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MADÁCH'S TRAGEDY OF MAN AND THE TRADITION OF THE "POÈME D'HUMANITÉ" IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

Rather than attempting to present a completely new interpretation of Madách's drama, this study will try to place it in a wider framework of European literary trends by laying the emphasis on the genre Madách used so effectively.¹ One of the goals of this approach is to show that Imre Madách was both European and Hungarian in his outlook. This is, of course, not a totally new and original insight, but this paper was conceived as mainly a status report on one important area of Madách studies.

Ever since Arany took a first, not very careful look at the manuscript of Madách's Az ember tragédiája (The Tragedy of Man) and decided that it was yet another imitation of Goethe's Faust, much of the discussion of the work has focused on its relationship to this German drama, and, depending on the critic's point of view, Madách appeared either as an imitator, as a devoted disciple of Goethe's, as being influenced by him in some general way, or as totally independent. Perhaps it was inevitable that German reviewers stressed from the very beginning Madách's alleged dependence on Goethe as a model. The first published reviews in German journals referred to

¹ Thus, I will not try to answer the question as to whether Madách's drama constitutes a true tragedy or is essentially salvationistic. Perhaps a study of Geothe's Faust, labeled a "Tragedy" by the poet, will show that these concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as Thomas R. Mark will have it in his interesting study, "The Tragedy of Man" Salvation or Tragedy?" Acta Litteraria Academiae Scienartium Hungariae, 15 (1973), 291—308.
The Tragedy of Man as "a Hungarian Faustiad" and called Madách "the Hungarian Faust author."\(^2\) When the play was first performed in Vienna in 1892, the well-known critic Eugen Zabel claimed that Madách's entire way of thinking and feeling could be traced back to a Goethe imitation.\(^3\) But even more recent studies emphasized the Faust parallels. In 1957, Otto zur Nedden subtitled his paper on Madách's play "Eine ungarische 'Faust'-Dichtung" (A Hungarian "Faust" poem),\(^4\) and as late as 1973, Günther Mahal wrote an article on "Bemerkungen zum 'Ungarischen Faust'" (Remarks on the Hungarian "Faust").\(^5\)

J. W. Smeed, in his book on Faust in Literature, went even one step further. He gave the title of Madách's play in German and took all quotations from Ludwig Dóczi's 1891 German translation, pointing out in his preface: "Quotations are given in the original language, except in the cases of A. Tolstoi and Imry [sic] Madách. Here, since one of the main points made is the link with Goethe's Faust, I have quoted from German translations rather than in English."\(^6\)

Of course it would be foolish to deny that there are very clear parallels, both in general themes and in details. A Hungarian scholar, Vilma Pröhle, listed 44 literal correspondences (even

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\(^4\) Imre Madách "Die Tragödie des Menschen": Eine ungarische Faust-Dichtung, Beiträge zur Duisburger Theatergeschichte, 5 (Duisburg, 1957).
