

Ildikó Vásáry: An Obituary

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Ildikó Vásáry, research fellow at the department of anthropology, University College London, died at the age of 47 in May 1994. She was born to Hungarian émigrés, Lajos Kutasi-Kovács and Eszter Körmendi, on May 10th, 1947 in Drütte, British-occupied section of Western Germany, and was two when the family emigrated to Brazil. Ildikó grew up in Sao Paulo where she studies classical and modern dance. In 1967, She married Tamás Vásáry, concert pianist and conductor in Switzerland. After the couple moved to England, Ildikó enrolled in the University College of London's department of anthropology. She received her doctorate from that school in 1983 and became a research fellow soon thereafter.

Ildikó conducted both her field research and her doctoral dissertation (between 1979 and 1981) in the Transdanubian (western Hungarian) village of Pécsely, in what she intended to be a long-term study. This rural settlement of 600 was the natal village of her maternal grandparents whom she never met, but about whose geographic and social environment, and symbolic legacy she wrote about with rare insight in her dissertation and several reflective essays. For instance, she discusses anthropological fieldwork in an essay entitled "Az elkésett unoka" (The grandchild who came late. In *Uj Horizont*, 1990); "A Jegyzetfüzet" (The Notebook. In *Uj Horizont*, 1992); and "Mire szabad emlékezni?" (What is allowed to be remembered? In *Uj Horizont*, 1993). Among her most significant English language studies are: "The 'sin' of Transdanubia: The one child system in rural Hungary" (1989. *Continuity and Change* 4(3): 429-468), and "Competing Paradigms: Peasant farming and collectivization in a Balaton community" (1990. Special Issue on Market Economy and Civil Society in Hungary. Chris M. Hann, ed. *The Journal of Communist Studies* 6(2): 163-182). In her monograph, *Beyond the Plan: Social Change in a Hungarian Village* (1987. Boulder and London: Westview Press), Ildikó discussed how rural families in Pécsely maintained considerable control over their lives during the radical social transformation. In a recent study, entitled "Comrades, it's over! the election campaign in Hungary 1990" (1991. *Anthropology Today* 7(4): 1-6), she analyzed some of the symbolic manifestations of post socialist political change.

Ildikó's premature death is a loss to cultural anthropology in general and East Central European and Hungarian studies in particular. She was not only ever fascinated by our world and

our discipline's place in it, but as she told me in New Orleans some years ago, also felt that anthropology was the only discipline she could both practice and in a sense really "live it" while traveling with Tamás world-wide on his numerous concert tours. Indeed, even on the road and even in the last period of her life while battling with cancer, Ildikó wrote with elegance and what from the outside appeared to be great ease. When I lamented to her about writer's block, she replied that she understood it only too well, but that she found that often a work takes considerably more toll if not written than it does to actually write it, regardless of the struggle writing takes.

Particularly those of us who are fortunate enough to know, love, and respect Ildikó Vásáry and to appreciate closely her integrity, generosity, gentle wisdom and empathy will miss her greatly.