

**Krisztina Kodó: Albert Wass: Tavaszi Szél és más Színművek. (The Winds of Spring and Other Plays)[1]**

Finding undiscovered treasures in Hungarian literature is difficult, but still possible. Finding literary texts that have hitherto been neglected or pushed to one side is seemingly impossible nowadays in our age of mass media and communication, but evidently still possible. That is how I had come across the writings of a Transylvanian-Hungarian writer's huge body of works.

Who is this seemingly undiscovered gem within Hungarian literature? A person who had been forced into the role of the emigrant writer? A person who still seeks his rightful place within the large canon of Hungarian literature? He is none other than Count Albert Wass de Czege (1908-1998). He is a writer who spent his entire life fighting in his literary works for the distinct rights of Hungarians in Transylvania and Romania. His works abound in beautiful and fantastical images and symbolic references of the natural scenery of Transylvania. But beside the immense beauty of nature there is the ever present suffering and tragedy of the Hungarians, who witnessed and the suffered the consequences of the disintegration of the Monarchy, the effects that followed the signing of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 and with it the relocation of the borders of Hungary, and the two World Wars and its aftermath.

Under his pen name, Albert Wass, has written a wide variety of works ranging from poetry, children's tales, short stories, beautiful love stories, dramatical plays, deeply felt political novels, and also a family epic. ([www.czegeiwass.org](http://www.czegeiwass.org)) He was merely nineteen when Wass' first collection of poems was published in 1927. Then his second work, *The Wolf Pit* (Hungarian title: *A Farkasverem*), a novel, became an instant success in 1934 and even won him the prestigious Baumgarten literary award. On the one hand, the novel deals with the heroic and partly tragic struggle of the main protagonist, and on the other the highly satirical characterization of the contemporary Hungarian aristocracy in Transylvania. Together with six million Hungarians the aristocracy must suffer the after-effects of the First World War, when the Romanian authorities confiscate major portions of their wealth and properties. ([www.krater.hu/uj/wa/wabemut.html](http://www.krater.hu/uj/wa/wabemut.html))

The figure of the struggling hero amidst a historical turmoil appears again in Albert Wass' play *The Winds of Spring*. Since 1989 with the fall of the iron-curtain the author and his works have been receiving increasing critical acclaim. Though there is still a lot of political controversy concerning Albert Wass between the left and right wing parties in Hungary, still one must acknowledge that his works are becoming more and more popular within the Hungarian population in Hungary and Transylvania.

From amongst his works the dramatical play, *The Winds of Spring*, is known only to a few. According to Éva Lukácsi and Ildikó Balázs (2003, p.1) a performance of the play at the Budapest Nemzeti Színház (National Theatre) was scheduled for the Christmas of 1944, but the premier was called off the very last minute. This article says that the play was banned, while another source by Ákos Dunai (1989, p. 2) says that it was merely "cancelled", and yet again in the volume of the play there is a note that the play was cancelled due to the bombings. (Wass, 2003, p. 6) But whatever the reasons may have been the play has never been performed on a public stage and it is still highly impossible that any national theatre would be willing to

stage it, and if there were a theatrical company that would volunteer to perform it, the production would not be without sharp critical assessments. (Lukácsi-Balázs, 2003, p. 1)

Albert Wass begins his play with a prologue and ends it with an epilogue, thereby establishing a frame-structure. Both the prologue and the epilogue take place in the present time of the play, while the central section transfers the reader back in time to the years following the First World War and the disintegration of the Monarchy. The locations set for the prologue and the epilogue are, one might say, the typical settings of Wass' fictional world. These are a forest clearing, snow-capped mountains, gurgling streams, blossoming pines, and the enchanting world of the birds and the animals. This is a world of heavenly idyll, a world that inspires awe and wonder.

The main character of the play is Imre Tomori a Transylvanian Hungarian aristocrat, who is very much at home in this world. But in the prologue and the epilogue he only features as Old Imre. He is the Old Man of the mountains, who walks the forests and has made his home there.

The play begins with a beautiful and fantastical description of nature, where the frightening beauty that it inspires mingles with superstition and the supernatural. The tone and mood is at once light and full of folkloristic elements beginning with the lyrical folksong "Tavaszi Szél" (The Winds of Spring)[2], which is full of the charm and wonder of the coming of Spring in the mountains. This little song serves as the basis for the whole play emphasizing the strength and power of nature that Man must adhere to, and follow the law of God and nature.

Do you hear the winds of Spring? It is the Law that causes the trees to howl; leaves and flowers to bud, to overflow waters, and scents to mingle. And also to fell trees, the rotting trees. This is the Law of God, the only existing Law. And if Man detaches himself from this, then he will stray from the rightful path and lose himself in the world ... (Wass, 2003, p. 20)

Spring is also a time of year when nature awakens from its long and peaceful winter slumber. Man, just like nature and with it the animals, seeks a mate with whom to share the beauties and tragedies of life. On the surface the play is light, filled with the fantastical and supernatural elements of nature, but underneath there is a barely controlled tragic suffering that is inflicted upon Man. The intense pain and suffering that emerges from the work shows Albert Wass suffering with his tragic hero.

The characters featuring in the prologue (Old Imre, Young Imre, Anikó and Irma) foreshadow on a lower level the main events of the play. Anikó, a young peasant girl in love with Young Imre, awaits her lover at full moon. And Irma the daughter of the wealthy Lord Lieutenant of the County represents the other world, the world of the aristocracy, for whom everything is allowed. Hunting is a sport and shooting a roe-buck just for the fun of it is also permitted.

The first two characters, who appear are Young Imre, carving a flute out of a piece of wood, and Anikó, who teases her lover. The enchanting and idyllic scene in the forest is suddenly disrupted by the sound of a shot being heard. Anikó leaves, but they agree to meet again at full moon. Old Imre appears and they both wonder who might have fired that shot. Then Irma appears, and we learn that she had been the one to shoot the roe-buck. She is now lost in the woods and offers Young Imre money to take her back to the hunting

lodge. Irma represents the enchantress, who offers to make a gentleman of Young Imre. He is on the verge of accepting Irma's offer, forgetting Anikó, the hills, the mountains and everything that nature had meant to him up to now. Old Imre tries to warn him, and to make him see and understand his impending doom if he accepts, he begins to relate the story of his life. And by the end of the prologue we know from Old Imre that he had once been a gentleman and an aristocrat, but in following his heart he had chosen to leave everything behind.

Through the story-within-the-story structure the reader has the opportunity to meet Imre Tomori, the young and wealthy Transylvanian-Hungarian aristocrat. From the enchanting and vivid images of nature we are transported to rural village life and to the home of Imre Tomori. As in the prologue the first act begins with the figure of, another, Anikó watering flowers and singing the song "The Winds of Spring". Thereby, the song takes us at once back, but also forward in time. This Anikó is in love with Imre, just like the Anikó with the Young Imre of the prologue, but, ironically, true love is cast aside by both Young Imre and Imre Tomori. Both are enchanted and fooled by the seemingly promising lies of Irma (in the prologue) and his fellow aristocrats, who sing of a wonderful and challenging future in Hungarian politics.

The second act takes place four years later in a big town and begins with the celebration following Imre's official appointment as Lord Lieutenant, but the Imre we meet here is an already disillusioned man, who sees all too clearly the decadence of the contemporary Hungarian aristocracy. He sees and understands the heartrending gap that exists between the "what could have been" and the "what is". There is a huge gap between the beauty and wonder of a heavenly nature and the mountains he had willingly left behind, and a disintegrating society and Monarchy.

This gap widens further in the third act, which takes place five years later (based on my calculations this would be sometime around 1918 or 1919) and the location this time is the Lord Lieutenant's office. Imre Tomori, who is still the Lord Lieutenant, has until noon to pack his own belongings and leave the office for good, since the Romanian authorities will be taking over. Indirectly, Imre is also told to leave Romania, instead he organizes his own fatal accident, which will give him the opportunity to go back to his beloved mountains and disappear from the outside world for good.

This is where the story ends, which does not really end, because in the next instant we are again confronted with Old Imre (or the once Imre Tomori) and Young Imre. Old Imre finishes his story and hopes that Young Imre has understood and learned from the other's mistake. But whether he has or not is left open at the very end. Old Imre leaves with the hope that Young Imre has understood the importance of being true to oneself. But whether he does or not is again left open, because we can see the young man's hesitation, by pacing nervously about before he goes to the shepherd's shanty to wake Irma. One can only hope that he will not make the same mistake, and will eventually choose the Anikó, who will be his true mate in life.

Imre Tomori's tragedy is that he chases a dream he cannot fulfill. He must come to realize that he is alone in his desperate fight for truth and justice. Everyone has a hand in the eventual turnout of the events. And Imre must learn through his own mistakes that the only truth that exists is that of a continuous and never ceasing nature. Everything else is a mass of disillusionment and lies.

In the play Albert Wass voices his concerns and love for his country through the main protagonist. Like his character, he too, tries to seek the truth and spread the truth in his fictional writing. And like Imre Tomori he, too, believed that if you do not give up and continue searching, then "God will help those who seek the truth". (Wass, Short Stories p.45) And Albert Wass' time has now come and his truth is being heard.

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[1] Since the play has no known English translation I took the liberty of providing it a possible title.

[2] Based on my sources the song was collected by Sándor Veress and is originally from the region of the Moldavian Hungarian speaking population.

### **Bibliography:**

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