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"Indian Legend" vs. "Indian Show". Károly Kazimir's 1978 Hiawatha

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Abstract: In 1978 Károly Kazimir directed Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* in the Theatre-in-the-Round in Budapest. Characteristically for Kazimir's work, the production catered to a mass public but was at the same time challenging and, in certain aspects, slightly provocative. This essay provides some important historical, cultural, and political contexts for the interpretation of Kazimir's experimental staging of *Hiawatha*.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem about Native Americans, *The Song of Hiawatha*, was put on stage in 1978 for the 20th anniversary of the Theatre-in-the-Round in Budapest. Directed by Károly Kazimir, one of the prominent experimental directors of the Communist era, the production—like almost all of Kazimir's works—was bound to stir controversy among critics and the audience. In this paper I will present what can be recovered from Kazimir's original concept as well as some important cultural contexts for its appreciation. As we shall see, the seemingly innocent subject of Native American myth and folklore had the potential to polarise responses as a consequence of which the production and its critical reception form a model case of the interaction between Kazimir's directorial art and communist cultural policy.

The Budapest Theatre-in-the-Round and Kazimir's "theatre of popular education"

Born in 1928, Kazimir graduated from the College of Theatre and Film Arts in Budapest in 1953, the year in which the hardline communist dictatorship of Mátyás Rákosi slowly started to crumble (a process that eventually led to the 1956 revolution). After a few years of acting in the country, he became director of the National Theatre in Miskolc where he won recognition by staging Sophocles's *Antigone* in 1955 and József Katona's *Bánk Bán* (widely regarded as the first "Hungarian national drama") in 1957.[1] These early productions already show a glimpse of what became Kazimir's lifelong project: actualising the classics, endowing their seemingly stale and bookish wisdom with fresh significance.

In the long run, this project necessitated the constitution of a new theatrical space; thus, in 1958, Kazimir started the Budapest Theatre-in-the-Round for his experimental productions. After visiting various European theatres and studying theatrical history extensively, it was in the Paris Théâtre-en-Rond (founded by Paquita Claude and André Villiers) that Kazimir found a suitable model for

[1] The production of Katona's play seems to have been an act of indirect resistance. Premiered on 10 January 1957, barely 2 months after the quelling of the revolution and amid ongoing rearguard fighting with the Soviet troops in Miskolc, performances were held in the afternoon but were still sold out. The audience interrupted the performance with the long applause for the monologue of Tiborc (a peasant character complaining about the misery of the people), and the lead actor, Attila Nagy, was (re)arrested in March. See PÁRKÁNY László, "Térdeplő Thália," *Miskolci Színházi Esték*, no. 64. https://szinhaz.hu/2006/12/14/terdeplo_thalia, accessed: 11.03.2025.

the realisation of his general artistic concept.[2] Using the abandoned exhibition spaces of Budapest City Park,[3] the new venue would feature performances where actors "felt as if they were in the same room with the audience" and could therefore "free themselves from clichés, forced gestures that is, theatricality in the wrong sense."[4]

This transformation of the conventional connection and interaction between actors and spectators went hand in hand with Kazimir's attempt to redefine the general purpose of theatrical performances. Kazimir considered television a serious challenge to contemporary theatrical culture (even though he knew "that the role of television will be different in the life of a socialist country than in the western world"), therefore, he set out to create "complex theatre" for "the masses."[5] The result was a "theatre of popular education" (*népművelő színház*) in which canonical works of Hungarian and world literature were put on stage in front of large audiences.[6] The theatre started with the staging of Sophocles's *Antigone* and *Oedipus the King* in 1959 and was in operation until 1990, when the final production was Ludwig Holberg's *The Political Tinker*.[7] From 1968 the theatre's programme also included stage versions of epic poems, such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1968) or John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1970), and from around the same time, Kazimir started to look beyond the canons of Western European literature to stage *Kalevala* (1969), *Ramayana* (1971), the Turkish shadow play *Karagöz* (1973), or *Gilgamesh* (1975).[8] For Kazimir, the success of *Kalevala* showed, epics are "not superhuman, complicated and inaccessible pieces of literature, but works which are very much connected to the thought and life of the people and which carry within themselves the promise of dramatic enterprises."[9] Perhaps that is why in 1978 he chose another epic work, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Theatre-in-the-Round.

The Song of Hiawatha *and its reception in Hungarian culture*

Published in 1855, *The Song of Hiawatha* is one of the most well-known of Longfellow's works. It is a narrative poem of a little more than 5000 lines which features Native American characters, chiefly among them the poem's eponymous hero, Hiawatha, and his love Minnehaha.[10] Longfellow was drawing on ethnographic accounts, authentic Ojibwe sources,

[2] KAZIMIR Károly, *Világirodalom a Körszínházban* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1975), 44. Kazimir elsewhere also mentions the Russian director Nikolay Pavlovich Okhlopkov (who revolutionized modern theatrical space by seating the audience on the stage) as a source of inspiration for the non-traditional stage arrangement of the Theatre-in-the-Round, see KAZIMIR Károly, *A népművelő színház* (Budapest: Magvető, 1972), 156–157.

[3] During its more than three-decade-long history the Theatre-in-the-Round occupied several former exhibition pavilions on the territory of the Budapest International Fair.

[4] KAZIMIR, *A népművelő színház*, 157. Unless otherwise stated, translations of Hungarian texts are by the author.

[5] KAZIMIR, *Világirodalom*, 90, 92.

[6] Performances usually took place in the summer.

[7] A full list of performances, complete with casts, is provided in the database of the Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute. A list of the titles of performances can be found in KAZIMIR Károly, *Thália örök* (Budapest: Szabad Tér, 1998), 124–125.

[8] On Kazimir's *Paradise Lost*, see Miklós PÉTI, *Paradise from behind the Iron Curtain: Reading, Translating and Staging Milton in Communist Hungary* (London: UCL Press, 2022), 19–64, 150–272, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2kg15tf

[9] KAZIMIR, *Világirodalom*, 120.

[10] On *The Song of Hiawatha* as a candidate for the "American epic," see Charlotte KRETZOI, "Puzzled Americans: Attempts at an American

as well as his own imagination to create what he professed to be an "Indian Edda," a collection and partly artistic recreation of Native American myth.[11] Written in trochaic tetrameters, the poem is directly inspired by *Kalevala*, but it was also its author's intention to conceive it as "a kind of American Prometheus."[12] What is more, as James McDugall points out, besides the oral tales of the Native Americans, *The Song of Hiawatha* also engages another strand of early American traditions, the graveyard poetry present in the "rude inscription[s]" (Longfellow's term) of the Puritans. As a result, through the merger of "two radically different and somewhat antithetical pre-Revolutionary cultures," in *The Song of Hiawatha* America emerges as "a poem written in a lost natural language that the poet must recover and decode."[13] Almost all of these distinctive qualities of the poem have, however, also served as bases for criticism: the colonial appropriation of Native American lore, the general atmosphere of "childishness" pervading the narrative, and the poet's heavy indebtedness to European literature have regularly been brought up against *The Song of Hiawatha* – together with the commonplace verdict of artistic mediocrity.

Unsurprisingly for an epic work, *The Song of Hiawatha* has strong dramatic potential. Its evergreen themes couched in suspenseful narratives of myth, the emblematic characters it features, and the smoothly flowing meter all render Longfellow's poem eminently stageable, so much so that, as Alan Trachtenberg points out, "in many ways, the staged Hiawatha fulfils the poem."[14] It is not surprising, then, that performances of *Hiawatha* took place in the United States from the late 19th century on, often with Native American actors using pantomime and indigenous languages. In certain cases, a successful enterprise was built on these performances, which empowered Native Americans to participate "in their own story of survival" rather than acting out a "white colonial fantasy."[15] Such efforts to appropriate the cultural currency of "Indianness" were part of a wider "Hiawatha Revival," which "captured American imaginations in the decades around 1900 with a [...] prolific, graphic, and ritualised [representation of the *Hiawatha* story] in pageants and films," and which, importantly, took place in a period critical from the perspective of the Native communities (i.e. the era of forced assimilation).[16] These attempts were revived in the new millennium: between 2006 and 2008, the Garden River First Nation put *Hiawatha*

National Epic Poem," in *The Origins and Originality of American Culture*, ed. Tibor FRANK (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1984), 139–148, 144–146.

[11] Henry Wadsworth LONGFELLOW, *The Song of Hiawatha* (New York: T. Nelson, 1855), 107.

[12] The phrase appears in Longfellow's letter to Leonard Freiligrath, April 25, 1855. *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence*, ed. Samuel LONGFELLOW, 3 Vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company), 2:286.

[13] James MCDOUGALL, "*The Song of Hiawatha* and the Ruins of American Literature," in *Reconsidering Longfellow*, eds. Christoph IRMSCHER and Robert ARBOUR, 71–85 (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 74–75.

[14] Alan TRACHTENBERG, *Shades of* Hiawatha: *Staging Indians, Making Americans 1880–1930* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 58.

[15] Katy Young EVANS, "The People's Pageant: The Stage as Native Space in Anishinaabe Dramatic Interpretations of Hiawatha," *MELUS* 41, no. 2 (2016): 124–146, 139, https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/mlw009

[16] Michael David MCNALLY, "The Indian Passion Play: Contesting the Real Indian in Song of Hiawatha Pageants, 1901–1965," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2006): 105–136, 112, 131, https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2006.0031

on stage again.[17] Quite independently from these stagings, British theatre director Michael Bogdanov came out with his own version of *Hiawatha*, a production primarily intended for a children's audience, in the Royal National Theatre in London in 1980.[18]

Kazimir admits to no knowledge of previous productions of *Hiawatha* and, thus, claims to do pioneering work.[19] The question comes up: why, then, of all epics, did Kazimir choose this particular piece to celebrate an important anniversary of the Theatre-in-the-Round? What was there in this nineteenth-century narrative poem—which some had written off as poor imitation, but others as outright plagiarism of *Kalevala*[20]—that captured the director's imagination? To what extent could he build on the Hungarian audience's previous knowledge or expectations? Some answers to these questions are, of course, provided by the production itself (together with Kazimir's reflections and the various critical responses), but first a brief look at the Hungarian reception of Longfellow's work in general and *The Song of Hiawatha* in particular is necessary.

Longfellow's poetry was known and translated among Hungarian literati as early as the 1860s, and by the 1870s he was reckoned to be "the most popular foreign poet in Hungary."[21] His popularity among critics had, however, waned by the early 20th century, and the great generations of the *Nyugat* writers were already rather dismissive of the qualities of his poetry. Dezső Kosztolányi, for example, points out that "he is only our Sunday entertainment, a delightful afternoon reading," while Mihály Babits compares his "supercilious eclecticism" to the way "American billionaires collected priceless pieces of art in their homes from American museums."[22] In the 1950s, there were some attempts to revaluate Longfellow's legacy: a reading of excerpts from his works, including *The Song of Hiawatha,* was staged in 1957 by Irodalmi Színpad (Literary Stage, a theatrical company specialising in performances of literary works) to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the poet's birth. The production was well received: a review in the magazine *Film, Színház, Muzsika* pointed out that Longfellow's works are "deeply rooted in the problems of his own day" and that he "steps up against the oppression of blacks, social inequalities, and the obstacles to cultural progression; sometimes rather naively."[23] In the same year, Tibor Lutter, the foremost Marxist-Leninist English Studies scholar of the day, reappraised Longfellow's work, arguing that his work is characterised by a noble *aurea mediocritas*, and its significance is in creating and solidifying the national ideal, rescuing

[17] See https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/garden-river-first-nation#Culture, accessed: 11.03.2025.

[18] On the cast and production dates of Bogdanov's adaptation, see https://theatricalia.com/play/8fr/hiawatha/production/pmf, accessed: 07.03.2025. A 1980 LP recording and a 1984 TV drama of Bogdanov's production were also published. The show also toured in the UK, see ANON., "Festival Comes of Age," *Theatre Ireland* no. 4 (1983): 34. It is a question whether Bogdanov knew about Kazimir's *Hiawatha*. Pauline Steel singled out Bogdanov's production as an eminent example of how drama can be used in education. See Pauline STEEL, "Staging drama from a director's point of view," *Teaching and Learning* 8, no. 2 (1988): 76–83.

[19] KAZIMIR Károly, "Hiawata éneke," *Magyarország*, April 23, 1978, 26.

[20] See Ernest J. MOYNE, Hiawatha *and* Kalevala: *A Study of the Relationship between Longfellow's "Indian Edda" and the Finnish Epic* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1963), 71–110.

[21] Lehel VADON, "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in Hungary," *Eger Journal of American Studies* 1 (1993): 129–136, 130–131.

[22] Ibid., 133–134.

[23] A. G., "Longfellow-est," *Film Színház Muzsika*, no. 3 (1957): 5.

American literature from provincialism.[24] Despite these efforts, what Lehel Vadon pointed out in 1997 still rings true today: Longfellow's "place in literary history and the evaluation of his achievements are still uneven and controversial," and were presumably so when Kazimir was preparing his production of *Hiawatha*.

Hungarian renderings of *The Song of Hiawatha* closely follow the course of this uneven critical reception. In the 1880s, two translations of Longfellow's epic were published, by Ferenc Bernátsky and Gyula Tamásfi, respectively. Both translators were highly enthusiastic about the work, which, besides the general nineteenth-century fondness for Longfellow's restrained and civilised poetry, can also be interpreted as a late reverberation of the Romantic preoccupation with the national epic. Thus, in a note to his translation, Bernátsky calls Longfellow "one of the most significant of America's poets" who became the "Homer of Indian tribes going extinct," while in his preface, Tamásfi points out that the poet deserves double praise: for arousing sympathy with the oppressed Native Americans (and by extension, also American slaves) as well as by preserving their myths.[25] After these interpretations, in the first half of the twentieth century, *Hiawatha* seems to have largely faded from the Hungarian literary consciousness, although a choral piece entitled *The Lament of Hiawatha* by composer Sándor Vándor testifies to the theme's enduring significance. In 1958, however, a new translation of *The Song of Hiawatha* was published in the "Gems of World Literature" series of the Móra publishing house. An anonymous endnote to this small volume (perhaps by the translator, András Fodor, or Tibor Lutter) portrays Longfellow as "the poet of the rising bourgeoisie," a kind of secondary Romantic poet who, however, has a lot to say "to progressive circles in the West and to countries in the peace camp [i.e. communist countries]." *Hiawatha*, the "epitome of the unwritten poetry of Native Americans exiled from their land," is, thus, the poem among Longfellow's works that "best stands the test of time" and in which the poet "declares peace in his own way between the victors and the defeated."[26] For Kazimir, "this beautiful translation was the strongest argument" for staging *Hiawatha*, together with the fact that Longfellow was inspired by the Finnish epic: "scientifically perhaps this cannot be taken seriously, but *Kalevala* is to some extent also our [i.e. Hungarians'] own ancient history from a very distant past.[27]

The 1978 production of Hiawatha

Hiawatha: North American Indian Legend in Two Acts was premiered on 7 July 1978 at the Theatre-in-the-Round. The script was based on András Fodor's translation, adapted to stage by Kazimir.[28] The cast included some of the well-known young actors of the day (mostly actors from the Thália Theatre): András Kozák as Hiawatha, Andrea Drahota as Nokomis, and Cecília Esztergályos as Minnehaha.[29] As it was customary for productions in the Theatre-in-the-Round, performances took place through the summer with

[24] Tibor LUTTER, "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," *Magyar Tudomány* 64, no. 5–6 (1957): 169–174. On Lutter's career, see PÉTI, *Paradise from behind the Iron Curtain*, 90–120.

[25] Wadsworth LONGFELLOW Henrik, *Hiawatha*, trans. Ferenc BERNÁTSKY (Budapest: Mayer Lajos, 1883), 167–168; LONGFELLOW Henrik, *Hiavata. Indus hitrege*, trans. Gyula TAMÁSFI (Budapest: Franklin, 1885), 5.

[26] Henry Wadsworth Walt DISNEY, *Hiawatha, a kis indiánus*, trans. Malusev CVETKO (Zagreb: Mladost, 1960).

[27] KAZIMIR, "Hiawata éneke," 26.

[28] Unfortunately, the script of the production has not survived.

[29] The full cast with photographs and links to some reviews is available at: https://resolver.szinhaztortenet.hu/collection/OSZMI54289 Accessed 11.03.2025.

a few stagings in the Thália Theatre during the autumn season.

For most Hungarians in the twentieth century, knowledge about Native Americans came not from Longfellow's poem but rather from the popular novels of Karl May and James Fenimore Cooper. Western films, some of which were produced in the Eastern Bloc (the so-called "Red Westerns" or "Osterns"), also played an important role in shaping the audience's expectations. Kazimir viewed his staging as a corrective move to such stereotypical representations, and to accomplish this decolonisation of Native American myth, he travelled to America and to France to do research on folklore material and asked actors to study footage from Indian reservations to be able to reproduce "authentic" behaviour and movements. Music accompanying the performance was played on instruments resembling Native American woodwinds and percussions, and its motifs were inspired by Indian songs. The entrance hall of the Theatre-in-the-Round featured a special exhibition on the past and present life and customs of Native Americans.[30] Although he insisted on authenticity, Kazimir refused the idea that his performance would descend to the level of an "Indian revue, an ethnographic show": "we are striving to create an authentic semblance [...] but we do not forget that in essence we are always playing Hungarians, even when we try to present the cultural treasures and national characteristics of faraway peoples."[31] Perhaps this is why he chose to weave into the script a romantic ballad presenting a story from rural Hungarian life by the nineteenth-century Hungarian poet János Arany, *Tengeri-hántás* (Cornhusking).

It seems, then, that in accordance with his project of the "theatre of popular education," in *Hiawatha* Kazimir aimed at some common denominator that transcends cultural and political differences. He points out that *Hiawatha* rises above all stories about the Indians, since it is a story "which Longfellow wrote, but the Indians lived it, suffered it, working joyfully, going extinct, and eventually turning into totem poles."[32] To illustrate the universal appeal and significance of the work, he quotes the following lines from Longfellow's "Introduction":

> Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,
> Who have faith in God and Nature.
> Who believe, that in all ages
> Every human heart is human, [...]
> Listen to this simple story,
> To this Song of Hiawatha![33]

Significantly, the Hungarian translation of the last two quoted lines is "Hallgasson a nyílt beszédre, / Hiawata énekére" (Listen to the speech spoken openly, / to Hiawatha's song).[34] In Kazimir's interpretation, Longfellow's "simple story," thus, becomes an explicit testimony to universal truth based on "a deeper understanding of other peoples."[35] Just like in the 1970 production of *Paradise Lost*, the attempt to represent an idyllic state of human society is far from apolitical: Kazimir explicitly

[30] ANON., "Hiawata sztori: Indiánok a Körszínházban," *Hétfői Hírek*, February 27, 1978; GARAI Tamás, "Hiawata sztori. Indiánok a Ligetben," *Hétfői Hírek*, June 12, 1978.

[31] GARAI, "Hiawata sztori: Indiánok a Ligetben." According to Garai, the South Dakota *United Tribes News* published an enthusiastic report on the preparations for Kazimir's production, but I could not find any such article in the newspaper's online archives.

[32] KAZIMIR Károly, "Kinek ajánlja Kazimir Károly a *Hiawatát*?," *Népszabadság*, June 25, 1978, 11.

[33] LONGFELLOW, *The Song of Hiawatha*, 2–3.

[34] KAZIMIR, "Kinek ajánlja..." In Fodor's translation the implications of Hiawatha's song are slightly less universal, as the text reads: "Hallgasson *e* nyílt beszédre," i.e. Listen to *this* speech spoken openly." LONGFELLOW, *Hiawata*, 8, emphasis mine.

[35] KAZIMIR, "Kinek ajánlja..."

contrasts the world of Native Americans with those of the "hobby-Indians" presented in Western magazines and points out that his production is an opportunity to get to know "the prehistory of an incredibly brave people who were daring even to the point of self-sacrifice" but whose descendants now build skyscrapers without fear."[36] His recommendation to the audience that *Hiawatha* "arriving on wings of the Western winds" (a mildly politically charged trope in communist Hungary) should be "received with cordiality and with good intentions," since Native Americans "had a hard time surviving their first encounter" with white men is also indicative of his approach.[37] In Kazimir's interpretation, *Hiawatha,* besides being a resounding testimony to universal human values, is also a gentle gesture of cultural resistance against historical oppression, as well as an act of reclaiming modernity through indigenous traditions.

Viewed from the perspective of communist cultural policy, Kazimir's revision of historically prevalent practices of staging and performing Native Americans could be interpreted both as a reaffirmation of, and a critical reflection on, the status quo. As a consequence, *Hiawatha* elicited mixed responses: although it was a great success among the audience, the immediate critical reception was divided as to the coherence, authenticity, and, most of all, the relevance of the production. There were critics who found Kazimir's vision of Native Americans rewarding: István Juhász, for example, praises the production for creating "the impression and experience of *total theatre*" and for being "void of any forced actualising and hinting."[38] Similarly, György Kriszt points out that Kazimir "gives a picture of the often falsely presented world of the Indians," and the performance raises the question "Why can't we live in peace with each other?" although the staging "indicates precisely later conflicts and helplessness in society."[39] The most positive assessment, however, is provided by Emőke Nagy, according to whom Kazimir "by magic, turns poetry into life and stage acting poetically beautiful." The appearance of white men on stage forming a line of "marble-cold faces in tuxedos and top hats" is, according to Nagy, a cathartic moment in which "yearning for human integrity and purity is mixed with compassion in us."[40]

Other critics were less impressed. László Szále, for example, admits to a general sense of uncertainty concerning the production: he praises Kazimir's efforts to "free classics from their book prisons," but in the case of *Hiawatha,* this, he contends, risks "re-locating the work in another cell, that of the theatre."[41] According to Gábor Hajdu Ráfis, Kazimir's production "lacked internal energy" and was like an "Indian revue [...] appealing to our childhood selves." He closes his piece with the somewhat enigmatic suggestion that perhaps a reflection on "what people liked about the production" would be "sobering" to both critics and the director.[42] Similarly, K. T. writes off the performance as "the fashion revue of extremely expensive clothes," while according to Miklós Apáti (who feels "very sorry for our Indian friends"), the gesture of

[36] Ibid. To compare the representation of Adam and Eve in Kazimir's production of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, see PÉTI, *Paradise from behind the Iron Curtain*, 19–64.

[37] KAZIMIR, "Hiawata éneke."

[38] JUHÁSZ István, "Hiawata: Indián legenda a Körszínházban," *Új Tükör*, July 23, 1978, 29, emphasis in the original.

[39] KRISZT György, "Hiawata: Indián legenda a Körszínházban," *Pest Megyei Hírlap*, July 13, 1978, 4; emphasis in the original.

[40] NAGY Emőke, "Hiawata éneke," *Egyetemi Lapok*, July 17, 1978, n. p.

[41] SZÁLE [László], "Hiawata a Körszínházban," *Magyar Ifjúság*, August 25, 1978, 39.

[42] HAJDU RÁFIS Gábor, "Indián legenda: Longfellow Hiawatája a Körszínházban," *Népszabadság*, July 12, 1978, 7.

Native Americans singing about the Hungarian homeland (in János Arany's ballad) before the coming of the whites is an "ill-thought-out pseudo-political gesture."[43] Perhaps the most characteristic response to Kazimir's *Hiawatha* can, however, be gleaned from the juxtaposition of two critical pieces on the page of the daily *Magyar Hírlap*. In the left column of the page, Pál Geszti's review of Sidney Pollack's *Three Days of the Condor* praised the "devastating realism" of the film's representation of "the true face of American secret services" and "the world's most ruthless, most conscienceless, and most immoral power."[44] By contrast, in the right column, András Lukácsy criticised Kazimir's *Hiawatha* for being "a faint, but gaudy shadow of Longfellow," a "mere show" whose quality did not reach the high level of the *Kalevala* production of 1968 and whose director was blinded by his previous success.[45] The difference between these two reviews illustrates how Kazimir's method, which was certainly less directly critical of modern capitalism (or in the jargon of the day, "imperialism"), could become problematic for a cultural policy bent on prioritising politically "correct" and unambiguous messages.

Kazimir's "Indians" and Playing Indian in Communist Hungary

The bemusement of Kazimir's critics might reflect a more general ambivalence in communist countries towards Native Americans. As Milla Fedorova points out, Soviet cultural perceptions of the indigenous population of America were not always favourable: the colour "red" attributed to Indians did not necessarily associate them with the "real" reds, the proletariat.[46] Nor would the hardships Native Americans have endured compare sufficiently in the eyes of communist theorists and travel writers to the persecution of Blacks in slavery, not the least because, as Boris Pilniak implies in his travelogue, Indians had "cravenly come to terms with their condition."[47] Further, since the tradition of "playing Indian"—with all its implications of animistic spirituality, exemption from the laws and traditions of Western civilization, and organic unity with nature—was bound to be countercultural even in the West,[48] it is not a surprise, that in the mainstream cultural policies of Eastern Bloc countries the prevalent cultural representation of Native Americans remained that of the "noble savage" inherited from 19th century novels. There were, however, notable challenges to such dominant ideological positions. In Hungary, for example, the cultural practice of playing Indians became "a metaphor for political resistance as well as environmental consciousness."[49] This practice originated from the Indian camps organized by Ervin Baktay in the 1930s in the Danube Bend, and continued, quite independently, in the gatherings of "Indians" led by singer-songwriter Tamás Cseh in the Bakony Mountains from the 1960s. Even in the more lenient 1970s, such activities amounted to protest, and frequently involved

[43] APÁTI Miklós, "Sasszárnyú ólomkatonák," *Kritika*, July 15, 1978, 4–5.
[44] GESZTI Pál, "A Keselyű három napja," *Magyar Hírlap*, July 20, 1978, 6.
[45] LUKÁCSY András, "Körszínház-show," *Magyar Hírlap*, July 20, 1978, 6.
[46] Milla FEDOROVA, *Yankees in Petrograd, Bolsheviks in New York: America and Americans in Russian Literary Perception* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), 165–166, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501758171
[47] Ibid., 166.
[48] Philip J. DELORIA, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), esp. 128–180. https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300153606
[49] Katalin KÜRTÖSI, "To 'hunger … for wild sensations': 'playing Indian' in Hungary," *The Central European Journal of Canadian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2021): 25–41, 39.

conflicts with the authorities as well as, to a lesser extent, some of the locals.[50]

We might surmise (although I cannot ascertain it) that Kazimir was aware of these special Hungarian traditions and the complexity of views surrounding them. But even if he did not know about the "Bakony Indians" led by Cseh, his attempt to revise culturally dominant representations of Native Americans along ideas of authenticity, cultural universals, and ecological values had most certainly resonated with some of his audience (as well as a number of his critics) who were familiar with the cultural and political complexity of what it meant to be an "Indian" in the Hungary of the 1970s. In creating the Theatre-in-the-Round, Kazimir was unapologetic about creating a political theatre that is "not meant to be a theatre of daily politics," but much rather a "theatre engaged in socialist politics from a strategical perspective."[51] Viewed in such a light, his attempt to transcend the local and temporal political constraints of his time in a production dedicated to expounding the universal and timeless implications of local knowledge is an emblematic example of striking the right proportion between the "destruction and the potential creation of values," a method he associated (but only implicitly identified) with the avant-garde.[52]

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[50] Ibid., 34–35.

[51] KAZIMIR, *Világirodalom*, 188.

[52] KAZIMIR Károly, *Páholyon kívül* (Budapest: Szabad Tér, 1990).

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