-historical study that the author calls a literary and cultural studies counterpart that grasps the writerly references of Hevesi (p. 13) in contrast to the work of Sármany-Parsons. Considering the commitment of the two new publications, Ludwig Hevesi's position in research can be legitimized, and emphasis

even placed on his multifaceted life's work as a challenge of a special kind as far as the scholarly mapping of his publications is concerned. Hevesi's oeuvre comprises several thousand texts, only some of which have been treated in research.

Endre Hárs pays tribute to Hevesi with a highly complex interdisciplinary approach to his criticism, novellas, humoresques, travel feuilletons, and fantastic writings. Hárs succeeds very well at contextualizing and systematizing the heterogeneous corpus. The Germanist manages to deploy a balanced arsenal of methods from literary, press and media studies, which is basically intended to serve two purposes: On the one hand, to (re)construct a portrait of a cosmopolitan of the *fin de siècle*, and on the other, to accompany the reader on a search for traces of Hevesi's "media footprint". If one looks at the table of contents, it becomes clear that Hárs explicitly places the person of Hevesi at the center of his investigation. The introductory chapter *Der Feuilletonist und seine Sparten* [The Writer and His Sections] unfolds as a hub for the further parts of the work. The first chapter explains how little can be learned about the person of Hevesi from personal biographical documents such as diaries or other souvenirs. In contrast, traces of his habits may be identified: what his colleagues wrote about him, the books he collected, as well as the consistent self-dramatizations in his feuilletons, lead Hárs to decide in favor of a discursive reshaping of the author (p. 27) and thus bring the author into focus. In the second part, *Monografisches* [Monographical], Hárs reconstructs some biographical segments of Hevesi's life, addressing first his role as a cultural mediator (Hungarian and Austrian/German culture); second, his activity as a "city writer" (with reference to the modernization processes of Budapest and Vienna); and third, his literary writings as a youth on Andreas Jelky. The third part of the work deals with Hevesi's "Feuilletonistik", highlighting mainly the travel feuilletons, while in the fourth part, *Belletristik* [Fiction], Hárs turns to the author's novelistic writings.

Hárs emphasizes the competence of multilingualism, which Hevesi consciously applies to the goal of cultural mediation. Hárs proves that Hevesi grew into the role of a Jewish intellectual by demonstrating his translation activity in the context of the Germanisation of several Hungarian pieces of writing, as well as his reviewing activity in *Pester Lloyd*. In addition, Hevesi wrote several socially critical texts on topics such as misery and cultural retardation in Hungary. Hárs recognizes in Hevesi a linguistically multi-coded, polyculturally active writer (p. 78) who has a sense for social dynamics and textual complexity (p. 91). In examining his urban feuilletons, Hárs notes that what began as a particular interest in change and urbanity unfolded over the years into a specialty, with the visualization of Hevesi's flaneur-like reflections, his narration and meta-commentary, according to Hárs, creating a particular overall form of composition (p. 94). How Hevesi experiences the achievements of his time not only in urban space but in a mobile and international way is thoroughly

discussed through his travel feuilletons. The topics of travelling and tourism, the changed living conditions of modern man, and the then feasible visiting of foreign sights were among the modern phenomena of the second half of the nineteenth century and can be found consistently in the feuilletons. Moreover, Hárs succeeds not only in capturing the “medial footprint” of the era, but also in establishing Hevesi’s individual stylistic and narrative traits.

The flow of reading is deepened by the smaller sub-chapters, which were not noted in the table of contents. This decision is probably justified for editorial reasons, but it can cause one or two surprises for the reader in the way that although one senses the deepening of the subject—the topic being dealt with is fleshed out in more detail—should one wish to leaf back to a particular problem area, one cannot find it again exactly. When reading the book, one not only accompanies the researcher Hárs on the trail of Hevesi, but one also sometimes loses sight of the researcher and it seems as if one approaches closer the figure of the author Hevesi. In the orderly labyrinth of chapters, the reader learns his way around work of Hevesi’s life. Hárs achieves this impression by alternately applying two text-analytical methods: distant reading, and close reading. According to Hárs, in the spirit of Franco Moretti one is no longer required to analyze large corpora text by text, but rather to concentrate on such themes and/or tropes as well as concepts that are generally relevant to almost all the treated texts. Hárs applies this approach in the case of Hevesi because of the genre (feuilleton) and its communicative condition (p. 223). The latter implies the particular nature of this journalistic text type: feuilletons were mass-produced and consumed, conforming to the expectations of everyday life. It was not the textual quality but the everyday regularity of the actors of the epoch (authors and readers) that was important—the desire to participate in shared literary communication (p. 224). Hárs was faced with the fortunate situation that a many feuilletonistic individual publications by Hevesi were republished in anthologies as novellas. The researcher succeeds in establishing a generic pattern in novella writing, as well as identifies typical traits, such as for example “*Ein Motiv: Lesende Helden*” [A motif: reading heroes] (p. 235), “*Ein Sujet: Kindersatiren*” [A subject: children’s satires] (p. 240), “*Ein Subgenre: Bildbeschreibungen*” [A subgenre: pictorial descriptions] (p. 250).

The alternating use of distant reading and close reading methods is particularly vivid in the treatment of the 240 selected feuilletons; it is consistently present throughout the monography. However, in the context of the explanation of the feuilletons, these methods demonstrate very well that Hevesi was not only a typical mass producer of feuilletons, but had his own way of writing, and possessed an authorial voice. One of the special merits of the book is that Hárs also applies the close reading method to the selected feuilletons and passages, and sheds light on stylistic and narrative aspects as well as literary elements.

This combination of distant reading and close reading harmonizes well with Hevesi's work: on the one hand, the reader is presented with a panoramic view of his entire oeuvre, gaining insight into the tendencies and most important segments of his work. At the same time, however, certain details from this extensive catalogue are highlighted and critically scrutinized, which in turn provides unique insights.

Ludwig Hevesi's media footprint consists of his lifelong achievement of striving for an entertaining balance between classical aesthetics and modern art, social problems and flourishing mass tourism, knowledge, and humor, with one of the most modern means of communication of his time, the *feuilleton*, thereby establishing a lasting impact in a sea of constant change. The fact that the objective of the present book is a cultural-historical portrayal of a *Feuilletonist* during perhaps one of the most exciting periods in the history of the Austro–Hungarian press gives the work special added value. The author Endre Hárs moves on a versatile podium, along the interface between literary studies in the classical sense and cultural studies in the broadest sense, thus tapping into the spirit of the twenty-first century in terms of daring to take interdisciplinary approaches to such a diverse and mixed body of work. The work under discussion may not only be considered a necessary supplement to Hevesi research but can just as well serve as inspiration concerning how to approach historical *feuilletons* and similar journalistic ephemera today.

