

Mark Bedard..... Adolph /Santha/Nervous Gentleman
 Joe Delafield..... Peter Juhász
 Jeremy Lawrence..... Philip
 Rachel Napoleon..... Paula
 Annie Purcell..... Adele/Dissatisfied Lady
 Kurt Rhoads..... Count
 Michael Schantz..... Young Gentleman/Mate/Cabman
 Maren Searle..... Delivery Boy/Thorough Young Lady
 John Seidman..... Domokos/The Old Gentleman
 Jill Tanner..... Aristocratic Lady
 John Tufts..... Oscar
 Gabra Zackman..... Unassuming Lady/Patient Lady

ACT I

A little shop of men's and women's fashion in downtown Budapest.

-Intermission-

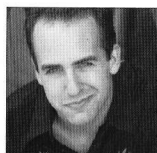
ACT II

The Count's study in the administrative building of the manorial estate.

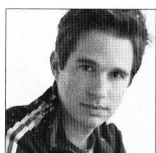
-Intermission-

ACT III

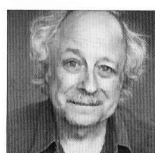
Back in Juhász's shop. It is a bright sunny autumn morning.



Mark Bedard



Joe Delafield



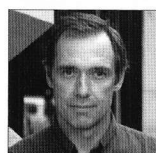
Jeremy Lawrence



Rachel Napoleon



Annie Purcell



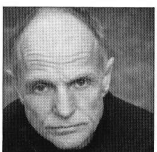
Kurt Rhoads



Michael Schantz



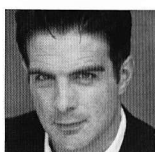
Maren Searle



John Seidman



Jill Tanner



John Tufts



Gabra Zackman

A Biography of Ferenc Molnár

by Maya Cantu

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Hungarian playwright Ferenc Molnár rose to international acclaim with his cosmopolitan fairy tales for adults. Molnár's plays inventively blended romantic fantasy and sardonic wit; pointed social satire and polished theatricality. Best known today for *Liliom* (the basis of the classic musical *Carousel*), *The Guardsman*, and *The Play's the Thing*, Molnár was immensely prolific and versatile as a journalist, short story writer, novelist, and the author of forty-two plays.

Born as Ferenc Neumann on January 12, 1878 to a middle-class Hungarian-Jewish family, Molnár grew up amid the elegant milieu of Habsburg-era Budapest. Abandoning his early legal studies, Molnár defiantly embarked on a career in journalism. At a time when Budapest's newspapers set the pulse of a bustling, young metropolis, Molnár quickly established himself as one of Hungary's most distinguished journalists. Often writing from his table at Budapest's New York Café—where he wittily presided over a bohemian circle known as the “New York Crowd”—Molnár created works ranging from his naturalistic novel, *The Hungry City* (1901) to his hit farce, *The Lawyer* (1902).

In 1907, the writer broke out as the first internationally famous Hungarian playwright. The year marked the publication of *The Paul Street Boys*, Molnár's classic novel of Budapest “juvenile street-gang warfare,” as well as the sensational success of his play *The Devil*. A risqué comedy of intrigue, blending motifs from *Faust* and Freud, the play had four simultaneous productions in New York City alone (including one in German and another in Yiddish). Molnár's personal life also invited drama. In 1906, the playwright married the gifted journalist Margit Vészi (the daughter of his editor at *Budapest Napló*, and with whom he had one child, Márta). However, he was soon enmeshed in a liaison with *The Devil*'s Budapest leading lady, Irén Varsányi—an affair that led to the actress's industrialist husband challenging Molnár to a much-publicized duel.



Molnár began his career as a journalist and worked as a correspondent at the front during WWI, while continuing to write plays.

Molnár's career, as both playwright and director, continued to flourish in the 1910's across continental Europe. The folk play *Liliom* (1909; to be presented as a Mint Further Reading on February 23rd) opened as a “noiseless flop” (in Molnár's words) in Budapest. Accustomed to Molnár's comedies, audiences were confounded by its bold mix of poetic fantasy, psychological realism, and social critique. However, *Liliom* received immense acclaim four years later in its Vienna premiere. The Hungarian premieres of *The Guardsman* (1910) and *The Tale of the Wolf* (1912) were followed by productions of these plays in Paris, Berlin, and New York, among other cities.

The onset of World War I turned Molnár's efforts toward war correspondence. Despite Austria-Hungary's status as an enemy of the Allies, Molnár's balanced and humane observations of the war (collected in *The Diary of a War Correspondent*) earned the distinction of publication in *The New York Times*. While Molnár's fantasy-streaked drama *The White Cloud* (1916) similarly confronted the devastation of WWI, other plays evoked a peacetime vision of Budapest. These works included *Fashions for Men*, which, as *Uri*

Divat, opened at Budapest's National Theater in December of 1917. Hailed by the *Budapest Daily Press* as "a subtle and delicious comedy" and "a witty parable," *Fashions for Men* went on to successful European productions in Vienna and Frankfurt, and five years later, arrived in New York. In its English-language version by Benjamin Glazer, *Fashions for Men* opened at Broadway's National Theatre on December 5, 1922.

The 1920's marked a spectacular decade for Molnár in both Europe and America. In 1921, the American premiere of *Liliom* (as translated by Glazer) marked a monumental success for the Theatre Guild, which also mounted the legendary 1924 production of *The Guardsman*, a comedy of marital role-playing starring

Throughout the 1920's, the celebrity persona of a wit, dandy, and bon vivant accompanied Molnár's reputation as "the best-known living Continental playwright in America." Molnár's romantic life continued to make headlines, as the playwright successively married operetta star Sári Fedák in 1922, and in 1926, the distinguished stage actress Lili Darvas. Living in luxury, Molnár quipped of his global "five-room apartment:" single hotel rooms maintained in Budapest, Vienna, Karlsbad, Venice, and Nice. He also made his first visit to America in 1927, when Conde Nast threw Molnár a dinner party whose glittering guest list included George Gershwin, Helen Hayes, and William Randolph Hearst. Stage productions of Molnár plays, such as *Delilah* (1937), appeared regularly into the

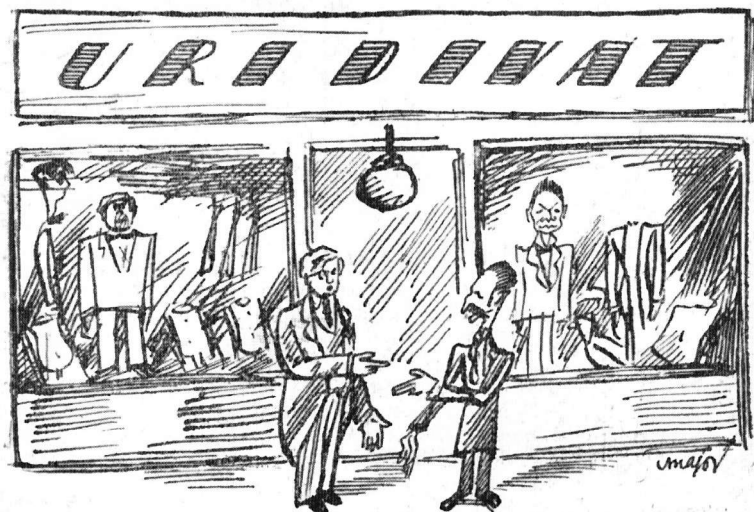
delicatessen on 58th Street. The adaptation of *Liliom* into Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel* (1945) also gratified Molnár, who wrote, "Theatrical music has never moved me so deeply before." His final days of exile were nonetheless somber ones. As S.N. Behrman recounted, "Asked one day whether he was quite happy (in America), Molnár said, 'Yes, I am happy, but quite happy, that I am not.'" Still a theatrical institution in America and Europe (though banned in Communist Hungary), the playwright died after a long illness in New York in 1952.

In the last few decades, Molnár's plays continue to be savored around the world as the work of a writer described by Billy Wilder as "smooth, elegant, the best of the urbane playwrights." Nevertheless—as critic Mel Gussow observed in a 1995 tribute—the playwright has been too "commonly regarded as a Budapest boulevardier who wrote frothy comedies for the café society of his time. Molnár remains primarily an entertainer, but (there is) substantial evidence to suggest that a reevaluation of his career would be justified."

Indeed, beyond their dazzling technique, Molnár's plays offer layered portraits of Budapest society, infused by the playwright's sympathetic satire of human foibles. His works are also consummately theatrical. As scholar

István Várkonyi observes, "Molnár imbues his plays with those fundamental human conflicts revolving around truth and lies, reality and fantasy. But he does not merely stop there—he projects them onto the urban milieu in order to expose the contradictions of middle class society. It is little wonder why later dramatists such as Bertolt Brecht read Molnár's plays with a certain interest. Even Luigi Pirandello...is known to have been a great admirer of Molnár's style." As "a creator of illusion (whose) plays are glamorous and touched with the quality of dreams" (*The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*), Molnár remains among the greatest of Hungarian writers, and a playwright of vast and varied appeal. As the critic Karl Sebestyén observed in 1938, "Molnár's name and Molnár's works belong to the world."

Dr. Maya Cantu is a theater historian, scholar, and Dramaturgical Adviser for the Mint, where she has previously worked on John Van Druten's London Wall, and George Kelly's The Fatal Weakness and Philip Goes Forth. Maya is the author of the forthcoming Palgrave Macmillan book, American Cinderellas: Imagining the Working Girl on the Broadway Musical Stage, from Irene to Gypsy. In 2014, she received her Doctor of Fine Arts degree in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from Yale School of Drama.



Henrik Major's cartoon showing Molnár in front of a shop window appeared in *Színházi Élet* (Theater Life) November 25, 1917. The accompanying text said the first performance of *Uri Divat* (*Fashions for Men*) was sold out. "Constant inquiries from the public for these tickets are thus a futile effort."

Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. Throughout the decade, Molnár's plays compassionately traversed the social spectrum of Budapest: from the theatrical hijinks of *The Play's the Thing* (1927) and the Old World aristocracy of *The Swan* (1920) to the realms of industry and commerce in *Riviera* (1925) and *The Good Fairy* (1930). At the same time, Molnár's American success opened New York's stages to a dynamic influx of works by such Hungarian dramatists as Ernest Vajda and Melchior Lengyel.

next decade, while Hollywood adapted eight films based on Molnár's plays and novels in the 1930's alone.

Displaced by the rise of Nazism, Molnár immigrated in 1940 to the United States, where he moved into a room at New York's Plaza Hotel. Now separated from Darvas, Molnár made a new life with Wanda Bartha, his lover, "secretary, literary adviser, and best friend." He continued to write prolifically, and reminisced with fellow Hungarian refugees at his favorite

a note from the artistic director

Plays at the Mint tend to come from America, England or Ireland. The reason is simple: they're written in English. We've produced plays from France, from Austria, even from Russia—but that has always meant creating a new version in English. My preference is a direct connection to the author.

When *Fashions for Men* was first produced in New York the translation was by Benjamin Glazer, who also translated *Liliom* in 1921. Glazer was born in Belfast to Hungarian Jewish parents, but his Molnár translations were based on German texts. He had a successful career in the theater and in Hollywood, where he won the first ever Academy Award for Adapted

Screenplay in 1927 (for *Seventh Heaven*, a silent film.)

I don't credit Glazer for our text, because I've re-written some of the dialogue. I freshened it up, intending to make it both less British (by way of Belfast) and more accurate. For that, I enlisted the aid of two wonderfully helpful people, Agnes Niemitz of the Hungarian Translation Services, and Gábor Lukin, Molnár's great grandson. Gábor now lives in L.A. and is the keeper of his great grandfather's flame. At the drop of a hat, he would provide me with a quick and scrupulously faithful version of any passage that I thought was in need of improvement or elucidation.