

Notes

RODNEY GARLAND (ADAM MARTIN DE HEGEDUS)

THE *Heart in Exile* (1953), published under the name Rodney Garland by Adam de Hegedus, also known as Adam Hegedus de Lapos, is attracting growing critical interest for its period treatment of a homosexual theme.¹ De Hegedus himself has been recognized as a perceptive critic and among the first to draw attention to the significance of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945).² Yet de Hegedus' life remains largely unexplored, beyond the partial account he published in memoirs and articles. One often repeated error about his death can now be corrected and some new details about official interest in him can be added.

A 1995 reprint of *The Heart in Exile* was concluded by a biographical note by Peter Burton which stated of de Hegedus: 'His end is clouded in obscurity. It is believed he committed suicide in 1958 in Bayswater or the Marble Arch area.'³

The suicide story now has wide currency—internet searches show it is often repeated—and uncertainty about de Hegedus' death is widely shared even among usually reliable sources: for instance, the Library of Congress catalogue has no date of death against de Hegedus's name, whilst the British Library catalogue places his death in 1958.

A UK death certificate shows Adam Martin de Hegedus died on Sunday 9 October 1955 at Westminster Hospital, aged 48. The death must have been sudden or unexpected because it is certified by the Westminster Coroner. The

coroner himself acted very rapidly, issuing his certificate on 12 October and giving the cause of death as acute adrenal failure due to bilateral adrenal haemorrhage due to thrombocytopenic purpura. Somebody—presumably Ladislav Reisz of 6 Greek Street, Soho who registered the death⁴—must also have acted fast because his cremation was advertised in *The Times* on Thursday 13 October 1955, to take place the following day at Golders Green. The electric speed with which this sudden death was handled may have caught some contemporaries out, hence the stories repeated by Burton. The coroner does not mention suicide. Sudden death occurs in 1–2 per cent of those diagnosed with immune thrombocytopenic purpura, however drugs (heparin, the thrombosis treatment), alcohol, and various sexually-transmitted infections can cause a secondary condition.⁵ Reisz was granted probate on 13 August 1956 as attorney for Nora Magda Helene Hegedus, spinster, effects valued at £2179.⁶

There is also confusion about some aspects of de Hegedus' life which the newly released Home Office naturalization file can correct.⁷ Whilst Burton states correctly that de Hegedus visited London July to November 1927, he is wrong to claim that he settled permanently in Britain in 1939:⁸ de Hegedus claimed to the Home Office to have been permanently settled since 30 June 1929, and was naturalized a British subject on 1 August 1935. His application for naturalization was supported by an impressive and politically balanced trio of referees. These including his friend the Liberal industrialist and Zionist

⁴ Ladislav Reisz on the 1955 Westminster electoral roll, perhaps the same Ladislav Reisz, naturalized January 1947, also known as Laszlo, 1909–1993 National Archives, HO 334/168/21293.

⁵ <<https://www.clinicalkey.com/topics/hematology/immune-thrombocytopenic-purpura.html>>.

⁶ De Hegedus had just one sibling, a sister living in Budapest—presumably the beneficiary of his will. See 'Form to be used in respect of a British Subject for Enlistment...' Army Form A2012, Adam de Hegedus, 23 June 1941. Army Number 1130393. Army Personnel Centre, Glasgow.

⁷ National Archive, HO 405/20189 H1665 All subsequent Home Office references are to this file.

⁸ Peter Burton, 'Rodney Garland, A Biographical Note' in Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile* (Brighton, 1955), 299.

¹ Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile* (London, 1953); Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures of the Sexual Metropolis 1918–1957* (Chicago, 2005).

² Adam de Hegedus, 'Review of *Animal Farm*', *Commonweal*, xlv (1946), 528–30; Diane Telgen and Kevin Hile (eds), *Animal Farm: Notes for Students* (Detroit, 1998), 13; De Hegedus and Orwell were acquainted, see Adam de Hegedus, *Home and Away: Notes on England After the Second World War* (London, 1951), 48.

³ Peter Burton, 'Rodney Garland, A Biographical Note', in Rodney Garland, *The Heart in Exile* (Brighton, 1955), 300.

campaigner Henry Mond, 2nd Lord Melchett, and Ida Copeland, the moderate Conservative Member of Parliament with a grand European family tree, and a friend of the de Hegedus family (themselves solid, if not exalted, Transylvanian aristocracy with wide political connections). Home Office officials confess that his ‘influential friends’—friends which came to include a lady-in-waiting to Princess Elizabeth and senior connections in Conservative politics⁹—weighed heavily in the approval of his application. An anodyne, thinly-researched Special Branch report which recorded him working for Hungarian newspaper *Uj Magyarseg* and UK titles including the *Daily Telegraph* and *Observer* also acted in his favour.

However, the Home Office file reveals that de Hegedus was the subject of security hesitations: he was specifically named in a security circular and as a result stopped at Folkestone on his way to Hungary in December 1939 (he was thoroughly searched). Meanwhile MI5 (the UK Security Service) took a lively interest in him, asking for his file in both May and July 1940; the Army cross-checked with the Home Office when he enlisted in 1941,¹⁰ and somebody in the Security Service was still actively interested in his Home Office file as late as

December 1951, the last time his file is recorded as being borrowed, the enquiry coinciding with the publication of his political and social analysis of post-war Britain, *Home and Away* (1951), also the panicky year of the Burgess–McLean defection. The close relationship with senior figures in the Hungarian government he describes in his published work—family friends in many cases—can only have raised doubts about de Hegedus; his early and well-informed fictional account of the Burgess–McLean defection, *The Troubled Midnight* (1954), may also have piqued interest.¹¹ This anxious official reaction may help explain his repeated failure to secure promotion or a move to the Intelligence Corps; the sudden and ambiguously worded termination of the army career begun in October 1941 and ended just 51 weeks later; and the decision by someone from ‘Security’ not to allow him near British military bases as narrated in his 1944 autobiography of the war years, *Don’t Keep the Van Man Waiting*.¹²

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¹⁰ See ‘A Form used in respect of a British Subject for Enlistment . . .’ which cross-references the Home Office naturalization file H1665.

¹¹ Adam de Hegedus, *Hungarian Background* (London, 1937) and *Don’t Keep the Van Man Waiting* (London, 1944); Rodney Garland, *The Troubled Midnight* (London, 1954).

¹² ‘Territorial Army Record of Service Paper’ Adam Martin de Hegedus, Army Number 1130393, 39th Signals Training Regiment, Army Personnel Centre, Glasgow. De Hegedus is recorded as having A1 health in October 1941 but is discharged ‘permanently unfit for any formal military service’ in October 1942; see also de Hegedus, *Don’t Keep the Van Man Waiting*, p. 233.

⁹ de Hegedus, *Home and Away*, pp. 10, 87.