

# Rastislav Rusnák

## *In Search of Rosie Ney*

### *A Life Reflected Through the Lives of Others*

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#### **Abstract**

This study examines a brief period in the lives of four artists: František Foltýn and Gejza Schiller, two of the most renowned figures in the Košice Modernist movement, the author Béla Illés, and the main character, the photographer Rosie Ney. Several sources have suggested that the paths of these four individuals crossed in Košice in 1921. The study does not intend to present their lives or work in their full complexity but aims instead to clarify some ambiguities over their fates in the early 1920s. The primary focus of the article is to address the persisting uncertainty over the nature of the relationships between the four individuals and their movements between 1919 and 1923. The research collates and analyses a wide range of fragmented evidence of varying degrees of reliability in an effort to identify possible connections between the lives of the four artists and thereby raise the discussion of the issue to a new level. On the more settled question of the marriage of Rosie Ney and Béla Illés, the study also attempts to identify Rózsi Földy, alias Rosie

Ney, within Illés's autobiographical novel *Ég a Tisza* and to clarify the timeframe of their marriage and various aspects which can shed light on subsequent events. The key topic is the unresolved question of the relationship between Rosie Ney and František Foltýn. By outlining the sequence of events in the lives of the two artists in the early 1920s, the study offers a new perspective and some interesting findings regarding the nature of their relationship.

#### **Key words**

Artists. Biographical Notes. Early 1920s. Košice Modernism.

## 1 Rosie Ney

The Hungarian photographer Rosie Ney<sup>1</sup> [1] is one of many 20th century artists whom artistic or social pressures have driven into the hinterlands, either geographically in terms of national or international contexts or artistically in the uncertain territory between fleeting success and lasting renown. She is an artist whose life and work have been the subject of no academic monographs, appearing only in a series of catalogue entries accompanied by cursory and mundane details<sup>2</sup>; an artist whose surviving legacy is fragmentary. She is known chiefly for the series of socially oriented photographs, from the crisis-stricken Czechoslovakia<sup>3</sup>, which she created in 1931 under the auspices of the Sarló group, a collective of young Hungarian left-wing intellectuals based in Czechoslovakia, and later for her portraits of Hungarian émigré artists in Paris. Her reportage of the poverty suffered by the

lowest levels of society across Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus represents a unique social documentation of the period, but the exaggerated emotionality and moralising aspect of these works often undermines their artistic aspirations. Biographical accounts of Ney suggest that she was a remarkable woman who lived a full and adventurous life. She married and divorced several times in her life, and because some of her partners enjoyed an artistic fame greater than her own, their names appear frequently among her otherwise brief biographical details; sadly, the opposite is not the case. However, some details about her early adulthood at the end of the 1910s and the early 1920s can be extrapolated from the little information that is available to us. She studied art in Budapest; during the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, she worked at the office of the People's Commissar for War, Vilmos Böhm; after the suppression of the Republic she emigrated to Czechoslovakia, most likely to Subcarpathian Rus, where she married the Hungarian writer and prominent communist activist

Béla Illés<sup>4</sup>; the marriage was soon dissolved and she moved to Paris in 1921<sup>5</sup> where she met and quickly married the painter Lancelot Ney<sup>6</sup>. While this brief pattern of her life is repeated regularly, some accounts also allege that she enjoyed an obscure relationship with "a Czech painter called Franto" during her time in Czechoslovakia<sup>7</sup>, but the information provided is somewhat vague, being unsourced and offering no more details of the actual identity of the Czech

1 Rosie Ney (1897 – 1972), born Rózi Földy but in later years also used the name Rosie Rey. In 1921 she was still using the name Rózi Földy, but because she is better known by her adopted name of Rosie Ney, she will be referred to as such in this article.

2 See, for example: CSORBA, C.: *Magyar Fotográfusnők 1900 – 1945*. Budapest : Enciklopédia Kiadó, 2000; CSERBA, J.: *Magyar származású fotográfusok Franciaországban az 1920-as évektől napjainkig*. Budapest : Corvina, 2018, pp. 162-165.

3 For more on her photography in this period and on the Sarló group, see: *Szociofotó. Kiállítási katalógus*, Balogh Edgár bevezetőjével, Sarló, Pozsony 1931, September-October or studies by Béla Albertini, for example: ALBERTINI, B.: *A Sarló szociofotós vonulata*. Bratislava : Madách, 1993. Albertini notes here that the details of Rosie Ney's life are still shrouded in mystery and require further research.

4 The curator of the Déri Museum in Debrecen Zoltán Boross deserves particular merit for his work in collating the mass of material relating to the Sarló group. In the late 1970s and early 1980s he widened the existing collection of documents relating to the group, actively working to clarify the blind spots in our knowledge by contacting the surviving participants of the movement. Rosie Ney had already passed away by this time, but the task of mediating her reminiscences and providing biographical details was taken up by László Dobossy. His two brief letters about her became the source for most of the subsequent accounts of her life: DOBOSSY, L.: *Rosie Ney, Gépírat, Sarló Gyűjtemény, Déri Múzeum, Debrecen; DOBOSSY, L.: Dobossy László visszaemlékezése. Déri Múzeum Irodalmi Múzeuma, Kisebbségi Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény, P.S.X.86.560.1*. For more on the origins of the collection, see: BOROSS, Z.: *A Sarló - gyűjtemény keletkezése és összetétele. In Irodalmi Szemle*, 1985, Vol. 28, No. 20, pp. 860-861.

5 Most biographical accounts state that her emigration to Paris occurred only after her divorce from Illés or in the early 1920s; the year of 1921 is mentioned explicitly by Júlia Cserba in her recent and most extensive study of the life of Rosie Ney (see: CSERBA, J.: *Magyar származású fotográfusok Franciaországban az 1920-as évektől napjainkig*. Budapest : Corvina, 2018, p. 162).

6 Lancelot Ney (1900 – 1965), real name László Ney, Hungarian painter. He studied in Budapest and Berlin, moving to Paris in 1923. He was friends with Michel Seuphor, the co-founder of the Cercle et Carré group, of which Foltyn was also a member. After his arrival in Paris, he westernised his name to Lancelot; his wife did the same and began using the name Rosie Ney.

7 BAKK, Á.: *Egy elfeledett magyar fotós: Rosie Ney*. [online]. [2023-08-24]. Available at: <[http://mandarchiv.hu/cikk/1137/Egy\\_elfeledett\\_magyar\\_fotos\\_Rosie\\_Ney](http://mandarchiv.hu/cikk/1137/Egy_elfeledett_magyar_fotos_Rosie_Ney)>; *Földi Róza (rozsi)*. [online]. [2023-08-24]. Available at: <<https://artportal.hu/lexikon-muvesz/foldi-roza-rozsi-908/>>.

painter<sup>8</sup>. Only Gyula Ernyey claims directly that the painter in question was in fact František Foltýn; in his study of Gejza Schiller, he openly refers to Rosie Ney, then still known as Rózsi Földy, as Foltýn's partner in this period<sup>9</sup>. While living in Košice in 1921, Gejza Schiller dedicated a lithograph [2] to her with the dedication "Rozsinak az elrontott puding fejében", which can be translated as "For Rosie, in lieu of that spoiled pudding"<sup>10</sup>.

## 2 Béla Illés

The reliable sources relating to the life of Béla Illés [3] do not bring us any closer to Rosie Ney; indeed, given the paucity of references to her, it often seems as if she never existed. The life of the itinerant revolutionary with no fixed abode led by Illés (and most of the other protagonists of this study) during these years is reflected in the almost complete absence of any surviving written sources from this period. Even in his later memoirs,

Illés consistently avoids discussion of his personal affairs beyond those directly related to his literary work and his lifelong commitment to communism, and therefore the most valuable sources for our purposes are his novels and short stories, many of which are filled with autobiographical details.

Rosie Ney's short marriage to Béla Illés was first mentioned in correspondence from László Dobossy and has since been cited repeatedly (see footnote 5). However, Zoltán Boross recently corroborated this information through his correspondence with Klára Kassák, the wife of Lajos Kassák and a former friend of Rosie Ney. Knowing of her friendship with Rosie Ney, Borross had asked Kassák whether Ney and Illés had indeed once been married and she confirmed that they had<sup>11</sup>.

Illés was born in Košice but he grew up in Berehove in Subcarpathian Rus before moving with his family to Budapest in either 1907 or 1908<sup>12</sup>. During his adolescence, his political views moved further and further to the left, and when he returned from his active service in the First World War he shared the desire of many others of his generation for radical social change. The years from 1916

to 1918 also saw his earliest literary efforts. During the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Illés was a member of the Revolutionary Council, and in the military action against Czechoslovak and Romanian forces in April 1919, he was actively involved in organising the mobilization, personally fighting on the northern front against the Czechoslovak Army. By the end of July 1919, he was forced to flee the collapsing Republic before the arrival of the advancing Romanian forces, escaping from Budapest to Vienna via Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In February 1920, however, the Hungarian Communist Party ordered him back to Czechoslovakia to establish a party structure in Subcarpathian Rus and agitate for Bolshevik ideas. Although his political activities were mostly centred around the regions of Mukachevo, Svaliava and Polyana in the far east of Czechoslovakia, Illés was in close contact with the new editorial office of the *Kassai Munkás* newspaper in Košice and often contributed articles to the newspaper. Although the Bolshevik Revolution in Hungary had been brutally suppressed, communist organisations in neighbouring countries such as Czechoslovakia continued to gather support throughout the following year. Revolutionary hopes in the First Czechoslovak Republic reached a climax in the summer of 1920 before being stamped out in the savage suppression of the general strike in December of the same year. 1921 saw a consolidation of

8 In trying to trace the original source, one of those who referred to the story, Csilla Csorba, suggested only oral tradition (private correspondence).

9 ERNYEY, G.: Gejza Schiller (1894 – 1928). In *Košická moderna. Umenie Košic v dvadsiatych rokoch 20. storočia*. Košice : Východoslovenská galéria, 2013, p. 174.

10 In the inventory card at VSG (inv. no. 313), the dedication is translated as "V pokazenej pudingovej hlave Rózsi" [In the spoiled pudding-head Rózsi]. It is accompanied by a note stating that the dedication refers to Rózsi Földy, the partner of František Foltýn. The author of the note is given as Mária Kostičová but upon further investigation of the source it was found to have been provided by Gyula Ernyey himself (I wish to express my gratitude to Miroslav Kleban of the East Slovak Gallery for allowing me to view the material and for mediating the correspondence).

11 KASSÁK, K.: Private letter. Kassák Lajosné levele. *Rosie Ney életrajzáról*. Déri Múzeum Irodalmi Gyűjteménye Debrecen.

12 DIOSZÉGI, A.: *Illés Béla. Alkotásai és vallomásai tükrében*. Budapest : Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1966, p. 26.

state power, the decline of the more radical elements of the far left and the definitive formation of the powerful Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. As the senior representative of the communist movement in Subcarpathian Rus, Illés actively participated in the key party congresses in Ľubochňa and Prague. Following the founding congress of the Communist Party in November 1921, he was arrested, interrogated and ultimately expelled from Czechoslovakia<sup>13</sup>. He spent the following year and a half in Vienna, devoting his time to journalistic work before emigrating to the Soviet Union in 1923.

These turbulent times filled with upheaval, sudden disappearances and unplanned changes of address were not conducive to the survival of documents which might offer a deeper insight into the personal lives of our subjects, but this is somewhat compensated in the case of Illés by his prolific journalistic and literary activities. Concerned by the growing wave of censorship, by 1920 and 1921 Illés had decided to concentrate on the literary short story style rather than a more journalistic approach in his articles for *Kassai Munkás*; as Ferenc Botka recalls, these stories served as a store of scenes to which he would return in his later literary works such as the more expansive novels *Ég a Tisza [Tisza on Fire]* and *Kárpáti*

*Rapszódia [Carpathian Rhapsody]*<sup>14</sup>. There is a considerable narrative overlap between these novels, and also with his other stories from the period, and the plotlines are strongly autobiographical. In his novels, Illés brings to life a number of actual people, some of whom are depicted using their real names, others under changed names. Illés himself appears in the novels under assumed names; in *Ég a Tisza* he is Péter Kovács and in *Kárpáti Rapszódia* he is Géza Bálint, a name which he would subsequently use in his other works. While *Ég a Tisza*, focusing on the period of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and his time in Subcarpathian Rus, is suffused with his own unconcealed ideological beliefs, often depicted with an almost chiliastic pathos and sentimentality, it was in the lengthy family saga of *Kárpáti Rapszódia* that Illés finally hit upon his characteristic anecdotal style, filled with an irony which was sometimes bitter, sometimes wry. Although the novels are works of literature in which a certain degree of authorial license has been applied, the appearance of actual persons under their real names and the considerable degree of overlap in terms of temporal and geographical details allow us to reconstruct the real narrative of Illés's life and

suggest that the plotlines of the novels are in alignment with the corroborated historical facts<sup>15</sup>. Is it then possible to find Rosie Ney within these works? I would suggest that the answer is yes. The general temporal and geographical context of their presumed relationship is relatively clear; it played out in the territory of Subcarpathian Rus at the time of Illés and Ney's emigration to Czechoslovakia, between the fall of the Soviet Republic in August 1919 and the end of 1921, the point at which Illés is known to have left Czechoslovakia, with Ney also likely to have departed at this time. While Illés entirely avoids the subject of his romantic relationships in *Kárpáti Rapszódia*, he makes repeated mention of them in *Ég a Tisza*, albeit in a laconic manner. In the novel, Illés's alter ego Péter Kovács arrives in Uzhhorod on February 14th, 1920; this was also true for Illés himself, a fact which is confirmed by other sources, and a date which can therefore be considered as reliable. A few days after his arrival, Kovács meets a tall, slim girl by the name of Mária Rozsosová with short black

13 *Mám to ešte v živej pamäti. 50 rokov KSČ. Spomienky súdruhov žijúcich v zahraničí na obdobie vzniku KSČ.* Bratislava : Slovakopress, 1971, p. 24.

14 BOTKA, F.: *Kassai Munkás 1907 - 1937.* Budapest : Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969, p. 60; this information is confirmed by András Diószégi (footnote 12), p. 65. The novel *Tisza on Fire [Ég a Tisza]* was first published in Moscow in 1929 (in Czech *Hoří Tisa*, Prague, 1960); the novel *Carpathian Rhapsody [Kárpáti Rapszódia]* was published in Moscow in 1939 (in Slovak *Karpatská rapsódia*, Bratislava, 1950).

15 Compare, for example: KREMPA, I.: *Za internacionálnu jednotu revolučného hnutia v Československu.* Bratislava : Pravda, 1975; ROJÁK, D., TOMAN, Š.: *Odkaz minulosti, 100 rokov revolučného robotníckeho hnutia a KSČ v Košiciach 1870 - 1970.* Košice : Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1971; BENKO, J.: *Maďarská komunistická emigrácia a jej pôsobenie v rokoch 1919 - 1921.* In *Historický časopis*, 2015, Vol. 63, No. 4, pp. 605-620; *Mám to ešte v živej pamäti. 50 rokov KSČ. Spomienky súdruhov žijúcich v zahraničí na obdobie vzniku KSČ.* Bratislava : Slovakopress, 1971, p. 24; ILLÉS, B.: *Kniha anekdot.* Bratislava : Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1961 (autobiographical sketches).

hair and dark eyes<sup>16</sup>.

Illés writes that Mária's family are from Uzhhorod, but only her brother Ivan Rozsos figures in the novel, where he is depicted as an untrustworthy local left-wing politician and careerist. We soon learn that Mária had studied in Pest where she had been caught up in the Revolution, and over the course of the narrative it becomes clear that she is a passionate follower of communist ideas. From an initial mutual wariness, Péter and Mária slowly grow closer from February to August 1920, with the pair eventually moving in together. However, the relationship starts to turn sour as the revolutionary hopes of the summer of 1920 end in fiasco and Péter is arrested and imprisoned (a fate which befell Illés in this period). Mária works to ensure his release from prison but at the same time she comes to realise that she has no future in Subcarpathian Rus and moves to Prague to continue her studies.

None of these details would be sufficient to confirm that the character of Mária Rozsosová is based on the real figure of Rózsi Földy, alias Rosie Ney, were it not for a single sentence which mentions a specific physical detail of the character that is somewhat distinctive. In a meeting which represents a key development in their relationship, Péter notices

*“that Mária's black eyebrows meet almost completely above her nose”<sup>17</sup>. Of course, this detail is by no means definitive proof, but given that we are already in the realm of suggestions and subtle indications, it is still an important point; Rosie Ney also had almost conjoined eyebrows, a feature which is not particularly common among young women [1; 4]. Also noteworthy is the epilogue to the story. Péter Kovacs is back in Vienna where he meets up with a friend and comrade from his time in Subcarpathian Rus, a character by the name of Gottesmann. He tells Péter that Mária, whom he refers to as “your former lover”, had returned to Subcarpathian Rus; she has abandoned her communist beliefs and is now engaged to a sergeant in the Gendarmerie<sup>18</sup>. This episode suggests that Illés is looking back on these years with a lingering sense of bitterness; although Illés constantly marginalises the issue of his emotional relationships, the significance of Mária's betrayal is expressed through her abandonment of communist ideals, an act which, in the context of the book, is considered as the worst conceivable transgression, a sin which is only exacerbated by the fact that she is now betrothed to a representative of the state establishment and a member of the very forces which were actively hunting down his comrades.*

Furthermore, it is also implied that her new partner is of Czech nationality.

In summary, Illés spent the majority of the 1920 and 1921 in Czechoslovakia, primarily in Subcarpathian Rus, but he also lived for some time in Košice or other parts of the region. In 1920 his main activity was agitating for the establishment of a communist structure in the region in preparation for the impending revolution. While his professional life in this period can be traced with a relative degree of certainty, the same cannot be said of his personal life, and he himself appears to have been anxious to protect his own privacy. Revolution consumed a man entirely, and it is clear from reading between the lines of Illés's novels that he too liked to wear the badge of a true revolutionary even if he wrote about his own role with an affected modesty. Nonetheless, there is no reason to doubt that he may have had a brief marriage to Rózsi Földy, alias Rosie Ney, in 1920; it is also likely that Ney can be found in one of Illés's autobiographical novels, albeit under a different name and with amended biographical details. The relationship was short lived and, although it is pure speculation, the available sources appear to suggest that the bitter memories of their divorce may have cast a longer shadow over the life of Illés than that of Ney.

In 1921 Illés was an active participant in the establishment of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and was already recognised as one

16 ILLÉS, B.: *Hoří Tisa*. Prague : Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, 1960, p. 302.

17 Ibid, p. 345.

18 Ibid, p. 571.

of its most respected leaders. Little is known with certainty about the life of Rosie Ney in this period other than that she lived for some time in Košice, where she came into contact with Gejza Schiller. Several sources state that at the end of the year she moved from Czechoslovakia to Paris where she would spend the rest of her life, but more recent research suggests that she may in fact have emigrated at a later date. The only specific reference to 1921 as the date of Ney's move to Paris is made by Júlia Cserba, but this particular date appears to have suggested itself somehow. The Party had sent Illés to Subcarpathian Rus because he had grown up in the region and was aware of the local situation. Ney was from the vicinity of Budapest, and it is not known whether she had any contacts in this former Hungarian territory. It is natural to assume that after the breakup of their marriage and Illés's forced departure from Czechoslovakia, there would have been little reason for Ney to remain in the Mukachevo area. Júlia Cserba also claimed that by 1922 Rosie Ney had already set up her own photographic studio in Paris<sup>19</sup>. However, there is one source from this period which suggests that Ney was still present in Subcarpathian Rus at the beginning of May 1922. An article in the Uzhhorod newspaper *Új Közlöny* describes the May Day celebrations held by local

19 CSERBA, J.: *Magyar származású fotográfusok Franciaországban az 1920-as évektől napjainkig*. Budapest : Corvina, 2018, p. 162. No source was given for this information, only an address in Paris.

left-wing organisations<sup>20</sup>. One of the events mentioned was an evening performance by the Proletkult theatre group; the group was mostly comprised of amateur performers, one of the most prominent of whom is named as Rózsi Földy. Even when we take into consideration the possibility that the woman named in the article was not in fact Rosie Ney, everything that we know about Ney suggests that if she were indeed in Uzhhorod at that time, she would almost certainly have attended just such an event<sup>21</sup>.

### 3 František Foltýn

There can be little doubt that Rosie Ney and František Foltýn [5] knew each other personally; their friendship is mentioned in passing by several sources, but one later document offers direct evidence of the closeness of their relationship; a 1969 letter from Rosie herself addressed to Foltýn which was found among his papers<sup>22</sup>. The letter is written in German and in it Ney calls Foltýn "Franto", using the informal "du" form and signing the letter "Rózsi", her name from the period before her departure for Paris. She writes that she is on

20 Május elseje Ruszinszkóban. In *Új Közlöny*, 1922, Vol. 44, April 29, p. 1.

21 In one of her recollections of her time in Paris in the 1920s, Rosie Ney mentions that the exile community often took part in amateur dramatics: FODOR, I.: Illyés Gyula: "Hunok Párizsban" című regényének születéséről - Beszélgetés a szerzővel és kortársaival, III., befejező rész. In *Kortárs*, 1974, No. 3, p. 341. Rosie Ney's lifelong dedication to socialism was well known.

22 Moravian Gallery in Brno, Foltýn Collection, Karton 5, Letter dated 7.9.1969 + photograph.

her annual month-long visit to her mother in Budapest, adding that her former husband Lancelot had died three years earlier. She asks Foltýn if he is still painting, what he is reading, whether he can come to Paris sometime, asks about his wife and hopes that his life has been and still is a happy one, this last wish suggesting that the two have not seen each other for a long time. She includes a photograph of herself, gives him her address (with the name Rosie Rey) and says that she is looking forward to his reply, although it is unknown whether she ever received one. The fact that she mentions Lancelot Ney, whom she had divorced almost thirty-five years before his death, clearly indicates that Foltýn knew him during the period of their marriage, a fact that is corroborated by the appearance of the name and address of "Ney Láslo" in Foltýn's address book from the period which he spent in Paris<sup>23</sup>. A caricature of five men by Ney from 1925 with the title *Company at the Table* depicts Foltýn in the centre of the group with a glass of wine in his hand<sup>24</sup>. During their time in Paris in the late 1920s, Rosie Ney and František Foltýn were both part of an extended circle of artists which, in addition to émigrés from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, included major artistic

23 Moravian Gallery in Brno, Foltýn Collection, Karton 6, Address Book (22).

24 HLUŠIČKA, J.: *František Foltýn*. Prague : Odeon, 1982, p. 71. The caricature also features František Halas and Vincent Nečas which shows that the émigrés from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire formed a close community in Paris.

figures of the period such as Michel Séphour, Fernand Léger and Piet Mondrian.

It is not known exactly when František Foltýn arrived in Košice; most studies of the painter's life indicate that it occurred sometime in autumn or September 1921<sup>25</sup>. On September 2nd, 1921 an exhibition opened at the East Slovak Museum featuring works by the Košice-based group of artists which had formed over the course of a year, with contributions from Gejza Schiller, János Kmetty, Vilmos Perrott-Csaba and Károly Quittner among others. Newspaper articles from the period do not mention Foltýn as one of the featured artists of the exhibition, but he himself includes it in a handwritten list which he made of his exhibitions<sup>26</sup>. It is commonly believed that Foltýn came to Košice at the invitation of Josef Polák, then acting as the director of the East Slovak Museum, and it is highly likely that this was the case; Josef Polák's personal involvement and interest in practically all cultural affairs in Košice in this period is well-known and indisputable. The two are generally assumed to have met at an exhibition in

Bratislava in May where Foltýn's works were shown together with those of Gustáv Mallý and Janko Alexy. Although the exhibition was received with critical acclaim, visitor numbers and sales of the exhibited works were disappointingly low, and the experience forced Foltýn to reassess his artistic and personal plans.

Košice was not an unknown territory for Foltýn as he had visited the city several times in the past. Given this fact, it is not wholly surprising that between September and December 1921 he participated in the group exhibition at the East Slovak Museum, published two essays on art in one of the local newspapers<sup>27</sup> and designed the scenography for the Hungarian production of Čapek's *R.U.R.*, a cultural event whose significance extended far beyond the local region<sup>28</sup>. By January 1922 he had been the subject of a solo exhibition at the East Slovak Museum and had created the sets for the Slovak National Theatre's production of

*Pictures from the Insects' Lives* by the brothers Karel and Josef Čapek. Foltýn seems to have hit the Košice cultural scene like a meteorite, and his time in the city undoubtedly represented a crucial turning point in his artistic ambitions. The platform which he was granted immediately upon his arrival in Košice indicated that he was already an artist with a substantial reputation, but this interpretation is somewhat paradoxical because it was only during his time in the city that his work visibly matured, a result of the influence of his fellow artist, Gejza Schiller<sup>29</sup>.

Our subconscious tendency to see time as a linear process naturally leads us to perceive the earlier phase of Foltýn's life as a closed chapter, an impression which is made even stronger when we consider the transformation of his art in this period; there is a clear distinction between his search for a personal style during his Bratislava years and the maturity of his Košice work. While this may seem convincing, there are indications that Foltýn's stay in Košice was not initially intended to be permanent and that he only accepted it would be after some time had passed. This is suggested, above all, by a letter from Professor Stuchlík, the head of

25 MACHARÁČKOVÁ, M.: *Raná tvorba: Bratislava - Košice 1920 - 1922*. In *František Foltýn, 1891 - 1976: Košice - Paříž - Brno*, Brno : Moravská galerie, 2007, p. 18; POMAŽLOVÁ, A.: *František Foltýn (1891- 1976)*. In LEŠKOVÁ, L.: *Košická moderna. Umenie Košíc v dvadsiatych rokoch 20. storočia*. Košice : Východoslovenská galéria, 2013, p. 196; HLUŠIČKA, J.: *František Foltýn*. Prague : Odeon, 1982, p. 14 - this work gives the date of his move as "the beginning of 1921" which now seems highly unlikely.

26 INGERLE, P.: *Životopis*. In *František Foltýn, 1891 - 1976, Košice - Paříž - Brno*. Brno : Moravská galerie, 2007, p. 201.

27 FOLTÝN, F.: *Glosy o výtvarnom umení*. In *Slovenský východ*, 1921, Vol. 3, No. 225, p. 4; FOLTÝN, F.: *Národné umenie a kosmopolitizmus*. In *Slovenský východ*, 1921, Vol. 3, No. 231, p. 4.

28 The local press was not unanimous in this respect. Eugen Krón is also mentioned as the creator of the scenography together with František Foltýn - see: FERKO, T.: *Divadelné letopisy mesta Košice v súvislostiach dejín*. Košice : EQUILIBRIA, 2013, pp. 449-450. The project developed through a close collaboration with Josef Polák who assisted with the translation and likely delegated the creative aspect of the work to artists with whom he was associated. Eugen Krón is known to have worked on the project as he was the designer of the posters and book covers, but the question of his involvement in the scenography remains open (it is, however, possible that Polák deliberately assigned work to ensure that more artists could earn some money from the project).

29 See: HLUŠIČKA, J.: *František Foltýn*. Prague : Odeon, 1982, p. 16; MACHARÁČKOVÁ, M.: *Raná tvorba: Bratislava - Košice 1920 - 1922*. In *František Foltýn, 1891 - 1976: Košice - Paříž - Brno*. Brno : Moravská galerie, 2007, pp. 20-22; POMAŽLOVÁ, A.: *František Foltýn (1891 - 1976)*. In LEŠKOVÁ, L.: *Košická moderna. Umenie Košíc v dvadsiatych rokoch 20. storočia*. Košice : Východoslovenská galéria, 2013, pp. 198-202.

the psychiatric clinic in Košice in the early 1920s, in which he recalls that Foltýn “resided” either at his clinic or in the maternity department of Dr Frankenstein between 1921 and 1922<sup>30</sup>. The artist had thus asked his fellow countrymen to find some temporary accommodation for him, a not uncommon request in these years. The initially provisional nature of Foltýn’s stay is also indicated by his preference for landscape paintings in this period, especially in 1922. If we were to attempt to reconstruct the artist’s life in this period through his artistic legacy, it would give the impression that he spent the majority of his time travelling between the Košice area and Subcarpathian Rus. Paintings made in the studio environment are relatively rare in this period, and this would only change from 1923 onwards. Foltýn did not arrive in Košice with the intention of relocating permanently; instead, he was drawn to the city by the promise of new opportunities, and his hopes in this respect were soon realised. The circumstances in which Foltýn found himself enabled the rapid development of his creative ambitions, yet for a relatively long period of time, he avoided making practical arrangements to prolong his residence in the city. Why was he reluctant to find more permanent accommodation in Košice? One of the main reasons was his marriage to Zdenka Andělová Foltýnová

30 See: INGERLE, P.: Životopis. In *František Foltýn, 1891 – 1976, Košice – Paříž – Brno*. Brno: Moravská galerie, 2007, p. 200.

which had taken place in Bratislava on September 24th, 1921, shortly before his departure for Košice. The Czech-born Andělová Foltýnová had been transferred to Slovakia by the Ministry of Schools, and from July 1920 she was working as an office clerk at the University Library in Bratislava<sup>31</sup>. The marriage was short-lived, and although the exact date of their divorce is not known, it likely occurred sometime before 1925 and almost certainly prior to Foltýn’s departure for Paris<sup>32</sup>. In his study of Foltýn, Jiří Hlušíčka notes that the painter returned to Czechoslovakia after his first visit to Paris in the autumn of 1923 in order to “resolve some urgent personal matters”, one of which may have been his divorce<sup>33</sup>. Archival documents relating to Zdenka Andělová Foltýnová in the University Library in Bratislava also state that in February 1925 she had requested permission to remarry, adding that her first marriage had been dissolved “with the husband at

31 Archive of the University Library in Bratislava, Section A - II.4 1919-1949, document 1383-2r. The possibility of a marriage taking place during Foltýn’s Bratislava period had already been noted by Marcela Macharáčková. The new findings about Zdenka Andělová Foltýnová provided in this article were obtained from the Archives of the University Library in Bratislava. On the issue of Czech functionaries in the University Library in Bratislava during the interwar years, see: KAŠČÁK, M.: Česi a počiatky Univerzitnej knižnice v Bratislave. In *Knižovná: knihovnícká revue*, 2020, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 58-79.

32 No documents in the names of Zdena Andělová Foltýnová and František Foltýn are found in the Bratislava County Court collection held at the State Archives in Bratislava.

33 See: HLUŠIČKA, J.: *František Foltýn*. Prague: Odeon, 1982, p. 67. Jiří Hlušíčka knew František Foltýn personally, and he likely obtained most of this information about the artist’s personal life directly from Foltýn himself.

fault”<sup>34</sup>.

However, new light has been shed on the issue in the form of two documents from the archives of the East Slovak Museum in Košice which first drew attention to the marriage of František Foltýn<sup>35</sup>. The first document is a request made by Zdenka Foltýnová to the museum director Josef Polák, for the return of paintings by her husband which she had loaned to the East Slovak Museum for his solo exhibition. It is interesting to note that she makes the request to the director of the Museum rather than her husband; indeed, she does not send the request to Polák personally but through the intermediary of her lawyer. The letter is polite but firm, concluding with the threat of legal action. Similarly, the second document, Polák’s reply, dated March 7th, 1922, is formal and measured, carefully avoiding any obligation to Zdenka Foltýnová, and adding that he has returned the paintings with the full knowledge and goodwill of Foltýn himself. It is difficult to pinpoint Rosie Ney in the background of these events from Foltýn’s personal life, but we can see that at the time of his Bratislava wedding, Foltýn was already in Košice mentally and shortly also physically; little more than four months after the wedding, relations between the couple were

34 Archive of the University Library in Bratislava, Section A - II.4 1919-1949, document 1383-17.

35 Archive of the East Slovak Museum in Košice, Josef Polák Collection, 1922, letters from 2.3. and 7.3.



strained, and the marriage would shortly end in divorce “with the husband at fault”, most likely at the end of 1923. There could, of course, have been many potential reasons behind the failure of the marriage, but the possibility that Foltýn had become romantically involved with Rosie Ney in the autumn of 1921 would not be at odds with the known course of events. Indeed, the hypothesis that Rosie Ney did not in fact emigrate to Paris in 1921 but stayed in Subcarpathian Rus until 1922 or even 1923 during which time she was involved in an affair with Foltýn might to be corroborated by several interconnected details, which are in themselves only speculations. One such clue is the afore-mentioned denouement of the love story in Illés’s novel in which Mária Rozsosová returns to Subcarpathian Rus with a new partner who is most likely of Czech nationality, combined with the fact that Foltýn is known to have made many paintings in Mukachevo in 1922 and that he stayed in the town with his compatriot, Dr Josef Frantál<sup>36</sup>. Further light is shed on the sequence of events by another literary source, the 1946 novel *Hunok Párisban* by Gyula Illyés<sup>37</sup>. This work narrates the lives of a group of Hungarian émigrés in Paris

in the early 1920s, and some of the characters are clearly inspired by real-life individuals. The novel has great potential as a source of information, but it can also be subject to misinterpretation, and the real identity of the characters has long been the subject of discussion. One such suggestion is the likelihood that Rosie Ney was the inspiration behind the character of Vera. In the novel, Vera is staying in Paris with her husband, a Dr Kohut from Bratislava, but she soon attracts the romantic interest of another man, a painter called Miller, for whom she eventually abandons her husband. Interestingly, Rosie Ney herself was once asked whether this plotline was inspired by her relationships with Foltýn and Lancelot Ney<sup>38</sup>. She demurred in her reply, making a guarded denial but indirectly confirming the supposition through two interesting admissions; she acknowledged that her personality contributed to some part of the character of Vera, and she confessed that she had in fact travelled to Paris with František Foltýn. Naturally, these hitherto overlooked details open up a whole raft of questions, but with regard to the topic of this article, the information disclosed at the end of the sentence is a bolt out of the blue. Further research will be required to specify and then ascertain the date of their

alleged mutual departure for Paris period and also the date of Foltýn’s divorce, but it is clear that there can no longer be any doubt about the fact that Ney and Foltýn were involved in a long-term relationship. It seems that Foltýn was living a double life for almost the entire period of his brief marriage to Zdenka Andělová Foltýnová; one in Košice and another in Subcarpathian Rus with Rosie Ney, with whom he ultimately emigrated to Paris, returning to Czechoslovakia only once in order to finalise his divorce.

#### 4 Epilogue

Rosie Ney returned briefly to Czechoslovakia in 1931 at the invitation of a group of young left-wing activists, including Lajos Jócsik, Rezső Peéry, János Terebessy and László Dobossy, members of the Sarló collective whom she had met during their stay in Paris<sup>39</sup>. During this period, her photography was featuring in the prestigious magazine *Vu* and she was moving in the elite circles of the Paris art scene, and she was thus greatly admired by her young compatriots. She travelled to Czechoslovakia with the Italian photographer Silvio Silka, who many sources suggest had already become her third husband. Together with members of the Sarló group they travelled through Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus, creating a series

<sup>36</sup> This is confirmed by a letter from 1934 found among Foltýn’s papers. Dr Josef Frantál was the director of the Children’s Home in Mukachevo: Moravian Gallery in Brno, Foltýn Collection, Karton 5, Letter dated 16.4.1934, pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> See: ILLYÉS, G.: *Hunok Párisban*. Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó-Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1978.

<sup>38</sup> See: FODOR, I.: Illyés Gyula: “Hunok Párisban” című regényének születéséről - Beszélgetés a szerzővel és kortársaival, III., befejező rész. In *Kortárs*, 1974, No. 3, p. 344.

<sup>39</sup> DOBOSSY, L.: *Dobossy László visszamlékezése*. Déri Múzeum Irodalmi Múzeuma, Kisebbségi Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény, P.S.X.86.560.1.

of socially minded photos depicting the impact of the agricultural crisis on the poorest levels of society. These photos subsequently featured in the Szociofotó exhibition in Bratislava, arousing considerable interest and representing her most significant artistic legacy<sup>40</sup>.

In this period, Béla Illés was still living in the Soviet Union where he enjoyed the status of a prominent émigré revolutionary. 1929 saw the publication in Moscow of his novel *Ég a Tisza*; featuring a preface by Béla Kun, the work was received with international acclaim. In this same period, František Foltýn was in the midst of his creative peak in Paris where, as a member of the Cercle et Carré and Abstraction Création art groups, he would gain international artistic renown. By this time, Gejza Schiller had already been dead for three years.

### List of Illustrations

[1] – Róza (Rózsa) Földi, Rosie Ney; 1919, Unknown Photographer, MNT TF, inv. nr. 69.1446.

[2] – Gejza Schiller, Hlava

<sup>40</sup> For the catalogue of the exhibition, see: Footnote 3. For contemporary reviews of the exhibition, see: SZALATNAI, R.: Szlovenszkó, ilyen vagy! Beszámoló a Sarló szociofotó-kiállításáról, A Reggel, 1931, October 4; PEÉRY, R.: Magunkra döbbenünk. Beszámoló a Sarló pozsonyi fényképkiallításáról, Az Út, 1931/8-9; R[YBAK]: J.: Vystava "Socio-foto" v Bratislave, DAV, Bratislava, 1931/12; BROGYÁNYI, K.: A fotográfia útja (Der Weg der Fotografie) III. Pozsony: Forum, 1932; The ideas of the Sarló group were later popularised by Béla Albertini. The topic continues to attract the attention of Hungarian historians and art historians, see: BAJCSI, I.: A cserkészettől a kommunizmusig. A sarlósok alternatívái a két világháború közötti Csehszlovákiában. [Dissertation thesis]. Eger: Eszterházy Károly Egyetem, 2018.

muža [Head of a Man], 1921. Východoslovenská galéria Košice, inv.nr. G313;

Lithograph with a Dedication to Rosie Ney.

[3] – Unknown Photographer: Béla Illés (without Year, Early Twenties?), Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, Collection Fine Arts, Photo and Relics.

[4] – (Rózsa) Földi, Rosie Ney, Presumably on the Occasion of Confirmation; First Half of the 1910s;

Unknown Photographer; MNT TF, inv. nr. 2023.23.1.

[5] – František Foltýn, 1920s, Private Collection. See: INGERLE, P.: (Footnote 26), p. 200.

### Acknowledgement

*This study was supported through public funding provided by the Slovak Arts Council. The paper was also prepared as part of VEGA Project No. 1/0565/23.*

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- DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34135/ejmap-23-02-04>
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