

György Kövér

“A Satisfactory Combination in Every Respect...”

The Spouse Selection Dilemmas of a Young Man of the Christian Middle Class at the Turn of the Century

This case study looks at how a late nineteenth-century diarist from Hungary approached the problem of finding a wife. His system was to make lists of the ladies he met in various social circles, and appraise their potential benefits and drawbacks. In later life, he also left memoirs of his youth, although these make few references to the dilemmas he faced in choosing a wife. The literature on spouse selection focuses on the relative weights of socio-economic motives and “emotional-affective” conditions in courtship. How much did parents and relatives have a say in the choice, and how much did the decision rest on the young people’s individual will, or feelings of love? How much were the norms and the actual relationships differentiated by social class and gender? What was the balance between interests and emotions in the final outcome? Alajos Paikert (1866–1948), taken as a representative of the non-gentry middle class, did attempt to meet family expectations, but did not leave the choice to his parents. He wanted to find his future partner himself. The diary is a document of internal struggle, but is less concerned with feelings than with desires, possibilities and calculations. By bringing in other sources, however, the historian can try to work out what lay behind the words.

Keywords: gender relations, spouse selection, courtship, marriage

Max Weber’s primary operationalized index of “ständische Lage” (which in American sociology became simply “status”) was connubium, or who marries whom.¹ Weber here was not thinking of status in its historical-legal sense, but of “behavioral-sociological” status. If we relate this concept to nineteenth-century Hungarian history, then in the pre-1848 (*Vormärz*) period, this might mean marriage of noble and bourgeois young people within their own groups, and in the second half of the nineteenth century, when “the society of Estates” was breaking down, it manifested itself much more as an expression of the endogamy of occupational or socio-cultural groups.

Historiography oriented to modernization, or more broadly, to evolution, has also come up with a model of the long-term development of spouse-

1 Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1978), 305–6.

selection strategies. This sees a dominance in traditional societies of socio-economic interests rather than “emotional-affective” relations.² In the transition to modern society—which Lawrence Stone sees as having taken place in England and New England in the second half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century—the spread of individualism resulted in a radical shift of emphasis. Young people increasingly took the decisions themselves, of course leaving their parents the power of veto over socially or economically unacceptable candidates.³ The general picture naturally has some social differentiation, in that wealth strongly influenced the possibility and justification for intervention by parents and relatives, and there must have been numerous types and variants within each group.⁴

A decade later, although maintaining his views on the direction and phasing of the process, Stone put his argument much more subtly:

At all levels of society, there was a complex admixture of emotion and interest, affection and calculation, and a complex interaction between the wishes of the individuals and those of their ‘friends.’ The higher the social level, the more parents and friends dominated the situation and controlled the outcome; the lower in the social and economic scale the families were, the more free were the individuals to make their own choices, although that choice was itself not infrequently based as much on economic calculations as emotional commitment. Only in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries did patriarchal ideas of parental power, even at the highest levels of society, begin to give way to a new ideal of affective individualism, so that the companionate marriage emerged first to compete with, and finally to take full priority over, calculations of interest and economic advantage.⁵

Pressure for a more sophisticated evaluation of the process came from leading historical anthropologist authors for whom the above argument was never

2 Reinhard Sieder, “Ehe, Fortpflanzung und Sexualität,” in *Vom Patriarchat zur Partnerschaft. Zum Strukturwandel der Familie*, ed. Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder (Munich: Beck C. H., 1984), 143.

3 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage In England 1500–1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 270–73.

4 Stone, *The Family*, 390–95.

5 Lawrence Stone, “Love,” in Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited* (London–New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 334–35. It is interesting that at the end of the quotation, the author refers to chapter IV of his own 1977 book, making no further comment.

fully convincing.⁶ The somewhat limited set of sources—diaries from various social groups—did not support the chronological linearity of the thesis either in the early stage or the stage of transition.⁷ And the customs of transferring wealth and the regulated institutions of courtship for a long time permitted the parents to control their offspring.⁸

In addition, if we look beyond the early modern and Western European transition and take a comparative perspective on nineteenth century changes in continental Europe, we find much more differentiated views in recent literature. For example, Josef Ehmer, writing about nineteenth-century “bourgeois” marriages, asserted:

Of course, in many individual cases, there were conflicts between family strategies, parental plans, and the feelings of young people. The novels of the nineteenth century are full of such plots. Historical research, however, has shown that marriage alliances and individual love did not necessarily have to come into conflict. Since these young people moved within a particular social milieu and communication network, their individual contacts were concentrated within a narrow circle of marriage candidates who fitted into their own family strategies.⁹

David Sabean, looking at European systems of relations over a much longer timespan (and of course always drawing on the enormous Neckerhausen microhistory base) goes further, in declaring about the formation of various networks:

The education of both men and women to open and fluid systems where couples had to cooperate in tasks of social representation required protracted drill in taste, morality, sentiment, and style. Love and sentiment and emotional response or their expected development were

6 Alan Macfarlane’s highly critical review of Stone’s book: *History and Theory* 18, no. 1 (Feb. 1979): 103–26. See also Alan Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism. The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978); Jack Goody, *The European Family. An Historico-Anthropological Essay* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

7 Leonore Davidoff and Cathrine Hall, *Family Fortunes. Man and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Good examples are the negotiations concerning finance and religious creed preceding the marriage of Rebecca Solly and Samuel Shaen. *Ibid.*, 326.

8 Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500–1914* (London–Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), 51.

9 Josef Ehmer, “Marriage,” in *The History of the European Family*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, vol. 2 of *Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century 1789–1913* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2002), 315.

built into the very nature of familial circuitry. They were the software necessary to direct the course of all the hard-wired connectors. There were, of course, different ways of falling in love. Some people first chose a suitable family by visiting, dining, walking, and playing cards together in the evening, and others did it by correspondence. Some looked for a friendly face among relatives, while others latched onto families where their careers were directed. Some followed the wishes and advice of their parents and siblings, and some bravely struck off for themselves. But love always determined the flow of capital, access to office, the course of a career.¹⁰

Here, the financial and mental motifs are not static preconditions, but interactive products of everyday social organization and the subtle and sensitive network of relationships.

When we examine marriage strategy in general, we attempt to answer the question of “who marries whom” using registers of births, marriages and deaths, and genealogies. So we determine from a kind of ex post viewpoint what the ex ante motives of spouse selection might have been. From the “what it became” we try to find out “what it evolved out of”. Without going into the argument of how this is methodologically possible, we address the question using a source which allows us to take a definitely ex ante approach. This case study looks at how a late nineteenth-century diarist from Hungary approached the problem of finding a wife. His system was to make lists of the ladies he met in various social circles, and appraise their potential benefits and drawbacks. Of course it is difficult to determine the extent to which “marriage market” is based on rational choices, because the emotional motive of decisions, however unpredictable it might seem, is somewhat self-evident. In our case, however, as we shall see, the presence and extent of rational assessment is quite striking. In addition, the man in question left later memoirs, so that we do not lose the ex post viewpoint either. If we have to rely on memoirs alone, we deprive ourselves of the sight of the rival candidates and are forced to look at the whole process of spouse selection purely through the actual marriage.

Youthful diaries permit a genetic study of marriage strategies even for the pre-1848 period. A well-known diary in the Hungarian literature is that of Etelka Slachta. While she was tending her sick mother in Balatonfüred in the summer

10 David Warren Sabean, “Kinship and Class Dynamics in Nineteenth-Century Europe” in *Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300–1900)*, ed. Sabean et al. (New York–Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 309–10.

of 1841, she was also choosing among suitors. At the same time, she wrote the following to her cousin and friend:

There are two serious candidates among these 14 suitors, but that must remain between us. If I do not take their hand, I do not want to enquire about what they have to offer. One is as handsome as Adonis, with fine manners, a majestic upbringing, very noble, elegant exterior. His father was only a grain factor, but he is very rich. He came here with four horses, but fancy, I didn't say yes! I am this young man's first true love. He is from Komárom. I thought for a moment, but I know little about this handsome, intelligent youth. The other is from Pest, not so handsome as pleasant, intelligent, jolly, witty and so dreadfully in love, declaring that only now he sees what true love is. He is so rich he keeps an equipage in the city. I think he should also be considered. I am not in love with either of them; I would go to them only out of reason. And where the mind and not heart decides, we always choose more slowly.¹¹

In her diary, she goes well beyond wealth and noble origin to consider many other aspects and tricks of hunting for a husband. Here it is worth having a look at the subtle differentiation of social life in Balatonfüred in the circumstances of society of estates, where a distinction was made between “société” and aristocratic “haute volée”. Etelka, although her mother was a baroness, was not at home in the latter.¹² Etelka Slachta's freedom of choice was afforded to a great extent to her remaining alone after the death of her mother, allowing her to give free rein to her feelings towards the man of the Reformed faith who kept an “equipage”.

Even the diaries do not simply record established customs. That would hardly be worth writing down on a daily basis. As Alan Macfarlane wrote about the diary he published, kept by a seventeenth-century pastor, “the very fact that he kept a diary suggests that he was slightly exceptional.”¹³ Contemporary diaries

11 To Baroness Mária Baumgarten, 3 August 1841. Katona Csaba, “Azért én önnek sem igent, sem nemet nem mondtam.” *Válogatás Slachta Etelka és Szekrényessy József leveleiből*, vol. 5 (Győr: Mediawave, 2008), 41–43. The diary reveals that the first candidate was called Mihály Csetke and the second József Szekrényessy. The latter became her husband. In the eyes of the Catholic baroness mother, the latter's greatest defect was that he was of the Reformed faith. Descriptions in the diary: Csaba Katona (ed.), “...kacérkodni fogok vele.” *Slachta Etelka soproni úrleány naplója 1840. december – 1841. augusztus*, vol. 3 (Győr: Mediawave, 2006), 133–36.

12 Katona, ed., “...kacérkodni fogok vele.” 139, 159–60, 165, 179.

13 Alan Macfarlane, ed., *The Family Life of Ralf Josselin a Seventeenth-Century Clergyman. An Essay in Historical Anthropology* (New York: The Norton Library, 1977), 11; Macfarlane, *The Origins*, 65.

certainly do not contain all the important information. There are things that are kept quiet deliberately, and others for which the author has no words. There are facts that cannot be uttered.

This is when we can find some assistance in the memoirs of advanced age, which show more insight by virtue of life experience and wisdom, not to mention the distance from the emotional storms of the time. Júlia M. Hrabovszky, aunt of Sándor Márai, put to paper at the age of eighty her memories of struggles to find a spouse in the late 1870s. She too had lost her father at an early age, and the family of landed gentry became impoverished. When still a girl, she earned her bread as a governess while seeking possible spouses in various spa towns (Herkulesfürdő, Buziás). She also had several suitors, and according to the narrative of her memoirs, she too made her own choice. One suitor inquired after her financial position, causing her deep offence. Another, for similar reasons, did not want to marry her but invited her as a girlfriend on a trip around the world, thus putting an end to that connection. One she rejected because he was old, and another was unacceptable on account of his employment as a farm bailiff; she did not want to live with him in a village. The latter, according to gossip, was of Jewish origin, although “nobody could prove it” (why take the trouble if a rumour did the job!). Then she met the nephew of the Prince of Serbia, but ruled him out because he had neither wealth nor employment. Finally, a noble judge of Romanian origin and a Romanian architect from Bucharest came on to the scene almost simultaneously, and clearly coincidentally. Somewhat less accidental was Júlia Hrabovszky’s choice of the latter. In Georges Muntureanu she found everything in one. As she looked back, the former bride wrote in the narrative present: “now that the matter is settled. I am marrying a handsome, elegant witty, well-placed man whom I like.” Later she added, “although I found perfect satisfaction in marriage, and the happiness I wanted, I would still say that unless one is moved by great love or great advantage, a girl should marry in her own country and not wish for a foreign place.”¹⁴ But it is not only abroad that sentiment and interest (“advantage”), can harmoniously complement each other.

14 Júlia M. Hrabovszky, *Ami elmúlt. Visszaemlékezések életemből*, ed. Ágota Steinert (Budapest: Helikon, 2001), 33–95. Quotations: 88; 93–94.

Alajos Paikert's Diary Entries and Gender Lists

Alajos Paikert (1866–1948) was much more of a public figure than Etelka Slachta or Júlia Hrabovszky, indeed the biographical dictionaries tell us he was one of the founders of *Magyar Gazdaságtörténelmi Szemle* (Hungarian Economic History Review) and a founder of the agricultural museums in Budapest and Cairo and of the Turán Society. It is his diaries, however, rather than any public capacity, which make him interesting here. These, written in several volumes of various sizes, and now held in the Manuscript Department of the National Széchényi Library, cover the years between 1887 and 1943.¹⁵ He also wrote several versions of his autobiography, now held in the Personal Memory Collection of the Budapest Museum of Agriculture, and from which a member of the Museum staff has published an extensive selection.¹⁶ Although he clearly did not keep his diary continuously, we have documentation of a volume that permits analysis to some depth. As might be expected from a male diary, the main subject is the author's career and his activities in public life. Nonetheless, his private life does feature quite strongly in the diaries of his youth, particularly on the subject of seeking and courting potential spouses. The young man tried to fulfil family expectations, but did not leave the choice to his parents. He wanted to find his future wife himself. His diary is the documentation of this internal struggle. First of all, in order to understand the parental norms, we must first introduce the family.

His parents traced themselves, according to the author of the diary, to Sudeten German ancestors. His father and his maternal grandfather were both high-ranking military doctors: the father, also Alajos, was staff doctor in the army and at the peak of his career was chief medical officer of the

15 OSZK Kt. Quart. Hung. 3264. Paikert Alajos naplói (1887–1943), vols. 1–11. The extensive bequest contains other volumes: Quart. Hung. 3265. Paikert Alajos vegyes feljegyzései és rajzai (1889–1894), vols. 1–4; Quart. Hung. 3509. Paikert Alajos: Naplórajzok (1889); Quart. Hung. 3605. Paikert Alajos naplói és egyéb feljegyzései. (1886–1895), vols. 1–4; Oct. Hung. 1299. Paikert Alajos naplója és egyéb feljegyzései (1909), vols. 1–2; Oct. Hung. 1445. Paikert Alajos évről évre szóló kis naplója (1911–1916), vols. 1–2; Fol. Hung. 2549. Paikert Alajos: Napló (1890. március–október). The Personal Memory Collection of the Museum of Agriculture (MgM) also holds some diary-like notes: 2012.3.1. Paikert Alajos, Régi feljegyzés 2 May – 18 December 1898, and notes marked “24. napló” 3 May 1944 – 8 May 1945; 2012.9.1. Paikert Alajos, Kis napló, 1 January – 30 December 1947, 2012.8.1. Paikert Alajos, Kis napló 1946.

16 Alajos Paikert, “Életem és korom (Egy emlékirat a múzeum Adattárának őrizetében),” pub. Rózsa Takáts, in *A Magyar Mezőgazdasági Múzeum Közleményei, 1998–2000* (Budapest: 2001), 159–218. The original manuscript and its typed versions: MgM 1338. Paikert, Életem; 1339–45.

Budapest corps. His mother’s father, Dr Vince Walter of Waltenau was also a staff doctor, the chief medical officer of the Kassa corps. Alajos senior (Jeleny, 1831–Budapest, 1914) was raised to the nobility in 1909 with the noble predicate “of Seprős”, which extended to his two surviving sons. Henrik (1865–1949) and Alajos were born in Nagyszombat (now Trnava, Slovakia) and went to school in Pozsony. Henrik chose a military career, enrolling in the military academy of Wiener Neustadt and advancing to the rank of lieutenant of hussars. After his marriage, however, he exchanged life as a hussar officer for that of a farming landowner.¹⁷ Alajos first graduated from the agricultural college in Magyaróvár and then matriculated in the Faculty of Law in the University of Pest. For both sons, the somewhat autocratic father played a decisive part in their choice of career. In his memoirs, the son largely blamed his father’s strictness for the loss of his hitherto swelling fortune in 1873. To at least partly recover it was thenceforth his father’s overriding ambition. He did not succeed.¹⁸ Young Alajos for a long time swithered between an agricultural or a legal career, and even toyed with the idea of painting (robustly opposed by his father) or becoming an inventor. For a short time, he served as a junior lecturer in the anthropological department in the humanities faculty. Finally, in 1891, he became assistant secretary of the organization representing large estates and the agricultural profession in Hungary, the National Hungarian Agricultural Association (OMGE), later rising to secretary. In that capacity, he made extended visits to England and North America, was involved in organizing the international agrarian movement, edited the agricultural historical journal *Magyar Gazdaságtörténelmi Szemle*, and founded the Museum of Agriculture. He resigned his office in OMGE in 1896 (again earning his father’s disapproval), and as he rebuilt his career, his thoughts increasingly turned to marriage.

On 21 April 1897, he noted in his diary:

I *should: get married*, have myself appointed director, I should write articles for newspapers and journals, I should go to meetings, take part in moderate movements, correspond with various personages, make

17 Paikert, “Életem és korom,” 167. In the substantial apparatus to the diaries, Rózsa Takáts notes: “He married a daughter of the publicly respected and very wealthy Kintzig family... At his wife’s behest, he entered the reserves and farmed as a tenant at Seprős (Arad county). It became a model farm, he had a fine stud farm, ten thousand apple trees... he lost the estate, husband and wife live apart...” Ibid., 208.

18 Paikert, “Életem és korom,” 164. Shortly before his death, his father declared in his will that he had no substantial fortune (capital, property, jewellery, etc.). Only household furniture, clothes, etc. BFL VII,6 e, 1914.-V(I)-105. Alajos Paikert, Testament, Buda, Mai 1913.

some appearances in society, I should travel, I should take photographs, paint, sculpt, invent, write poetry, do scientific research, etc. etc. This is all feasible!¹⁹ (Underlining in the original)

Ultimately, he was not appointed director of the agricultural museum he had founded. Nonetheless, he moved into his office there and worked as a curator (*custos*) while he planned his future.

His distinctively thorough approach to the subject of marriage was not a new line of thought for him. He also received clear prompts in this direction from home. As he wrote in the unfinished memoirs he intended for his family, after his elder brother married, his mother urged the issue: “...often holding agreeable tea parties to which she invited mothers of girls whom she considered worthy of my considering as a bride; of course the mothers were to bring their daughters.”²⁰ Most often, however, the young man did not even attend these. He wanted to take his affairs into his own hands. Living in the same house as his parents, this was not easy to do.

Over several days in 1894, he drew up a list of his acquaintances among members of parliament, the aristocracy, academia, finance, literature, the arts and public administration. His review of this network of contacts ended with a list of ladies and girls.²¹ Of course, not all of the seventeen spinsters in the list could have been regarded as candidate brides, but they all had a reason for being there. We cannot identify every name on the list (one even lacks a Christian name), but some are marked with the letter “t”. Since this also appears in the other lists, we have inferred from the names that it denotes a level of social connection. On the page before the young-lady acquaintances, for example, it appears in the list of lady acquaintances against the names Baroness Ida Kollmann, Mrs Ferenc Kintzig and Mrs Béla Kintzig.²²

19 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5, Paikert, *Napló* 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 32v; 21 April 1897.

20 MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert Alajos *önéletrajza* 1940. *Életem és működésem*, 25.

21 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3265/3, Paikert, 45–53, 12–14 November 1894.

22 Baroness Kollmann, née Ida Zinn (1839–1913), for example, may have been one of his acquaintances from Nagyszombat. Certainly, her husband, Colonel Antal Kollmann, died in Nagyszombat in 1875. János József Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség XX. századi genealógiája*, vol. 4 (Budapest: Heraldika, 1998), 383. Mrs. Ferenc Kintzig née Ilona Kintzig and Béla Kintzig were siblings of Henrik Paikert's wife Lujza Kintzig. These markings may even indicate guests of the tea parties arranged by his mother. Except where I indicate another source, I have used the death notices collection of the National Széchényi Library to identify the families. Accessed December 26, 2013. http://www.rakovszky.net/E1_LSG_ObitsIndex/GYJ-NevIndex.shtml

	gf. [countess] Mária Kornis
	Erzsébet Concha
	Hedvig Concha
	Melanie Koller
	Margit Tyroch
	Margit Baross
	Laura Whilen [?]
	Elsie Whilen [?]
	Iza Dömötör
	Irén Dömötör
t	Ida Kollmann
	Herzog
	Natalia Kormann
	Margit Gombár
t	Margit Kintzig
t	Erzsébet Hasz
t	Sarolta Hasz

The girls marked “t” are mostly placed towards the end of the list, and the last three were probably relatives: his brother Henrik had married Lujza Kintzig in 1891, and Sarolta and Erzsébet Hasz’s brother Antal was also married to a Kintzig girl.

Alajos Paikert’s diary includes several lists of marriageable girls. When planning the period ahead of him a year later, in October 1895, he envisaged getting engaged before the end of the year and marrying during the next. The engagement and marriage had career overtones. The engagement was connected with a post of “ministerial secretary” which carried a salary of 2–3000 forints and required further actions to attain (“an article, a plan, a drawing, a poem, a speech, a deed”), while marriage by 1896, counting on the higher income, was linked with the keywords “travel, son, district, abroad”. The word district (*kerület*) undoubtedly alluded to an election constituency, and thus to political ambitions. After the action plan came a reduced list of names marked only with initials (although at least half of the names can be deduced from the first list).

Winifred W.

Marie D.

Mária K. [Countess Mária Kornis]

Erzsébet C. [Erzsébet Concha]

Hedvig C. [Hedvig Concha]

Anita G.

Melanie H.

Natalia K. [Natalia Kormann]²³

The other names, as our present knowledge stands, remain undecipherable. Even such an intimate journal, it seems, does not lift the veil on every secret. We are restricted to discussing the girls who feature on subsequent pages of the diary.

Countess Mária Kornis (1878–1955), who we may recognize from the top of the first list, was the daughter of Count Károly Kornis (1841–1893). Her brother, also Károly Kornis (1869–1918) appears on Alajos Paikert's diary as one of his friends.²⁴ Károly, the child count, who was some years younger than Alajos, went to school in Pozsony. Indeed, the strict Paikert father allowed him—at the request of the Batthyány counts—to live in their house as part of the family. Through this friendship, Károly Kornis the elder invited Alajos Paikert several times during his school years to his estate in Szerep, Bihar county, where the hunts and the wetlands of Sárret aroused pleasant recollections when he wrote his memoirs several decades later.²⁵ We know only from the diary, however, that when he met his friend again in 1896, somewhat different experiences came to the mind of the still-young man:

In Váci utca, I met with Count Károly Kornis, my best friend. I was most pleased to meet him again, and he was too. We walked and talked for half an hour, while he told me of his plans (to sell land for 300 florins per lesser hold [1 lesser hold=0.36 hectares]) and I told him mine (museum and attaché). If Károly divests himself of his estate, he will get about 2 million for it. He will be there in winter, and he will

23 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/4, Paikert, Vegyes, 1894–1895. Kis Napló, 41, 7 October 1895. This was not the only list of females in autumn 1895. Shortly afterwards, in early November, in the same book, we find lists of “handsome ladies” and “girls”. Here there are again only different names: “Girls: Kornis, Pallavicini, Szechenyi, Concha, Hegedüs, Kormann, Haller, Tyroch, Lukács, Koller, Czigler, Fábíán, Károlyi” OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/4. Paikert, Vegyes. 1894–1895. Kis Napló, 51, 1 November 1895. Besides the standard women's names, there seems to be a strong presence of girls from aristocratic families.

24 Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség*, vol. 2, 105–6.

25 Paikert, “Életem és korom,” 166.

visit me. Marie is now 18 years old. If she loves me as she did then, I will immediately ask her hand [...]²⁶

The feelings of a young girl are of course no basis for marriage, as the young Paikert clearly well knew, but Mária's fate was still on his mind in spring 1897: “I take umbrance at Károly Kornis visiting me so rarely. He has no office, he's got the time. Will Mária be happy?”²⁷

It was during his years at school in Pozsony that Alajos first developed strong inclinations towards the aristocracy (and the gentry), and some illusions in that regard.²⁸ The feeling of “amalgamation” may have been aroused by musical evenings in certain houses, although the partitions between the “first” and “second” societies clearly remained in place and were apparent on some occasions.²⁹ This occasionality may be compared to that moment after the aeroplane takes off, when the stewardess discreetly draws the curtain between the business and economy classes so as not to show off the difference in service between the classes (but to indicate that this dividing line exists). His time in the

26 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5, Paikert, Napló 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 11, 16 December 1896.

27 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5, Paikert, Napló 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 24, 13 April 1897. The remark was clearly prompted by Mária's marriage to Baron Géza Gudenus on 26 May 1897. Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség*, vol. 2, 106.

28 He recorded in his memoirs: “Pozsony was a very aristocratic city at that time, exuding the nimbus of the old coronation city and the direct proximity of the imperial court in Vienna. In my youth I had invitations from the following aristocratic families in Pozsony and environs: the Frigyes archducal (his wife was Princess Izabella Croy-Dülmen), the Rohan, Pálffy and Odescalchi princely, the Esterházy, Batthyány, Pálffy, Zichy, Hunyady, Erdődy, Apponyi, Waldstein, Henckel-Donnersmarck, etc. county, the Vay, Prónay, Podmaniczky, Feilitzsch, Lederer, Hengersen, etc. baronial and many fine Hungarian gentry families. For most of them, my father was their doctor. The magnate families were by their nature of a courtly bent, owing to their family bonds, somewhat international outlook, marriages and extensive travels.” Paikert, “Életem és korom,” 164.

29 “In Pozsony, we lived first in Szél utca (Windgasse) near the county hall and the Crusaders' Church, and later on the first floor of the enormous Wittmann House in Ventur utca. In the second-floor flat of the insignificant building in the former side-street, my parents, who were both great music lovers (my father played the violin well and my mother sang in a fine alto voice), held intimate musical evenings attended by the finest intelligentsia in Pozsony. Only classical music, Haydn, Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Boccherini, was played. Most frequent were quartets, on which István Dávid played first violin, Gessler viola, Frigyes Dohnányi cello, and Baroness Lederer Mathild played the piano part. There were several excellent musical evening families in Pozsony at that time, such as the Baron Lederer family, Princess Odescalchi née Countess Valerie Erdődy, and several others.” Paikert, “Életem és korom,” 165–66.

OMGE only stoked the awe Paikert felt towards the aristocracy.³⁰ We know from the original manuscript of his memoirs that, after he moved to Budapest, he often went on excursions to the Buda hills. The lady members of the party may have been the inspiration behind his lists of women.³¹ It was clearly after one of these occasions that Paikert put to himself a kind of “why not?” question: “Why should I not marry Count Béla Széchenyi’s daughter?”³² An interesting point about the retrospective lists of excursion-goers and the contemporary lists in the diary is that Cécile Tormay, who later became a writer, appears only among the excursion company. Considering the system of social connections, this seems plausible, because her father, Béla Tormay, who had graduated in veterinary science and agriculture and gained employment on the Derekegyház estate, rose step by step to membership of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (in 1899).³³ It may be a subtle sign that Edina Pallavicini (1877–1964), whose divorce case put the matter of Cecil Tormay’s lesbianism on spectacular public display in the 1920s, may be found in both the contemporary and retrospective lists.³⁴ The name at the head of the list of the excursion company was Helén Bartha, daughter of military staff doctor János Bartha, who belonged to the same professional circle as the Paikert family and was made a noble in 1909. She,

30 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5. Paikert, *Napló* 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 43, 23 April 1897. “Aristokratia. This is my world. Oh, democracy is such a fine word. Today we see such climbers in every field, base, villainous climbers ... out in the open or into the arms of the aristocracy! Károlyis, Dessewffys, Széchenyis, Andrássys, Pálffy, Esterházy etc. etc. That is my world.”

31 MgM 1338, Paikert, *Életem*. The participants in the excursions, according to a later list, were: “Helén Bartha, Adrienne Fischel, the Nagy sisters, Miczi Kormann, Alice Széchenyi, Czilli Szalay, Edith Koller, Edina Pallavicini, Erzs Concha, Cecil Tormay, Mária Herzog [Margit], Elza Pethes, Ilona Dömötör, Margit and Ella Lukács [P]”. 71. The Christian names faded in his memory. The Herzogs had a daughter called Margit (*1871) and not Mária, and she got married in 1893. Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség*, vol. 1, 542. And Antal Lukács had—to our knowledge—seven daughters, none of which were called Ella.

32 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3605/4. Paikert, *Vegyes*, 1894, 95, 6v, before December 1894. Alice Széchenyi (1871–1945), eldest daughter of Béla Széchenyi, married Count Tibor Teleki in summer 1895. Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség*, vol. 4, 52.

33 The literature on Cecile Tormay classes her without qualification as a child of the gentry, even though her father only gained a title with the noble predicate “of Nádudvar” in 1896. Before then, following her mother (Hermin Barkassy) she could have been at most considered as ‘agilis’ (matrilineal nobility). Béla Pettkó and Ede Reiszig, eds., *Magyar Nemzetiségi Zsebkönyv*, part 2, *Nemes családok*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Franklin, 1905), 43.

34 Zoltán Ónagy, *Tormay Cécile* (2009), accessed December 26, 2013. <http://www.irodalmijelen.hu/05242013-0953/tormay-cecile>. After Count Rafael Zichy’s divorce in 1925, he claimed in public that his former wife Countess Edina Pallavicini had a lesbian affair with the celebrated conservative writer of the age, Cecile Tormay. The two women took the matter to court; the ex-husband lost, and was even imprisoned.

however, does not appear in any of the lists of potential brides. In addition, at the turn of the century, the Barthas lived nearby in Döbrenței utca 4, and were very likely to have attended the tea parties arranged by Paikert’s mother.³⁵ The name Margit Tyroch does not appear in the retrospective list of excursioners, but recurs in several other lists. She also belonged to the father’s old professional-collegial circle and the Pozsony company: “Last night I was at the Tyrochs, perhaps the first time for a year. Margit indeed takes my fancy, a bright, kind, natural girl, just right for me. I felt very good in her company.”³⁶

The diary for autumn 1895 makes several mentions of the Concha girls, daughters of Professor Győző Concha. Prof. Concha, from Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca, Romania), was one of the pioneers of political science and history of ideas in Hungary. He had been widowed upon the birth of his fourth daughter in 1883, in the eighth year of marriage. He had multiple connections to the Paikerts’ company, and his mixture of occupational and kin relationships extended to the Baross, Forster and Dömötör families.³⁷ We know only from the memoirs that Alajos wrote for the family that the Dömötör girls’ brother László, another leading light among the young members of OMGE, was also a great admirer of Erzsébet Concha, although this did not damage the friendship between the two men.³⁸ The four marriageable girls must have been a factor in the young Paikert’s interest in the family, even if Győző Concha headed the

35 BFL Budapesti cím és lakjegyzék, 1900. Accessed December 26, 2013, <http://bfl.archivportal.hu/cgi-bin/lakas/lakas.pl>. Helén Bartha (d. 1947) married a military officer, Frigyes Quandt and was soon widowed (in 1907).

36 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5. Paikert, Napló 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 2v, 29 September 1896. Dr József Tyroch [sic!] was a staff medical officer. He died in Pozsony in 1899 at the age of 62. Only one of his daughters survived to adulthood.

37 First of all, Concha himself came from an agricultural family. His father was bailiff of the Marcaltó estate, and died in 1865. Additionally, his wife Emilia Forster, who died in childbirth, was the daughter of János Forster (1810–1891), primatical steward and brother of Gyula and Kálmán Forster, pioneers of the agrarian movement. Through the Forsters, the Concha family were in-laws to the Baross family of Bellus and also related to the Dömötör girls, who also featured on the list, because Izabella Dömötör’s elder sister Emmy was married to Gyula and Kálmán Forster’s brother Géza. On the Forster family, see József Szinnyei, *Magyar írók élete és munkái*, vol. 3 (Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1894), 656–58, András Vári: *Urak és gazdászok. Arisztokrácia, agrárértelmiség és agrárius mozgalom Magyarországon 1821–1898* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2009), 419. Pál Baross’ wife was called Anna Forster. Their son was Károly Baross, a key figure in the management of the OMGE and elder brother of Margit, born in 1870, who featured on the first list. See Béla Pettkó and Ede Reiszsig, eds., *Magyar Nemzetiségi Zsebkönyv*, part 2, vol. 1, 44; Béla Kempelen, *Magyar nemes családok*, vol. 1 (Budapest: Grill Károly Könyvkiadó, 1911), 431–36. Emmy, daughter of the retired bailiff of Tordas, who died in 1893, buried her husband, Géza Forster, retired director of the OMGE, 1907. He was also mourned by his brothers Gyula and Kálmán, and his brothers-in-law Pál Baross and Győző Concha.

38 MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert, Életem és működésem, 16.

list of academics for 1894. “I would very much like Erzsike as my wife, but I do not have enough money to satisfy her ambitions. Marriage: must think about it very hard...”³⁹ Perhaps his attitude to the girl would have been more positive had he still been aiming for an academic career, although there may have been something else in the background: upon meeting her father a year later, he noted: “Concha came with kindness. – Concha was as charming as ever, it seems he would like me to forget the past and marry Erzsébet.”⁴⁰ The Concha girls never completely disappeared from the list of choices. Hardly six months later, new motives appeared: “On the way to Köztelek I met the Conchas. Oh Erzsi why are you not my wife. On the way back, I saw Erzsi again on her father’s arm. It is only because of my parents I do not ask her. And yet what a splendid wife she would make...”⁴¹ Alajos, whose abilities also extended to art, actually painted Erzsébet in 1898. The picture shows not a social type but one of the female ideals: she is painted with a bonnet, a combination of innocent little girl and nun.⁴²

A high-ranking name on the early lists was Melanie Koller. Although it has not been possible to identify a Koller named Melanie, the diary frequently mentions the pretty Edith Koller, daughter of Koller Lajos of Grantzow, trade counsellor, who died in 1891 at the age of 51. They also lived not far from the Paikerts in Buda, on Várkert rakpart.⁴³ Beauty and brightness of eyes clearly complicated the choices:

When I was on the underground in the afternoon, Mrs László Arany came on to the train with the pretty Edith Koller at the Opera. She is a decidedly beautiful girl, with good taste. I was somewhat clumsy and did not greet the handsome lady, but Edith threw me a secretive glance with her black eyes – and set me alight. It is difficult to choose.⁴⁴

39 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/4. Paikert, Vegyes. 1894–1895. Kis Napló, 47, 27 October 1895.

40 Ibid., 12v, 20 December 1896.

41 Ibid., 52v, 25 April 1897.

42 MgM 2012.19.1. Paikert, Vázlatkönyv. 35. Erzsébet Concha, 4 February 1898. Two of the four Concha girls—Erzsébet and Emília—did not get married. Paikert also notes in his memoirs that Erzsébet retreated to a convent for a while, and most significantly, the rival friend László Dömötör never married either. MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert, Életem és működésem, 16.

43 The Paikerts lived in Buda, at Jégverem u. 2. Paikert, “Életem és korom,” 169. (Note by Rózsa Takáts, *ibid.*, 194).

44 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5. Paikert, Napló 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 27, 14 April 1897. Edith Koller of Grantzow (1878–1958) married the later minister of finance, Baron Frigyes Kozányi of Tolcsva, in 1901. Gudenus, *A magyarországi főnemesség*, vol. 2, 97.

So powerful was the experience that next day he put her on the list of his top favourites: “I must get married. Margit Lukács, Erzsébet Concha, Edith Koller, all three *grazzia* are beautiful and good and intelligent.”⁴⁵ This shows how uncertain was the rationally-selected place in the hierarchy when exposed to the caprices of the market.

For all his thoroughness, the lists he produced were far from perfect. The detailed diary entries reveal that in autumn 1896, young Alajos was making his most fervent advances towards Margit Lukács, whose name is absent from the first lists. Although not listed until early November, she was not a new acquaintance and came from a family with several marriageable girls. Antal Lukács, Director of the Magyar Földhitelintézet (Hungarian Agricultural Land Credit Institute), had seven daughters and one son. Margit (1875–1952) was the fourth daughter.⁴⁶

I am utterly happy. This evening I was at the Lukácses. I went up in some trepidation that they might receive me somewhat coolly owing to my long absence, but they received me warmly indeed! – they were just having tea, and I went with them to the opera and we had a fine time together. I am completely reassured. – I find Margit most attractive, she will be just right for me! It will be splendid, why can't we have the wedding tomorrow!⁴⁷

He was clearly finding his self-confidence, as if marriage was of more concern to him than progress in other areas of life:

But my marriage is even more important. At the moment, Margit Lukács is the favourite. I would be glad if she married me, and I think she would be glad to be my wife. I will truly love her and I can make her happy, and that is approximately what I will say to her.⁴⁸

Then he seemed to waver, while feeling a stronger drive than ever:

My lady, my fine upright lady, loving wife. I forget the past, live for the future, my family's future. Margit Lukács was a proper and in every respect satisfactory combination, and that it did not become a reality was down to me alone. She was taken hand in hand before me in her finest dress, with the sincere good wishes of both parental families.

45 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5. Paikert, Napló 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 28v; 15 April 1897.

46 Tamás László Rozsos: *Az erdélyi örmény eredetű nemes Lukács család genealógiája* (Budapest: 2012), 16.

47 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5. Paikert, Napló 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 8v–9.

48 Ibid., 11v, 18 December 1896.

One word, one misunderstanding, drew us apart. And yet how good it would have been for both sides! There is so much in common between the two families, and it would have been a truly harmonious and healthy accord.⁴⁹

There seems to have been an understanding between the families, and the failure of the match was obviously because of the young people. In the light of what happened later, it is hard to believe Alajos:

I sigh deeply, thinking that in January I could have taken here my bride, Margit Lukács. How splendid it would have been. What joy I would have caused the good parents!⁵⁰

Nonetheless, the fateful year of 1898 still seemed to revolve around Margit:

Margit. You have wounded me. I am not like the others. Love me, or do not love me and let us go our separate ways. I will not run after you. I found everything in you that I sought – I want to be your everything, and if I am not, that is the end of everything.

In the meantime, more about the background comes to light:

Margit. She would still have been best for me. She is homely, good-hearted, healthy, nice, good family, thrifty, pretty, etc. etc. – But I have done everything, she knows I am not a *courmacher* (“Romeo”), why does she demand that from me? I will not humiliate myself.⁵¹

What the girl actually felt is sadly unknown to us. Some signs, however, do emerge from the background. These suggest more than “one word” or “a misunderstanding”. There must have been more subtle “behavioural sociological” barriers to the marriage if the error was in the courtship. Could it be that Margit Lukács put him to the test, or in fact wanted to rebuff a young man who she did not really like?

This was just as he was producing his final list, consisting mostly of familiar names (or at least Christian names), but ending with a completely new one.

49 Ibid., 20, 12 April 1897.

50 Ibid., 54–54v, 26 April 1897. On his 31st birthday at the end of May 1897, he was fantasizing about getting engaged in Csömör (where the Lukácses lived), *ibid.*, 61, 31 May 1897.

51 MgM 2012.3.1. Paikert, Régi feljegyzés, Személyes, 1898. máj. 2 – dec. 18, 1, 2 May 1898; 3, 5 May.

“Girls: Erzsébet – Margit – Adrienne – Hedvig – Irma – T. Margit – Mila – H. Marie – Winifred – Deli.”⁵²

Erzsébet and Hedvig are clearly the Concha girls. The Margit without a surname is Margit Lukács, and T. Margit is Margit Tyroch. The name Adrienne appears only on this list, and may be the Adrienne Fischel from the retrospective list of excursioners, or possibly the lady to whom he wrote a poem in 1895 (Paikert wrote poetry throughout his life), the eldest daughter of Károly Andrányi of Győrök, trade counsellor of Arad, who died in 1893 at the age of 55. Whoever it was, she still ruffled the conscience of Alajos Paikert as he sought a mate in 1897: “I am so miserable! – I have alienated the angelic Adrienne from me. How long will this last? It will end in madness.”⁵³ This was clearly the period of ultimate desperation and final effort, but one in which a new ray of hope appeared.

The Decision: Deli

In summer 1898, several of his relatives were still encouraging him to make up his mind and finally marry Margit Lukács: “...I must embark upon the siege of Margit, God grant me that I will succeed and M. will love me, I know we will be a very good couple.”⁵⁴ In early September, however, he was back to the cultural and methodological problems of courtship, considerations unlikely to win him the battle.

Why cannot I say to Margit: I love you, love me, do you love me? – Yes or no. – No, nowadays I have to swerve around the question ten times in all kinds of attitude and costume, and she has to play the most hostile faces, before we get anywhere. What’s the use? Ah – the choice of a wife is certainly the most important when one is married for life. A one-year marriage with a six-month break, that is much more practical.⁵⁵

52 Ibid., 3. 4 May 1898.

53 OSZK Kt Quart. Hung. 3264/5. Paikert, Napló 1896. szept. 29 – 1898. márc. 11, 72, 11 March 1898. The nexus did indeed fit into the above web of relationships, especially after she married Ferenc Baross of Bellus and her younger sister Elvira married Lajos Baross.

54 MgM 2012.3.1. Paikert, Régi feljegyzés, Személyes, 1898. máj. 2 – dec. 18, 4, 28 June 1898. He even came out with a slogan: “Csömör – courtship, siege, capture!” Ibid., 4 August. Theodore Zeldin has aptly described the traditional masculine model of courtship to be a combination of commercial techniques and military means. Theodore Zeldin, *An Intimate History of Humanity* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), 116.

55 MgM 2012.3.1. Paikert, Régi feljegyzés, Személyes, 1898. máj. 2 – dec. 18, 5, 4 September 1898.

His outrage against middle-class courtship norms was stronger than his resolution.

Then the diary seemed to find a new protagonist. At the end of May, for the sake of Deli, the last on the list, he seemed to put all of his cards on the table.

Deli – Do you understand me, will you love me? Oh God give my heart peace! From your beautiful gentle eyes, so much goodness radiates towards me, will you keep what you promise me?⁵⁶

Then he gives himself a stern command: “It must be decided, a man cannot love more than one! – Let there be an end.”⁵⁷ This sentence is misleading at first sight. It looks as though Alajos had been simultaneously in love with all of the women he had listed and courted. His diary is not, however, the outpouring of an adolescent girl’s secrets. In fact, he betrays no signs of romantic love, and as for feelings, he wrote much more about what he perceived—or hoped for—in others, than about what he felt himself. We cannot say he was devoid of feelings, but he was certainly either incapable of expressing them or considered it unmanly to write them down.

The diary fails to reveal what caused the sudden urgency surrounding marriage two years into his thirties, or what led to Deli Rónay’s appearance at the end of the final list. More helpful are the memoirs he wrote for his family. From there, we find that he had seen her as a little girl on a photograph when she was eight years old and immediately declared, “she will be my wife.” His first real-life acquaintance with the Rónay family was a wedding, where he was a groomsman and asked Deli to accompany him as bridesmaid.⁵⁸

Who were they? Károly Rónay (1849–1935) was a prosperous attorney and later royal notary. His wife Izabella Sztipán gave him three daughters and a son, the first, in 1880, being Deli Franciska Izabella.⁵⁹ The father (and his family) were raised to the nobility in 1912 with the noble predicate “of Osgyán”, thus following a similar path of elevation to that of the elder Alajos Paikert (although neither of them could have known this in 1898).⁶⁰ Károly Rónay’s wife on her mother’s side was a descendent of the “Fluk family of Rággamb” and brought

56 Ibid., 7, 24 September 1898.

57 Ibid., 7, 2 October 1898.

58 MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert, *Életem és működésem*, 35–36.

59 Register of Birth and Death, accessed June 16, 2013. <https://familysearch.org/search/record/results#count>, All four were registered in the Lower Víziváros Roman Catholic register, not far from the Paikerts’ home.

60 József Gerő, ed., *A királyi könyvek* (Budapest: Gerő József, 1940), 176.

with her “a substantial fortune”. This important aspect only comes to light in the memoirs, as does the fact that the Rónay parents were “highly cultured, learned, well-travelled and spoke fluent English, French and German, and provided their children with a first-class education.”⁶¹

The memoirs give an accelerated account of the courtship, at first leaving the year of engagement blank. The somewhat slower progress of events in reality is evident from the diary. “On 3 October I talked to Dr Rónay. Deli, my gentle little Deli, my youthful dream will come true. Love me, love me, and heaven will be ours!”⁶² Since the girl was still a minor, it was natural that he spoke with the father. But this did not settle the matter. The uncertainty partly arose from external causes: the father did not want to act in haste:

I do not understand Rónay’s advice not to be in undue haste. I can find no other explanation than that Deli cannot yet decide. It has made me very sad. Or... or. This vacillation cannot go on. As soon as possible! Oh, how I would like a nice little wife.⁶³

On the other hand, the young man himself was in a state of some confusion. We almost see the great dilemma of classical dramas in microcosm: reason or passion? Failing (or not wanting) to realize this himself, he directly ascribed the curious situation to nature (he resembles his mother) or upbringing (father’s hard drilling) or even some kind of disease.

My mind is utterly confused. I am mixing up everything, I cannot make a good judgement, I ascribe importance to matters of no substance and miss what is important, I busy myself with trivialities, ignoring questions of life itself. – Paralysis progressiva. My speech is slovenly, and I write the same way, leaving out words, letters and sentences. I mix up everything. It is all the consequence of an unnatural way of life. I must get married.⁶⁴

61 MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert, *Életem és működésem*, 36. The Fluk family were raised to the nobility in 1792. Kempelen, *Magyar nemes családok*, vol. 4, 145.

62 MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert, *Életem és működésem*, 7, 13 October 1898.

63 *Ibid.*, 9–10, 28 Nov 1898.

64 *Ibid.*, 8, 24 Nov 1898. There is no sign in the diary of omitted words or letters.

And although falling somewhat short in logic, this sequence of thoughts ends with a fairly definite conclusion. Since the goal seemed to be coming no closer, dissatisfaction and rumination escalated:

Deli's irresolution is extremely irritating. Or is it hostility? (5 Dec)
Tomorrow, after a long enforced pause, I go again to Deli, or to the Rónays. Why must they draw this out so? – I very much like the girl and would be happy with her, but I do not want to force my love on anyone.⁶⁵ (6 Dec)

Finally, however, his perseverance bore fruit, and the engagement took place before Christmas. The diary does not confine itself to the romantic moment of the avowal, and records for posterity the family ritual of the engagement day:

Today I engaged myself [sic!] to Deli Rónay. Heaven grant us that we will find mutual happiness. The avowal took place in the Museum of Applied Arts, in the English exhibition in front of a drawing of a yacht. Yes, oh Deli, how happy you have made me.
We went home by coach. Kinga, Alice. Then I went home to give the happy news. Mama was very moved, Papa had been to Count Endre Csekonics and came home in full dress. They came to the Rónays, introductions, festive mood, friendship made. After lunch, at 4 o'clock, the Rónays, the parents and Deli came to us. It was so congenial. Papa and Mama were very cordial, sincere, showing all kinds of things. [...] Farewell, tea, whist party, and then to the Rónays, photographs, signatures, [...], Papa, dinner, champagne, toasts, Kinga, joyful mood, Dalma, drafting the engagement card.⁶⁶

The wedding took place on 4 April 1899. The groom's witness was his youthful friend Count Károly Kornis, effectively representing the historic aristocracy, and raising the tone of the occasion.⁶⁷ In his sketch book, we find only a portrait taken after the wedding, with the title *Deli my lovely wife*.⁶⁸ She was hardly more than a girl, her hair done up in a bun. Not long after the wedding they left for North America, which solved Paikert's employment problems for a

65 Ibid., 11, 5–6 December 1898.

66 Ibid., 12, 18 December 1898. Sunday. On the "English exhibition" see Radisics Jenő, "Az orsz. iparművészeti museum," *Magyar Iparművészet* 8 (1898): 368. Kinga and Dalma were younger sisters of Deli.

67 Register of Birth and Death, accessed June 16, 2013. <https://familysearch.org/search/record/results#count>.

68 MgM 2012.19.1. Paikert, Vázlatkönyv, 47, 13 November 1899.

while. The Minister of Agriculture, Ignác Darányi, appointed him as agricultural counsel to Washington (as Paikert had written “attaché” in his earlier plans). The ageing Paikert joined up the themes of career and marriage in his memoirs thus:

My dear wife Deli immediately declared me ready for travel over the ocean, there to share with me for at least three years the vicissitudes of unaccustomed climate and social conditions. This showed her intelligence, astuteness and wifely devotion. Few *Hungarian genteel brides* would have done the same.⁶⁹

Thus even in reminiscence, Alajos Paikert felt that he had taken a long time but chosen well. He did not regret missing his mother’s tea parties with girls.

I did the right thing, because that way I could choose as my wife the one who was and is best suited to me, and who has devoted her entire life to me and our children, and if I have achieved anything in life, it is mainly thanks to her... she gave me the gift of three splendid children, brought them up admirably, and now shares with me everything that fate has dealt.⁷⁰

This frank statement of the male-centred family model may be regarded as a social fact, even if the reminiscence obviously idealizes the image of the past. The marriage hardly features in subsequent volumes of the diary, and we do not even know whether his wife left any source on this subject. Our evaluation is therefore unfortunately but unavoidably asymmetric.

Consequences

The characteristics of Paikert’s marriage strategy may be viewed according to Weber’s criteria of “behavioural sociological status”, and the young man’s dilemmas—at least in the “end game”—can be placed in the context of the “marriage market” model. We will not, however, attempt to interpret events in the spirit of the “stable matching algorithm” of the Nobel prize-winning theory.⁷¹

69 Paikert, “Életem és korom,” 179. Here the “genteel” (*úr*) was a reference to bearing and not just origins. (GyK’s italics in the quotation.)

70 MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert, Életem és működésem, 35.

71 The game theory model goes back to a 1962 paper by D. Gale and L. S. Shapley. D. Gale and L. S. Shapley, “College Admission and the Stability of Marriage,” *American Mathematical Monthly* 69, no. 1 (1962): 9–15. The 2012 Nobel Prize went to the surviving Lloyd S. Shapley and to Alvin E. Roth, who developed its

Our sources, however informative and intimate they may be, unfortunately do not provide a sufficiently comparative perspective. We do not know the preference of the other side, the ladies, or the potential rivals.⁷² Secondly, the original model makes the implicit assumption that there is “no payment (dowry) between the actors,” which in our case would clearly not be realistic. One conclusion of the theory was considered self-evident in the male-dominated society of the turn of the century: the stable matching algorithm leads to a boy-optimum result.⁷³ For the candidate brides who stayed in the “competition” longest, however, we would have to assess which parameters the self-appointed groom took into account.

Two empirical observations should be stated at the outset:

1. There was a substantial oversupply of females in the Concha, Lukács and Rónay families. We cannot say that this was the general demographic male/female ratio (although there was actually a female surplus in the 15–45 cohort at the turn of the century), but it was clearly the situation in the middle-class circles where Alajos Paikert made his selection in the “end game” (the Conchas with four girls, the Lukácses with seven girls and one boy, and the Rónays with three girls and one boy). And as well as playing a part in the number of potential heirs, it indicates a buyer’s market in the wider sense.

2. This is why Alajos Paikert stresses in his memoirs how “the market came to him”, how much in demand he was (which he of course tended to ascribe to his own qualities): “I could have chosen a daughter from any of several very fine families, because I was a young, educated, healthy, well brought-up, well turned-out, modern young man, I excelled in nearly all the manly sports, and I had a good general knowledge and a promising future.”⁷⁴

application further. The subject has been covered in Hungarian by Péter Biró in “Stabil párosítási modellek és ezeken alapuló központi párosító programok,” *Sigma* 37, 3–4 (2006): 153–75. I would like to thank Aladár Madarász for bringing the model to my attention.

⁷² We could take as a basis for comparison the reminiscences of other social ladies, although we do not know of the treatment of any diaries. With reference to the introduction, however, we do not consider this to be methodologically sound. A revealing attempt at confronting interests with feelings has been made by Gábor Gyáni, who examined individual cases of “patriarchal” and “partnership” marriages through three 1914 marriage contracts. Gábor Gyáni, *Hétköznapi Budapest*, (Budapest: Városháza, 1995), 14–20. On the same, in a wider context, see Gábor Gyáni, “Middle-Class Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Hungary,” in *Kinship in Europe*, 293–94. These cases were from the year the First World War broke out and I would not hazard to extrapolate them back to the turn of the century.

⁷³ See Biró, “Stabil párosítási modellek,” 153, 155. There have been many attempts to develop the model by building in payment and dynamics (i.e. the effect of new market entrants).

⁷⁴ MgM 2012.20.1. Paikert, *Életem és működésem*, 38. It should be noted that according to the 1895 “gazdacimtar” [Farm Directory], the Paikert family did not have land greater than 100 holds. Only the

Let us now look at Alajos Paikert’s “ranking matrix” in 1896–98:

Candidate bride	Father	Noble birth	Wealth
Erzsébet Concha (1st of 4 girls)	professor	noble (mother’s side)	
Margit Lukács (4th of 7 girls)	bank director	noble (father’s and mother’s side)	paternal and maternal inheritance*
Deli Rónay (1st of 3 girls)	notary public	noble (mother’s side)	paternal and maternal inheritance**

* According to the 1892 national register, Lukács Antal, *virilis* [major taxpayer] of Bihar county (address: Bp. V, Bálvány u. 7.) paid direct taxes of 2547 forints. In 1895, Lukács’ estate in Újpalota (Bihar county) extended to 2149 cadastral holds (1 hold = 0.57 hectare), but he also owned land in Csömör (Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun county) and in several places in Csanád (his wife also owned land in one of these).⁷⁵

** Károly Rónay, then still an “attorney” (address: Bp. II., Apór u. 3.) in 1892 was a *virilis* of Pest, paying tax of 604 forints. He was also part-owner, in 1895, of a farm of 1380 cadastral holds in Osgyán (Gömör and Kishont county), from where later he took his noble predicate.⁷⁶

Had Alajos chosen a university career (he did reach the status of junior lecturer), Professor Győző Concha’s family would clearly have appreciated in value, even though the father was not of noble birth and the four girls’ dowry could not have been large (this was probably what caused the Paikert parents to oppose the match). To marry her, Paikert would have needed more money of his own (“I do not have enough money to satisfy her ambitions”).

The choice of Margit Lukács (“harmonious and healthy accord”) was expressly supported by the parents (and other relatives). A bank-director father-in-law would have opened up good prospects on the economic front, and he was of noble rank and had a substantial fortune. Here, however, the girl was choosy, demanding that her suitor be a *courmacher*, which must have meant more than the usual middle-class norms if Paikert regarded the idea of fulfilling her wishes as

first-born son Hennik farmed, as a tenant, a 330-hold estate in Seprős (Arad county), which was owned by his father-in-law. KSH, ed., *A magyar korona országainak gazdaczímháza* (Budapest: M. kir. Statisztikai Hivatal, 1897), 418–19. That was the origin of the family’s predicate upon their ennoblement.

75 J. Lajos Máté ed., *Magyar Almanach. A Főrendiházi tagok, Országgyűlési képviselők- és az Országos Virilisták Czímkönyve az 1892. évre* (Budapest: Fischer J. D. 1892), 85; KSH, ed., *A magyar korona országainak gazdaczímháza* (Budapest: M. kir. Statisztikai Hivatal, 1897), 244–45; 340–41; 422–25.

76 Máté, *Magyar Almanach*, 40; *A magyar korona országainak gazdaczímháza*, 566. It should be noted that in 1917—calculating double—he was a Pest *virilis* with direct tax of 11,704 crowns (1 forint = 2 crowns). *Budapest Székesfőváros legtöbb állami adót fizető – 1200 választó – 1917. évi névjegyzéke* (Budapest: Székesfőváros háziyomdája, 1918), 7.

“humiliation”. He was clearly put off by a female character who placed strong demands, but it is also possible that Margit Lukács was employing a courting-game gambit to express distance, and difference in rank, from her suitor.⁷⁷

It seems that Paikert, just as he was embarking on a government-service career, was most impressed by a man who was freshly—in 1898—elevated from attorney to notary public in the 1st District (!) of Budapest. Rónay had authority, learning and knowledge of languages (which must have been particularly important for the future American “attaché”), and had inherited wealth and rank through both the paternal and maternal lines. It cannot have been accidental that the Rónay daughters all made marriages befitting their rank. The memoirs particularly mention the excellent upbringing, which in these circles was almost natural. And since Deli was hardly 18 years old, she could be further “educated” as an obedient wife. Although the young man had not found the answer among the military officer–medical-profession circles managed by his mother, he did make a decision that his parents could support. This also contributed to the establishment of a stable marriage. The family dynamics of the choice was only confirmed by the raising of the two heads of the family to noble rank. The match proved to be a “harmonious accord” for more than just that moment, and persisted in the long term. The young couple could make their own lives, but within the bounds of social norms and parental expectations. For which, of course, they had complete freedom in America. Paikert must surely have looked through his old diary entries as he was writing his memoirs in old age. The diary’s serial account of protracted indecision may not have made for pleasant reading. The gallery of rival ladies did not find its way into the catalogue listing of the memoirs. He did, however, leave everything for the archives, so that someone in a later age, with time and inclination, could reconstruct his youthful decision-making mechanism.

77 Margit Lukács got married in 1900, two years following the siege recorded in the diary. Her husband was also of the nobility, an assistant secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr Jakab Tahy of Tahvár and Tarkeő. Rozsos, *Az erdélyi örmény*, 16. (The noble predicate were written out in full in the marriage register!)

Archival Sources

Budapest Főváros Levéltára (BFL) [Municipal Archives of Budapest]

VII.6.e. Kihirdetett végrendeletek [Announced Wills], 1896–1950.

Budapesti cím és lakjegyzék [Budapest Directory of Addresses], 1900. <http://bfl.archivportal.hu/cgi-bin/lakas/lakas.pl>. Accessed March 27, 2014.

Mezőgazdasági Múzeum Adattár, Személyi emléanyag-gyűjtemény (MgM) [Archives of the Museum of Hungarian Agriculture, Personal Memory Collection].

1338. Paikert, Alajos. Életem (manuscript).

2012.3.1. Paikert, Alajos. Régi feljegyzés, Személyes, 1898. máj. 2. – dec. 18 [Old notes, Personal, 2 May – 18 December 1898] and notes marked “24. napló 1944. máj. 3. – 1945. máj. 8” [24th Diary, 3 May 1944 – 8 May 1945].

2012.8.1. Paikert, Alajos. Kis napló [Small diary] 1946.

2012.9.1. Paikert, Alajos. Kis napló [Small diary] 1947. jan. 1. – dec. 30.

2012.19.1. Paikert, Alajos. Vázlatkönyv [Sketch book].

2012. 20. 1. Paikert Alajos önéletrajza [Autobiography of Alajos Paikert] 1940. II. Életem és működésem [My Life and Work].

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár Kézirattár (OSZK Kt) [Manuscript Department of the National Széchényi Library]

Quart. Hung. 3264. Paikert Alajos naplói (1887–1943) [Diaries of Alajos Paikert]. Vols. 1–11.

Quart. Hung. 3265. Paikert Alajos vegyes feljegyzései és rajzai (1889–1894) [Miscellaneous Notes and Drawings by Alajos Paikert]. Vols. 1–4.

Quart. Hung. 3509. Paikert, Alajos. Naplórajzok (1889) [Diary Drawings].

Quart. Hung. 3605. Paikert Alajos naplói és egyéb feljegyzései (1886–1895) [Diaries and Other Notes by Alajos Paikert]. Vols. 1–4.

Oct. Hung. 1299. Paikert Alajos naplója és egyéb feljegyzései. (1909). [Diaries and Other Notes by Alajos Paikert]. Vols. 1–2.

Oct. Hung. 1445. Paikert Alajos évről évre szóló kis naplója [Small Diaries from Year to Year by Alajos Paikert]. (1911–1916) Vols. 1–2.

Fol. Hung. 2549. Paikert Alajos: Napló [Diary]. (March–October 1890).

OSZK gyászjelentés-gyűjtemény [OSZK Death Announcement Collection]

http://www.rakovszky.net/E1_LSG_ObitsIndex/GYJ-NevIndex.shtml. Accessed March 27, 2014.

Registers of Births and Deaths

<https://familysearch.org/search/record/results#count>. Accessed March 27, 2014.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Budapest Székesfőváros legtöbb állami adót fizető – 1200 választó – 1917. évi névjegyzéke* [List of Highest State Taxpayers in Budapest, 1200 Electors, 1917]. Budapest: Székesfőváros háziyomdája, 1918.
- Gerő, József, ed. *A királyi könyvek. Az I. Ferenc József és IV. Károly király által 1867-től 1918-ig adományozott nemességek, főnemességek, előnevek és címerek jegyzéke* [The Royal Books. Directory of Noble and Aristocratic Titles, Suffixes and Armorial Bearings Granted by Francis Joseph I and Charles IV between 1867 and 1918]. Budapest: n.p., 1940.
- Gudenus, János József. *A magyarországi főnemesség XX. századi genealógiája* [20th Century Genealogy of the Hungarian Aristocracy]. Vols. 1–5. Budapest: Natura (1)–Tellér Kft. (2)–Heraldika (3–5), 1990–1999.
- Katona, Csaba, ed. „...kacérkodni fogok vele.” *Slachta Etelka soproni úrileány naplója 1840. december – 1841. augusztus* [“...I’ll Flirt with Him.” The Diary of Etelka Slachta, Gentlewoman of Sopron December 1840 – August 1841]. Vol. 3. Győr: Mediawave, 2006.
- Katona, Csaba. „Azért én önnek sem igent, sem nemet nem mondtam.” *Válogatás Slachta Etelka és Szekrényessy József leveleiből* [“So I Said to You Neither Yes Nor No.” Selection from the Correspondence of Etelka Slachta and József Szekrényessy]. Vol. 5. Győr: Mediawave, 2008.
- Kempelen, Béla. *Magyar nemes családok* [Hungarian Noble Families]. Vols. 1–11. Budapest: Grill Károly Könyvkiadó, 1911–1932.
- KSH, ed. *A magyar korona országainak gazdaczímtára* [Directory of Landowners of the Hungarian Crown]. Budapest: M. kir. Statisztikai Hivatal, 1897.
- Máté, J. Lajos, ed. *Magyar Almanach. A Főrendibázi tagok, Országgyűlési képviselők- és az Országos Virilisták Czimkönyve az 1892. évre* [Hungarian Almanac. Directory of Members of the Upper House, Members of Parliament and Highest State Taxpayers for 1892]. Budapest: J. D. Fischer, 1892.
- Paikert, Alajos. “Életem és korom (Egy emlékirat a múzeum Adattárának őrizetében)” [My Life and Times. (A Memoir Held in the Museum Archives)], published by Rózsa Takáts. In *A Magyar Mezőgazdasági Múzeum Közleményei 1998–2000*. Budapest: 2001, 159–218.
- Pettkó, Béla, and Ede Reiszig, eds. *Magyar Nemzeti Zsebkönyv* [Handbook of Hungarian Families]. Part 2. *Nemes családok* [Noble Families]. Vol. 1. Budapest: Franklin, 1905.
- Radisics, Jenő, Az orsz. iparművészeti muzeum. *Magyar Iparművészet* 8 (1898): 368.

Rozsos, Tamás László. *Az erdélyi örmény eredetű nemes Lukács család genealógiája* [Genealogy of the Transylvanian, Originally Armenian Noble Family Lukács]. Budapest, 2012.

Szinnyei, József. *Magyar írók élete és munkái* [Life and Work of Hungarian Writers]. Vols. 1–14. Budapest: Hornyánszky, 1891–1914.

Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Michael. *Approaches to the History of the Western Family 1500–1914*. London–Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980.
- Biró, Péter. “Stabil párosítási modellek és ezeken alapuló központi párosító programok” [Stable Matching Models and Central Matching Programs Based on Them]. *Szigma* 37, no. 3–4 (2006): 153–75.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Cathrine Hall. *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Ehmer, Josef. “Marriage”. In *Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century 1789–1913*. Vol. 2 of *The History of the European Family*, edited by David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, 282–322. New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Gale, D. and L. S. Shapley. “College Admission and the Stability of Marriage.” *American Mathematical Monthly* 69, no. 1 (1962): 9–15.
- Goody, Jack. *The European Family. An Historico-Anthropological Essay*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- Gyáni, Gábor. *Hétköznap Budapest* [Everyday Budapest]. Budapest: Városháza, 1995.
- Gyáni, Gábor. “Middle-Class Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Hungary.” In *Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300–1900)*, edited by David Warren Sabeau, Simon Teuscher, and Jon Mathieu, 284–301. New York–Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007.
- M. Hrabovszky, Júlia, *Ami elmúlt. Visszaemlékezések életemből* [What is Past. Recollections of My Life], edited by Ágota Steinert. Budapest: Helikon, 2001.
- Macfarlane, Alan, ed. *The Family Life of Ralf Josselin a Seventeenth-Century Clergyman. An Essay in Historical Anthropology*. New York: The Norton Library, 1977.
- Macfarlane, Alan. “The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800 by Lawrence Stone.” *History and Theory* 18, no. 1 (1979): 103–26.
- Macfarlane, Alan. *The Origins of English Individualism. The Family, Property and Social Transition*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- Ónagy, Zoltán. *Tormay Cécile* (2009). Accessed December 26, 2013. <http://www.irodalmijelen.hu/05242013-0953/tormay-cecile>.

- Sabean, David Warren. “Kinship and Class Dynamics in Nineteenth-Century Europe.” In *Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long-Term Development (1300–1900)*, edited by David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and Jon Mathieu, 301–13. New York–Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007.
- Sieder, Reinhard. “Ehe, Fortpflanzung und Sexualität.” In *Vom Patriarchat zur Partnerschaft. Zum Strukturwandel der Familie*, edited by Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, 141–62. Munich: Beck C. H., 1984.
- Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977.
- Stone, Lawrence. “Love.” In Lawrence Stone. *The Past and the Present Revisited*, 327–44. London–New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.
- Vári, András. *Urak és gazdászok. Arisztokrácia, agrárértelmiség és agrárius mozgalom Magyarországon 1821–1898* [Lords and Farmmanagers. Aristocracy, the Agricultural Professional Class and the Agrarian Movement in Hungary 1821–1898]. Budapest: Argumentum, 2009.
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1978.
- Zeldin, Theodore. *An Intimate History of Humanity*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994.

Translated by Alan Campbell