

## **ЗАПАДНАЯ ФИЛОСОФИЯ И СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ МИР**

УДК 1 (091)

### **EMBRACING THE AMBIGUITY OF CREATIVITY**

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### **ОХВАТЫВАЯ ДВОЙСТВЕННОСТЬ ТВОРЧЕСТВА**

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Статья нацелена на детальное раскрытие взрывного эффекта творчества А. Бергсона, который значительно повлиял на традицию американской философии процесса, на венгерскую культуру первой половины XX столетия. До времени написания этой работы (июль, 2016 г.) автор опубликовал одну статью о влиянии Бергсона на крупнейшего венгерского поэта XX века Эндре Ади и две статьи о воздействии французского философа на католического епископа Оттокара Прохазку. Настоящая публикация – результат исследования влияния Бергсона на Михая Бабитса и Жигмонда Морица, двух писателей первой части XX столетия, предвосхитивших экологические проблемы. Оно стало возможным при поддержке фонда Фулбрайта. В статье после краткого рассмотрения влияния Бергсона на Бабитса автор попытался рассмотреть воздействие бергсоновского витализма на примере одного из крестьянских персонажей Морица Дани Тури, сравнивая его с фигурой грека Зорбы из романа Никоса Казандзакиса, бывшего студентом Бергсона. Он приходит к выводу: необходимость укорененности в почве и творчестве природы, «творческий порыв» («*élan vital*»), не является безусловным, лишенным двойственности добром, но может иметь двойственные результаты.

**Ключевые слова:** *А. Бергсон, двойственность творчества, философия процесса, А.Н. Уайтхед, венгерская культура первой части XX века, влияние Бергсона на венгерскую культуру, Э. Ади, М. Бабитс, Ж. Мориц, Н. Казандзакис.*

There were always lots of books on my Father's bookshelves when I was growing up. As I learned to read, I noticed that a number of books had the name Henri Bergson on it with the picture of a well dressed mustachioed man. I started to read Bergson and also about him, especially in Maurice Friedman's *To Deny our Nothingness*, once I got to college.

I was in my first full semester at the Claremont School of Theology (then called the School of Theology at Claremont) in the Fall of 1971 – January 1972. I had taken two theology courses from John Cobb that fall, Contemporary Continental Theology, a PhD level course for which I needed his permission to be in the class. It was a difficult and demanding.

The other class was Process Theism, a class at my entering level, challenging yet quite manageable. Doing the readings was a religious experience! I wound up doing my first major paper at Claremont on a comparison of Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead. My grade was a borderline B+/A-. But John Cobb made a comment about which I am proud to this day: «This paper shows much promise for your future as a theologian!» I thought I was pretty hot stuff!

I went home for a brief break before Spring semester started (my parents lived in Phoenix, exactly 325 miles between my door at Methodist housing and my parents' carport). I was most anxious to show my father John Cobb's comment (my father spoke twelve languages and had two Ph.Ds). After I showed him the paper, instead of responding to the comment, my Dad said, «You wrote about Bergson!» I replied, «I know! Would you read the comment?» To which he responded once again, «You wrote about Bergson!» By this time, I was getting exasperated. «Would you read the comment?» I asked semi-angrily, semi-sheepishly. «You don't understand», he replied, «I wrote my second dissertation on Bergson!» This time he got my attention: «You did?» Each one of us grabbed a pack of our favorite cigarettes and set off for a walk with the spectacular backdrop of a desert sunset. I had forgotten about the extra crispy Hungarian fried chicken and onion potato salad my mother had made so engrossed did we get in the philosophy of Bergson!

In ensuing years, my interest in Bergson was sporadic, mostly in the context of his relationship to the radical empirical tradition (James with whom he was friends and carried on active correspondence, Wieman, Meland, and Loomer) within process thought. My interest in Bergson was rekindled following the Great Transformation of 1989 and as part of the retrieval of my Hungarian heritage. I became interested in the role of process thought in Hungary.

Researching process thought in Hungary, I found all of two references during the entire Communist period. Both of these were in textbooks by the eminent then Marxist, later dissident philosopher and former Lukács student György Markus. In 1966, Markus wrote one line: Whitehead was a bourgeois philosopher. A year later, the length was the same—one line—but the content different: Markus thought Whitehead deserved credit for his dialectical understanding of God!

Following the Great Transformation, the Central European and Hungarian Whitehead Society became quite active with monthly meetings, retreats, translations of Whitehead's and other works, etc. But the ebbs and fortunes of the Society seemed to get difficult to follow, some key peoples' participation affected by job changes, etc. I also began to feel that may be this phase of the history of process thought should be written by a Hungarian. I decided to study in greater detail the explosive impact of Henri Bergson, no less a part of the process tradition, on Hungarian culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Up to this point (July, 2016), I have published one article on the influence of Bergson on the greatest Hungarian poet of the twentieth century, Endre Ady, and two on the French philosopher's impact on the Roman Catholic Bishop Ottokár Prohászka [1–3]. The topic of my Fulbright (before being rudely interrupted by illness) scholarship research was on Bergson's influence on Mihály Babits and Zsigmond Moricz, two writers of the first half of the twentieth who anticipated environmental issues. In this article. after a brief

summary of Bergson's influence on Babits<sup>1</sup>, I seek to show the influence of the vitalism of Bergson, as can be seen in one of the peasant characters of Moricz, comparing that character, Dani Turi, to Nikos Kazantzakis' (a former student of Bergson) Zorba the Greek. I then seek to draw out the key points: the need be rooted in the land and in the creativity of nature, the «élan vital», which is not an unmitigated, unambiguous good but may have very ambiguous results.

### **Henri Bergson (1859–1941)**

Instead of a detailed biography of Henri Bergson, I shall bring out some of the highlights of his life and career. For much of his career, the French philosopher had been a very prolific author and accomplished, popular professor when he was appointed to a chair of philosophy at Collège de France in 1900. He taught at that institution until 1921. Considered the finest institution of higher learning in France at the time, the Collège de France had no real student body and no official examination system. All lectures were open to the public. Bergson's lectures became so popular that people had to be turned away.

In 1917, Bergson was entrusted with a secret mission by the French government: to convince U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to enter World War I on the side of France and England! In return, France promised support for Wilson's idea of a League of Nations. Bergson was supposed to resemble an embodiment of Plato's philosopher king which, in the estimation of the French, was very much the way President Woodrow Wilson saw himself. The French philosopher's attempt at diplomacy reputedly made an impression on the American President.

His international stature had grown to the point where he had received invitations to lecture in Bologna, London, Oxford and Birmingham in 1911. In 1913, he lectured at and received an honorary degree from Columbia University.

Henri Bergson was elected to the Académie Française in 1914, an achievement greeted with great euphoria by admirers as well as virulent anti-Semitic attacks on the far right. That year the Roman Catholic Church put his works on the list of forbidden books. The main reason for the condemnation was his perceived abandonment of the mandatory scholastic rationalism in favor of an emphasis on intuition.

In June, 1940, Germany invaded France. Soon thereafter, Jews were required to register. The puppet Vichy government declared him an «Honorary Aryan» in an attempt to exempt him from this. A non-practicing, assimilated Jew who had planned to convert to Roman Catholicism, Bergson decided to be in solidarity with the Jewish people instead and stood in line to register as a Jew. He died two days later, in January, 1941 of pulmonary congestion [4].

The key concepts in Bergson's philosophy are the following: intuition, the idea that the primary way we know things are through intuitions, gut level feelings, rather than a priori reasoning or sense experience; duration, affirming the reality of time and the temporal nature of the self rather than a transcendental ego above time; the importance of metaphysics, especially as expressed in the concept of creative evolution, embracing modern science yet rejecting mechanistic, deterministic views

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<sup>1</sup> See my forthcoming, «The Influence of Henri Bergson on Mihály Babits», in Encounter, paper presented at the 14th Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation, University of Pécs, Hungary, June 2012.

of nature; and embracing a form of «vitalism», the *élan vital*, the «life force» that drives all things and is in all things. It is Bergson's version of God.

Although «*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*» was published late in Bergson's career, its basic ideas had a profound relationship to the others we have already mentioned. In this work, the French philosopher contrasted the idea of closed with open morality and static with dynamic religion. Closed morality and static religion focus on the preservation of the life of the group, its unity, warding off anything that appears to pose a threat – all too often and all too easily new ideas, cultures, and peoples. To Bergson, the militarization of cultures throughout the world of the 1930s was a frightening example of the effects of closed morality and static religion.

But to the French philosopher, if there was an *élan vital* driving the universe, evolution and change were its ways; closed morality and static religion were contrary to its ways. Fortunately, there were human beings throughout history, the mystics of the various religious traditions, who had a special intuition of this *élan vital*, who had a special sense of oneness with it. To Bergson this meant being in communion with, at one with the Love that is the *élan vital* of the universe, a love that enhances individuality within the bonds of a genuine community open to diversity.

### **The Historical Context in Hungary**

The Hungary in which the writers Mihály Babits and Zsigmond Moricz were beginning to have an impact in the literary world (1908–1912), and in which Henri Bergson was already having an explosive influence was a world ready to come apart. The various nationalities of the Austro-Hungarian wanted their independence even as the government of the Kingdom of Hungary embarked on a program of enforced Magyarization (the word «Magyar» is the Hungarian word for ethnic Hungarian). The socio-economic-political-cultural structure of the country was basically feudal with a few members of the nobility, along with the churches, owning most of the land. In this very hierarchical social order, these members of the nobility who owned so much of the land were also the ones who wielded the most power. They also adhered to «liberalism», which in the Central and Eastern European context referred to free thought as well as free trade and commerce. Although this social structure survived in a largely rural country, the Empire was also industrializing gradually. Poverty was widespread in the villages and cities alike, with very little means of social mobility. There was a very small middle class, with the impoverished gentry at times playing the political role of the middle classes. Once Jews were emancipated following the creation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (they had actually been emancipated during the Revolution of 1848), assimilated, well educated Ashkenazi Jews – and ethnic Germans – became the backbone of the relatively small middle class. The explosion, of course, came with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the ensuing World War.

The end of World War was also the end of Old Empires including the not so old Austro-Hungarian Empire. Hungary became independent. First, there was a reform minded, democratic oriented revolution in October 1918, followed by a Soviet Republic that lasted 133 days. A Red Terror was followed by a White Terror. At the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Hungary lost two thirds of its territory and one third of its ethnic Magyar population. Admiral Horthy came to power as Regent in 1920 and

gave his name to the next era in Hungarian history – the Horthy Era (1920–1944). The old aristocracy had come back to power in a semi-feudal, semi-democratic, semi-authoritarian, socio-politico-economic system with little means of social mobility. Suffrage was not universal and was not secret in the rural areas. During the «White Terror», anti-Semitism had at least a semi-official status («*numerus clausus*» laws were passed), fed by the high visibility of assimilated Jews in the waning days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the oft repeated statistic of 31 out of 34 People's Commissars being of Jewish origin. The official ideology was staunchly anti-Communist and «irredentist» – unwillingness to be reconciled to the loss of territory and more especially ethnic population, felt to be a national tragedy and humiliation that was synonymous with the word «Trianon».

Under the moderating and stabilizing leadership of Prime Minister István Bethlen (1921–1931), the anti-Jewish laws were not enforced, a *modus vivendi* was attained with the Jewish community, and an agreement was reached between the government, The Social Democratic Party, and the labor unions. Bethlen was also anti-Nazi and as long as he was in power, Hungary stayed out of the clutches of an increasingly aggressive Germany. Most of his successors admired fascist Italy and some made Faustian deals with Hitler, the return of lost territories and populations in return for Hungary's alliance with the Axis powers.

### **Mihály Babits (1883–1942)**

The most important figure in Hungarian culture and history on whom Bergson had the most profound influence from the beginning of the twentieth century was Hungary's greatest poet of that century, Endre Ady (1877–1919). Ady was a Calvinist from Transylvania who foresaw the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on account of competing nationalisms. A Francophile, he listened to and imbibed Bergson's lectures and sought to emulate his role model, the French Socialist leader, Jean Jaurès assassinated in 1914. Ady was a symbol of the democratic aspirations of the Revolution of 1918. His influence would be formative on all subsequent Hungarian literature.

I am going to mention briefly one other figure on whom we see the influence of Bergson very early on. That figure is Ottokár Prohászka (1858–1927), Bishop of Székesfehérvár (1905–1927). Prohászka is a most enigmatic figure to me. He can write almost poetically about God as the «*élan vital*»; how the «*élan vital*» is in the Reserved Sacrament (three of his works were condemned for Bergsonism); how the Church needs to espouse Christian Socialism and redistribute its lands, something the prelate in fact did. Yet, Prohászka was capable of the most virulent anti-Semitic attacks, at times from the floor of the Parliament.

Finally, we come to people who were the topic of my Fulbright, Babits and Moricz. Babits wrote three articles on Bergson. The first of these exudes enthusiasm for what Babits sees as Bergson's recovery of metaphysics, in contrast to the anti-metaphysical bias of much of modern philosophy. Even more importantly, Babits' understanding of Bergson's metaphysics—rejecting a mechanistic view of the world in favor of one that sees the universe as alive, dynamic, creative, made up of interdependent parts—seems, in an uncanny way, to anticipate (as I have mentioned before) contemporary environmental philosophers' attempts to overcome anthropocentrism and to see nature and its constituent parts as being of intrinsic value. Babits is

not entirely consistent in this regard—reflecting Bergson's own inconsistencies regarding dualism.

Babits' other two articles on Bergson are a two-part review of the French philosopher's book *«The Two Sources of Morality and Religion»*. Babits sees the book as extremely insightful about the insularity of extreme nationalism and, although he seeks to be apolitical, a resource for resisting militarism and all manifestations of modern humanity's impulse toward self-destruction.

### **Babits and Szigmond Moricz**

I need to mention that both Babits and Moricz initially were sympathetic to the Soviet Republic in 1919 and that both were appointed to academic positions. They both became disillusioned fairly quickly.

I mention this in part because both were subject to reprisals; they both lost their academic positions. Moricz was never again allowed to have one of his plays produced. As a result, both wanted to convey to the censors that be that they were «apolitical». Moricz used the term «épits», «build», as slogan for what he deemed to be an apolitical reform program. Of course, even such self-avowed apolitical programs at some level are political and have political consequences.

Babits was a liberal Roman Catholic poet, essayist, playwright, and novelist. He was a pacifist at a time of rising nationalism. If I may use an analogy to the political and cultural conflict between the «Westernizers» and the «Slavophiles» (especially the «narodniks») in Russia, Babits was the quintessential Westernizer in the Hungarian context. Although deeply rooted in Hungarian culture, he was profoundly influenced by Western thought. He was the translator of numerous classics of Western literature. It is interesting to note that the devout Roman Catholic Babits so enthusiastically embraced Bergson's philosophy at a time when the French philosopher was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church and his works put on the Papal Index.

Moricz, a Calvinist like Ady, and Babits, the liberal Roman Catholic, were co-editors (1929–1933) of *«Nyugat (The West)»*, Hungary's most influential political, literary, and cultural journal in the first half of the twentieth century. Moricz, while conversant with Western literature and culture and a friend and collaborator with Babits (they complemented each other), emphasized Hungarian historical and cultural themes in his writings. Although he saw the Hungarian peasant, rooted in the soil and the non-human natural world, as being in touch with a primordial “life force, «elan vital», in a special way, his works, instead of romanticizing the peasants, are, in their realism, scathing indictments of the injustice, harshness, and brutality of the lives of those peasants. Although Babits and Moricz complemented each other, they were in many ways at the root of the most fundamental political and cultural divide in twentieth and twenty-first century Hungary. This split is between «the urbanists», largely intellectuals of middle class, urban origin, with an important working class contingent, Western oriented vs. «the populists» (a poor translation of the Hungarian, «népies», «of the people», «with the people»), rural, nationalistic, village and East or South (the Balkans) oriented. This urbanist, Westernizer vs. «populist», lover of indigenous traditions dynamic finds expression in various forms in Russia, throughout the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and even in some of the rhetoric of post-colonialism.

### **Environmental Ethics**

Both Babits and Moricz anticipate and raise some of the most fundamental meta-ethical questions raised by environmental ethicists, namely what is humanity's place in the world? Are we above nature or are we parts of nature? It also raises the question of whether the non-human is of intrinsic value or instrumental value.

We have seen that Babits is excited about Bergson's philosophy because the French thinker develops a metaphysics in which humans are a part of and belong to the universe – a universe that is not mechanistic but alive and creative. It is very clear that he has read Bergson very closely and wrote about him directly in prose. In the case of Zsigmond Moricz, there are no indications that he has read Bergson nor has he written about the French thinker in prose. Nevertheless, Moricz had to be familiar with Bergson's ideas; they were part of the intellectual air he breathed. One could not be part of the intellectual life of Hungary in the first half of the twentieth century without some familiarity with, some animated, passionate discussion of the philosophy of Henri Bergson. For Moricz, human beings are parts of the creativity of the earth, «the *élan vital*»; the goal of existence is to be in harmony with, rooted in this «*élan vital*». He certainly feels that people like the rugged peasants of the Hungarian Plains (the «*Alföld*», «the Lower Ground» literally; the Hungarian plains are a continuation of the Russian steppes on the Western side of the Carpathians) live rooted in the land, closer to the elemental forces of life. In this regard, Moricz would not be strikingly different from what seems to be a transcultural phenomenon, that is to say the emphasis on rootedness in the land, in the creativity of the earth, the «*élan vital*». One can find this emphasis in authors, particularly the Romantics, from such diverse cultures as Leo Tolstoy in Russia and James Fenimore Cooper in the United States.

Authors like Tolstoy and Moricz are «realists»; they describe life as it is – not just in its beauty but with its suffering, hardship, cruelty and brutality. In spite of this, there is a tendency on the part of Tolstoy (and others) to romanticize the Russian peasant and her/his rootedness in the earth as an unmitigated good and the source of wisdom. This can most readily be seen in the characters of Gerasim in «*The Death of Ivan Ilich*» and Platon in «*War and Peace*». Gerasim is the only character who is not self-preoccupied as Ivan Ilyich is dying but is «natural» as a source of comfort, reacting always spontaneously, intuitively in ways that are always a relief to Ivan. In similar fashion, Platon (it is not accidental that his name is Plato) teaches much practical wisdom to Pierre, the protagonist, in «*War and Peace*», while they are in French captivity. There is a scene after Platon is shot by the French in which Pierre starts to laugh uncontrollably, having realized through the wisdom and death of his friend that there is a part of him that can never be taken away, a part of him that can never be destroyed. In a similar fashion, the rootedness of Cooper's character Natty Bumppo in nature is an unambiguous, unmitigated good that is romanticized.

This is where Zsigmond Moricz is different from other realist authors: he is a realist through and through, accepting the ambiguities that come with being rooted in the «*élan vital*». A meaningful existence, an abundant life can be attained only through a rootedness in nature—but this is a blessing full of ambiguities, beauty as well as ugliness, suffering, brutality and cruelty.

### **A Whiteheadian Interlude**

Before I go on to consider one of Moricz's earliest novels, «*Sárarany (Gold in the Mud: A Hungarian Peasant Novel)*» [5; 6], I need to take a Whiteheadian interlude or intermission for the sake of perspective. Process philosophy is usually identified with the philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000). Bergson is usually seen as belonging to the school, an influence on Whitehead and others. I have always wanted to expand the process family to include not only Bergson but the likes of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955); such Classical American philosophers as William James (1855–1910), Josiah Royce (1855–1916), and John Dewey; and Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) and others from all over the world.

The main tenets of the process view of the world is that the universe is creative, made up of interdependent and interdependent parts. There is no dualism of mind and matter or anything else. Matter is energy and what we see in the world are extensions of energy events in space and time organized in various degrees of complexity.

In process thought, all actualities «feel» in however a rudimentary fashion. Of course, inanimate objects like rocks do not feel. However, the atoms, molecules, energy events that make them up do feel, at however a rudimentary level. Thus, all experiences of the moment, human and non-human, are of intrinsic value although not necessarily of equal value.

In this scheme of things, God is necessary to hold things together for Whitehead and most process thinkers. God is the supreme instance of creativity, ordering possibilities in order of graded relevance and the supreme instance of relatedness, «feeling» all «feelings» in the world and preserving them everlastingly. Other process thinkers see the creativity of the universe as sufficient, just as Bergson saw Creative Evolution as God.

The previous discussion has been to demonstrate the profoundly ecological vision of process thought, a vision which sees everything, including God, as interrelated, interdependent, and creative. Every actuality, human and non-human, has some degree of value. Process thought has offered this ecological vision as an alternative to the mechanistic view of the world—the «bête noire» of all environmental philosophies.

In Whiteheadian process thought, momentary experiences, human and non-human, are «lured» to realize themselves in their fundamental interdependence with all things. This lure is offered in the form of what Whitehead calls «propositions», some combination of the actual and the possible. The actual in propositions may include people, places, colors – as well as stories and narratives.

To me and other process thinkers, poems, novels, all forms of literature are propositions (whatever else they may be). They deal with actual characters, imaginary though they be, actual places, stories, etc. that arouse the imagination and empower unanticipated possibilities.

Poetry and all forms of literature deal with philosophical questions: «Who am I?»; «What is the meaning of life?»; «What is the world really like?»; «What are human beings really like?»; «What is human nature, if there is such a thing?». Poetry, novels, short stories, address these questions in ways that are far more evocative and speak to deeper recesses of our being than the rationality of philosophical tracts.

### **Sárarany (Gold in the Mud: A Hungarian Peasant Novel)**



This novel by Zsigmond Moricz takes place in the small village of Kiskará in the Alföld (the Great Plains of Hungary). It is a thriving village. Nevertheless, the lives of its inhabitants are hard. The land belongs to a wealthy count who has encouraged passivity on the part of the peasants. The protagonist is Dani Turi, a Don Juan type who seems to seduce every woman in the village, a man with «the Midas touch» who can turn the simplest thing like crop rotation into profit. Perhaps most importantly, his most fundamental orientation runs counter to what seems to be, without stereotyping, a trans-cultural attitude of peasants, namely a sense of «fatedness», a sense that no matter what you do and how hard you try, things are not going to change – «and there is nothing you can do about it». Dani Turi's attitude is that «there is always something you can do about it».

It goes without saying Dani Turi's explosive energy comes from an elemental rootedness in the creativity of nature, «the élan vital». He has broken the bonds of the sense of fatedness. To the other villagers, he is an object of both respect and resentment.

For a time, Dani gains a new appreciation for his wife and children and begins to live a life of simpler domesticity. He begins to put on weight and lose «some of his edge».

He comes up with a plan. He will rent the land from the Count—eventually hoping to buy it—and during the process, seduce the Countess! A poetic and historical righting of social injustice, of a rigidly hierarchical socio-politico-economic system.

To complicate things, the Count already has a buyer for the land. However, the potential buyer has a riding accident and dies. Dani rides with legal papers in hand allowing him to rent to meet the Count. In the most shocking ending I have ever read in a novel, Dani winds up killing the Countess, the Count, and one of his cousins. Turi's wife accepts and forgives him. As for Dani, he has had a catharsis and attempts to take to heart his wife's words about facing a newness of life—with whatever that may entail.

Dani is taken into custody by villagers armed with pitchforks and thrown into the village's very primitive jail cell while somebody goes to get the gendarmes. The protagonist asks why he had lived, what was life? «Mud» was the answer. Then what was humanity's place in the mud?

«Gold in the mud».

«So who is at fault if nothing came of this gold?

Who?»

«God, who has made nothing of it».

### **Zorba the Greek**

Nikos Kazantzakis is an author in whom many of the currents of our time intersect: the influence of his teacher, Henri Bergson; the search for God; mysticism; the search for peace, justice, and reconciliation; a flirtation with Marxism; an interest in Buddhism; transformation of the world, all held together by a practical wisdom for living found in the immediacies of lived experience, as portrayed by many of his characters, most especially Zorba.

I need to mention in the beginning the manner in which we have moved beyond the Fulbright project. In the Fulbright project, the focus was on Bergson's influence on Babits and Moricz, especially on Babits' essays on Bergson. We have

built on that foundation yet moved beyond it in considering Moricz by himself as a Hungarian writer and drawing out similarities to the Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957).

I have already mentioned that Kazantzakis had been a student of Henri Bergson (1907–1909). The influence of Bergson is reflected in many of Kazantzakis' characters but it is most readily apparent in *«Zorba the Greek»*.

The two main characters in *«Zorba the Greek»* are the bookish narrator whom Zorba calls «Boss» and Zorba himself. Their relationship starts when «Boss» has inherited a lignite mine on the island of Crete and sets out on a boat from Piraeus. Zorba convinces Boss to give him a job at the mine.

Zorba is a character totally caught up in the immediacies of life, rooted in the creativity of nature, in the «*élan vital*». He can get enthralled by the beauty of a dolphin. Or, if he feels like going swimming with no clothes on, he will do so without a second thought. Zorba is totally spontaneous, totally the present moment of experience, completely one with his intuitions.

Although some of the best parts of the book are soliloquies by Zorba, there are important subplots and other, minor characters. For one, there is the ongoing relationship, more and more complicated as the book goes along, between Zorba and Madame Hortense («*Bouboulina*») For another, there is the story of the young widow with whom Boss winds up spending the night. When a young boy who has a crush on her sees them together and villagers make fun of him, he winds up drowning himself. Although Zorba does his best to save her, the boy's father decapitates the widow in front of Boss, Zorba, and the entire village. The scene echoes Bergson's concepts of closed morality and static religion.

Like Moricz (a causal influence is virtually impossible, with Moricz publishing his novel in 1911, Kazantzakis in 1946), Kazantzakis sees the meaning of existence, the abundant life in our rootedness in the creativity of nature, our rootedness in the «*élan vital*». But as with Moricz, that creativity can be ambiguous with ambiguous results.

Some of this may be seen in the way the reader responds. For example, as Madame Hortense is dying and dies, the women of the village, very poor, cannot wait to ransack her domicile and take her belongings. Boss wants Zorba to do something. He reminds Boss that her possessions will not do her any good! Readers like myself might want a moment of silence or someway of honoring her. And Zorba would ask, «What difference does it make?» – all the while fully recognizing the deep care he had for her.

### **Conclusion**

And what does all of this have to do with the problems of the day, particularly climate change? First of all, the novels *«Sárarany»* and *«Zorba the Greek»* have been Whiteheadian propositions luring us into a larger world, beckoning us to live our lives rooted in the creativity of the universe, the Bergsonian «*élan vital*». While that is where we find the meaning of life and the abundance of its blessings, that creativity and its results are not an unmitigated good but fraught with ambiguity.

Facing issues like climate change, we need to make the decisions we need to make with strength and courage amidst all the ambiguities of the Brave New World we have created, with ever present possibilities of creative transformation.

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## EMBRACING THE AMBIGUITY OF CREATIVITY

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The paper is aimed at revealing in detail the explosive impact of Henri Bergson, who considerably influenced the American process philosophy tradition, on Hungarian culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Up to the point this paper was written (July, 2016), the author published one article on the influence of Bergson on the greatest Hungarian poet of the twentieth century, Endre Ady, and two on the French philosopher's impact on the Roman Catholic Bishop Ottokár Prohászka. The current publication is the outcome of his Fulbright scholarship research on Bergson's influence on Mihály Babits and Zsigmond Moricz, two writers of the first half of the twentieth who anticipated environmental issues. In this article, after a brief summary of Bergson's influence on Babits, the author seeks to show the influence of the vitalism of Bergson, as can be seen in one of the peasant characters of Moricz, comparing that character, Dani Turi, to Nikos Kazantzakis' (a former student of Bergson) Zorba the Greek. He then seeks to draw out the key points: the need be rooted in the land and in the creativity of nature, the "élan vital," which is not an unmitigated, unambiguous good but may have very ambiguous results.

**Keywords:** *A. Bergson, ambiguity of creativity, process philosophy, A.N. Whitehead, Hungarian culture in the first half, of the 20-th century, Bergson's*

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