To understand each other we need at least two things: good luck and a common language, *probably in this order*. There is not much we can do about the first; we can, and should, pave the way for the second. Addressing an American conference on 19th century realism, and trying to describe the vicissitudes of, and indeed the odds against, the mimetic orientation in 19th century Hungarian letters, one has to face the further difficulty of talking about a literature almost completely unknown to foreigners. To make my story intelligible I should refrain from couching it in terms exclusively Hungarian. I have to provide, instead, a point of departure familiar to Western scholars. This point of departure, or more precisely, our mutual frame of reference, serving as a common denominator and enabling us to compare critical attitudes of different cultures, will be M. H. Abrams's typology of critical orientations.

In the introductory chapter of *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), a book not very fashionable today, but of lasting heuristic value, Abrams classifies the embarrassing richness and variety of critical principles and strategies into four basic orientations. The main concern of the *mimetic* is the relationship between the work of art and the universe; of the *pragmatic*, that between the work of art and the reader; of the *expressive*, that between the work of art and its author; of the *objective*, that between the parts and whole of the work of art “as a self-sufficient entity”, whatever this phrase may mean. Their norms are tailored to fit their main concerns. For mimetic criticism the task of art is to imitate the world; consequently
it would apply special norms requiring adequacy, truthfulness (in description), precision, typicality, and the like. Pragmatic criticism focuses on how the work of art affects the reader, hence its norms would demand efficiency in instructing (Horace’s prodesse) or moving (movere) or entertaining (delectare) the audience. Expressive criticism views works of art as expressions of authors, as emanations of their psyche. Therefore its characteristic norms are sincerity, authenticity, truthfulness (in the psychological sense of the word), spontaneity, etc. Finally, objective criticism is interested in the isolated work of art, examines its internal relations, evaluating it by norms like coherence, harmony, balance, unity. Historically the mimetic orientation is the oldest of the four, with traces in Plato and Aristotle; the pragmatic had the longest reign in Western criticism, from Horace almost through the 18th century; the primacy of the expressive was advocated by romanticism from Wordsworth and Coleridge through Keats and Shelley to John Stuart Mill’s proposition that poetry is “the expression or uttering forth of feeling”; the objective, after tentative beginnings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, reappears in Art for Art’s Sake, then in some of T. S. Eliot’s views, and finally in the heyday of the American New Criticism.1

This summary is far too sketchy and rudimentary to do justice to either the theoretical or the historical aspects of Abrams’s typology, a conceptual scheme originally both lucid and sophisticated enough to have been justly called “the best possible introduction to the study of modern criticism”.2 Yet even my poor rendering may suffice to provide a familiar background to the peculiarities of Hungarian criticism in the 19th century, helping to discern both the similarities and the differ-