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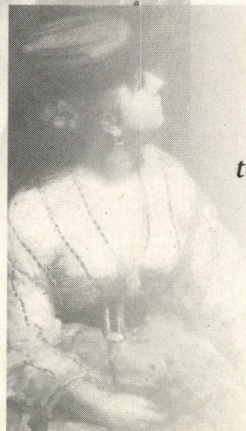
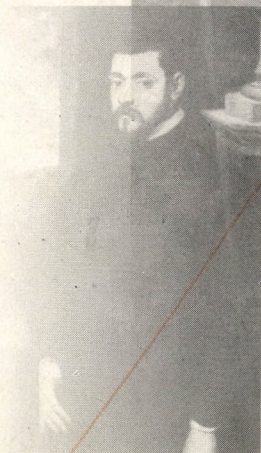
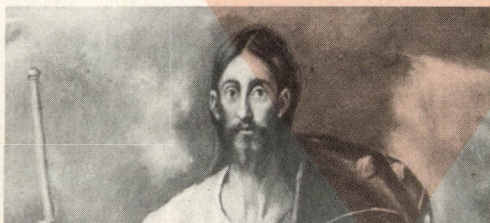


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# The Hungarian Quarterly

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137



*From Comecon to the EU*

*The Social Psychology of  
a Changeover*

*Poetry Under the Weather:  
György Petri*

*E. P. Wigner:  
A Visionary Scientist*

*Hungary on the Threshold  
of World War II*

*Bartók and the Jugendstil*

*"Animation Doesn't Exist  
to Make You Laugh" – John Halas  
1912-1995*

*The 1995 Budapest Film Week*



# The Hungarian Quarterly

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Zsófia Zachár, *Deputy Editor*

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László Csaba

# Ripeness Is All

From Comecon to the European Union

**D**ocuments accepted by the Essen Summit of the European Union in December 1994 contain important decisions on a prospective Eastern enlargement of the European Union. The June 1993 Copenhagen Summit declared that the EU shares the desire of the Associated Countries to become full members of the EU. This statement, however, was fairly non-specific. The Essen Summit has taken an important further step towards giving an institutional framework to the idea. First, it restated the Union's readiness to co-opt new members that wish to join, provided their conditions are ripe for joining. This implies the Treaty of Rome criteria: European location, pluralist political democracy and a market economy based on private property.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the 1992 Europe Agreements stipulate additional conditions for the six countries involved respecting human and minority rights.

The current position means that, both legally and politically, the EU has committed itself to an enlargement eastwards in the foreseeable future. Not to an unrestricted openness towards all post-communist countries: post-Soviet and post-

Yugoslav countries are not included, although the three small Baltic states and Slovenia may be added to the Essen list. Currently, it is only the Visegrád countries, plus Bulgaria and Romania that are being taken into consideration. Prime ministers of the six countries are to meet once a year with EU premiers, and the ministers of foreign affairs are to meet twice annually. Adding all this to the already functioning Association Council and the

---

## László Csaba

*is Senior Economist at KOPINT—DATORG,  
the Economic Research, Marketing and  
Computing Company Ltd.*

*His publications include Privatization,  
Liberalization or Destruction  
(Ed., Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1994) and  
The Capitalist Revolution in Eastern Europe  
(E. Elgar, 1995) Research for this article was  
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of the University of Trento, Italy.*

**1 ■** Importantly, the Treaty of Rome does not contain reference to the level of development, whereas it does spell out European location and full parliamentary democracy among the criteria. This can be decisive in answering the question of where the limits to further enlargement are.



Interparliamentary Commissions, as well as to the Six's membership of the Council of Europe, the move towards closer integration appears clear. In the Mediterranean region only tiny Malta and—following territorial reunification—Cyprus may aspire for future full membership, Central and Eastern Europeans stand a much fairer chance. The accession deadline of 2000 seems to have been informally accepted for the front runners in all major decision-making circles. In this respect, a strange compromise emerged in Essen. On the one hand, the Mediterranean countries—such as Morocco, Turkey or Egypt—may expect more financial transfers due to their strategic significance. On the other, Central and Eastern European countries, namely the Six, may expect less financial assistance, but a more forthcoming attitude on issues of membership. Indeed, this already applies to the Europe Agreements. These were not as favourable as the EU Association Agreements with the Mediterranean countries, since they did not contain similar financial obligations on the side of EU. Indeed, the agreements even lack a formal financial chapter. In legal terms, however, the Europe Agreements were much closer, especially in terms of potentialities to what fully-fledged membership could and will imply (Balázs, 1994).

The major question may, and indeed will be the precise meaning of the second half of the Essen formula, "when their economies are ripe for full membership". Here, it might be instructive to sum up how much Hungary has travelled on its way from a planned to a market economy during the first five years of change. Equally interesting might be to address the medium-term prospects. The present centre-left Hungarian government has been working on a medium-term economic programme for 1995–97. The implementing of this programme will be in its final stages by the time the EU intergovernmental conference in 1996 finalizes the mandate of the Commission to launch preparatory talks with those of the Six that have made their way to meeting the Essen criteria.

### The special case of Hungary

**I**n the socialist period, it used to be difficult to describe Hungary in terms of a classic Soviet-type economy. Likewise, current processes are equally difficult to understand in terms of the general perceptions of transformation, mostly distilled from the Polish and Russian experiences. Unlike the latter two, Hungary has not experienced major twists and turns, or general shake-ups on her way towards capitalism, either in the political or in the economic sphere. The change in the political setup was negotiated and peaceful, as were economic changes. The various radical phases in socialist market reforms paved a way to private capitalist institutions. Having built on evolutionary change of over thirty-five years (Berend, 1990; Swain, 1992) Hungary was in no pressing need of social engineering. Indeed, the role of the latter, as embodied in various governmental documents, has constantly been subordinated to spontaneous, evolutionary social and economic change.



a) Unlike former Czechoslovakia and Eastern Germany, Hungary did not have to start from scratch in 1989. Collective farms had never been like Soviet kolkhozes. From 1965 onwards, their auxiliary activities on household plots—and also in services or industrial activity—flourished, their management often drawn from previously well-to-do farmers. Thus in the provinces a “commercial spirit” had actually survived the socialist period.

The 1968 reforms in industry and the 1982 reforms in trade and services made most economic agents cost-sensitive and profit-oriented. With the 1985 introduction of enterprise councils, sectoral ministries and the party hierarchy lost control over corporate management. When the Corporate Law of 1988 made this possible, managers were ready to turn public property into their private hands. Small business, which expanded both formally and underground (Dallago, 1991) gathered momentum as soon as limitations on the number of employees or on the type of activities were lifted. They were not slow in expanding into medium-size ventures. In foreign trade, the 1987 abolition of state monopoly and the 1988–90 liberalization programme produced an open trade régime by 1990. Last but not least, the tax reforms of 1987 produced a system where state revenues were no longer contingent upon taxing the corporations. Both conceptually and in terms of techniques (Gém, 1994), a system based on consumption related taxes and moderate inflation helped to free the Treasury from the adverse repercussions inherent in de-statization.

Though inflation is always pathological, in Hungary the policies of the 80s brought important results. First, prices and wages were gradually but entirely freed prior to political changes. Secondly, society has learned to live with inflation. Third, by the late 80s shortages were virtually non-existent, especially after the liberalization of foreign trade. Finally, regular governmental overspending could be mitigated by inflating away the excessive purchasing power that resulted from too generous transfer entitlements (Newbery, 1993).

b) It follows from the above that, unlike the model cases of transition, Hungary had no need of a stabilizatory shock. While the latter consideration dominated Russian, Polish, and even German and Czech transformatory policies, Hungary experienced only moderate inflation, even in its worst year of 1991. The fiscal problems, which surfaced in 1992–94, had more in common with those of Italy and Germany than with—say—those of Ukraine. Shortfalls in government revenue are determined in part by the 1989–93 loss of 20 per cent of output, in part by privatization. Meanwhile, transfers continued to expand, due to such factors as the ageing of the population, constant double digit rates of unemployment, costly pension and health care schemes covering everybody and, last but not least, due to the explosion of domestic public debt. This debt will approach the value of total GDP in 1995. Debt servicing requirements will eat up a third of fiscal outlays in 1995.

There is no uncontroversial and politically feasible medicine to cure the structural ills discussed above, as the experience of delayed social security reforms in



both Italy and Germany indicate. Similarly, the watering down of the Clinton reforms in the USA point in the same direction. It is not so easy to re-tailor social redistributory schemes—in either directions—as some academic economists would suggest. The nature of reforms required now in Hungary is qualitatively akin to those discussed in the OECD countries mentioned above. These do not resemble the problems of Russia, where in 1991–94 only 50 per cent of targeted public revenue could be collected. (*Finansovii Izvestiia*, vol. 3. no. 47.) Similarly, the far too generous Hungarian unemployment and sickness benefit and early retirement schemes, rightly criticized by the country study of the OECD (1993) have more in common with, say, the Dutch problems, than those of CIS countries where unemployment benefit schemes have yet to be introduced. Although these do constitute a serious drain on public revenue, they can certainly not be tackled by conventional stabilization policies, conceived to alleviate former—flow, rather than structural, stock disequilibria. Systemic reforms are, of course, badly needed, but not, however in the context of arresting inflation.

c) Much to the surprise of many observers, the reorientation of Hungary's trade from East to West has taken place smoothly. The process, as could be documented years ago (Csaba, 1992), started as early as 1987 and was triggered primarily by early domestic liberalization. Relatively little could be attributed to the extraneously generated Comecon shock (the unexpected loss of Eastern markets): in an ex post calculation of a World Bank study, 2.5 per cent of the 11.9 per cent of GDP lost by Hungary in 1991, or one-sixth of it, was attributable to this factor (Ábel–Hillman–Tarr, 1992, p. 292). Therefore, it may be safely assumed that the new long-term trading pattern of Hungary has already emerged. With the 1994 accession of Austria into the EU, over two thirds of Hungary's exports are now sold into the Single Market; the share of Russia was about 11 per cent on the export and 15.8 per cent on the import side in 1994. These proportions make it imperative for Hungary, as a small open economy, to adjust to its external environment. The law harmonization project follows from the implementation of the Europe Agreement of 1992, and contains twenty-two priority areas. Any new law to be passed by the Hungarian legislature after 1992 has to be compulsorily examined from the point of view of its congruity with EU law. The adjusting of earlier legislation as well as further adaptation of the bulky EU legal material into Hungarian jurisdiction is under way, within the framework of a special interdepartmental committee under the Ministry of Justice (Kecskés, 1994). The aim is to complete this by the year 2000. Most of the existing legislation on economic affairs is already in line with EU standards. The Law on the Central Bank, the Law on Accounting, the Law on Competition are all based on EU standards. True, there is still some way to go before the spirit and the detail of each of these legislative items are observed in practice. For instance, statutory independence is only one of the many factors that make a monetary authority truly free of any governmental tutelage. In Hungary both the first and the second



chairmen of the National Bank were relieved of their post following political disagreements with the prime minister (in 1991 and 1994, respectively), rather than for professional disagreements over expansive fiscal policies. True, this is certainly not unprecedented, even in EU countries. Similarly, competition policy in Hungary enjoys a large number of derogations from the GATT agreements (Hoekman-Mavroidis, 1995), which will no longer be justified once accession to the EU becomes a realistic policy target. But this, the derogation *per se*, is indicative of a degree of sophistication in regulatory practices, which more resembles some OECD countries (like Japan) rather than those countries of the CIS which are not yet members of the GATT/WTO framework.

All in all, the peculiarities of Hungary consist in the relatively long preparatory period, and the resultant imprinting of market conforming behaviour in a large number of business agents and in the bureaucracy. Furthermore, fairly large progress has been made in building the institutions typical of market economies in the EU. In the majority of cases, the nature of those reforms, yet to be instituted in Hungary, is identical or similar to those currently underway in OECD/EU countries. This fact is possibly the best indicator of the market maturity of this prospective EU-entrant.

### State of the art

**I**t is hard to gain a reliable overview of facts and processes in Hungary. In many ways, the "hard" facts are frequently quite soft. For instance, final GDP figures are available only eighteen or more months later. Foreign trade statistics may fluctuate to as much as 20 per cent before preliminary figures are finalized. Data on savings, cash and wealth include a large degree of inevitable guesswork. Inclusion of the expanding irregular economy, currently put at 25–30 per cent of officially reported GDP, may significantly alter both officially registered monetary and physical flows, proportions of income distribution, employment, and accumulation. About 20–25 per cent of personal consumption is known to go unrecorded in official statistics (as direct purchases from producers, illegal imports, trade on second-hand markets, falsifying the certificates of valuable items, not to mention personal services). The item of "unrequired transfers" is traditionally close to 10 per cent of current account intakes in Hungary. Thus it can be assumed that official statistics understate recovery and overstate losses both in terms of output and consumption.

It is important to state, however, that Hungary—unlike some other countries—stopped systematic falsification of statistical reporting back in the late 60s. Some debates over methods notwithstanding, Hungary has adopted the UN SNA accounting practices. For the last twenty-five years, the reliability of Hungarian statistical reporting has never been subject to such sweeping criticism as Soviet statistics, either domestically or internationally. The deficiencies



pinpointed above have to do with the inevitable multidimensional fluidity and novelty of the transformatory process. Traditional reporting was based on large organizations and sample-based methods. Many large public organizations have disappeared. New private ventures have emerged, with a very strong interest in underreporting. Many corporations have become parts of transnational networks with transfer pricing, where individual transactions do not have a meaning in their own right, torn out of the overall context. The currently 900,000 registered small entrepreneurs are as hard to oversee as small and irregular business is difficult to measure in any less developed economy. In sum, circumstances rather than policies or malpractices are to blame for the softness of "hard facts".<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the nature of systemic change lends itself to quantitative assessment to a limited degree at best. Many companies are only partly privatized, or owned by other corporations, or by merchant banks under mixed—state and foreign etc.—ownership. The nature of the corporation as well as established business practices (e.g. secrecy, inaccurate registration, etc.) make it difficult to oversee and quantify the spread of private ownership. The vast majority of bankruptcy cases are concluded outside the formal judicial framework by informal agreements among debtors and creditors. The nature of leveraged buy-outs and of preferential forms of privatization—such as employee stock ownership programmes—make it difficult to follow the true distribution of economic power. What finally matters is the threat of extinction, which has become very real even for large public companies and even in sensitive sectors. Over a dozen soft coal mines and the uranium mines are under liquidation. The once prestigious Óbuda Shipyard exists on paper only; not a single vessel has been produced for years. The aluminium works of Almásfüzitő are just about to be closed down.

In the private sector, the first examples of failures due to unrestricted and too fast growth of businesses, typical of early capitalist ventures, have surfaced. The crises of the Pekó Steel Works, or of the once prestigious Kontrax telecom firm, or of the Microsystem software company are indicative of this. In other words: the introductory phase of market capitalism has definitely been passed through by Hungary. International comparisons—say, by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development—obviously disregard these methodological constraints when making regional comparisons and should be treated with a fair degree of caution.

Recent empirical analyses (Major, 1995) covering basically the entire big business sector of 72,000 or so large incorporated business units have come to the peculiar conclusion that not only 42 per cent of their assets went over to private

2 ■ As far as sample-based methods are concerned, they are fine when repeated occurrences are measured in a known quantity (say illnesses in a country). When the quantity is unknown, it is hard to secure representativeness and lower the standard error. If frequency is unstable, the same holds. Both problems are typical in transformation. Thus modern statistical methods do not help much.



hands between 1988 and 1992, but precisely the same share of cumulated losses, reported at the national level. In our critical assessment of these findings the following clarification can be established: 1) The 1988 sample is vastly different from the 1992 one in its composition. Many players were liquidated, while others newly created. 2) Private companies under-report intakes and overstate losses or costs. 3) Many new and privatized firms enjoy tax holidays and other implicit subsidies in exchange for keeping people in loss-making jobs. 4) Foreign owners tend to rechannel profits via transfer prices. 5) With new ventures and especially with large investments such as Suzuki, GM, General Electric, any economic textbook would expect a gestation period. This implies losses in the first years due to plant construction, on-the-job training, the usual problems with new products etc., and gains to be harvested only a couple of years later. 6) 1988–92 was a period of most dramatic structural and regional readjustment, when survival itself was a strong proof of the long-term viability of a business. 7) 1992 was the last year of serious recession, with high real rates of interest and a wave of bankruptcies and closures. Thus it might not serve as the soundest base for making generally valid judgements. 8) Evidence from field studies suggests that the figures in the books of Hungarian entrepreneurs may well show a balance in the red. But in the meanwhile their—and their families'—wealth, consumption or even the market share of their products may grow. The same person who had to use his own Trabant now uses his company's BMW, which—in terms of accounting—is, of course, a cost item. The list of such examples is infinite. 9) Studies of poverty in Hungary have shown the unemployed not to be in the most devastated decile. That in fact was made up of people with large families and the very old with no family support to fall back on. This cautions against mixing up reported wealth with stock and consumption [flow] data. One should not make sweeping judgements on the basis of the latter, especially if it reflects a very particular year and a very particular source (one produced primarily for the tax authority). The construction boom, the surge in the numbers of imported cars and mobile phones, or the inflexion point in the growth of unemployment all point in a different direction.

Further empirical studies (Laki, 1994) demonstrate that, as the vast majority of new entrepreneurs are small or very small, they do not adopt the macro-textbook behaviour of an 'ever'-expanding private firm. On the contrary, precautionary motives and competition compel them to be circumspect, particularly when investing. The 1993–94 investment boom was produced by direct foreign investors and large infrastructural projects, in other words, by the activity of—a minority by definition—large and giant investors. Therefore no direct functional interrelationship can be established between the spread of private business and economic recovery. If conditions for recovery improve and the prospects of good returns emerge, a couple of players can well change the entire scene. True, these deals had to do either with strategic Foreign Direct Investment—as in the telephone network—or with concessionary financing—as in the highway or waste management projects.



Anyway, a by and large passive behaviour on the part of the majority of domestic business could not stop an investment-led recovery in 1993–94.

Let us turn to an overview of 1990–94 macrostatistics. First, the drop of GDP had neither been unprecedented nor limitless. Second, domestic utilization decreased only by a third of that of the GDP. The cumulative GDP drop of 22.2 per cent was followed by an 8.6 per cent drop in domestic uses. Public consumption actually expanded during recession. This has to do primarily with government attempts to mitigate the social repercussions of the loss of 1.5 million jobs in a country with 4.5 million economically active individuals. The number of registered unemployed at the end of 1994 was 530,000, with about a million people living more or less on various transfer schemes, such as early retirement. Though it is in many ways irrational and unrepeatable, due to financing constraints, this option seems to be the price that had to be paid for the peaceful nature of systemic change. There was only one major action of civic disobedience, in October 1990. With the exception of this prime political act of protest, no sizeable industrial conflicts surfaced in five years. This is a clear *quid pro quo*, with the obvious tradeoffs.

The overall impression is confirmed by trends in private consumption. This item too dropped only half as much as overall performance in 1991–92 and grew in 1993 prior to overall recovery as registered in GDP statistics. The 10 per cent cumulative drop in terms of private consumption, spread across four years, is neither unprecedented, nor surprising in an international perspective. The loss equals only 45 per cent of the drop in GDP, registered in the same years. Thus—by and large—statistics does not lend support to frequently voiced claims (Köves, 1993) on the allegedly excessive price Hungarian society had to pay for economic transformation. This holds even if these figures do not contain the corrective elements described in the introductory part of this section. In sum, statistical analysis supplants political science analyses (Körössényi, 1994) of the—by now ritually invoked—economic justification for the move left of the political shuttle in both national and municipal elections of 1994. Instead, the antiquated political style of the rightist parties, their less than scintillating individual performances, the poor packaging of their policies, their inability to cope with the mass media, aggravated by major mistakes in their concept of coalition building, all contributed to their ultimate failure in winning the sympathies of the non-committed majority of voters, and are all factors of higher explanatory value.

The regular poverty surveys of the statistical authorities, as well as of independent sociological analyses (e.g., of the International Blue Ribbon Commission) all point to the same direction. The proportion of those living under the poverty level went up from 15 per cent in 1989 to 23 per cent in 1993. This is a quick increase but not intolerable. Income differentials have widened from 1:5 in 1982 to 1:6 by 1989 and 1:7 in 1993, which is also anything but dramatic (either in terms of absolute differences or in terms of tendencies). What really becomes



**Table 1**  
Main Economic Indicators (1990–95)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994*	1995
GDP (in real terms)	-3	-11.9	-4.5	-2.3	4	2
Domestic use	0.8	-9.2	-6.2	11.0	10	0
Private consumption	-3.6	-5.6	-2.2	1.4	0	-2
Public consumption	2.6	-2.7	-1.1	30.5	25	10
Investments	-7.6	-10.0	-4.4	-0.7	28	10–15
Exports	-5.3	-3.1	5.4	-11.9	20	10–15
Imports	-4.3	5.4	0.5	18.6	20	4–6

\*) 1994: preliminary

1995: author's forecast based on Ministry of Finance and National Bank of Hungary, as well as press reports and his own calculations.

Source: Kopint-Datorg, Inc.: *Economic Trends in Eastern Europe*, vol. 4. no. 3. (1994).  
Vienna–New York: Springer Verlag.

a source of strain is the sizeable internal rearrangement of relative income positions among various social groups—but this is a different story to that of overall impoverishment. The growth in capital-related and managerial incomes, or the spread between the remuneration of better and less-skilled labour are positively welcome developments of the transformation, and were intentional rather than pathologic.

Turning to investments, it is clear that the decline came to an end in 1993. In fact, monthly data indicated a recovery from the second quarter of 1993 onwards. Imported equipment, private equipment investments and the new possibilities opened up by the new depreciation procedures of the 1992 Law on Accounting, all contributed to this. Western investors capitalizing on depressed asset prices, low dollar wages, generous tax holidays, and the generally quiet political atmosphere were the driving force behind this. The government's willingness to maintain a free trade régime also contributed to this trend. Unlike in previous investment booms, it is not industry but the infrastructure which is the driving dynamism. Furthermore, the share of direct currency credits raised by the firms themselves have doubled and reached 10 per cent of total invested outlays by the end of 1994 (cf. *Figyelő*, vol. 38., no. 50.). This means that guarantees and prospects for return seem much better than under the protected markets of the Comecon period. Since only 9 per cent of investment outlays are financed from domestic credit, high real rates of interests for the forint can do little to hamper this process. The construction boom is clearly visible in the data series. This is all good news insofar as the longer run self-dynamics of the process is concerned. If the government provides incentives to invest and export, the recovery can become self-propelling.



**Table 2**  
Production and Prices

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Agricultural produce	-9.2	-15.7	-13.4	-24.0	+5.0	2
Industrial output	-10.2	-16.6	-17.2	4.0	9.04	-6
Construction	-16.7	-9.4	0.0	1.7	20	10
Index of farming prices	28.5	-0.9	9.7	25.0	26*	27-29
Consumer price index	28.9	35.0	23.0	22.5	18.8	25-2
Industrial price index	20.9	31.5	11.1	10.3	10.8*	15

\*) First 10 months

Source: as in Table 1

**Table 3**  
Change of Real Effective Exchange Rates

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Based on consumer prices	104.3	113.2	106.5	109.0	98	95
Based on industrial price index	101.3	112.1	99.9	102.8	93	90

Source: as in Table 1

Turning to prices, it is conspicuous that the worst Hungarian year, 1991, shows results equal to the best Polish years of 1993-94. In 1991, Hungarian inflation peaked at 35 per cent, whereas Polish inflation stood at 70.3 per cent in 1991,<sup>3</sup> 43 per cent in 1992, 35.3 per cent in 1993 and 32.3 per cent in 1994. Since then Hungarian inflation has stabilized in the range of 23 per cent, with 1994 closing at 18.8 per cent. This is not high or hyperinflation, but is what international economics terms as moderate, typical of medium-developed market economies. For comparison, comparable rates in 1994 were nine times as high in Russia, four times as high in Bulgaria and eleven times as high in Romania.

An examination of the exchange rate conspicuously shows that, unlike all other transforming countries, Hungary has never made use of steep devaluation of its domestic currency to promote exports and curtail imports. This also means that the efficiency pressure on Hungarian firms has been considerable and adjustment to external markets has become a must. Recent devaluations simply stopped the previous appreciation of the local currency in real terms. In other words, the central bank has applied a practice of "tying its own hands" when competitive devaluations were considered to enhance foreign sales. This may add to the foresight of investors and to the credibility of the monetary authority.

3 ■ The 585.5 per cent figure for 1990 was not taken into account for Poland to filter out the effects of a one-off corrective inflation. The latter was not needed in Hungary, for price and wage liberalization has already been accomplished by 1990.



**Table 4**  
Domestic Economic Activity  
(annual change, in per cent, in constant prices)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Sales of agricultural produce	-9.2	-15.7	-13.4	-24.0	8.8	0+2
Industrial sales	-0.5	-17.9	-6.4	2.9	6.5	+4+6
Retail trade turnover	-7.6	-28.2	-2.5	-0.6	-6.0	-5-7
Unemployment rate	1.9	7.5	12.3	12.1	10.4	10
Gross real wages	-3.7	-8.0	1.4	-0.4	9.0	0+2

Source: as in Table 1

**Table 5**  
The External Balance

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Balance of merchandise trade (mn \$)	0.941	-1.195	-0.374	-3.623	-3.5	-2.5
Current account (in bn \$)	1.27	0.267	0.324	-3.450	-4.0	-3
Current account (as a percentage of GDP)	0.4	0.9	0.9	-9.6	-6.5	-5

Source: as in Table 1

It is remarkable that the rate of unemployment peaked in November 1992 and has continued to fall ever since. The end-1994 rate of 10.4 per cent is equal to the EU average and is much below that of several countries—from Spain to Poland. The fact that recovery in investments goes hand in hand with decreasing unemployment (also in the winter months) is a strong proof of Hungary's having overcome the recession.

In foreign trade, it is pretty clear that a wide gap opened in 1993. This deficit of about \$3 bn could not be overcome in 1994 either, with exports recovering, but imports expanding at an unchanged pace. What I have expounded so far would caution against applying protective measures to squeeze imports, since that would kill recovery. Instead, severe fiscal spending cuts were needed in public consumption and transfers, as well as a one-off "corrective devaluation" of the currency to the equilibrium level (where the level of exports and imports would automatically meet). In this way, domestic utilization of GDP could be restrained, exports and investments boosted and the current account deficit outgrown, as happened in the case of Taiwan and Korea. A growing GDP and growing currency intakes allow for a regular current account deficit of about \$2 bn in order to supplant an investment-led, lasting recovery. Conversely, governmental inability to curb transfers, fiscal spending and imports may only jeopardize recovery, as well as structural adjustment.

If we look at monetary aggregates we see a crystal clear picture of the price to be paid for the repeated postponement of fiscal reforms in 1988–94. The ex-



plosion of the debt servicing burden is direct proof of this. Thus, the urgency of fiscal reform becomes a trivial matter, even if we remain conscious of the societal limits to retailoring social security schemes, as discussed above. One should be seriously concerned about the outcomes of tripartite negotiations where social partners and several influential quarters in the governing parties have shown explicit reluctance to address this issue. The new minister of finance is as lonely a long distance runner, as his predecessors were.

Finally, two points are worth making on the financial aggregates. First, the Central Bank seems to be waging a tough battle in 1993–95 (but not before) against fiscal laxity and for sound money. This fight has had results, as decelerating inflation demonstrates. However, in 1995 there is a danger that the twin of badly timed price readjustments and continued fiscal laxity may overwhelm this movement, driving up inflation from 18.8 to 25 per cent, or higher. Second, household savings seem to be quite unimpressed by fluctuations in interest rate policies. This is good news. It indicates that old-fashioned Keynesianism is dead in Hungary, if neither savings nor investments react primarily to interest rate signals. In addition, it allows more elbowroom for monetary policy for a long period of time. Thus the need to rely on cruder administrative means of macro-economic control is very unlikely to return, which is yet another sign of the successful completion of the first transition phase in Hungary.

### Prospects

So far, an attempt has been made to focus on long-term continuity in change. By abstracting from the twists and turns in current politics as well as from the impressionistic, often ideologically loaded vision of some analysts in the international press, a technical overview of the current state of market maturity in Hungary could be offered. The qualitative and quantitative aspects of this analysis point to the same direction, namely that both the strong and the weak points of Hungarian development have to do with the prevalence of spontaneity, an inherent feature of any evolutionary change. This may seem less lucrative for daily reporting or for textbook-based modelling but makes it certainly safer and more predictable, both for local people and strategic investors.

On the one hand, spontaneity is an integral feature of any market economy, which is good news. Furthermore, two consecutive free elections have cleared the political scene of Hungary of well-publicized, loud, but marginal radical rightist and leftist populist groups.

None of the forces contesting the fundamentals of market economy and EU accession could win a parliamentary representation. The governing centre-left coalition holds 73 per cent of the seats in Parliament. Since it is certainly committed to the two fundamentals described above, as well as to the social compromise, the continuation of the policy of muddling through with slow and half-



**Table 6**  
**Monetary Aggregates**

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
General government deficit (GFS) as a percentage of GDP	-0.8	5.0	7.7	6.9	9.0	10-11
Interest payments	3.3	4.0	6.1	4.9	8.0	10
Growth of M	228.7	28.7	27.4	16.8	15.0	13
Incremental net savings of households (in bn Fts)	95.6	346.1	271.9	186.4	320	370

Source : as in Table 1

hearted reforms can be forecast with a very low margin of error. The further spread of private property<sup>4</sup> will be coupled with a continuously large discretionary power of management. The social engineering projects of the last couple of years—from restitution to the small investors' programme (a version of the voucher scheme)—will gradually fizzle out. A governmental policy line anxious to avoid major antagonisms has already been made palpable by the Horn administration's concessions to the railworkers and to metalworkers in December 1994.

"More of the same" may be an encouraging message against the repeated allegations of the "commies' revenge"; it is much less satisfactory however, if the standard by which we judge things is full EU membership by the year 2000. Not only the virtues but also the limits of spontaneity are clearly discernible. Spontaneous adjustment of the Hungarian economy proved sufficiently robust to dispel numerous prognoses of lasting depression. Still, it might be less than adequate for handling some of the overdue reforms in the financial sector.

First, fiscal reform in Hungary overlaps with social security reform, since subsidies and governmental investments have already largely been eliminated. If the Horn government remains as hesitant in its first two years in power as its predecessor was, it might simply run out of time. Its political capital melts away with its curtailing public sector payrolls and increasing energy prices to cost-covering levels.

Second, banking reform has been subordinated to other considerations,<sup>5</sup> which has had debilitating influence on Hungarian merchant banks, created in

4 ■ The detailed methodological study of Árvay and Vértés (1994) puts the actual share of privately produced income to 60 per cent of GDP. As privatization accelerated in 1993 and private firms tend to be much more efficient, this figure can easily be reconciled with the 1992 estimate of Major (1995) discussed critically above. Most of the difference is attributable to the factors discussed above as well as the progress in privatization.

5 ■ Enforcing these priorities, extraneous to banking reform, rather than its early start is to blame for the deficiencies. The latter view, originating from a pamphlet by Åslund (1994), introduces a reverse causality and also a reverse sequence in explaining actual ills.



1987. At the outset, inherited bad debts were not written off. Later, in 1992–94, the operation of relieving bank portfolios of bad debts was repeated three times, though this should have been a once and for all option. Even worse, despite having spent money exceeding a full year's general government deficit in 1992–94 on this item, there is no guarantee against repeated occurrences of bailouts, or against continued erroneous lending. Both the concept and the techniques of the consolidation operation were contested (Antal and Tétényi, 1994). Last but not least, fiscal considerations seem to have dominated the purpose of bringing about an autonomous, well-functioning banking industry. Repeated hints by government officials about providing cheap credit for "everybody" (industry, farming, new firms, employment, innovation, retraining, higher education, just to name a few) threaten an unending passing on of fiscal problems into the monetary sphere. The idea of postponing the privatization of large public banks to 1997, not for lack of demand but as a deliberate policy measure, as aired by the chief Treasury official in charge of bank privatization (Farkas, 1994), is not a very promising sign. All the less so, since bailing out banks has meant their partial renationalization. Furthermore, debt equity swaps enhanced bank ownership—thus indirect public ownership—in big industrial firms. Therefore the longer the Treasury owns merchant banks the higher the probability of the latter's heeding the calls for cheap money for everybody. This can only fuel inflation and distort the allocation of scarce resources.

If no countervailing measures are taken, spontaneity will evolve towards a bargaining society with lastingly moderate or high inflation, protectionism in the job and, later, in the commodity markets as well. Thus an early policy statement of the Minister of Industry, Pál (1994), deploring excessive liberalism and neglect of protection has proved no empty declaration. In quick succession the lobbies were able to get protection in 1994–95, from the steel industry to farmers, week by the week, often against the explicit decisions of the Europe Agreement. This is discouraging, since it is demonstrable (Csaba, 1995) that in a transforming economy protectionism does emerge spontaneously. It is free trade and a strategy aiming at accession to the EU which requires both an agency and conscious policy, i.e., governmental involvement. Paradoxically, it is precisely the latter which does not emerge spontaneously, under any policy or régime.

The above-listed dangers should not, however, be overestimated. The tradition as well as the trend of muddling through with partial reforms and policy corrections has always been a suboptimal policy. In the 1980s, it did produce a relatively advanced market infrastructure for Hungary. And in the years 1990–94, it did perform the task of filling this skeleton with flesh when reforms escalated into a full systemic transformation to private capitalism. This task has been basically mastered without producing a social backlash on the Russian, Romanian, Slovak, or Serbian scale, where the majority of voters turned their back on pro-Western and pro-market forces. The criticism above thus pinpoints to subopti-



mality as against the path forecast, and not to a partial reversal, much less towards a Hungarian "impossibility theorem". The more policymakers and the general public feel the strategic commitment of the EU towards Hungary as a reciprocal act, the higher the probability of radical measures being instituted. The groundwork for fiscal reforms has already been laid by expert groups. Public debate on the projects is underway. If the EU can bring into being its role as an anchor to further reforms, this can be of more use as a form of assistance than the pumping in of billions of untied public money which, in Hungary, has never been seriously considered. ■

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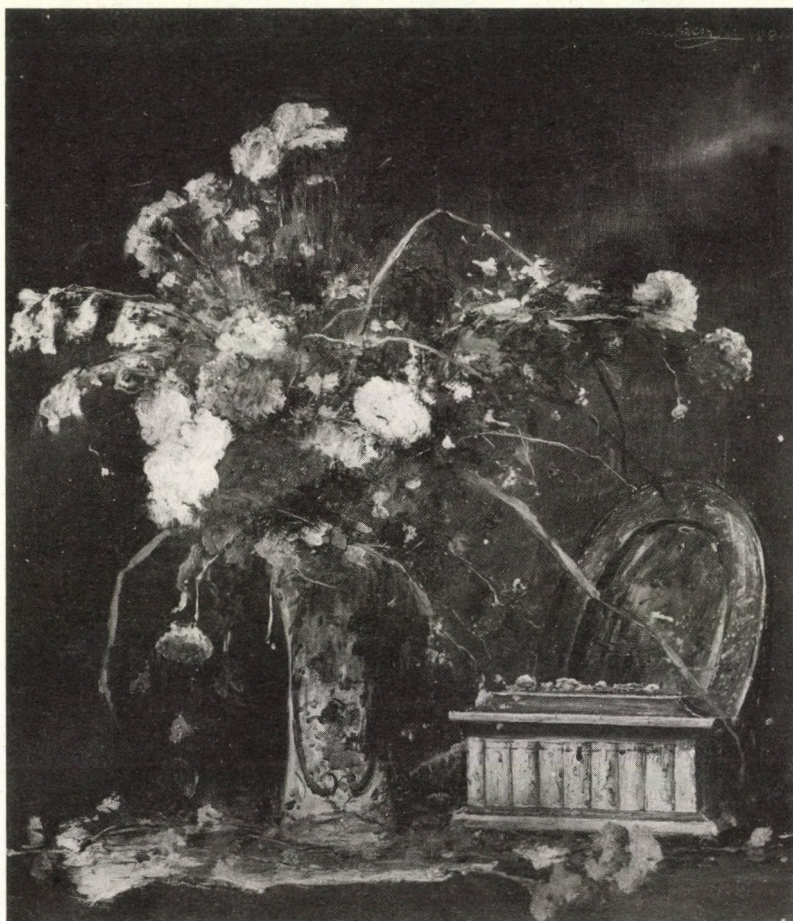
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Mihály Munkácsy: Still-life with Flowers ("Summer", "Summer Flowers"), 1881, signed. Munkácsy's finest flower still-life. Exact size not known. Hatvany Collection. Deposited in the Hungarian General Credit Bank, now in the Pushkin Museum, Moscow.



György Spiró  
Forest

(Short story)

They were travelling on a renowned local train, along the Moscow–Gorky line immortalized by one of the masterpieces of twentieth century Russian fiction, a key piece of writing, entitled Moscow–Petoushki. The author was still alive at the time, he died ten years later, world-famous, of cancer of the larynx caused by drink. It was strange to see the names of stations familiar from this short novel in real life, to see that a station called Serp i Molot (Hammer and Sickle) really existed, that it was not simply the invention of the playful, sardonic author. They tried to guess, between themselves, what fantastic concoction the protagonist of the Yerofeyev-piece could have been drinking at this very station, for it is about a person, recognizable by intimation as the author's alter ego, drinking throughout the journey and chanting the praises of self-destruction, which, it must be acknowledged, is the only acceptable, rational, normal form of behaviour in an abnormal environment.

But it was ominous too, that an ordinary local train had become steeped in Russian literature. He suspected that he was about to lose his wife. He should not have accompanied her on this trip. He had no hopes left, he knew that his wife had fallen in love with someone else, they were on their way to him now, his wife insisted on his coming along, his getting to know the boy who was living with a girl who was four months pregnant with his child; they had taken a dacha on lease along the noted Moscow–Petoushki line, a couple of stops before Petoushki, it was cheaper than renting a room in Moscow. He had no idea

of what his wife really wanted. Perhaps she wanted him to keep her from engaging in a fatal love affair, perhaps she wanted his benediction, but she wanted at all costs to draw him into this thing somehow, and he was too weak to say no, in other words he still believed that a miracle could happen.

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**György Spiró,**

*a novelist, playwright, essayist,  
translator, and Slavic scholar,  
now heads the Szigligeti Theatre  
in Szolnok. His latest book is  
a collection of short stories from which  
this one has been taken.*



So they sat in the train, it being early in the afternoon it was not too crowded, there wasn't really much to find fault with, not even to Western eyes, though by then he knew the choice had to be made and in principle he had already made it, he had chosen the Western point of view, even if there was not much philosophical and aesthetic depth to be derived from it.

Only people are important, his wife was in the habit of saying at the beginning of their relationship, and she lived accordingly, she adored exceptional people, whether they were friends or students, and the friends and students adored her in return; statistics alone will prove that the vast Russian expanse produces more exceptional people than their confined homeland, and their extraordinariness is made all the more glorious by their background, ill-omened as it has been for centuries, perhaps perennially so, glazing it with an heroic aura and enriching it with the sanctity of their predecessors, that is the way truly significant tradition works, and in truth anyone who is excellent there is very much so, more resolutely, more fiercely so, which is something that tends to get around, especially if the person has artistic talent besides; it was something he always envied the Russians; his language, a splendid language by the way, could not, for historical and political reasons, compete with the renown of the Russian language, not even with that of the lesser Slavic languages, the corroboration of this latter fact was a humiliation each time he encountered it; incidentally, he was as fond of exceptional people as his wife, and often boasted that they were his marriage portion, the extraordinary people he had collected for himself over the years from all over Eastern Europe, he had introduced a large number of them to his wife, and they did reciprocally adore each other, yet he must have had an intimation about the twists and turns of life and death even then, for it had been around that time that the sentence "you must not love your fellow man; die he must and solitude will be your end" slipped from his pen, he was surprised at himself for writing it, because he sensed there was something in it. As to his image of himself, he was convinced that he too was capable of loving deeply, yet he always kept a certain distance, there was always a kind of modest objectivity about his feelings, and his wife was the only person he loved unconditionally, whereas his wife, when she loved, loved indiscriminately and uncritically, for as long as it lasted.

His wife was excited and happy, she would soon be meeting her beloved.

And she was very beautiful, as beautiful as when she had fallen in love with him, her future husband.

And like when, after three years of marriage, she had fallen in love with a superannuated Bulgarian ballet dancer at the Bulgarian seaside, because she could talk to him in Russian.

It was the Russian language that his wife was in love with, as he soon realized and even managed to understand. Russian was his father-in-law's native tongue, and as a child his wife had gone to a nursery school where the teachers



taught in Russian, for her father, upon returning home from the Soviet Union, was attached to the diplomatic service, and for this reason his daughter happened to be born in Peking and went to a Russian-language nursery school in Sofia. She did forget her Russian later on, and had to learn it all over again and her accent was never again quite perfect, yet, because her father had died young, at the age of thirty-two, of cancer, and because she hardly remembered him, she compensated for her loss with a passion for Russian language and literature, and was inclined to fall in love with anyone whose native tongue was Russian. There had been the Russian painter who had married a Hungarian girl from Kecskemét, that was sometime during their fourth year, back home; she had brought him home to the flat, wife and all, and they had slept the three of them in the bedroom while he, the host, the husband, had slept on a foam rubber mattress in the living room; the painter was a hefty, disgusting fellow, who boasted he had killed a man once, and it was true, he had thrown a drunk who had set upon him out of a moving train, and the man had died, and he was acquitted because of insufficient evidence. Then this painter and his Hungarian wife defected to Paris, and the affair petered out.

But this was different. Not because his wife was going to live with her lover, whose girl-friend was expecting his baby, anything can happen in Russia, children grow up parentless and neglected, such is life under any great power, no, the difference was that this time he was going to lose her no matter how he conducted himself in that dacha, because the crux of the matter was that it had got to be final.

The point was not that his wife was having an affair, but that she wanted to leave her husband. She was through with something.

Until he met his wife, he had always thought he would never marry. He had a number of affairs of sorts; they were not really important. He had fallen in love a few times, had known torment and anguish, that's what these affairs were for. But his wife was the first woman about whom he felt that you could spend a lifetime with her. What kind of life he imagined for himself was of course never made quite clear. Obviously he longed for a peaceful, middle-class, contemporarily rococo idyll, constant, sentimental family intimacy, a lot of friends, a couple of children, as befitted the age he lived in and from which he tried in vain to keep a rational-ironic distance. Another thing that misled him was that his wife and he shared the same thoughts. He did not realize in time that this was because it was he who had implanted most of his opinions into his wife's thinking: he had taught her while on teaching practice in her last year of secondary school; nor did he realize that by doing so he had unintentionally, in other words inadvertently, been forced into a father-role.

When he realized that his wife wanted at all costs to treat him like a father, he protested, fought against it tooth and nail. But his wife proved the stronger. Or perhaps it was the powerful and intense need for a father hidden deep in his



wife that was stronger. And something else too, a dark, suicidal impulse which his wife feared yet craved: she was caught stealing once in a department store, though she had money on her; there was no scandal, the affair was hushed up, though it was the scandal that his wife wanted; and she wanted to die young, of cancer of the stomach like her father. And like one of her uncles, whom she did not know personally, but knew that he had died as the director of what became under his hands the best provincial theatre in Hungary, also of cancer of the stomach, before he turned forty. They often went to that theatre later on and as a husband he felt that these visits were in some way a perverse mode of condolence. It was to this craving mingled with fear that he attributed his wife's voracious lust for life which accepted no bounds, neither in her enjoyment of it nor in her suffering from it; let it be short but all the more intense, be it a question of love, travel, artistic pleasure, human relations, work, smoking; and in this Russian culture, Russian literature especially, would have abetted her even if her father's first language had not been Russian, but being the child of the 1919 generation of communist Hungarian emigrants, it was. Only this way the turn things took seemed that much more inevitable—fateful, really.

As a teenager his wife had been a zealous leftist, that had been her way of identifying; at the time he met her, she had grown up and become anti-Soviet, and her fanaticism found its object in Russian literature.

His default is all the greater for having believed that a relationship with such a companion could last a lifetime.

He, a mature man, should have realized that his wife wanted to treat him at all costs like a father so as to have a figure of authority she could look up to and adore, to rebel against when the time came and so grow up at last, and if he had really wanted what was best for his wife, he should have fortified her in this endeavour. After that business at the Bulgarian seaside he should have said: I adore you, but you'd better go your way, not because you wanted to deceive me, but because my native tongue will never be Russian. He did not say it, though it was then that their marriage began to go downhill and never picked up again.

That he found he had no desire to make love after that, neither with his wife nor with anyone else, may have been his way of paying penance. What he wished to atone for he never made clear, not even to himself. He was not a mature person after all, it was just his wife who wanted to see him that way, and because she wanted it very much, she won, as she usually did. Neither did he believe that continence may be a solution for him, to whom ascetism was not alien, perhaps he was pressed into ascetism, into workaholism, wanting to follow in his ten years dead father's footsteps, (and that was an indulgence too, a pleasure-seeking of sorts, which was something his father could hardly have known, but he knew, at least his profession was such that he should know), but it could not be a solution for another person in whom time for some reason passed faster.



What was it that he did not want to lose, really? A person whom he adored. A person whom he adored mostly for repeating back to him his own opinions, for bringing up his own arguments to support and encourage him in his weaker moments. Someone for whom he was the absolute, the ultimate authority. Perhaps this was the most important factor of his love. It was this image that he did not want to lose, the image of himself existing in his wife in the form of juvenile hero-worship. It is almost pathological, this unconditional devotion to his wife, and to crown it all he is accompanying her now without a word of protest, like a squire, like the henpecked husband that he is, to meet the man she has fallen in love with.

Perhaps he is accompanying her so he won't have to be the first to speak of divorce; let the events bring about what must happen, let him have no choice but to slink away after the insufferable humiliation he will be forced to endure. He must, he needs to be a victim in order to be able to continue his rococo-sentimental life in the confined, lap-warm sty that is his homeland, his living-space, Western compared to the Russian expanse, where tensions are pleasantly reduced, and conflicts need never be fully resolved, overgrown as they are by the myriad tendrils of petty lies. Where, however, insanity does not make rational thinking impossible from the outset, and from where there is a chance of understanding, if not elaborating, both Eastern and Western madnesses. He hoped that the two alternative principles, the Eastern and the Western, the inevitably religious and the ruthlessly interest-oriented, heterogeneous self-images of man both, are surveyable from the tower overlooking the two areas, and that one could acquire true knowledge through the dramatic confrontation of the two.

They arrived, got off the Soviet jerkwater train, his wife possessed a roughly sketched map, they set off along the frozen, beaten dirt track, it led them past shabby, dilapidated, once stylish wooden houses, it's a wonder they're still standing after so many years of Soviet rule, and they were there.

The boy was tall, slender, blond, a beautiful Ashkenazi, his eyes blazing with what a Russian Jew's eyes should blaze; his companion was pretty, insignificant, her belly nicely rounded; the dacha was a real dacha, built entirely of wood, the garden was neglected, in keeping with Soviet conditions; they started drinking at once, their hosts had prepared for company, they had even taken a foam rubber mattress upstairs; in that part of the world visits are the staying kind and last several days; they drank vodka, Stolichnaya, at that time it was not in short supply, and it was not too expensive either, for this all happened during the peaceably stagnant Brezhnev era, when there was still time enough to experience love and sorrow, read thick books and ponder; after the first couple of shots the conversation naturally turned on to Akhmatova and Mandelstam and Pasternak, as it must, these truly great poets in their after-life sanctified everything, even an act of adultery shortly to take place, a tangle that would affect many, an unborn child among them. He watched his wife sitting beside him, spell-bound by the



boy's sophisticated Russian speech and by his knowing the life-work of all the best Russian poets by heart; a Russian speciality, this; in the absence of books everyone commits to memory the samizdat volumes lent to them for a couple of days, this is why the Russian poets favour strictly cadenced, rhymed forms to this day, like in ancient times, complying with the demand for verbalism; his wife's eyes shone with a radiance he first saw in them when he was teaching her Attila József; his wife was destined to fall in love with a priest every time, he realized as he sipped his Stolichnaya, and this he could peaceably ponder over, the others not seeming too eager to have him join in the conversation, though it was true that he gave no sign of wishing to do so either.

He felt that there was something unbearably obscene in bringing poetry into all this, it was virtually an exploitation of poetry, sinful prevarication, he did not have the strength to deliberate on whether poetry was not a party to this somehow but, though the vodka was rapidly befuddling his mind, he did realize that the beautiful, slender Ashkenazi boy was in this moment the high priest of the mind of the Russian people, while he had been the high priest of the mind of the Hungarian people at the time his wife had fallen in love with him.

It is obviously no mere chance that both are Jewish, bobbed the thought to the surface of his mind, there may be some kind of compensatory dread at work beneath his unconditional love of literature too. That literature had a religious function for Russians too did not surprise him; that it may function in a similar way in his own country gave him food for thought.

But what made him ponder above all was the realization that he too was a priest of sorts, and that this profession was inherently erotic. He could have interpreted the rambling, even unrestrained conversation about the Russian poets differently, as an obligatory prelude, or as procrastination, the four of them in that dacha were actors in an unwritten Chekhov scene, but he did not after all appreciate the situation in quite such a primitive way; it did occur to him though that to long for such a mediator between God and man, to create him even if this is not the main point, even if the essence is more compelling than the making and receiving of confession, because it is instinctive, arises perhaps from the exclusively religious disposition of the female soul, for it is ordained mediators that they crave to make love with, but not with ordinary mortals, and the love-making is subject to the condition that the man furnish evidence of his sanctity. Which he did, reciting a mass of poems from memory. That the Ashkenazi boy was beautiful and slender and blond and blue-eyed, as befits a true-bred Aryan according to the Nazis' book, was of no consequence whatever, nor was the fact that he was no match for the boy in looks. It was the religion of a vast area triumphing over the religion of a confined area that was happening here, as world politics and world literature made abundantly clear; the beautiful, slender Ashkenazi Russian boy could be hunchbacked for all it mattered, and he could be the most good-looking Hungarian of them all, it would be of no help:



the things he knew about her were all true, her father-complex, her thirst for the Russian language, and anything else; the only thing he had not known about her until now was that his wife was a woman, and what this entailed.

The pregnant girl, allegedly his wife's friend since it had been she whom his wife had met first, before meeting her beloved, gave no sign of having the slightest inkling of what was actually happening here; from time to time she would kindly and pleasantly draw him into the conversation, and he would reply courteously, as befitted a guest, thereby, he could feel deep down in the gut, causing disappointment to his wife, who would have loved to make a scene both in a Russian and in a non-Russian medium, or at least to prolong her present state of exhilaration, revelling in pent-up emotion; he could sense, too, that the beautiful, slender boy could not understand his patience, his peaceable drinking either; the boy did not know his wife yet, that was quite obvious, he had just fallen in love with her, and why shouldn't he have fallen in love with her, his wife was the kind of woman you had to fall in love with, it happened to a lot of his friends after their divorces, and the reason why nothing became of those relationships was that they were hampered by the ex-husband's, that is his, shadow; the beautiful, slender boy was young still and had not yet made close acquaintance with women in whom the transitory stages between the primitive and the most complex are almost entirely eliminated, as they were in his wife.

It felt strange, sitting there on the closed porch of the dacha, sipping his drink on a bench by the roughly hewn wooden table, different from the way he imagined it on their way here. He had prepared himself, helpless and cowardly, for a total and ignominious defeat, primarily for the dramatic exposure of his hen-peckedness, but this did not happen after all, which, he could tell, surprised his wife as much as it surprised him, consequently, in her heart of hearts, she had been desiring her husband's public and preferably scandalous humiliation. Instead of which her husband achieved a state of enlightenment, in which the effect of the vodka taken on an empty stomach may have had some part, it may have been the vodka that made him so self-possessed, dispassionate like he had never been before in his life perhaps; what he felt was that, though the events threatened to disrupt his very existence, the life-strategy he had adopted up until then, it was the play of greater forces he was witnessing here, which at the worst could annihilate him in due course.

His tranquility was not feigned, but there had to be something provocative, something derisive in it, and he could sense that they sensed it.

In company, at such times, something has to happen, the seating pattern is disrupted, as if by chance.

It turned out that there was not enough bread.

Oh dear, how could that have happened. Someone must go and buy some more bread.



But the shop beside the station is closed.

Then the beautiful, slender boy said there's sure to be someone at the post office still, we'll ask them for a hunk of bread.

This was a summons. Addressed not to the four months' pregnant girl, nor to his wife, for this was not the way he wished to tear her away from the company.

Alright, he said, let's go.

They put on their coats, stepped out of the house, the two women watched them walk out through the garden gate from the porch.

They set out towards the station. The cold was dry and bitter, as was usual in that part of the world, and the scenery with its old, tumble-down dachas could have been designed by his wife, enamoured of Russian culture.

My wife does not rebel against me because she wants to grow up, came unbidden into his mind at the sight of the disintegrating decor, on the contrary, she wants to remain a child, irresponsible, childless.

The landscape, shrouded in mist, seemed baleful somehow, or perhaps it was just he who wanted to see it that way, because finally there was nothing special about the scenery, it was just miserable, dilapidated, temporary.

They went to the shop first, which was of course quite pointless as the shop had been closed for some time. This made it clear to him that the beautiful, slender boy was embarrassed. He found this amusing, but without malice, after all, he was no exception, it had happened to him, and whenever he had seduced someone else's wife he too had always been at a loss as to how to behave towards the husband, his own wife being a case in point, he had been present at her wedding, a guest, a friend, laughing at the back with other friends, and six weeks later the young bride had moved in with him.

Then they made their way towards the post office. The boy hurried on ahead, he walked a couple of steps behind. The boy—though he was only the subtenant of the dacha, by favour of the owner's son (the owner was an officially sanctioned writer, and as such could easily afford a dacha)—wanted to prove that he was on home ground, he understood this and was almost sorry for the boy.

He soon dismissed this thought however, knowing that the beautiful, slender boy already had a child somewhere, whom he never even saw, he was just a Russian who lived for the moment like all the rest, his days were made up of a series of brief affairs, he had no plans as to what to make of his life, nor would he ever have, his about-to-be-seduced wife would soon be forsaken too, and the child that would be born in five months' time, he had no sense of responsibility for any other person, the age-old evil spell had worked on him, producing a total indifference toward others, if things are going hard with him, let the whole world blow up, his soul was pan-Slavic, even if he was a Jew.

This was what his wife had chosen. Yet in the first three, beautiful years of their marriage he had remoulded his wife's soul, had awakened in her a love of Hungarian literature, which she had had no real knowledge of up until then, his



wife had grown to love Hungarian poets and writers, and was truly grateful, it is its literature that makes the Hungarian nation, in other respects it is just like any other nation, a little better, a little worse, but the same. Strange that he had effected a Hungarian war of independence within a two-member family. It seemed for a while that the war would be won. And now it appeared that the Hungarians would be losing again.

The boy rapped at the locked door of the post office for some time, while he stood at the bottom of the steps and waited. The door was opened at last and after a brief transaction it turned out that they had no bread to spare either, and the door closed.

The boy came down the steps disappointedly.

Never mind, he said.

This path here, said the boy, leads into the forest, it's one of our favourite walks, would you like to try it?

*Poosty pasmotrim.*

They set out along the path and at once reached the forest.

Tall pine-trees aligned the path, the snow that had melted into slush in the village still frosted the boughs, a light night wind was blowing and the smaller branches knocked against each other, making a tinkling sound. It was music that they made. He had never heard anything like it before.

The boy had perhaps prepared, even planned for one of those Slavic, self-tormenting showdowns, the kind people usually find so blissfully enjoyable, but then did not speak after all, and he did not speak either, the music was too beautiful.

They walked slowly along the path, the great trees gleamed blindingly white in the moonlight that reflected off and onto them and tinkled.

The boy wanted perhaps to show him a Russian forest, as a testimony of his own human superiority, for there surely cannot be such great, frozen trees in Hungary, and he, the Russian Jew, is the rightful owner of this forest, while his guest, whose wife he will bed that very night, does not have the disposal of such a forest, such and so wondrous a transcendence, and so cannot compare with him humanly either; or perhaps he wanted less, perhaps he thought that the forest was his, and he would show it off, the marriage portion as it were; or perhaps he wanted something more human, wanted to share his property with he whom he was about to rob, offering up the forest in the stead of the woman; or perhaps, driven by a burdened conscience, he wanted to conciliate in advance him whose rights were to be violated; but the guest, who had never seen such great trees in his life before, did not think of the forest that enthralled him with its frozen beauty in terms of a Russian forest, but saw it instead simply as a forest, a phenomenon of the planet upon which living beings such as they, possessed of a fleeting awareness, reside temporarily. Or at least that was what his silence was about, and the boy must have sensed some part of it, for he continued to walk on in silence.



Then they stopped. The boy suggested that they turn back. They turned back. They walked on silently. They reached the dacha, went in, took off their coats, their ushankas, the women had made a griddle-cake of sorts out of potatoes and anything else they could find which served instead of bread, they ate and drank until dawn, getting drunker and drunker, every half an hour or so he declined the suggestion to go upstairs with his wife and turn in, at dawn his wife accompanied him to the station, and waited with him for the first train to Moscow, she could have got on the train, there was plenty of time, she could still have decided differently, he had no say in the matter by then, but his wife looked at him as if he were a stranger, it was a stranger she had accompanied to the station, an imperceptibly small ant from a distant, small region, she did not board the train, he rattled back to Moscow, witnessing her first retreating steps from the window.

That was when it happened; what was done could not be undone. The religion of the more spacious, more fatal land triumphed. That was when he had to wake up to the truth that he had reached adulthood, that his marriage with the woman he loved above all was over, that his European-sentimental-peace-time vision of the future was in pieces. Not that this was in any way a decision on his part, one doesn't really decide anything even when one solemnly resolves to do this or that, the rest comes later anyway, the senseless, pointless, passionate outbursts, the back-downs, the vain attempts, the futile sacrifices, the self-torture, all aimed at making a total wreck out of the other by way of retaliation, humiliating emotional tantrums to while away the time, and the like.

After she returned because her scholarship had expired and she lived as if in a dream, lying on her bed for months on end reading Russian novels, and they finally got a divorce and moved apart, for a while his wife seriously considered going back to the Soviet Union to live with that boy, or with someone else.

He tried to dissuade her, tried to protect her from the special kind of madness that is common in those parts and of which every variety is lethal; to a certain extent he did achieve his purpose, his wife did not go back, and he had at least satisfied his conscience.

It was only much later that he realized that her staying was not his doing after all, it was his wife who had accomplished this for herself and by herself, in the process of growing up. True that she had finally picked herself a family where infantile existence was permitted, the members all being artists, and where inner emotional turmoil was extroverted or camouflaged by the lavish entertainment of interesting and less interesting native and foreign friends and acquaintances arriving in hordes almost every other day, and by the continuous, endless sensation this multitude created, but, because he too sometimes moved in those circles, he could see that his wife had become one of the most adult persons there. Whether his wife was assisted in this by her religious passion for Russian culture, which the members of that large family always open to guests



did not share, he no longer had the insight to tell. Perhaps she was. If someone has a private little world where they can retreat to in their hinder brain, a place that is their very own and no one else's, it will protect them from life. This was something he knew from experience, it was his clamorous, restless fancy, squirming within his crocodile brain that saved him from the monotonous sequence of day-to-day existence.

Then one day his ex-wife paid him a visit, he was living alone at the time; without taking off her coat she sat down in the armchair where she often used to sit back in the days they were still living together, I only dropped in for a minute, she said, putting the small ashtray she carried about with her everywhere on the arm-rest and chain-smoking, as was her custom, and they talked for three hours or so, or more precisely his wife talked and told him about the things she felt she owed him to tell. He listened, hardly put in a word, his wife had become an adult, thinking being, she knew everything one can know, was able to take a rational view of their shared past and her present situation among other things; he admired the person who sat in his former wife's armchair and was not in the least jealous of her current husband, he would have been afraid of living with such a person by then.

He was happy that he knew such a person, but had a sudden, strange premonition, their conversation was running a course that made him feel as if it might be the last. And at the end his wife apologized, and it was no good him telling her what he really thought, that there was nothing to apologize for. After his wife left, the flat where he had been living alone for years in the thrall of his memories became irrevocably empty, and he pondered for a long time why his former wife had begged his forgiveness so adamantly.

This happened two months before his former wife found with her own hands the tumour that the doctors had been unable to detect despite her complaints.

Time ran a rapid course in his former wife, and she died of the same cancer that had killed her father and uncle, though, in consequence of the progress of medical science, it took her much longer; she suffered for six years and in that time was forsaken by everyone who loved her, friends, students, even he, her second husband; everyone except her new husband; from the heights she had fought her way to she reverted after the third operation to the level of a ten-year-old child and did not deviate from it, it was the only way she could bear what was happening to her, and perhaps she was right, she had to undergo surgery four or five times after that because of the metastases, in her more lucid moments she would say I'll be damned if I kick the bucket just to please you.

That forest, that forest may not have changed, but even if it's been cleared, if they've destroyed it root and branch like they destroy every living thing over there, it still exists somewhere, or it will grow again sometime, and the frozen branches will knock against each other. ■

*Translated by Eszter Molnár*



Szabolcs Várady

# Poetry Under the Weather

A Portrait of György Petri

**F**ollowing the 1949 communist takeover, the natural chronology and development of Hungarian poetry were to display serious dysfunctions for more than a decade. When a new generation, including a number of exceptional talents, (e.g., Ferenc Juhász, László Nagy, et al.) appeared most of its premier poets (Lőrinc Szabó, István Vas, Sándor Weöres, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, László Kálnoky, Zoltán Jékely, János Pilinszky, et al.) were forced to the edges of literary life. The scene to which they were to return to begin again for the second time, after eight to ten years of enforced silence, was still one in which the critical response was chiefly determined by the strict ideological and tactical considerations of the ruling party. Many other talented poets who—out of weakness, ambition, credulousness or fanaticism—had met the demands of the dictatorship for a while, also had to start their careers all over again, with a newly found or regained poetic voice (Zoltán Zelk, for instance).

In the late fifties the renewal which was to fill the lacunae in Hungarian poetry did not only begin from within (that is from the desk drawers). The introduction of modern poetry from abroad, which had stopped in 1948, was at last continued. The most significant in what was new was not so much the works of contemporaries as those of the great masters of the first half of the century. The first representative anthology containing works by Rilke (long known and translated in Hungary), T. S. Eliot (scarcely known) and Cavafy (virtually unheard of) was not published until the 1960s.

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## **Szabolcs Várady**

*has published two volumes of poems.  
He works as an editor at Európa Publishers  
and on the staff of Holmi, a literary  
monthly. He has translated numerous  
English and American poets.*

The two most important careers launched in this period which contributed substantially to this renewal of Hungarian poetry were those of Dezső Tandori and György Petri. At the beginning, they had important connections with those involved in the restructuring of the landscape outlined above. Tandori's mentor was



Ágnes Nemes Nagy, translator of Rilke, while Petri's was István Vas, the translator of Eliot and Cavafy. They helped the younger poets by their personal example and advice—as well as by the new opportunities in language which their translations had opened up for Hungarian poetry. The primary reason why the beginning of their two careers merits particular attention is that these two poets—apart from possessing exceptional talent, or perhaps for that very reason—did not continue with what they had inherited from their predecessors. The strikingly novel aspect of Tandori's work was the matter and technique of his poetry, the formal impact of a distrust of language as a means of expression. Petri's poems, however, are organized by the position of the persona of the poet, by a distrust of the constitutive elements of both the world in general and specifically, Eastern Europe.

György Petri (whose family background is Hungarian-Slovak-German-Jewish-Serbian) was born in Budapest in 1943. He began poetry by giving it up, so to speak. He was seventeen when the most prestigious Budapest literary magazine published his first poem and he was only twenty when he came to the conclusion that the literary tradition which had inspired him could not be continued and therefore he must give up poetry altogether. Planning to become a psychiatrist, and later a philosopher, he took jobs as a psychiatric nurse, a porter in a book warehouse and a trainee journalist with a country newspaper before eventually going on to study philosophy and literature at university. The encounter with the poetry of T. S. Eliot was the final impetus which enabled him to find his own voice and method after three or four years of silence. This is how he remembers the impact of Eliot: "...for me it was important that he pointed to the possibility that one can write in the same poem one's ideological crisis and the crisis of culture and about the very simple facts of life: the connection of these two spheres was important for me, not so much the philosophy of Eliot, which is quite apart." (Clive Wilmer, *Poets Talking*. Carcanet, 1994, p. 46.) In order to find his true self, he also needed the intellectual maturity and historical experience the years around 1968 provided for young Eastern Europeans who had, like Petri, started out as Marxists.

The ill humour and nausea which permeates *Magyarázatok M. számára* (Explanations for M., 1971), Petri's first volume, was more prominent on the book's appearance than the poetic power and originality of the pieces themselves. With the benefit of hindsight, a present-day reader might primarily be struck by the formal, methodological and tonal richness of the volume, along with its exceptional unity. A detailed and multifaceted portrait of a personality, of an intellect and of a lifestyle is drawn in the poems and however darkly the poet sees the world around him and himself within it, his practice of his craft is both enjoyed and enjoyable. He is in full possession of his newly found devices: the intellectual fervour and greed with which he incorporates a wide range of knowledge into his poems recalls the English Metaphysical poets. The tonal register of the vol-



ume, extending from near prose to ethereal song, is also noteworthy: Petri imitates the Baroque elegy, evokes Catullus, the troubadour lyric and German Romanticism. With this last he has particularly strong intellectual ties, for it is here that he discovers poetic predecessors in whom ill humour was coupled with a marked consciousness of the philosophy of history, the "acerbic moralists", who were enabled by a tragic one-sidedness, a partiality deriving from recognition, to take apart the customary lies of their period.

The first of the three lengthy sequences in his volume (*Demi sec*) is dominated by the theme of love and sketches the environment and lifestyle of its "lyrical hero." He exists primarily in two situations: he stays up at night drifting and contemplating. In the morning—a rather late morning—on waking with a bad taste in the mouth, having survived his death, as it were, he tries to infer his identity from the objects that surround him. It is night that liberates poetry in this world where the light of day falls on a bleak and hostile reality. The way of life is a view of life. Dislocation from the ordinary world, which is governed by the alternation of day and night, sheds a critical light on human relations too. The earthly rites of love occur in a *demi sec* mood, only moderately improved by *demi sec* drinks bought for the whole week's lunch money. My use here of "earthly" is not in the least accidental, for the heavenly pole is present too. In the words of Baudelaire, a poet who was to be frequently evoked in Petri's later work, there is both spleen and ideal.

The latter concerns poetic style as well. Ideal love requires a different environment and a different environment breeds a different kind of poetry. The anapaestic lightness of the idyllic dream in "A vékony lánnyal" (With the Slender Girl) is drowned by the broken iambs of the waking city's never-changing roar. "A szerelmi költészet nehézségeiről" (Of the Difficulties of Love Poetry), another important poem, explores the question conceptually and historically by contrasting the mediaeval troubadour with the modern intellectual. As the title of the volume suggests, Petri actually refuses to accept his experience in its immediacy—at this stage of his poetic development, anyway—preferring to investigate the nature and basis of the general problems his personal experience contains.

The final summary of experiences comes in the third sequence, in recapitulative pieces such as "A felismerés fokozatai" (Degrees of Recognition), "Metaforák helyzetünkre" (Metaphors of Our Position), and "This life of ours bled dry". The plural reference in these two refers to the tiny community of the like-minded, the force protecting one from the hostile outside world. This situation is, nevertheless, far from unambiguous. Outwardly, it may inspire passionate elation and rebellious determination; inwardly, it may raise a desperate irony towards one's own self. It is on this self-consuming disillusionment that the authenticity of the whole volume rests.

By the second volume, *Körülírt zuhanás* (Circumscribed Fall, 1974), the plural has vanished and so have the explanations. Everything is still too unambiguous,



and is already unambiguous. If there were any remaining illusions about a "real", an authentic Marxism which might oppose the ideology "existing socialism" professed, they too have vanished with the occupation of Czechoslovakia. The circle of like-minded idealists disappears completely—there is nothing to be explained any more, there are no means with which, and no one to whom, explanations might be made. "I amble on alone—/ the prisoner of a condition it'd be / going too far to call loneliness / and deceiving myself to call independence—on / among parched sights." (This, and subsequent quotations, come from the translations by Clive Wilmer and George Gömöri, in György Petri, *Night Song of the Personal Shadow: Selected Poems*. Bloodaxe Books, 1991.)

Parched sights: the main characteristic of the new volume. Long meditative monologues and spacious grand designs are followed by a gnomic poetry of condensed, thick and hard images, dessicated in both language and method. The dessication is present not only on the external surface, it spreads inwards as well. Like the vine-grower in the Hungarian parable who, finding his grapes destroyed by hail, starts beating his own grapes with his stick, shouting: "Let us see, Lord, how we manage together!", the solitary and unhopeful poet sees and presents human relations and the allegedly beautiful feelings they involve with ever darkening colours, through ever more cruelly alienating and degrading images and with black humour and grotesque form. At the same time, he seems to intimate all that had been lost or never even realized in the world which it was his fate to inhabit.

**T**his second volume was only a transition to the full scale rebellion of *Örökkétő* (Eternal Monday, 1981). In spite of certain strictly enforced taboos, the limits of the Kádár era were relatively liberal for the Eastern Europe of the time, Petri's third volume, however, could have no place within them. It appeared in samizdat and thus Petri became the only poet to be *persona non grata* for the officially allowed Hungarian literature of the period.

This, too, was a rather unusual situation in Hungary at that time. There was hardly anyone who actually liked the Kádár regime, but many considered it to be the best of possible regimes, particularly that generation of writers who had escaped death during World War II by the skin of their teeth, suffered under the Stalinist dictatorship, and had experienced the euphoria and failure of the 1956 Revolution and the subsequent reprisals. What the consolidation of the Kádár regime from the mid-sixties on meant for this generation was the opportunity to devote their remaining energies to quiet and carefree creative work, if at the expense of observing certain taboos and prohibitions. The majority of the younger poets strove for the aesthetic autonomy of art. Political taboos proved to be a rich creative challenge for some, as the amorphous zone between openly naming and complete silence inspired a whole range of artistic finesses. Petri, however, was predestined to be the bull in the china shop both by temperament, the



internal logic of his poetic development, and by his contacts with the newly formed "democratic opposition", which quickly began to publish its illegal periodicals and books. Petri ignored the prohibitions concerning the "geopolitical position" of the country—a term frequently used by the political leadership as a sort of an insider's joke—and the particularly strict taboos on certain names and events. The most carefully guarded taboo was that of the 1956 revolution and the person of its executed Prime Minister, Imre Nagy.

A stylistic counterpart to his first volume of poetry, *Eternal Monday*, too, was written in a relatively short period of time after several years of silence. With the savage relief the discharge of a long-festering abscess brings, Petri wrote in rapid fits of inspiration, and released not only all that was banned by the mild dictatorship, but also all the painful unexpressed personal memories and experiences that had collected in him. The usual internalization and artifice of poetry are missing; the book simply forces the reader to face the agonizing human experience of physical love and corruption, of inevitably approaching and voluntary death through a brutal openness, which is both affecting and repulsive. Such a poetic radicalism has great merits; it involves equally great dangers as well. Rebellion against any euphemism and prudishness easily crosses the fine line between prudishness and plain good taste. An additional danger is the fossilization of the political poet's role. Yet, Petri could not have written *Eternal Monday* had he been reluctant to take these risks, in spite of the inevitable unevenness they were to cause in quality. The balance is unambiguously positive; the fact that this volume laid the foundation for the next stage in Petri's poetic career (by fully exploring and exhausting one possible direction) itself made the venture worthwhile.

His second samizdat volume, *Azt hiszik* (What They Think, 1985) was much slimmer than the first. Although it contains two outstanding political poems ("Electra"; "To Imre Nagy"), it is dominated by a resigned, autumnal lyrical poetry, largely devoted to old age in the shadow of death and to taking stock of the past. Géza Fodor, Petri's most thorough interpreter to date, writes of these poems: "... a final objectivity seems to appear in Petri's poetry for the first time, a lean and precise prosaic quality nearly devoid of metaphors, and yet mysteriously giving off the heat and light of true lyric." (Géza Fodor: *Petri György költészete*. [The Poetry of György Petri] Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1991, p. 150.)

This process was consummated in a sequence of poems which were published in a large volume of selected and new poems. In 1989, as the logical consequence of the political changes taking place in Hungary, this was published by the same state publishing house that had brought out his first two volumes. It is in these poems that Petri's work comes to some sort of a rest for the first (and so far, the last) time. He does not make his peace with the world, let alone the collapsing political order, but his priorities seem to have changed to favour things that involve him internally and personally, things which are not hostile, but his



own. Love has always been Petri's most important theme alongside politics. After the tonal variety of the past from a playful-passionate-ironic literariness, to a self-torturing objectivity bordering on morbidity, and to bitter passion—love now appears as a taking stock of the past, a past remembered, accepted, or peacefully abandoned. In other poems, a morning coffee in autumn or the dripping icicles of a February dawn are enough to dissolve the subject in the life of nature, the very rhythm of alternating day and night that the first volume had seen as alien and hostile. "I can start to carry on. I give myself up / to an impersonal imperative."

By the time these poems appeared in a book, György Petri had become one of the most established and most quoted poets in Hungary. The state and private literary establishments vied with each other in paying back the long overdue debt: he was awarded four literary prizes in the span of a single year. His name now has a familiar ring even abroad. A first volume of selected verse in German, which Suhrkamp brought out as early as 1983, was followed by a second collection in 1989. Another volume was published in England in 1991. After the transition period, Hungary had a new political system complete with a free press and a democratic Parliament, virtually everything the democratic opposition, including Petri, had been fighting for. The internal balance and stability in Petri's poetry, however, turned out to have been but a fleeting moment of rest. This is what he wrote in 1988: "The age of intrepid idiots is upon us. / Fools or knaves? They're both at the same time. / I'm scared of understanding, and yet I laugh at it: / You can't stop a boulder once it's rolling back." ("Sisyphus Steps Back") There is still no sign of this pessimism this time. He remained in political opposition in the new system as well, within constitutional limits. (SZDSZ, the Alliance of Free Democrats, the party which had grown out of the core of democratic opposition, functioned as the liberal parliamentary opposition of the Christian-Conservative coalition until 1994.) Petri seems to have no intention of taking on the poetic role history offers him on a platter: the freedom fighter whom history itself has proven right. In fact, he flees this role in every possible manner as several of his poems, including "The Oracle of Delphoi Predicts a False Ruin", attest. He rejects the role of amateur seer and declines—as a poet, anyway—participation of any kind in public affairs ("Neither community, nor party, nor office, nor caste."). Indeed, the poems increasingly view his own life as if from outside. It is a life in which he takes no active part, one which is only given, or rather still given. Besides making its appearance in the text, rejection also manifests itself in the way the text is formally transmuted into poetry. The latest volume, *Sár* (Mud, 1993), makes frequent use of alienating effects which seem to attempt to push the poem in formation beyond the limits of poetry, or at least beyond what readers habitually expect of poetry. The determination, indeed the self-destructive vitality of this effort holds the promise of a release of some sort. This poetry is still open, although it is hard to say to what. All the more reason to keep our attentive eyes on it. ■



György Petri

## Poems

Translated by George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer

### *You are Knackered, my Catullus*

*Kivagy, Catullusom*

*You are knackered, my Catullus, you wake with a skull  
heavy as stone, your feet tight bags of water.  
As for your mirror, better not look. Not all of Rome's  
most refined balsams would serve to restore your slack and pallid skin.  
And your teeth, too, teeth that were once so white!  
—that's how a city-wall, once ruined, turns to decay.  
Where now are the days of "ready for nine embraces in one go"?  
Your used-up body, the yawning silent sum of all of this,  
does not tell to what extent the causes of this effect  
were a great passion, exemplary for centuries,  
and ceaseless, omnivorous greed—  
how much due to the poison of deliciously high living  
and how much to the stewed gut-rot of low taverns.*

### S. K.

*That dead woman  
dead fourteen years  
a young woman  
crosses our room at night  
potters about absent-mindedly  
ambles in and out of the room  
picks up and nicks things I then  
can't find in the morning*

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**György Petri**

*has published ten volumes of poems. A volume of interviews he gave appeared in 1994.  
His recent translation of Molière's Don Juan is currently running in Budapest.*



*or just stands up against the wall  
and although dead  
stares straight ahead in terror  
as if facing a firing squad*

*she begins to undress  
takes off the things she had on  
when she went  
knickers and stockings  
and I keep pleading No  
it's impossible not here and now*

*she puts on her coat  
over the blue-lace breastplate  
and sidling away retreats  
as if afraid I might hit her  
her "camel-hair" swagger coat  
she pulls it over her  
shivering  
asks me "Why don't you put the fire on?" and  
"What are you alive for?"*

## *The Walk*

*A s ta*

*Our slow walk out of life  
as the ad hoc company, in which we proceed, piles up,  
as we lag behind, as we huddle closer together,  
hurry ahead and stand aside—this walk  
is worth our attention. especially because  
experiencing is entirely our own business—  
it finds an end for itself in its own consummation;  
both sting and sugar.*



*"The disposition to sting sweetly."  
That's how youth would have put it, long ago,  
at the time when logic gave us joy. At a certain age,  
you don't go any more for that sort of thing.  
Only things which, even unanalyzed, are something  
—a good sentence, a flawless pebble—  
only they matter. You may ask, of course, What is "good"?  
What is "flawless"? Sure. It's a question you could raise.  
Only I'm not going to raise it.*

*Those coming after us  
shove us forward, but also urge us to stay, as they drive us along.  
Still, some dignity can be retained.  
And more than just the appearance  
of speed and direction. The right  
to slow down, to double your pace, to wander off  
can be exercised (although perhaps it is not  
expedient to refer to it as a right).  
Our walk, at any rate, is walk-like.  
You just can't say that... Oh well, let's forget it.*

*But when you get to it, to the very end, to the point  
where water falling becomes a waterfall  
—the moment of rolling over roundedly—  
the sheer slipperiness of the granite lip  
is all you perceive. I'm putting this correctly: only that—up to a point.  
Let us return to the road.  
If our bemused state can squeeze a word  
from unwordsworthiness, it isn't the road's fault.  
Let us say: The road's interesting. It's beautiful.  
(Really it is.) So let us walk and breathe.*



# Daydreams

Ábránd

*Into destruction I would bring  
an order whole and classical.  
Hope for the good? Out of the question.  
Let me die invisible.  
Sors bona nihil aliud. To  
whoever digs my bones I send  
a message: which is, Look how all  
god's picture-images must end.*

*And no, there cannot be a heaven,  
or else there oughtn't to be one  
for, if there were, this plague of love  
(come what may) would still go on.*

*Nor do I want the obverse—hell—  
though of that I've had, will have, my bit  
(planks beneath the chainsaw wail).*

*For anything unready, yet  
ready too, I lie in the sun:  
let the redeeming nowhere come.*

## Something Unknown

Valami ismeretlen

*Towards that something unknown  
we'll come up against,  
do we strive or are we driven?  
the blue flower  
of a new world, of new love,  
enticing us, keeps flickering on and off:  
will it lure us into a swamp?*



*How can you tell.  
"Let it all be different now"—  
the impulse, desire for that is no more than just:  
so run-to-ground we were,  
so pissed off we are!  
As for self-pity, you can't object to that:  
who else, ever at all, felt sorry for us?  
And anyway,  
we should ourselves  
know best—if anyone does—  
why we deserve  
pity.*

*All the same, what lies ahead?  
What lies ahead? I say.  
It's the question  
you can't evade  
and can't answer.*

*As for the clot, it is  
slowly, yes,  
and also surely  
swimming  
towards the heart.*

## *Self-Portrait 1990*

*Önarckép 1990*

*Strange spider:*

*empty  
the menacing centre of attention.  
Spokes and ribs  
glisten unstirred.  
Weave withstands storm,  
there being no resistance:  
because of the nigh-perfect  
absence of sail.*



*As for himself, on his  
lifeline-thread,  
he keeps on yo-yoing  
up—down  
up—down*

## *Ideas and Dance-Music Records*

*Eszmék és tánclemezek*

*And where are our ideas  
Of twenty years ago? Just being realized.  
István Vas*

*And what remains of István Vas?  
I mean, apart from his writings,  
but just now it's not of his writings  
I wish to speak. Where's it gone, into what's it changed, his human stuff:  
what we loved, the bodily dross, what's left when the spirit's been burned off?  
God's servant the priest gave a balanced, an almost  
precise consolation for loss.*

*But what shall I do with such comfort, who do not believe?  
I who have only this single and singular life,  
a bumpy, stony, muddy, swampy road of it  
which leads, in the end, into the pit.  
Or rather, another's hands in expert mode  
board up one's 'person' for one's last abode—  
according to where on the scale of rank and wealth one happens to be,  
one's coffin will be plain pine, or bronze, or mahogany.*

*So that "we'll meet again up there" is something I can't believe in:  
it's -270C° in my notion of heaven.*

*The work, yes: there's no question of that not surviving.  
But the man who drank red wine and smoked cigars—him I shall never meet with  
in this stinking life again; still less in that yet more stinking death—  
though our many stupidly unachieved encounters,  
alas, how they ache with a sort of phantom pain,  
just as legs, long since amputated, can start hurting again!*



*But never mind. You have to get used to this:  
with time there'll be more and more people we miss.  
After all, we have buried Pilinszky and Kálnoky;  
how vile that a few of us should live on parasitically—  
because for me, for a long time, survival or post-vival  
has been bare-faced cheek, I wonder I have the face at all...  
(My word-play, probably, wouldn't strike you as fun.)  
But this whole poem, half out-of-tune, is just a dissonant drone:  
a lot of sounds struggling to make a sound. Not for you.  
You are no more. I do it for no reason, for myself, for I don't know who.  
On a gramophone gone mad they keep going round and round—  
worn-out ideas, old dance tunes, that scratchy sound.*

## *Credit Card*

*It's never a good idea  
to rush things.  
Annihilation included.  
No good  
ever comes of haste.  
Therefore:  
we stay alive.*

*In other words: we keep open  
the purse of possibility.  
We take death's million-pound note  
and break it up  
into the small change of life.*

*Or, not break it up exactly—  
only present it.  
For who on earth can give change  
for such a fine, crisp deathnote?  
But it's impressive. So  
we can live on the never-never.*

*The General Bank of Death  
guarantees everything.  
So our balance always stands  
at moral zero.*



# The Social Psychology of a Changeover

**T**he nations of East and Central Europe found themselves suddenly and unexpectedly struck by political and ideological change. The people of this region were informed out of the blue that everything they had believed in or had regarded as normal in politics and government—"up there"—or had been made to believe in by the regimes they had lived under for decades, had lost its validity overnight. This was not the first time in this century that people had been subjected to so sweeping a change, but they had lost some of their alertness during the long decades after Yalta.

## Finding a term to describe what happened

In the midst of the euphoria that the invigorating experience of the first encounter with change created, both actors and

observers suddenly hit upon the word "revolution", as if the swirl of connotations associated with that word was where an explanation could be found for everything they experienced around 1989 and 1990. The associations, however, stopped swirling fairly soon, and it became evident that the series of events taking place had been a great deal milder, gentler and quieter than a genuine revolution, altogether bloodless, showing no inclination to devour its own children. The legal system was not altered radically either: the contrary was true, since painstaking efforts were made to maintain legality.

All in all, a new term had to be found. The word "transition" seemed most appropriate, suggesting, as it did, that the economic, political and ideological order founded on total centralization had now passed and yielded its place to a pluralist, democratically organized social system. The region had seen a number of efforts to create such a system in the past but, with the exception of two decades of democracy in Czechoslovakia between the two world wars, had seen no instance of enduring success. As the years went by, however, the difference between the starting and closing points of the process of transition gradually faded. The most fundamental experience people underwent was that life went on as it always did, along its

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### **György Csepeli**

*is Professor of Social Psychology  
at Eötvös University, Budapest, at present  
Visiting Professor at the University of  
Michigan at Ann Arbor.*

*He has written books on national identity,  
anti-Semitism, and attitudes of Hungarian  
society in transition.*



bumpy, rather miserable road, the road everybody was accustomed to in this part of the world.

The expression "change of system" started to predominate, later to be supplanted, at least in Hungary, with the rough equivalent of "system changeover". This happened on the strength of the argument that "change of system" would too closely resemble expressions like "change of underwear" or "change of clothes", and would therefore fail to conjure up sentiments lofty enough to describe the replacement of one political and social system with a different one.

### Passive voice

In Hungarian, both expressions refer to the same kind of experience, handed down from generation to generation, which is so magnificently portrayed by the great peasant sagas of Eastern Europe (the most perfect description provided perhaps by Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*). The most important element in that experience is one of a passive presence in the social and political processes, the absence of any sense of active participation, of intervening or making things happen. It is the experience of people travelling along a path that has been imposed upon them. Change does take place not because it is the traveller's wish but simply because the conditions which determine movement allow no choice other than change.

Following the free elections of 1990, the people of Eastern Europe were soon overcome with feelings of depression, apathy and confusion instead of the exhilaration and joy they were supposed to feel. Disappointment and disillusionment were especially strong in Hungary where, as early as the autumn of 1990, a huge crisis of confidence between society and the first freely elected post-communist government

manifested itself, initially in the form, of all things, of a nationwide taxidrivers' strike.

The causes are obviously to be found in the apathy that is an unavoidable consequence of the sense of being passive subjects, in the infantile experience of "about me but without me". That is a condition well known in the development of neglected children who are brought up in institutions. East Europeans are overwhelmed by a learned helplessness, which prevents them from seeing the results of their efforts and obscures the causes of success or failure.

The basis for interpreting this state as a movement along a predetermined track is provided by a scenario that has been polished and perfected from generation to generation. That scenario makes the shouldering of responsibility, rational action and adaptation based on comprehension impossible. Fatalism becomes the predominant attitude. Thus the change declared by politicians will mean, as usual, nothing but stasis, and transition will mean staying in place, just as in the old times. The Orwellian vocabulary remains in use in the post-communist era, too.

### Survival

It was a strange contradiction that even those who had expected it could not bring themselves to actually believe in it when it all started. But there were many more who neither expected nor believed that State Socialism would simply disappear as rapidly as a bout of bad weather. Parties were founded, free elections held, public discourse became free, the appearance of life changed, there were new flags, new uniforms, and the very look of the streets showed dynamic changes. Everything seemed to indicate that the changes undergone by the societies of Central and Eastern Europe were, indeed, epoch-making.



However, many began to suspect that the real purpose of all those changes may actually be to avoid change. The societies of Central and Eastern Europe have had ample historical experience of turns in events, the very essence of which had been the absence of change disguising itself as superficial change. If that is the case, then you had better look out, since beliefs and values really do change, and those who are unable or refuse to join the camps organizing under new slogans and new flags might easily fall through a sieve.

The survivor's presumption is that arbitrariness will remain, society will continue to be the captive of deceitful ideologies, injustice and inequality will remain the ruling principles, and the state's excessive power over the individual will not diminish.

Some of the activities of the government that came to power after the first free elections revived in many people the survival strategies formed during earlier changes of regime and handed down through generations.

## Conversion

Conversion occurs every time there is sudden change, and the dominant ideological and political values of the previous period become empty overnight, with a consequent loss of credibility. Simultaneously, new values become predominant, values which one would have done better not to mention in public in the earlier era. Since the change is sudden and unexpected, those holding on to earlier values experience an adaptation challenge. In principle it is possible to refuse to adapt, but there may well be grave consequences from the point of view of survival.

The great socio-psychological question of the period following the turn of events of 1990 is whether society will be able to see more in post-communist transition than a

mere reincarnation of the changes of regime that had taken place in earlier times. The less scope survival strategies have, the more credible it will be that a genuine civil society is developing, that economic, social and cultural institutions independent of the state are being given birth to.

## Saul to Paul

An extreme case of conversion is described in the Acts of the Apostles. Saul, that resolute persecutor of Christians, set out for Damascus to take an active part in rooting out Christianity there. On the road, however, he is converted, and arrives in Damascus blind. By the time his vision has returned, Paul becomes a herald of the new faith. Blindness is a symbol of the *horror vacui*, of the gulf that exists between the collapse of the old faith and the birth of the new.

Post-communism did not give birth to new ideologies. It turned not toward the unknown, but toward the familiar. The ground for social change had been prepared by ideological change. The courageous liberal position taken by former Marxist intellectuals furnished the moral and ideological ground for a post-communist transition. No matter what political directions they would take later, credit is also due to those whose previous communist "internationalism" was replaced by a deep sense of national identity. And there was a contribution to the change of political system by disillusioned members of the old single ruling party, who realized that State Socialism as a system was beyond redemption, and moved over to the camp of multi-party democracy and a market economy.

## The renegade

A typical figure of sudden and radical change in the political and social system is the renegade, separated from his past not



by blindness but by cynical calculation. You cannot communicate with renegades. If you ask them how they relate to the individuals they used to be, they do not even comprehend the question. They hate everything and everybody linked to the past by any thread, yet it is they who are bound to that same past by the strongest ties.

"Moscow summer 1994 was generous with funerals in artistic circles," Vassiliy Aksyonov wrote in *The New York Times* on 22 November, 1994. "Once, standing in a crowd of mourners, I noticed a man watching me intensely from afar. Having caught my eye, he gave an amicable nod and started toward me, dispersing smiles and apologizing right and left... 'Haven't seen you for ages,' he said as he reached me. I mumbled something accordingly in response. 'You know,' he continued in the breezy manner of a cocktail reception, 'I wanted to invite you to the Sakharov reading but I could not get in touch with you.' I recognized him at last. He had been the Soviet Writers' Union's managing secretary under Leonid Brezhnev and until its collapse. He was the Communist Party and K.G.B. commissar in charge of handling writers; all the expulsions of dissidents (including myself) were carried out under his supervision. And now, three years after the August Revolution, he turns out to be organizer of a literary event named after the dissident Andrei Sakharov."

The renegade diverts attention from himself, from his suspicious former life full of acts of terror, when he so loudly mourns the victims and denounces the past. He who preaches about damnation comes from hell himself, cleansing is demanded by the dirtiest of them all, judgement is passed by those who have already received heavy sentences. The great unwritten drama of the changeover is hidden in this situation, and there is indeed a dramatist in Hungary able to write that

drama if only he would have the courage to put himself on stage, namely the playwright turned politician, István Csúrka.

## Mimicry

The most frequent variant on survival is mimicry, when a person takes on protective ideological colours unthinkingly and automatically, and turns himself into a mouthpiece for the slogans, views and opinions of those in power. Mimicry is the defensive strategy of the "little man". This symptom is recorded with clinical precision by Christopher Isherwood in his autobiography *Christopher and his Kind*. He describes a visit to Frl. Schroeder of his Berlin stories, whose name in real life was Frl. Thureau. Isherwood realizes with astonishment that this once militant communist, then enthusiastic Nazi, whose residence happened to fall within the US sector of Berlin, had, by the time of the visit, become a staunch friend of America. But why should she, along with many million others, not have changed, Isherwood asks rhetorically, when the pattern has remained the same: she was, and still is, at the mercy of outside forces, lacking even the most basic means needed to protect her personal autonomy.

## Self-justification

At the beginning of 1994, when the results of the forthcoming elections could not be known, we carried out a survey on a small sample with the purpose of charting the socio-psychological effects of the change of regime.

The individuals in the sample were selected from among those in particularly sensitive positions insofar as this change was concerned: they were school principals who had been dismissed and later reappointed.



The post-communist citizen could not be sure that, once the government's four-year-term was completed, new elections would follow and a new government would be put in place, not through a coup or the agency of a foreign power, but by the citizens themselves. Such a handover of power had no precedence in their own lifetimes. The people in the sample were asked to give an account of their lives; we found that they had at no time been blind, nor had they become renegades, nor did mimicry hold any attractions for them. Their adjustment simply consisted of their redrafting their own *curricula vitae*.

### Insulation

We have managed to identify several variants of self-justification. In the case of "insulation", the person involved simply tears out the critical period of his career from the flow of changes, and makes it appear as a single, unrepeatable incident. (For instance, he admits that he failed to take a stand on behalf of a colleague persecuted for his political views.) In so doing, the individual concerned becomes his own historian.

### Banalization

Banalization is another frequent technique. The autobiographical narrative retains a negative evaluation of the original event, but the importance of the moment is played down in the retrospective recreation of the story. One of our subjects, for example, recounted his activities as an informer as if all he had done was have a cup of coffee with a stranger in a café once a month.

### Self-heroization

In recreating autobiography, negative moments may turn up of which, even at the time, it was possible to know that they

were beyond the reasonable limit of acceptable compromise. (For instance, actual denunciation of another person.) Afterwards, however, the event in question may be described in such a manner as to make it appear as a heroic deed, through which something far worse was prevented. János Kádár must have used the same technique when, in his sleepless hours, he explained to himself the crime of Imre Nagy's execution. He was evidently convinced till the day he died that it had been the only way in which Mátyás Rákosi, the evil Stalinist dictator, could have been prevented from returning to the leadership of the Communist Party and the country.

### Consensual attribution

This is a highly usual form of self-justification. In the reconstructed narrative, the person concerned admits to some of the reprehensible moments of his life (for instance, he confesses that he joined the Communist Party in order to further his career) but finds absolution for himself in declaring that "I only did what everybody else did or would have done in my place."

### Déjà vu politics

Some features of the period between 1990 and 1994 may have triggered off survival reflexes. The "Christian national" government, formed after the 1990 elections, wanted to begin where the story was cut short forty-five years ago. The country began to be haunted by ideological ghosts. These, however, bore only a resemblance to their originals, which had undoubtedly been effective in their own time. After all, between 1938 (the passing of what is known as the First Jewish Law) and 1963 (the releasing from prison of those sentenced for their political activities in 1956), the blood had been real, the suffering irre-



versible, and victim and culprit faced each other not only in minds but also in physical reality. In the mirror of the electronic media that the Right managed to seize control of, everything began to look as it had done in a long gone past, yet at the same time, in the eyes of the media audience, nothing was right. Too much time had passed.

This exorcism, unable to conjure up the image of the devils, turned out to be counterproductive: rather than looking for the devil in their own past, people began to seek for an angel, and the recent socialist past became beautified.

### The power of symbols

Visibility in politics was fatally obscured by the unprepared state and the ideological attitude of the political forces that came to power in 1990. Those in authority attacked precisely where they ought to have trod most carefully (in the field of symbols), and hesitated where society expected them to take effective action (in radically transforming the conditions that shape our future prospects in a positive direction). These political Don Quixotes, spellbound by the delusion of a "Christian national middle class", attacked the windmills of the mass media. They succeeded in capturing their target. And that was all they managed to achieve in four years. They were bitterly disappointed when they found that where they thought they would find the enemy headquarters, there were only cameras and microphones, the proper use of which was beyond their capability.

### Disillusionment

The psychology of need explains the paradox that among the European post-socialist countries, the people of Albania, probably the least fortunate in the eyes of the outside observer, are actually the happiest

and most content with the change of the political and social system; it is in seemingly happy and successful Hungary that the number of unhappy people is the greatest. The reason is that Albania moved from a condition of absolute deprivation to one offering at least a chance of improvement; the people of what used to be called "the most cheerful barracks in the bloc" had gone through the bitter experience of finding itself, as a consequence of the much-desired but never really hoped-for transformation, in the "saddest shopping centre".

It was not only the people, it was also the elite that found little joy in the transformation. No matter how much they profited from privatization and how wealthy they became, the continuous barrage of haughty words about nation, faith and middle class that they laid down missed its target entirely. They were never able to win the heart of the people. The feelings of anger, offense and frustration were mutual. Since the right kind of openness of discourse failed to develop, the symptoms of distrust grew apace. Love, so richly deserved by the tormented, helpless and confused people, was devoured by power.

### The alternatives of survival

In totalitarian systems you have to be a genuine hero to be able to avoid the traps of survival. For the man-in-the-street, the dilemma occurs only when there is a chance to establish a system in which the advantages offered by the strategy of survival come up against the rewards for living a responsible, autonomous life. The success of the transition toward a multi-party democracy and a market economy depends on whether the post-communist citizen will be able to kill the survivor in himself.

It is not easy to believe in a life free of anxiety in a place where fear had been imprinted on the minds of people for gener-



ation after generation. Survival makes for a wretched life, but at least it allows you to live.

In whatever way the balance of political forces have developed, the changes have begun, and the progress of change cannot be halted. The number of people who have experienced what it means to live without being directed by the compulsion to survive is increasing. The changes, however, have also produced a huge number of losers. The transition to a society of freedom cannot succeed if the value of equality is lost in the process, if there is no longer solidarity for those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to create for themselves the conditions of a life worth living. If the cost of capitalism is to be massive poverty, then the majority of society will continue to face the spiritual poverty of mere survival.

### The election victory of the socialist and liberal forces

Following 1990, the development of society did not proceed through political symbols but through economic, socio-political and cultural factors. In the elections of 1994 the socialist and liberal forces won a sweeping victory. The reasons for that victory are, in all likelihood, to be sought in the determining factors mentioned above. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that the new government configuration, just like the previous one, is not without illusory, *déjà vu* type elements either. Nostalgia for the recent past, though, is at least closer to people, and is rooted in an experience they actually had. A nostalgia for the distant past is born out of the denial of that very same recent past. Closeness also bears the promise that it may now be easier to break through the walls of irrational politics. The future may hold a better chance of opening

the field, at long last, to genuinely professional political activity which is based on the will of citizens.

### Learning processes

The election results also show that, as opposed to the old strategies of survival, behaviour patterns of a different type have now evolved in Hungarian society. The pace of the process of democratic socialization was increased by the authoritarian challenges to democracy witnessed during the previous four years.

The experience of what it means to be hated has, in many people, hugely increased a feeling of compassion for the stigmatized and the humiliated. The camp of survivors came up against staunch resistance from those willing, and determined, to act and live autonomously. Alongside the camp of those crippled by the burden of freedom, the gentle champions of civic integrity also pitched their tents. Those who had lost heart while protected by those in power had to face a new kind of rebel, who went into battle not with them but in defense of the democratic values they had smeared. The morally paralyzed were left behind in the race by those who supported moral order.

The "other Hungary" which had always lost out against the "survivors' Hungary"—in 1848, 1919, 1920, in 1944, and again in 1956—now gathered enormous strength.

With the second free elections—another landmark, since this was the first time two free elections had been held in succession—the first chapter of the changeover was closed. The experience of change was, in a psychological sense, genuine. What happened in politics was, clearly and unambiguously, decided by millions of Hungarian voters. There is no more evil Other, no mysterious Ill Fate, no outside power through which responsibility could be avoided.



## West and East

The stakes for Hungarian society are, of course, much higher than the mere experience of a bloodless change of regime. The real issue is whether Hungary will succeed in leaping over that dividing line which, in a famous essay (*Three Regions of Europe*) was identified by the late Jenő Szűcs as the eastern border of the Carolingian Empire. It is very unlikely that Hungary or any other country in the former Soviet Bloc will ever be able to leap over that dividing line on its own, without outside help.

In the West, some may be tempted to replace the old Iron Curtain with a new,

similarly impenetrable curtain. Passing judgement irresponsibly, they call into doubt the results of the elections in Central and Eastern Europe. They have no confidence in the democratic maturity of the peoples of East and Central Europe, and believe that they have a monopoly on the term "democracy". However, the levelling of the charge of nationalism or socialism—or both—is a dangerous prophecy. The less understanding that is shown for and the less help that is given to the countries of the region to break the bonds of underdevelopment and to become peacefully integrated democratic members of the international community, the more likely it is that this dark prophecy will be fulfilled. ■

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György Marx

# A Visionary Scientist

Eugene P. Wigner 1902–1995

It's a joyful thing to know that you are truly a physicist.  
What else besides love can compare with it?<sup>1</sup>

E. P. W.

**L**ike all children, I was born without my permission. What a pity it is that we cannot recall the day of our birth. What a memory that would be! But as soon as I realized that I was alive, I was curious about the world and happy with it. At least internally, I thanked my parents for having given me life."—this is how E. P. Wigner started his recollection in a most excellent biography, written by Andrew Szanton.<sup>2</sup>

Wigner was born in Budapest in 1902, at the beginning of the century that his work has also shaped. He died at Princeton on New Year's Day, 1995. The way people will live in the 21st century, the way they will look at nature will in part be determined by the work Eugene P. Wigner did.

Wiegner means cradle-maker in German, this was spelled Wigner in Hungary. Eugene corresponds to the Hungarian given name Jenő. It is a bit of a formal grown-up name, so the small boy was called simply Jancsi (Johnny) in the family. (Later on, in the USA Eugene signed his letters mailed to friends as Wigwam, to be more direct.)

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**György Marx**  
is Professor of Atomic Physics at  
Eötvös University in Budapest, a member  
of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,  
Academia Europaea, and the International  
Astronautical Academy. He is  
vice-president of the International Union  
for Pure and Applied Physics,  
and president of the International Group of  
Research in Physics Education.

He said about Budapest that "you heard a great deal more erudite conversation than you hear in the United States—people talked more about culture."<sup>3</sup> [...] "Simple Hungarian poems and songs that I learned before 1910 still come to me unbidden. After 60 years in the United States, I am still more Hungarian than American, much of American culture escapes me. Jokes

1 ■ Andrew Szanton: *The Recollection of Eugene P. Wigner*. Plenum, New York, 1992, p. 125.

2 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

3 ■ Stanley A. Blumberg-Gwinn Owens: *Energy and Conflict*. Putnam, New York, 1976, p. 14.



are apparently universal, but no country could possibly love them more than Hungarians did. I have never known such a taste for jokes in all the years since I left Hungary; certainly not in Germany and not in the United States either. Food and shelter are necessities. But laughter is not. So why do we invent jokes with such skill, and laugh at them with pleasure?" Wigner especially liked Hungarian poetry, "perhaps the finest in Europe." "In Budapest there were many cafés, of a kind that hardly exist in the United States. In such places, you were not only allowed to linger over coffee, you were supposed to linger, making intelligent conversation about science, art, and literature."<sup>4</sup>

Hungary was always at the crossroads of history. "Under the hardening conditions of World War I the communists began gaining strength in Hungary. My father deeply opposed them. Many of the top communist leaders were Jewish. As Jews became more strongly associated with communism, my father arranged the conversion of his family to Christianity. For him Roman Catholicism seemed too much like communism, a well-run dictatorship. He had been a student at the Lutheran Gymnasium, so it was natural for him to pick the Lutherans."<sup>5</sup>

In 1919 the communists were lead by Béla Kun, a Jew indoctrinated in Russia as a prisoner of war. Most of his top commissars were Jews as well: they wished to obtain complete civil rights and get rid of the feudalistic supremacy of landowners. After the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, this created a further excuse for anti-Semitism. This was the reason why not only Theodore von Kármán, Michael Polányi, Leo Szilárd, Arthur Koestler, but later George de Hevesy, Edward Teller, Eugene Wigner, and John von Neumann left Hungary. "Béla Kun can unwittingly take credit for the American preeminence in the development of nuclear energy,"<sup>6</sup> Stanley A. Blumberg and Gwinn Owens wrote. But this was not the reason why Béla Kun was killed during Stalin's purges in Russia in 1937.

**T**he well-to-do Wigner family took special care to send Eugene to the Lutheran Gymnasium, "the best school in Hungary, at that time it could have been the finest school of the world,"<sup>7</sup> as Wigner said in his later years. In Stockholm, on receiving the Nobel Prize (at the age of 61, in 1963) he emphasized: "I wish to say on this occasion a few words on a subject about which we think little when we are young but which we appreciate increasingly when we reflect on our intellectual development. I mean the indebtedness to our teachers."<sup>8</sup> Wigner made his mathematics teacher, László Rátz, a legendary figure. With typical modesty, not for edu-

4 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 16-17.

5 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

6 ■ Blumberg-Owens, *op. cit.* p. 20.

7 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

8 ■ Nobel lecture, 1963.



cating him into an excellent scientist but for already recognizing the special mathematical talent of John von Neumann—his schoolmate—at the age of 12. When he was 85, he told secondary school students in Budapest in 1987: "In the school Neumann was one grade below me, in mathematics he was two grades above me. In the Lutheran Gymnasium the teachers enjoyed teaching. Rátz taught calculus and its applications as well. It is not easy to create such schools as the Lutheran Gymnasium was. I feel this strongly in America. There the high schools are far less good than the Lutheran Gymnasium was."<sup>9</sup> [...] "I enjoyed mathematics, but I was really interested in physics. Physics developed a lot when it began applying mathematics. It impressed me how many relations connect physics and chemistry."<sup>10</sup>

When Eugene became 17, he had to decide on his future profession:

My father came and asked me "My son, when you grow up, what do you want to become?" After a short silence I answered, "Father, if I am to be frank with you I have to say that I would like to become a physicist." My father seemed to have expected this answer, and asked me "Tell me, my son, how many jobs are available in our country for a physicist?" With some exaggeration I said, "Four, I think." (In reality there were only three, at the three universities.) "And do you think, my son, that you will obtain any of these four jobs?" This is how and why I started studying chemical engineering. After the high school classes of Sándor Mikola, the lectures at the Budapest and Berlin Institutes of Technology were just repetitions. Essentially the physics lessons in the Lutheran Gymnasium were the last physics courses which I regularly attended. During my study of chemical engineering I participated in the Physics Colloquiums of Professor Ortway in Budapest, and in the Physics Seminars of Max von Laue in Berlin.<sup>11</sup>

These seminars were attended by Planck, Einstein and other celebrities; they were more critical than encouraging to young students.

In Berlin-Dahlem, near the Institute of Technology was the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, where Michael Polányi was the director of the Institute for Physical Chemistry. "After László Rátz of the Lutheran Gymnasium, Michael Polányi was my dearest teacher,"<sup>12</sup> remembered Wigner. Polányi studied medicine in Budapest and received his Ph.D. in chemistry there. He left Hungary in 1919 like Theodore von Kármán and Leo Szilárd did. He was the father of the Nobel laureate chemist John Polányi. "His finest gift was to encourage young men with his very great heart. In all my life, I have never known anyone who used encouragement as skillfully as Polányi. He was truly an artist of praise."<sup>13</sup> Even later, when

9 ■ György Marx: *Beszélgetés Marslakókkal*. OOK Press, Veszprém, 1992, p. 36.

10 ■ Marx, *Beszélgetés*, p. 30.

11 ■ George Marx: *The Voice of the Martians*. Eötvös Physical Society, Budapest, 1994, p. 27.

12 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

13 ■ *Ibid.*, p. 79.



Polányi was working in America, he advocated that not centrally planned research, not a sort of Big Science is what promotes progress, but the Republic of Science, mutual cooperation and criticism among scientists. He asked the young student Wigner to call him by his first name, 'Misi'.

Once I made a remark to Polányi about the impossibility of an association reaction. He heard my idea without grasping it. Months later Polányi told me, "I am quite sorry. This point which you have made on association reactions: I have heard that the same problem had been discussed in a very recent paper of Max Born and James Franck. [Both obtained Nobel Prizes later.] I told them that you had the same idea. I am quite sorry, I failed to understand you"<sup>14</sup>

Wigner completed his Ph.D. thesis under the supervision of Michael Polányi in Berlin. The thesis (published in 1925 jointly with Polányi) treated the formation and decay of molecules. "When two hydrogen atoms collide, they stick to a single molecule. After a bit of thinking I found it to be a miracle: the molecules have discrete energy levels. How do they know that they have to collide just with such an energy? How do they manage that their angular momentum is an integer multiple of Planck's constant  $h$ ? I suggested that the energy of molecular levels is not sharply determined, because the excited molecular state may decay after a while to atoms. Even the conservation of angular momentum is not a completely strict law! At collision the value of the angular momentum jumps to the nearest integer multiple of Planck's constant  $h$ . These were described much before quantum mechanics was invented. This is why several people accused me of having invented Heisenberg's uncertainty relation which is not true. But my conclusions turned out to be right."<sup>15</sup>

Antal Wigner was one of the directors of a tannery in northern Budapest, which is why he tried hard to convince his son Eugene to study chemical engineering. Dr Eugene Wigner worked in the tannery in Budapest in 1925–26, where he subscribed to the *Zeitschrift für Physik*, the avant-garde journal of modern physics. He learned from the journal that quantum mechanics had been invented. After having read the paper by Max Born and Pascual Jordan, he was in heaven. He could not refuse the invitation to become an assistant of Weissenberg's at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for a salary of 136 Marks per month. (It turned out that Polányi's helping hand was behind this invitation.) Later on he was called to become an assistant of David Hilbert's in Göttingen (following in the footsteps of John von Neumann). From there he returned to Berlin for habilitation as lecturer. In his recollection:

14 ■ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

15 ■ Marx, *Voice*, p. 98.



When I returned to Berlin, the excellent crystallographer, Weissenberg asked me to study how come that in a crystal the atoms like to sit in a symmetry plane or symmetry axis. After a short time of thinking I understood: being on the symmetry axis secures that the derivatives of the potential energy vanish in two directions perpendicular to the symmetry axis. This means that two of the three equations of motion are solved. (In case of a symmetry plane the derivative of the potential energy vanishes in one direction.) This is how I became interested in the role of symmetries in quantum mechanics. I spent the holidays—Christmastime and summertime—in Hungary, in Budapest and in Alsógöd, on the banks of the Danube. There I wrote the book *Group Theory and its Application to the Quantum Mechanics of Atomic Spectra*.<sup>16</sup>

The intrusion of group theory into quantum mechanics was not well received. Wolfgang Pauli called the idea *Gruppenpest*. Albert Einstein, Max von Laue, Erwin Schrödinger also expressed their uneasiness about it. In spite of his reservations, Max Born was less discouraging. Essentially only John von Neumann and Leo Szilárd encouraged Wigner's efforts. If an experiment is repeated in another laboratory, under similar conditions, the same results will be found. The outcome depends neither on the location and timing of the experiment, nor on the spacial orientation of the equipment. Even speed (e.g. that of the rotation of the Earth) does not influence the way how the laws of nature work. To express this basic experience in a more direct way: the world does not have a centre, there is no absolute rest, privileged direction, privileged origin of calendar time, even left and right seem to be rather symmetric. From these symmetries of nature the conservation of momentum, speed of centre of mass, angular momentum, energy and parity follow. In the 1920s Wigner showed the power of these experienced symmetry properties of space and time in quantum mechanics. They express the dynamics (how the future evolves from the present), the structure (how objects interact), and the uncertainty of our measurements (how the human brain observes the state of objects). The long-lasting essence of quantum mechanics was explained by Wigner, and it will be his way of seeing it how this most important intellectual achievement of the twentieth century will be taught in the next. Wigner's book on quantum mechanics has been published in German, English, Japanese, Hungarian, his results were later acknowledged by the Nobel Prize, "for his contribution to the theory of the atomic nucleus and the elementary particles, particularly through the discovery and application of fundamental symmetry principles."<sup>17</sup>

Eugene P. Wigner respected the mathematical superiority of John von Neumann the most. "I have known only one genius in my life, Johnny von Neumann," he once declared. And, with a modest smile, he added: "You may value

16 ■ Marx, *Voice*, p. 99.

17 ■ Nobel lecture citation, 1963.



my statement more if you recall that I had known Einstein as well."<sup>18</sup> He met Edward Teller in Germany; enjoying his wide interest and sharp logic, Wigner liked Teller from the start. The two Hungarians formed a life-long friendship. Teller remembers that once he was depressed because of not understanding an Einstein lecture. Eugene kindly asked Edward what was wrong. His answer was, "I am so stupid". Eugene comforted Edward with the home-truth: "Yes, yes. Stupidity is a general human property."<sup>19</sup> Wigner was puzzled by the selfish, pushy character of Leo Szilárd, the opposite of Wigner's polite modesty. Wigner noticed that "Szilárd did not always see his own deficiencies but he saw brilliantly the deficiencies of others, and he wanted to correct them. Szilárd's best ideas looked crazy, and yet he expected other scientists to work out these crazy ideas for him. That was unreasonable. When other scientists want to work on crazy ideas, they prefer to work on their own." [...] "It was sometimes hard being Szilárd's friend. No one knew his weaknesses better than I did. For all his faults, Leo Szilárd was the best friend I ever had."<sup>20</sup>

**H**istory caught up with Wigner in Berlin with the appearance of Nazism. Thus he accepted the invitation from Princeton University. Cornelius Láncoz, John von Neumann, Edward Teller, and Eugene Wigner were called to America to teach the New Physics to the New World. Leaving Berlin, Wigner followed the path of his respected friend Albert Einstein.

The late 1920s and the 1930s were heroic times for quantum mechanics: it was successfully applied to explain the empirical facts collected in spectroscopy, atomic physics, chemistry, molecular physics, solid state physics. Eugene Wigner took a leading role, published over 60 fundamental papers in these years alone, and with such co-authors as Michael Polányi, Pascual Jordan, John von Neumann, Victor Weisskopf, Frederick Seitz, John Bardeen, George Breit, R. Smoluchowski, and Edward Teller. For their advanced understanding of the new revolutionary scientific ideas and their special political instinct, Neumann, Szilárd, Teller, and Wigner were called "the Martians", creatures who had landed on Earth but were unable to learn to speak English without a foreign (Hungarian, that is) accent. Neumann, Szilárd, and Teller enjoyed being called Martians, but Wigner did not like it. He considered himself to be the slowest among the four.

From time to time Wigner visited Hungary to spend holidays with his family and to lecture in Budapest at the Ortway Colloquium on quantum mechanics. Professor Ortway once invited Maurice Dirac to lecture at his Colloquium. Dirac was known to be withdrawn, not enthusiastic about public contacts. Therefore it

18 ■ Marx, *Voice*, p. 62.

19 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

20 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, p. 121.



was a great surprise when in the next year Dirac himself offered to come again and lecture to Ortway. Dirac arrived, his visit happened to coincide with Wigner's, and they both spent a relaxing holiday at Lake Balaton, together with Wigner's sisters, about whom Wigner said [to Szanton]: "I loved my sisters. As a child I was on very good terms with my older sister Biri, and occasionally I quarrelled with my younger sister Manci, who was natural and more impulsive."<sup>21</sup> After one of the visits, the deeper reasons for Dirac's interest in Hungary was understood: he married Manci Wigner.

**T**he neutron, a nuclear particle with zero charge, was discovered in 1932. Wigner published his first paper on nuclear physics in Hungarian, in the periodical of the Hungarian Academy in 1932, about the theory of neutrons. Wigner showed that quantum mechanics could be used to understand nuclear properties as well. Hideki Yukawa started his Nobel lecture by saying: "Wigner pointed out that nuclear forces between two nuclear particles must have a very short range of the order of  $10^{-15}$  m, in order to account for the rapid increase of the binding energy from the heavy hydrogen to the alpha-particle."<sup>22</sup> (Protons and neutrons are tightly kept together in the nucleus, resulting in a huge kinetic energy due to quantum mechanics. This kinetic energy explains why a particle attracted by only one other particle is only loosely bound in the nucleus. In the helium nucleus each particle enjoys the joint attraction of three partners, this is why it is so strongly bound in spite of its large kinetic energy.) Later on, Wigner contributed to the understanding of nuclear spectra, based upon symmetry principles. He discovered the conservation theorem for the number of nuclear particles (neutrons + protons).

In the meantime, history had taken some sharp turns, and Wigner played a decisive role in them.

As Wigner studied the quantum theory of the nucleus in the 1930s, Leo Szilárd, his friend from Berlin, told him the idea of neutron chain reactions, and Wigner did not see anything impossible in it. Being an expert in the binding energy of the helium nucleus, he did not believe that splitting beryllium by a neutron into two helium nuclei would be the appropriate energy releasing process as originally suggested by Szilárd. But when—in early 1939—he discussed with Szilárd the fission of uranium, he immediately recognized the reality of Szilárd's *Moonshine Project*, and they started working on it together. He was at home especially in the investigation of the resonance capture of neutrons by  $^{238}\text{U}$  nuclei, on the line of his thesis and of the Breit-Wigner resonance formula. In the middle of 1939 the neutron chain reaction was not a remote possibility any more, so Wigner—abandoning his non-assertiveness—was urging most forcefully that the

21 ■ Szanton, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

22 ■ Hideki Yukawa, Nobel Lecture, 1949.



US government be informed about the possibility of the atomic bomb. His close link to Einstein was essential in sending Einstein's historic letter to President Roosevelt urging the research into nuclear chain reactions.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the US organized intensive work on the practical realization of the nuclear chain reaction, concluding in the atomic pile in Chicago (1942), then in the construction of high power reactors in Hanford (1943) to produce plutonium for the bomb. In this work, Wigner drew up the theoretical design, down to the most practical details; Alvin Weinberg (who followed him as director of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory) called Wigner "the first nuclear engineer."<sup>23</sup> After the collapse of Nazism, in the summer of 1945, Wigner, possessing a Central-European historic instinct, joined Szilárd's efforts together with Bohr and Einstein, to prevent the use of the atomic bomb against Japan. Wigner proposed the use of common water for cooling reactors. From this idea his student, Alvin Weinberg developed the water-moderated—water-cooled reactors (at first for powering the nuclear submarine *Nautilus*), from which the present pressurized water reactors and boiling water reactors were developed, used worldwide today to produce 17 per cent of the world's electricity. As Weinberg said: "Wigner did not design nuclear power plants but one may say: he was the grandfather of the water-moderated and water-cooled power reactors."<sup>24</sup> Weinberg and Wigner wrote the first comprehensive textbook, *The Physical Theory of Neutron Chain Reactors* (1958), which became a classic, with over 10,000 copies sold. Alongside Szilárd and Fermi, Wigner did the most to make nuclear reactors a practical reality. He was honoured by the Fermi Award in 1958. After World War II, President Eisenhower created the Atoms for Peace award. The first recipient was Niels Bohr, a Dane, for creating the theory of atomic spectra, nuclear reactions and nuclear fission (1957). The second recipient was the Hungarian-born George de Hevesy for the method of nuclear tracing (1958). At the third time medals were given to the Hungarian-Americans Leo Szilárd and Eugene P. Wigner for designing the nuclear reactor (1959). At the fourth occasion, the recipients were the American Alvin Weinberg and the Canadian Walter Zimm for building nuclear reactors (1960).

**"E**ugene and Heckmann were lying on the lawn near the municipal swimming pool in Göttingen. Heckmann (a German astronomer) observed that a trail of ants was crawling across Eugene's right leg, and he asked Eugene, 'Don't they bite?' The answer was 'They do'. Question: 'Then why don't you kill them?' Answer by Eugene Wigner: 'I don't know which one it was.' "<sup>25</sup>

23 ■ Marx, *Beszélgetés*, p. 45.

24 ■ Marx, *Beszélgetés*, p. 34.

25 ■ Edward Teller's Epilogue in Francis S. Wagner: *E. P. Wigner, an Architect of the Atomic Age*. Rákóczi Foundation, Toronto, 1991, p. 32.



According to John von Neumann, when Leo Szilárd entered a revolving door after somebody, he somehow managed to come out first. Not so with Wigner. If you were accompanied by Wigner, and let him enter the revolving door first, he managed to leave it last. 'In America every physicist knows Wigner's modesty,' Valentine Telegdi said. "This is, however, an 'apparent' modesty. Wigner knows his own value very well, the modesty serves only as defence against provocations."<sup>26</sup> Edward Teller characterized Wigner as follows: "When he says to a seminar speaker: 'What you say is interesting', that is a much harder criticism than my telling him 'That's damned nonsense.' "<sup>27</sup>

Albert Einstein, along with many others of the giants of physics, had reservations about quantum mechanics because it is not deterministic in the strict Newtonian sense. Quantum mechanics offers only probabilistic prediction about the outcome of a measurement, and about its impact upon the state of the microobject. "But what is a measurement?" asked Wigner. He tried to give himself an answer: It is the interaction of the real outside world with the consciousness of the physicist. This has raised the further question of consciousness. What happens if a human looks at the measuring device but he misses appreciating the position of the dial? And do animals possess consciousness? In the last twenty years, Eugene P. Wigner thought more and more about consciousness and its relation to quantum mechanics. In his acceptance of an honorary Ph.D. at Eötvös University in 1986, Wigner expressed his personal opinion:

The Universe is huge. The size of the Universe is connected to the smallness of gravitational force. From this it follows that one cannot isolate the wave function of a laboratory object from its environment. (The isolation is possible up to a good approximation, which I am happy about.) What is macroscopic and what is microscopic, and where is the borderline between them? It would be good to create a theory which includes both of them. This theory would be causal up to a certain degree. If somebody could succeed, it would bring a huge change in our scientific understanding.

Now there are phenomena which physics cannot yet describe. For example, it cannot describe life, emotion or consciousness. This situation is like not taking gravitation into account would be. But gravitation exists and life exists. I am here, I feel joy and desire. It used to be said that man is subjected to the laws of physics, and his emotions are irrelevant. I cannot accept that! I am convinced that the sequence of events is influenced by my consciousness in a similar way as it is influenced by gravity. If this were true, there would be something which physics is not interested in, as it was not interested in the existence of atoms 100 years ago.

I can imagine that human intellect has its own limitations just like the animal brain is limited. Once I tried to teach the multiplication table to a nice and clever

26 ■ Marx, *Beszélgetés*, p. 71.

27 ■ Marx, *Voice*, p. 102.



dog. Not to make a difficult calculation like 6 times 8, I showed him 2 squares and 3 squares, and I wanted the dog to indicate that the product makes 6 squares. I failed. The dog can learn very different skills, but it seems not to be interested in multiplication. Up to a certain degree we are like animals. It is quite possible that our interest and our knowledge is limited as well. I would like to hope that understanding life does not lie beyond the limits of our intellect. We have learned to describe the behaviour of gases and the behaviour of atoms. Once perhaps we shall understand life as well. This is why one cannot exclude that the deterministic description of the human mind will not be possible. It may be that present physics will be enough to describe a bacterium, and when it succeeds, the bacterium will not be considered to be alive any longer.

But it is possible that understanding consciousness remains as far from human intellect as multiplication from my dog.<sup>28</sup>

According to Wigner, Newton was the greatest physicist because he was able to condense all the knowledge of the physical Universe in the single volume of the *Principia*. In the early 20th century, Wigner welcomed the arrival of relativity and quantum theory because they promised again a compact world picture at the price of a certain abstraction. In fact, Wigner's monograph, *Group Theory and its Application to the Quantum Mechanics of Atomic Spectra*, is a rather successful attempt to offer this synthesis for the 20th century. Seeing the expansion of physics, the recent flood of scientific information filled him with anxiety. At the age of 85 he was asked by Hungarian high school students about his view of the future:

Well, it is a hard question. The realm of physics has been extended tremendously. The first book I ever read about physics when I was 17, [written by Sándor Mikola] said: 'Atoms and molecules may exist but this is irrelevant from the viewpoint of physics.' Only chemists were interested in atoms. It is marvellous that physics succeeded in explaining atoms. It is not clear whether such a success will be also reached in the future. How far humans can progress in science is not clear.

Physics have offered me a lot of joy. I loved physics. I still love it. But I cannot grasp a considerable part of recent physics: it is getting too complex and too sophisticated for me. But if a single person is able to catch only smaller and smaller fractions of science, if one cannot understand the essence of science, young people may lose their interest in it. Today it is almost impossible to know the whole of physics. I consider this complexity to be a danger for the future of science. If people don't get an overview, they may become less interested. If they are not interested, they will not learn science. If young people will not study science, that will terminate the development of science.

I am deeply worried that we have not yet received any message from alien civilizations. It is probable that there are other habitable planets; people or other similar creatures may live on them. It is likely that some of these civilizations have developed more knowledge than we did. Therefore it is surprising that they have not



established contact with us. I don't think of a direct visit because of the huge distances, but they might use telecommunication. I am surprised that there is only one Earth and only one race which is interested. There are two possible explanations for this puzzle. One possibility is that they developed science and technology in the past, they started an armament race, and then they annihilated themselves and their whole planet. If this is a rule of the development of intelligence, it could explain the silence. Another possibility is that they developed science, which increased their standard of living. The luxury made them lazy, they gave up reading books and learning physics. It is also possible that physics turned out to be too complicated for them, thus they found it boring, and stopped being interested in science. This is why those beings ahead of us by 50 years or more are not interested in contacting us. I hope I am wrong. I hope my fear of an end of the story is mistaken. I don't know."<sup>29</sup>

During the last twenty years, Wigner visited Hungary several times, gave lectures and talks, published papers in the Hungarian monthly *Fizikai Szemle*. He became an honorary member of the Hungarian Physical Society (as Neumann and Teller had), and a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Upon his death, *The New York Times* published a six-column obituary about "the bold physicist who changed science's perception of subatomic particles," and "who helped usher in the Atomic Age".<sup>30</sup> It said: "Dr Wigner was part of a circle of remarkably visionary scientists born and educated in Budapest who eventually came to the West and transformed the modern world." ■

29 ■ Marx, *Voice*, pp. 103–104.

30 ■ *The New York Times*, 4 January 1995, p. C19.



András Mink

# The Desirable Autonomy of Research

The Management of Science Reorganized

**T**he Hungarian Academy of Sciences was founded in 1827. Up to the communist take-over after the Second World War, it had functioned as an autonomous private foundation. An act of parliament granted the Academy regular annual state subsidies, but this affected neither its legal status nor its authority. It remained an independent body of the élite of Hungarian scholarship and, as an institution, took no part whatever in the direction of science policy. Owing to their standing and prestige, its members naturally had a decisive influence on scientific life in the country.

The approach of the war and the swing to the right in Hungary left its mark on the academic world and on the autonomy of the Academy. During the war, and particularly after the Arrow Cross coup in October 1944, the Academy, too, witnessed shameful expulsions etc., with some of the members taking an active part.

Under the new multi-party democratic system that existed prior to the 1948 communist takeover, extending the Academy's functions was suggested and supported by some of those in charge. The Academy

would have functioned as an autonomous public body charged with the task of organizing and directing Hungarian science and establishing a network of institutions. According to the initiators, a new form of organization, a structuring of scientific life and a clear and resolute scientific policy was to lead to an unprecedented scientific boom in Hungary. The underlying notion naturally was to finally place the direction of scientific research and decision-making on the allocation of resources into the hands of the most competent and eminent scientists and scholars. This organizational change would also have considerably boosted the prestige of scientists; it is easy to see the intellectual illusion, gaining ground from the early 1900s, that the main role in shaping the life of society should be played by scientists, that rational research could establish what was the trouble and what had to be done about it.

The idea of a centralized and rationalized organizational network in scientific life was not necessarily inspired by the Soviet model. The establishment of a network of scientific institutions centrally directed by the state had been a fashionable notion from the 1930s onwards in Europe (the French CNRS was founded in 1939). Nor did the idea of a network of scientific institutions created by the state and centred on the Academy of itself mean the

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**András Mink**

*is a journalist on the staff of the  
weekly Beszélő.*



spread of the idea of communism, though the form resembled the Soviet model.

The fact that post-1945 politics, increasingly under the influence of the Communist Party, urged the centralization of scientific life, is another matter. Naturally the Communist Party had a different interpretation of "rationality". For them the aim was clear: to create a centralized scientific organization which would implement what politics wanted, "plan targets" for science and efficient ideological control over scientists and scholars, curbing ideas deviating from official ideology, along with providing "suitable" party-minded young replacements.

The postwar political changes immediately made themselves felt. Academicians who had compromised themselves through their political activities during the war and the Arrow Cross regime, were expelled; some were brought to trial. However, it was not just the politically compromised who were affected; the growing pressure on the Academy from 1948 onwards led to scientists of "outdated bourgeois ways of thinking" being expelled. A changing of the guard took place in the universities as well.

This did not, of course, mean that only political commissars stepped in. New members included scholars of international repute, for instance György Lukács, and others who had been excluded from Hungarian academic life for their political views. Nonetheless, the precedent and "institutionalization" of direct political interference was the starting point for extremely injurious processes warping the development of scholarship and research.

In 1949, the Academy, purged of "doubtful" elements and with absolute political loyalty ensured even from within, was granted through Act XXVI of that year extensive legal privileges as a state organization directing the sciences in Hungary. Institutions attached to the Academy were established,

and scientific life was under the direction, and strict political supervision, of the leadership and an extensive apparatus of the Academy. Higher degrees were awarded by the Academy, permitting close control over both research subjects and the personnel "licensed" to do scientific work. Political loyalty became the primary consideration, and this led to a considerable dilution in the quality of research staff and of the academicians themselves. Degrees and the status of academicians involved many—including financial—privileges. Centralization, and appointments for life, treated as fiefs, allowed a system of personal patronage to flourish. The Academy bureaucracy had a decisive say on who could travel, to which conference and on which subject; it often happened that those sent were not those invited by people who knew their work. Researchers were at the mercy of their superiors. It was not performance that counted.

The norms and ethics of scholarship in many fields naturally modified relations determined by power and politics. In later years, hand in hand with the relaxing of the dictatorship, a growing number of relatively independent teams and projects could be started, where valuable work to a high standard was done. However, it was clear to everyone that the rigid structure lacked efficiency and hindered the development even of ideologically neutral or, indeed favoured, disciplines. A high proportion of the funds allocated to science came into the hands of persons who were unable to show real results, or went to programmes which, mainly in the applied sciences, had the sole goal of copying more developed Western technologies in order to meet the demands of Comecon and the Warsaw Pact. The late 1970s saw another change: research ceased to be an economic priority and with depleting resources contradictions and conflicts became increasingly visible.



**A**s the state struggled with growing financial difficulties and a shrinking economy, it is not surprising that less and less money was assigned to research and education. In this respect the last ten years have seen no major change in the rhetoric or the policies of successive governments. Each expressed a high priority for science, education and culture; each, arguing financial stringency, continued to cut the diminishing funds allocated to these so-called non-productive spheres. In 1988, 2.3 per cent of GDP was spent on research and development (R & D) in Hungary; by 1993, this proportion had dwindled to 1.03 per cent. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that the GDP itself (from the very outset only one third of that of Austria) has itself diminished by twenty per cent, calculated at constant prices.

As to the sources of the dwindling money for R & D, in recent years there has been a gradual increase in the share deriving from the state budget and from various funds (e.g. the National Scientific Research Fund), and other sources, such as local government authorities, foundations and international organizations; in the meantime, the input from commercial or industrial firms fell to one quarter. Today 30 per cent of Hungarian firms spend no money at all on research, and another 25 per cent assign less than one per cent of their income to this purpose. An even more telling survey revealed that the overwhelming majority of Hungarian firms do not feel that there is any need to invest anything in R & D. Thus it is little wonder that there has also been a major shift in the character of research projects: the proportion of basic research projects has grown from 46 to 69.7 per cent.

Within the overall decline in income, the diminishing of funds to be won by tendering for research projects can have a particularly keen effect. Although these

only account for some 10–15 per cent of the total from all sources, the majority of new research projects are financed in this way. Direct budgetary support is often insufficient even to pay salaries or the maintenance costs of a given institution, thus practically the only source for the funding of new research projects or for replacing outdated equipment is money obtained through tenders. Indeed, institutions are regularly forced to siphon off some of the money obtained by tendering for a given research project simply to pay for the maintenance of the institution.

The whittling down of tendered contributions gravely endangers the initiation of modern research projects. Typically, in recent years the National Scientific Research Fund had to turn down dozens of projects and tenders they considered to be of top quality and worthy of support simply and only because there was not enough money available. This is hardly an incentive for the younger generation.

The overall cut-back is indicated by the dwindling number of scientists. It is particularly dramatic in engineering, where 30 per cent of those doing research have opted for other employment. The average decline is between 10 to 14 per cent, the figure is lowest in medical research thanks to the boom in pharmaceuticals. Most of those quitting are absorbed by the private sector, but a far from insignificant number have gone abroad. Five per cent of research workers have found jobs abroad, although often not jobs in keeping with their qualifications. Figures for emigration are even higher among mathematicians, physicists and biologists, about a quarter of whom have joined the brain drain. An even more alarming sign than the mere fact of migration is evident in the careers of the most gifted among the young: they go abroad for three to four years to earn a Ph.D., and then, back at home—if they do



return home—most do not work in the scholarly sphere.

Many are of the view that the threshold figure for the country to spend on R & D is one per cent of the GDP. Spending below this level opens the floodgates to the third world. A country with any self-respect cannot spend less than that amount on science. If science is not promoted here, the country is at the mercy of technological colonization, claim the defenders of Hungarian science, indeed in the long run it will even lose its ability to adapt the new technologies of the developed world.

Many do not subscribe to this opinion. To them the amount of the money allocated to science in itself does not disclose much about the course a country is taking, and particularly not about how much is worth investing and in what, taking into consideration the traditions and resources of the country in question. An international survey shows that Spain, Ireland, Singapore or New Zealand, for example, come under the one per cent bar, and although not among the world's leaders, they are still more highly developed than Hungary.

Those who stress economic rationality argue that the financing of the sciences is not a matter of prestige. The slow-down, particularly in technological innovation, is only natural; even at their peak, institutions engaged in it never had any real achievement to their name and this has now become clear as market conditions begin to prevail. Today it is no longer possible, they say, to make a living out of tinkering in the backyard with various technologies on the COCOM list for military and industrial purposes. Investments must be made in things that bring real returns.

It is therefore not worth investing in something that can be done better and more efficiently by others. The fact that budgetary allocations to the sciences have been cut and some research institutes are

on the verge of not being able to operate, is far from being all that tragic. There is no sense at all in spending the tax-payers' money on the upkeep of institutions whose only purpose is to offer asylum for sham researchers unfit for creative work.

Those who put forward these radical views do not fail to call attention to the fact that, in conjunction with the opening of the markets, there is a growing number of voices calling for protectionism, state subsidies and support for certain sections of society, and that pressure groups within the domestic research sphere, working with low efficiency and lagging far behind international standards, make up a decisive part in this chorus.

**T**he issues of financing are closely connected with the questions of the external autonomy and internal democracy of the Academy. The debate has been, and is essentially on how to share out the money. No one now argues that the Academy's research institutes should be liquidated. The question is whether the incoming funds actually reach those who turn out real results. The general financial stringency and insecurity further increase distrust. If there is not enough money for sound projects, this steps up the demand for a controlled and clear division of finances and financed scientific activity. In other words, a demand to make the internal activity of the Academy more democratic and to ensure that there is a say in the guidance of scientific policy not only for the "Immortals" but for all those concerned, that is research scientists who themselves are not members of the Academy.

Discussion is hampered by several factors. First, albeit grave issues of survival are at stake, the effectiveness of scientific production is difficult to measure. The risks of investment in scientific goals are therefore always higher than is the case in an



economic undertaking. It is hard to decide what counts as a result, and it is also difficult to predict long-term advantages. The debate itself is not conclusive: it is always open to question whether deficiencies are due to underfinancing or to a lack of talent.

The other reason, naturally, is that, for the historical reasons outlined above, the composition and legitimacy of the Academy are highly debatable. A frequently voiced concern is that with the current internal structure untouched, autonomy only leads to a strengthening of conservative structures, feudal fiefs and hierarchies. Developments since 1989 show this concern not to have been wholly unfounded.

The idea of reform of the Academy was raised even at the dawn of the political changes, in the spring of 1989. The initiative at the time came from the Academy's then leadership and administration. This immediately gave rise to grumblings among researchers who were not Academy members and who, in keeping with the by-laws of the time, had no say at all in questions concerning the functioning and internal structure of the institution, even though in principle they were (even if not fully equal) members of the scientific world financed by the state. To them, this initiative, coming as it was from the "management" of this "scientific giant works", (the term they used for the Academy in the proposed bills they drafted) was simply an attempt to secure power and resources.

According to the bill (drafted in several versions), the Academy would have been turned into an autonomous public body. In a legal sense the Academy would have been embodied by a general assembly made up of the academicians themselves. The new public body would have drawn up its own by-laws and elected its own officials. Its assets would have consisted of the institutes funded with money from the state in previous decades, the real estate

and the equipment used by the Academy. (Up to then this counted as state property, on which the Academy exercised management rights. The original property of the Academy had been nationalized by a 1949 act.) Other sources of income would have been the annual subsidy from the state and income from research work. The Academy, or rather the body of academicians, would have decided on the use of these moneys through their own budget. The Academy would have been obliged every three years to render account to Parliament on the use of budgetary money and property, with Parliament having no power to influence decisions concerning scientific policies other than fixing the amount of the subsidy.

Those who drafted the bill and supported it argued that, from the point of view of Hungarian science, the most important thing now was to create political independence and financial self-reliance. Only thus could the existing valuable research network be preserved and developed, the preamble to the bill stated.

Critics of the draft drew attention to the fact that the bill would assign almost the whole property and resources of Hungarian science to a closed, meritocratic body, indeed a body without any outside or internal control. The drafts contained practically nothing on what powers and representation the research scientists would have had in this public body. This was particularly objectionable, since one of the institution's main sources of income, that derived from research work, had effectively been produced by ordinary researchers, who had no say at all in real decisions. The noble aims of the drafters, opponents argued, to create independence and financial self-reliance for the Academy, do not postulate the maintenance of internal anti-democratic organizational and decision-making mechanisms.



The last communist government and Parliament no longer dealt with the draft; and the influential radical right-wing of the coalition parties that came to power after the first free elections (1990), violently opposed the adoption of the bill. They were of the view that before the Academy could be granted property and independence, it should purge, or rather be purged, of its Communist Party inheritance and the people who represented the Party. The radical right looked askance at everybody who had come to any kind of position during the years of communism (and did not now join the new line). "Expertise is a Bolshevik trick," as István Csurka, the leading figure of the radical right, put it.

Without political consensus, debate on the Academy bill was constantly postponed. The Academy, headed by its new president, the historian Domokos Kosáry, elected in the spring of 1990, and hardly a man of the old regime—he had been denounced and imprisoned in the late 1940s and later, in the aftermath of 1956—hotly rejected the intended political interference. They considered the attack by the radical right as a replacement of the old political influence by a new, no less damaging political interference; the principal issue for them was to ensure the Academy's independence and autonomy.

This direct political interference was rejected not only by the Academy's leadership and administration, but also by the organizations and groups which had criticized and tried to reform the internal structure of the institution, and who in other respects had sharply criticized the draft. This brought about a singular situation. The consensus of the academic world opposed the political right's attempts at interference, but some of this community feared that maintaining external independence would preserve the internal structure of the Academy. The full-blown

rhetoric of the right put the reformers into the singular position in which all their proposals, whether justified or not, were presented by the leadership of the Academy as political attacks against the institution.

Contrary to re-unified Germany, in Hungary there was not, and could not even have been, an outside authority accepted by all which would have been able to rearrange intra-disciplinary structures on the basis of results and skills. It was impossible to visualize a body, least of all an independent one, whose impartiality would not have been questioned by one of the parties, which could have weighed the merits of various scholars and scholarly institutions. Reforming intentions would always have appeared as a political issue. All attempts to "set things right" could only have created chaos, a sharpening of inner conflicts and growing infiltration by politics. So the judgment of the situation by the leaders of the Academy, consistently opposing all forms of internal cleansing, made sense from this point of view.

The tug-of-war between the Academy and politics finally ended in a compromise. The Academy Act, granting autonomy and property to the public body, was passed late in 1993. By establishing the size of the subsidy, the state can indirectly influence the functioning of the institutions but the government has no practical say in its concrete use. Furthermore, the present method of financing on an institutional level does not oblige the individual institutions to render an itemized account on how much they have spent on each research project, nor is this offset by the fact that the Academy executive has to render account every two years to Parliament. Consequently, and paradoxically, it is the reformist, "liberal" opposition within the Academy which most vehemently urges the state to draw up a comprehensive policy on science, deciding how much it is to grant and for what pur-



poses, and then to strictly supervise how this is used, arguing that only thus can scanty resources be efficiently employed. This of course would also mean an upheaval in the present institutional structure, as it would be the institutions and research projects that had to adjust to the tasks and it would not be the institutional structure and its fiefs that would determine what the world of science was about.

Concerning internal democratization, the aim of the legislators was fairly unambiguous: Parliament has urged the Academy to take serious steps towards internal reform. This aim, however, only appears indirectly in the Act, leaving concrete details to be decided by the by-laws.

The Academy executive was able to accept the Act as a clear success. Naturally no one could expect them to work on curtailing the influence of the institution. Nor can their honest intentions be called in question. The main strategic goal for them was to ensure the independence and financial base of the Academy as the depository of Hungarian scholarship. As they saw it, anomalies springing from preset conditions, or rather from what had been inherited from the past, would be gradually eliminated by the inner dynamics of the very nature of scientific work and international competition.

However, many say that the by-laws passed in keeping with the new Act, misuse the autonomy granted by the Act and, taking advantage of the gaps in it, in fact curb the internal reform process. Nothing whatever has justified the maintenance and strengthening of the institution's centralized inner structure now that it has been granted autonomy—except power interests within the Academy.

The new Act provides for a democratic representation of research scientists who are not academicians (not left to the by-laws, as the earlier drafts did), but at the same time it ensures a wide enough room for the by-laws to determine the form and regulation of democratic representation. According to the Act, the President and the general secretary of the presidium must be academicians, but it makes no mention of the other members; according to the by-laws, only three of the twenty-five strong presidium can be non-academicians. Only Academy members can fill responsible leading posts.

Based on all this, critics of the Act and the by-laws object to the fact that, by ensuring autonomy, the state essentially left the direction of scientific policy to a body of academicians of contestable composition and to an academic bureaucracy, which by succeeding in passing the new by-laws has ensured for itself a decisive influence within the institution. The initial problems and dilemmas continue to divide Hungarian scholarship. The demand for internal transformation raises the phantom of political interference, while the ensurance of autonomy strengthens those in positions of power within the Academy and preserves the hierarchies within scientific life. Meanwhile, science has to function under increasingly impossible financial conditions and, in view of the economic situation, there is little hope for any increase in state funding for science or for market investment for science in the near future. Any government to take a step across the boggy marshland of the Hungarian world of science will get entangled in a maze of interests and arguments. ■



# The Torah Scroll of Tótkomlós

(A memoir)

**H**ow shall I begin? Perhaps I should start with the group of downcast men who stood gravely in the *shul* of Tótkomlós. The old synagogue, consecrated for the great millennial celebrations of 1896, was distinguished even in its unpretentiousness. However, during the war and the political upheaval that followed, it was mortally wounded, never to recover. The roof was leaking, the damp walls had cast off their whitewashed mortar long ago, and the glass panes were missing from most of the rotting window frames. The *omed* or Torah table, which at one time used to stand on a dais surrounded by an ornate wooden railing and which had been stolen and used for firewood, had been replaced, if with difficulty. It was even covered with a cloth of velvet. But the benches were destroyed, and only a dozen or so assorted chairs placed on the hard dirt floor awaited the congregation. In 1944 even the floor boards were carried off.

And now the ark itself stood gaping open and empty—the final blow. The synagogue's Holy Scroll, which had been hidden from the cataclysm by blessed hands and from which the Scriptures were read out every Sabbath day and feast day for over half a century, lay desolate on the *omed*. It too had died of its wounds. It had ceased to be. In accordance with the teachings of the Torah, the congregation would have to discard it. The Torah scroll was dead, and the grieving and shattered men sang the prayer for the dead over it. But a decision had been made as well. A new Torah scroll would have to be brought from Budapest.

The demise of the old Torah scroll was to some extent the fault of the cantor Henrik Goldstein. Of course, no one thought of accusing him. On the contrary. The Jews who were now standing by his side treated him with the utmost respect. What's more, he did not feel any cause for remorse either, just a slight pang of conscience, perhaps.

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**István Gábor Benedek**

*is a journalist and  
the Editor of Bank és Tőzsde,  
a financial weekly.*

*This piece is taken from  
his latest book, a collection  
of memoirs.*



**H**ow shall I begin? Perhaps I should first make it quite clear that Henrik Goldstein was not a local man. He had come to Tótkomlós from Budapest in 1951, when he was thirty-five. His had been the life of a Jew. His parents, his wife and baby girl—may their memory be blessed—had all perished in Auschwitz. A former yeshiva student from Sátoraljaújhely and a violin maker with a promising future, Goldstein was so shattered by the Holocaust that he abandoned every kind of civil occupation and with a steadfast pledge in his heart entered the service of the congregation. He was determined to dedicate his life to what remained of Hungary's Jewish population in whatever capacity he could—as a cantor, a shakter, a shamus, a teacher. He had seen death and destruction and in his own way he now wanted to do something to prevent further catastrophe.

This was no small undertaking. The surviving Jews were, almost without exception, in ill health and weak, their nerves shattered, their self-respect gone. They were touchy, demanding and dogmatic, and what was worse, many of them—and what a lot of them!—had turned atheist. God had turned his back on His chosen people, and this was hard to bear, especially when you were as wounded as they.

The faith of those who had survived the ghetto, the forced labour camps and concentration camps was under attack from three directions—atheistic Zionism from within, Marxist ideology from without, and selfish ambition, which filled in the gap. The Orthodox community in Hungary melted away as quickly and steadily as ice in the heat of the sun.

Henrik Goldstein remarried. His wife Eszter came from a large and well-known family, the Czitroms. What's more, the Lord blessed her womb with four daughters. It was His way of paying off a debt. But Henrik Goldstein's scant earnings from the community were inadequate for the quick succession of births. The idea of moving to the country probably came from someone passing through town from Tótkomlós. I don't know who it was. But notions like that don't come out of thin air. The good advice might have sounded something like this: "Look here, Goldstein, where there's as much wheat as in Tótkomlós, not to mention the famous Pipis Mill, and where you'll find ten pious Jews even now, a Talmud *hochem* like you need not starve." The four little girls, who were hungry day and night, were pale. And so, after the hasty exchange of hastily-read letters, the family set off by train.

Henrik Goldstein, now a cantor, did not bother about politics. He did not read the communist daily *Szabad Nép*, he read the Torah. It was the Talmud that engrossed him, not the Party seminars. He did not even have a radio, and it was only by chance that he heard about the "success of the people's democracy", the "achievements of the country of iron and steel", and the "triumphant building of socialism." He was oblivious to the class war, which was "escalating", and oblivious, too, of the all-out war waged against clericalism. In the world in which he



was raised, the feeling of being at other people's mercy was lodged in the heart of every Jew, and Goldstein did not have more to fear from the new regime than from the old. Too bad he had not reckoned with the oil. Because the oil was the cause of everything that happened to him.

**H**ow shall I begin? Perhaps with the tiny house which stood almost opposite the Pipis Mill at the end of the village nearest Kaszaper which Goldstein and his family called home, though it was more of a shelter with a chicken and duck run for those working away from home than a proper house. It had once belonged to the Lazarovics family, but since none of them had come back after the war, the congregation took it over and the Goldsteins were moved in.

The Jews of Tótkomlós were determined that the family who had come from such a distance should feel at home as soon as possible. They had the house renovated by skilled Slovak artisans, they replenished the furniture, replaced the missing pots and pans, and the women even taught Eszter, who was a city girl, how to force-feed a duck and tend the chickens. They even joined in the joy of the family when the girls started to fill out.

As for the shabby synagogue, well, every Friday night and on the Sabbath, you could feel the presence of the Lord in it once again. Henrik Goldstein read the weekly passage from the only surviving Torah; he talked about the Talmud as interpreted by earlier, wise old rabbis, and he felt he was a happy man. On weekdays he taught the Jewish children of Tótkomlós to read and write in Hebrew, and if he was called, he'd go as far as Orosháza, Szarvas, and even sometimes to Szentes and Hódmezővásárhely to slaughter animals for kosher tables. He was often called to funerals, too, where he'd pray for the soul of the deceased, which pained him. But what was even more painful, perhaps: he was needed to make up the *minyan*, the assembly of ten Jewish male adults prescribed for the prayer of the dead. But back to the oil...

In its quest for strategic raw materials the Nazi empire began to explore the oil fields in the Szeged-Algyó area, and before long, drilling rigs also turned up on the outskirts of Tótkomlós. But fighting interrupted work, and after the war the abandoned equipment was appropriated, but in 1946 MASZOVOL, the Hungarian-Soviet Crude Oil Company, saw to it that the work begun by the Germans would be resumed.

Two wells were immediately reactivated, one behind the former Lazarovics house, the Goldsteins' current home. The oil workers trampled all over the Goldsteins' yard. This was the time for heroic feats, the all-out efforts to surpass production quotas. "*Miner, dig your pick in good and deep, Weave your silk, comrade, and do not sleep!*" as the song went. What did a house on the fringe of a small town matter? What if the yard of a small family home was cluttered with pipes, iron bars, barrels, binding clips, nuts, and screws? The oil workers even dismantled the fence, though the infernal clanking and grinding of the engines



would have made it impossible to keep livestock in any case; not to mention the peace of the family's nights, which was now shattered.

But at this time something happened which demanded even more forbearance from Henrik Goldstein, who was in any case exceptionally dutiful. Out of the blue, the Jewish congregation of Budapest sent money for the restoration of the old synagogue. It wasn't a large sum, but work could begin.

On the Sabbath when the Jews took leave of their old synagogue in the hope that they would soon see it again renewed and refurbished, Henrik Goldstein gave a fine sermon before his regular reading of the Torah. He spoke about the need to make sacrifices. The men called upon to recite the *Maftir* and other prayers crowned their usual *schnoder* with certain pledges. Lipót Buchbinder undertook the restoration of the benches, Laci Grósz the decorative painting, his cousin Jóska Schwarz the renovation of the locks. When the last prayer had been recited, Goldstein informed the congregation that he would take home the synagogue's Torah scroll, and that until work on the old building was completed, services, including praying at the Torah, would be held in his house.

They were preparing in their hearts for the magnificent autumn days of the New Year and Yom Kippur when disaster struck.

It may have been the gasket of the oil well that proved too weak, or it may have been something else. Be it as it may, the rigging couldn't take the pressure rising from 1,600 meters with a bar force of 130. The gas, water, oil, gravel and sand spewed forth in the shape of a greasy sludge with such force that the poor-quality tiles of the Goldsteins' house caved in, the mud brick walls cracked under the impact, the ghastly sticky muck flooded the rooms.

This happened at half past five in the morning. Men in gumboots and helmets burst through the door shouting, "We're evacuating!" and they grabbed whatever they could. Meanwhile, roaring, rattling, hissing noises came from the well. The girls, still in their nightgowns, were crying. They were terrified. Mrs Goldstein was wailing, "The saucepans, the plates! Save the plates!" But by then everything in sight was covered in black slime. A hefty man with mud on his face cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled repeatedly, "Don't anyone light a match!"

Goldstein somehow succeeded in reaching the wardrobe where he kept the Torah scroll. He swept it in his arm, holding the precious relic close to him. And that's when he slipped. Only the velvet mantle of the Torah remained in his hands; the silver Torah crown rolled away, and the breastplate got caught on something, its chain snapping in two. The ribbon wound tightly around the scrolls was ripped asunder. The parchment came unwound from its sheath and was tumbling clear across the floor when one of the workers stepped on it. He had no idea what was happening, he just saw that the thin, bearded Jew was fussing over something or other when catastrophe might strike at any second. So with his oily hands he snapped up the Torah, inadvertently tearing it in the process, then heaved Goldstein up from the floor, and took them both out into the yard.



Like some raving biblical whale, the well continued to gush forth the yellowish-grey, stinking sludge. The neighbours and the people who worked at the Pipis Mill were also there by this time. The news had spread like wild-fire to the Jewish homes, near and far. And, as always, there were a couple of brave men who, without a thought to the state of their clothes or the exhortations of the oil men, went back into the house again and again to save what they and Goldstein deemed important.

By the afternoon the rescue team had the well under control. Exhausted, they danced around for joy. The Goldsteins' devastated little house seemed so insignificant by comparison, it was evening by the time the foreman remembered to say a few words of comfort to the desperate family. "You'll get so much money," he told Goldstein jovially, "you'll be able to fix all your daughters up with a sizeable dowry." That's what he said. But he didn't give them any paper about the damage. "Just write down your needs and send it to headquarters," he advised.

But where was the family to sleep that night? And where were they to live? The Comrade Town Council Chairman would see to everything, Goldstein was told.

Hard times were ahead for the Goldsteins. Trusting the authorities, though knowing, too, that they couldn't expect much help from the council, they nevertheless refused the well-meaning help of their fellow Jews. They could move in somewhere temporarily, but that wasn't Goldstein's biggest problem.

His problem was the Torah scroll. The New Year was rapidly approaching, the evening of Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur, the most solemn of all the Jewish holy days, to be followed by the tented Sukkot and the Maskir again, the prayer of tears, the pain of the mourners. And the congregation of Tótkomlós had no Torah! Oily, muddy, torn and trampled underfoot, the Five Books of Moses lay in a clothes hamper lined with a rug. I don't think any of the sad heroes of our story could have said how far back the Jewish congregation went in Tótkomlós, but they all agreed that with the exception of 1944, never had such sorrow and humiliation been their lot.

They fended for themselves as best they could. They read out the appropriate passage from their simple prayer books, but the words wouldn't rise to Heaven. They launched into the First Book of Moses, which signalled the start of the new year, "*In the beginning...*," but they felt something missing from the story of the Creation. The Torah was missing, the consecrated scroll.

**W**hen the holy days were at an end, Henrik Goldstein turned his mind to other matters. He had two related tasks, to give the dead scroll a decent burial, and to obtain a new one. He knew that this would cost money. A great deal of money. He thought of finding the surviving Jews of Tótkomlós and asking them for donations. There were five to seven families altogether. Those who'd gone overseas were out of the question; he knew enough about politics to know that.



In Szeged, the Weinbergers traded in feathers. They were the first family he visited. Salamon Weinberger gave him two hundred forints. My uncle from Makó took one look at the damaged Torah scroll and rushed off to the bank to withdraw three hundred forints. Next came Kecskemét. My father, who had recently retired, was in hospital in Budapest. I had just finished secondary school and was starting on my very first job. My mother, who was working in a shop buying scrap iron, gave Henrik Goldstein a hundred forints. Like everyone else, she too was ashamed of her paltry donation but comforted the cantor by telling him that the people in Budapest, the lawyer Misi Wallwerk and my Uncle Miksa, would delve deep into their pockets.

The cantor could not find Mihály Wallwerk. He'd made his way in the world and was now a diplomat in Prague. Uncle Miksa was another story. He lived in Budapest, though God only knows what he lived on. I wonder if he knew himself. His wholesale business had fizzled out a long time ago, and his shop, too, had been nationalized. He never accepted the job at the co-op he was offered. However, he was on the payroll somewhere, because he picked up some sort of wage. But he didn't work. At least, not for the state. He'd sit in the Rosemarie Café, receiving "clients". He made friends with actors, football players, writers, even former Prime Minister Lajos Dinnyés, who spent his mornings in the Brazil Café across the road, and his afternoons at the Rosemarie.

It was in this establishment that Henrik Goldstein caught up with my uncle Miska Braun. The appearance of the bearded cantor with sidelocks, wearing the traditional black wide brimmed hat and long black jacket didn't raise an eyebrow. The only Negro waiter in Budapest, Ethiopian by birth, used to come here in his spare time, as did the knife-throwers, lion tamers and fire-eaters of the now defunct Talentum circus, who'd sit there all day. The Catholic professor Ödön Szemethy, who had been banned from the university, gave language lessons at one of the tables. When the football star Sándor "Csikar" dropped by, a dozen of his fans swarmed in with him. The Rosemarie was also the place where the opera singer H. would meet his current teenage friend. Three young ladies, wearing hats, members of "the socialist brigade in the vanguard of the love industry", as they jocularly called it, set out from there in search of business.

Henrik Goldstein gave Uncle Miksa a brief resumé of the ghastly situation. When he saw that this was having precious little effect, he decided to show him the Torah scroll. This seemed to rouse some feelings of charity even in my Uncle Miksa.

"Come round to my apartment," he said to the cantor, who could already sense the donation in his pocket.

Uncle Miksa lived just a stone's throw away, in Jókai utca. His three-room apartment on the second floor was crammed full of bicycle parts, tires, tubes, tins of paint, light bulbs and the like. Henrik Goldstein made no comment and asked no questions as he followed Uncle Miksa into the innermost room. When they entered, the cantor saw a round table covered with a Tabriz carpet.



"Tell me, Goldstein," Uncle Miksa began, "do you consider me a good-looking man? I'm fifty-nine, you know. But in the pink of health."

And he stood up to demonstrate that he had a flat tummy, a muscular chest, and strong arms.

Goldstein blinked like a goose the first time it's being force-fed. What was Miksa Braun driving at?

"You're certainly a *betamt* man if ever there was one," he said. "You could knock ten years off your age and noone would be the wiser."

"Precisely!" Uncle Miksa yelled emphatically. "You meet a lot of people, Cantor. You get into all those old Jewish circles. You probably know I'm a widower. Or rather, a divorcé. My poor wife died in Auschwitz. Then I remarried again, of course, but we split up. None of this is important, however. The point is, I'm on my own now. And I'm a good, suitable match, believe you me! In short, you must introduce me to a decent woman. She can even be religious for all I care, just as long as she's rich. The emphasis must be on the dowry. With that we could buy as many Torahs as you want. What do you say?"

The cantor didn't know what to say. He sank deep into the armchair and thought about that morning when he had gone to Dob utca where he met the chief rabbi of the Orthodox congregation to ask him to arrange for the burial of the Torah scroll the following day and help procure a new one.

The telephone rang in the next room. Uncle Miksa hurried out. Goldstein sulked in the armchair. This man isn't going to give me a bean, he thought. The stock he's got accumulated here is worth a fortune. But nowadays one can only sell stuff like this with caution, or he'll land in jail. A rich woman would mean redemption, indeed. But where was one to find a rich widow in these hard times?

The cantor's eye strayed to the coffee table. Well, well! A golden cigarette case! He stood up and took a closer look. A fine piece. Magnificent. The new Torah scroll would cost ten thousand forints, a mind-boggling sum. Even if every living soul in Tótkomlós... But no, he mustn't even try to work it out.

He took a deep breath and reached out. He slipped the cigarette case, Uncle's donation, in the inside pocket of his coat and sat down.

Miksa came back irritated and impatient.

"Look here," he began. "You know that I would do anything for Tótkomlós. My dear departed father was twice chosen *rashe kol* by the community. I would gladly donate in his memory, if nothing else. But I'm flat broke now. I may have some money tomorrow. Who knows. Look me up at the Rosemarie when you have some news for me. You'll find me there."

**T**hat evening, Henrik Goldstein found himself sitting in the second floor Nyár utca apartment with the legal predecessor of the firm Pál Ajakai and Sons and his successors. Three generations were in the deal with the cantor: the grandfa-



ther Simon Auer, his son Pál Ajkai, and his grandchildren Tamás and Richárd. The diamond-encrusted cigarette case was passed from hand to hand, and each one of them read the inscription, "*For the nights spent in Lomnic—Matild, 1939*".

"Well, well," old Auer remarked. "They must have been weighty nights, considering that diamond."

"Doctor Goldstein," he resumed, "in the old days we had a flourishing business. Now there's nothing. Just the Watchmakers Cooperative. And twenty informers spying on us. If it hadn't been the chief rabbi who sent you, you'd be a ruined man with that cigarette case."

"Quite right. Who'd buy a diamond-encrusted cigarette case these days?" Pál Ajkai added.

"Maybe a dealer on the Teleki tér market," the older grandson added.

"And for peanuts," his younger brother commented.

"Quiet!" the head of the family said, putting an end to the senseless chatter. "This cigarette case is worth forty-thousand forints. The price of an apartment. You can see we Auers don't pull the wool over our clients' eyes. We'll give you twenty thousand. But listen carefully. Take the cigarette case away from here, just as you brought it. Go to 52 Rákóczi út, third floor, apartment four, and ask for Otto Würtenberg. Don't be surprised by his name or appearance. They are both genuine. He's a former customer, an old aristocrat. Leave the cigarette case there. Then go to the Körönd, to the house where Zoltán Kodály lives. Go up to the third floor, apartment number one. A Mrs Sajdik will give you twenty thousand forints. But again, not a word!"

**T**orah scrolls are copied with the utmost care onto sheets of parchment, then the sheets of parchment are bound together into a unified whole, just as they were a thousand, two thousand years ago. Should the scribe get even a single letter wrong, the sheet is set aside. It cannot be included in the Torah. The Torah has to be immaculate. If, on the other hand, the Book of Books should be irreparably damaged, ancient custom prescribed that the scroll be buried with the respect due to a member of the congregation.

The previous day a grave had already been dug in a remote part of the Orthodox cemetery in Kozma utca, and in the morning, after Shachrit was recited in the Kazinczy utca shul, the Jewish pensioners accompanied Henrik Goldstein to the funeral for the Torah scroll. They got on the #28 tram in Népszínház utca. To tell the truth, the fact that the city was restless, the people excited, with everyone arguing in worried groups standing on street corners did not catch the attention of the mourners. Absorbed in their own problems, they were oblivious of the world around them.

In the cemetery everything went smoothly. The prayers prescribed for such occasions were recited, everyone visited the graves of their relatives, then they set out back to town, just as they had come.



On the main boulevard, they were greeted by a bonfire of books replenished by people bringing more in their arms from the Free People book shop. Some were dancing wildly around the flames. "Long live the revolution!" they shouted in unison. "Down with Rákosi! Down with the Party!" The Jews quickly took leave of each other and hurried home. Henrik Goldstein made his way to the Rosemarie Café.

"Mr Braun has just gone home," the waiter informed him. "It's not like him, to be so scared of a little uprising."

Henrik Goldstein, for his part, also slipped away.

He found Uncle Miksa in a dark mood.

"So, did you find me a good match?" he asked as he opened the door.

"I've brought you a little money," Goldstein said.

"Money? For me?" Uncle Miksa asked in surprise.

They sat down at the table covered with the Tabriz carpet. There was probably nowhere else to sit.

"I was listening to Radio Free Europe," Uncle Miksa explained. "There's bound to be a war. If you're interested, I could turn it back on."

"No, no," the cantor assured him. "I won't be a moment. They're burning books in Népszínház utca. A Jew should keep out of the way. The train for Szeged is leaving at four. By tomorrow morning I should be in Tótkomlós, God willing."

"What's this money?" Uncle Miksa asked the talkative cantor.

Goldstein counted out ten thousand forints. "The cigarette case. Your due."

"What the...!" Uncle Miksa exploded.

You can imagine the scene. Uncle Miksa shot out of his chair, gasping. Then he flung his arms about, screaming.

"You scoundrel! You gangster! To think I kicked my girlfriend out, all because of a good-for-nothing thief with sidelocks! I slandered an honest woman. Do you know what that case was worth? The police! That's it. I'll call the police and have you put behind bars for the rest of your miserable life. And you call yourself a Jew, coming here with your scroll and your stupid story, then stealing from one of your own faith. I've got nothing left. I'm ruined. You've stabbed me in the back, yes, you've murdered me!"

He grabbed the cantor by the collar and shook him and yelled in his face. He was foaming at the mouth and his head was as red as beet root. Then all of a sudden he collapsed in his armchair and sat there exhausted, breathing heavily. Goldstein went looking for the kitchen and brought back a glass of water. He revived Uncle Miksa as best he could, then addressed him in humble tones.

"Look here, Mr Braun. What I did may not have been right. On the other hand, with the help of your cigarette case, Tótkomlós has a new Torah scroll. Your name will be blessed here on earth and in heaven for this. *Baruch ha'Shem*. Your generosity will stand as an example for generations. A good Jew should do



something for the community if he can. And what you did was the will of the Lord. I merely helped Him along in order that His will should be done. *Sha'ne-mar Adonai chofec le'eman sidkau yagdil Tauro v'yaddir*. Let us learn from Isaiah, Mr Braun. As it is written, "To fulfil His justice, the Lord wishes the Torah to be big and glorious."

My Uncle Miksa raised his hand. "Go away," he said. But with the same gesture, he picked up the thick wad of money from the table.

"You are my executioner. Be gone. I don't want to see you!"

Henrik Goldstein tiptoed out. He had already shut the door behind him when he had second thoughts and stuck his head through the door again.

"It's a magnificent scroll, you can take my word for it. And I will ask my wife to embroider your name on the velvet mantle. Consider yourself blessed, Mr Braun, in the name of the Tótkomlós congregation."

**H**enrik Goldstein's heart sank when he saw the tank in Klauzál tér. He hurried into the building where he was staying with a friend, and where the beautiful Torah scroll was lying in his yellow suitcase. In vain did they try to dissuade him, he insisted on catching the Szeged express at the Western Station.

From that moment on, the sequence of events is muddled. He didn't know what day it was or where he was, in Pest or in Buda, in Kőbánya or on Üllői út. He knew only one thing, that he must reach home with his precious Torah scroll. A huge crowd had assembled outside the station. People were coming down Váci út, singing and waving flags. At the corner of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky út, a scuffle broke out. People said that the printing house of the secret police was there. The crowd shoved forward, while the new arrivals quickened their pace. Somewhere a shop window was smashed in. By the time the cantor had fought his way over to the platform, the train was so packed that not even a child could fit in, let alone Goldstein with his suitcase.

A railwayman took pity on him and advised him to go to the Eastern Station and try to get home via Csaba and Orosháza. But the Eastern Station was no better than the Western Station. From the sight of the surging crowds, you'd think half the capital was bent on going to the country. People were yelling, the newspaper vendors in particular. Then the megaphone came alive and a pleasant girlish voice informed the crowd that there was shooting at Hungarian Radio headquarters in Bródy Sándor utca, and the secret police were spilling Hungarian blood.

"Fellow Hungarians! Let's defend our brothers! Come to the Palace Hotel!" shouted a hefty man at the top of his lungs. He was standing right next to Goldstein. Then he patted the cantor amicably on the back and yelled in his ear, "Beware of pick-pockets, old Jew!" Then he pushed his way out.

Henrik Goldstein never got on the train. He spent the night at the Rabbinical Seminary on József körút. He had breakfast there, too. It felt good, eating kosher food.



Before he set out, the cook slipped him a couple of sandwiches, and he was glad, too, that a rabbinical student would join him for part of the way. As they walked down the boulevard, it was reassuringly quiet. But around the headquarters of the Party daily *Szabad Nép*, and the National Theatre, a crowd had gathered. People were keyed up and tempers were short. The rabbinical student wanted to buy a newspaper, but the cantor thought it best to leave the dangerous square as soon as possible.

The goings on had absolutely nothing to do with him, he knew, just as he knew—and it was the newspaper that reminded him—that it would be best not to know what was happening. Even when about two dozen armed men surrounded him and shoved him up onto an open truck, he tried to behave as if he were just a passenger, or he'd got onto the wrong bus, and as soon as he got off at the next stop, the nightmare would be over. Since no one was the least hostile towards him or even bothered to speak to him, he crouched down, clutching his suitcase. Meanwhile, the truck was racing down unfamiliar roads and across a bridge. He didn't have a coat, and the very thought made him huddle up to keep warm.

When they arrived at a barracks, they were told to jump off the truck. Meanwhile, more and more trucks turned into the big parade ground where civilians and uniformed men mingled, as did the smells. Something fatty and oniony was cooking in huge cauldrons. In another place, chlorinated water was being poured over the stones of the arcaded corridor. On one of the landings, folded soldier's uniforms lay carefully tied up in bundles of tens, possibly twenties. Some of them had been undone. Henrik Goldstein stumbled about among them, hoping to find a coat that would fit. Someone tapped him on the shoulder.

"Hey, priest! I've been looking for you!" the man in question said cheerfully.

He was munching on a piece of boiled sausage and had half a loaf of bread under his arm from which he tore off a piece to go with the sausage.

"There was fighting all night at the Radio, and I'm damned starving, if you'll excuse the expression," he said gobbling his food. "Eight of us got killed. But who might you be?"

"I'm the cantor of Tótkomlós," Goldstein explained.

"That's fine," the other remarked as he bit into the sausage. "Come see the commander."

The commander's lanky physique embarrassed the cantor. A young man well under thirty in boots and baggy army trousers, he had on a civilian jacket. His desk was like an ammunitions store; a sub-machine gun, pistols, hand grenades and a tanker's helmet with the five-pointed red star scraped off.

"We must bury our dead, Rabbi," the commander said simply. A pleasant voice, Goldstein thought. "I asked the men to round up a couple of priests so we can pay our last respects."

Shuffling his feet awkwardly, Goldstein was about to say something when he thought better of it.



"Sit down," the commander offered. "Would you like something to eat?"

"No, no," Goldstein replied, startled. But the sound of his own voice gave him the courage to go on. "Look here, commander. I'm a Jew, and not a rabbi, even, just a cantor. I live in the provinces. It's pure chance I'm here at all. I want to take the Torah home to my village. The Five Books of Moses, copied onto holy scrolls. That's my mission."

"Holy scrolls?" the commander said enthusiastically. "That's great. That's just what we need. Holy scrolls."

"But commander," Goldstein protested, "a Jew can't bury a gentile. It's out of the question."

"I don't see why not," the commander retorted. "If there's one God, where's the problem? They're our martyrs, don't forget. The first casualties of our revolution. At such times what's the difference whether you're a Jew or a Christian? Besides, who's to say there isn't a Jew among them? There may well be. They'll be buried in the Kerepesi cemetery, where Kossuth lies. And that's an order!"

The cantor was hustled out of the office. "At least give me a coat," he said as they went down to the parade ground where the dead were lying on stretchers. An elderly Catholic priest was saying prayers near by.

"Let me introduce you gentlemen to each other," Goldstein's armed escort said, then as soon as they had shaken hands with some reluctance, he left them to it.

Goldstein saw that they were equally embarrassed. *Galach*. That's what they call Christian priests in Yiddish. Shaven-faced man. The *galach* grabbed Goldstein by the arm.

"Look, colleague," he whispered. "I'm cold. It was warm yesterday, and this morning when they called for me, I thought the weather wouldn't change. But I've been here for hours, out in the open air, and I'm chilled to the bone."

Goldstein took the priest to the landing where the uniforms were lying in bundles. They found some padded jackets.

"Must you carry that heavy suitcase around with you?" the priest asked. "It could mean trouble."

"It's the Torah scroll. I'm taking it home to my village," Goldstein explained.

"A Torah scroll, oh my God," the priest exclaimed. "When we have a moment of peace, you must show it to me. I think I can still read Hebrew. I graduated from the seminary with merit in Hebrew."

"*Baruch ha'Shem*," Goldstein said, pleased by the priest's reaction. He felt relieved, and as he repeated the simple blessing, he was filled with joy.

**T**he truck carrying the dead bodies went up front, the Catholic priest and the Jewish cantor trailed behind in a Pobeda taxi flying a red white and green tri-colour. Next to the driver sat their escort, the young man half in civilian clothes, half in uniform. They had just crossed the river into Pest over Liberty Bridge when shots were fired at them from a side street behind the Central Market Hall.



The sub-machine gun was aimed at the tires. Goldstein saw the truck in front skid and go out of control, shoot up onto the pavement, hit a lamp post and keel over. The bodies must be squashed together, he thought in horror as the Pobeda, too, was hit. It spun round, then as if it were skidding on a sheet of ice it swerved to the other side of the road. And this is what saved them. They ended up behind a standing bus. The driver and the young escort sitting next to him literally rolled out the open doors.

"Climb out and lie flat on the ground!" the escort yelled. The elderly priest nimbly climbed out of the back seat. But Goldstein didn't move. The driver lost his temper. He swore, tugging the cantor from his position on the floor.

"Open the back," Goldstein demanded with imperturbable calm, "I've got to take out my suitcase."

They were caught in cross-fire, but the escort and the priest, at times crawling, at times doubled up, managed to get across the road into Veres Pálné utca. The driver escaped into a doorway, leaving the car to its fate. Meanwhile, the gun fire had escalated. There was shooting from the roof of a building at the attackers behind the market. Goldstein eventually decided it was better to clamber out of the taxi. He opened the trunk and took out the suitcase with the Torah scroll. But he couldn't cross the road, so he stayed flat on the ground under cover of the bus and the taxi cab. As he peeped out between the wheels in the direction of the market, someone shouted at him from a window, "The bastards have heavy artillery! Watch out!"

From where he lay, Goldstein couldn't make out the action on the opposite side of the road.

"Crawl back where you were, for Christ's sake," the driver yelled, sticking his head out from behind the door.

The first cannon shot was aimed at the part of the roof where the partisans were. Stones, tiles and glass came crashing down to the street, some of the rubble landing dangerously close to Goldstein. Amidst smoke, dust, and shouting, tongues of flame leapt up from the ground floor of the apartment building on the corner.

Henrik Goldstein knew it was mad to do what he was about to do. But even so, he jumped up, seized the yellow suitcase, and as if he were rushing to catch a train, he ran across the far side of the road, very near to where the cannon stood. When he reached his destination, someone shouted at him from close by, telling him to join them. It took Goldstein some time to realize where the call had come from. His benefactor was behind the broken shop window of a haberdasher's store.

"The damn janitor's locked the front door. But there's room for you here!"

Goldstein climbed over the railing and through the shop front. Inside he found three men lying on their stomachs. He shook hands with all three, thinking it was lucky the glass hadn't cut him. He also thought how funny people were. A moment ago he was courting death, and now he was happy because his finger wasn't bleeding.



Another cannon shot followed.

"Hands up!"

Several soldiers stormed the tiny shop.

"To the wall! Any weapons? Throw your IDs on the floor!"

Soon several officers appeared, and one of the soldiers reported that none of the captives seemed like counter-revolutionaries. If anyone, the priest in black might be suspicious.

"Who are you?" one of the officers asked, poking Goldstein in the back with the barrel of his gun.

"I'm the Jewish cantor of Tótkomlós. I'm trying to get home."

"You don't say," the officer smirked. "Home. What's home, I wonder?"

"We were heading for Kálvin tér for bread when the shooting started," one of the others cut in.

"Lousy fascists!" an officer yelled, firing a round through the glassless shop front with his sub-machine gun. "The landowners and industrialists are already heading back from the West."

"You come with us," another officer said turning to Goldstein.

They climbed out and set off for the Danube, to the Central Market Hall. At the beginning of the small side street stood the cannon. Behind it were soldiers, proper soldiers. The officer told someone to send word to the political officer.

"What's that suitcase you've got?" the political officer, who'd taken charge of Goldstein, asked as he led him through the market hall, between stinking fish-mongers' stalls. Goldstein explained once again that he was a Jew from Tótkomlós, and would he like to see the Torah scroll?

"I'm from Soroksár, and I've seen what I've seen," the political officer said. "On one of the houses someone had written, '*Free our homeland of Jews!*' Well, they're going to learn from us no-one's going to stir up racism around here... But where did you say you're from? Tótkomlós? Happen to know the Rabák family?"

"No," Goldstein said, wondering how his answer would affect his fate.

They got into a partially open jeep and drove off in the direction of one of the bridges. It was almost dark by then; a bitterly cold night had descended. When they arrived at the river police station, it was in a state of chaos. Soldiers and police alike were being issued guns and ammunition; several civilians, too, were caught up in the throng, and troops were drawing rations. The wounded were brought in, the telephones were ringing, everyone was rushing about, some giving orders, others pushing through the crowd. Five radios were on at once, but most people had their ears glued to Radio Free Europe.

Goldstein was led up to the second floor. In one of the rooms, they came across Mihály Rabák.

"Misi," the officer called, "I've brought you someone from Tótkomlós. The Jewish cantor."



The regiment's political officer was a stocky blond youth who for all the world looked more like a jovial pastry cook than a rugged soldier. He set about cross-questioning the cantor. Who were his neighbours, how were the shops placed on the Tótkomlós market square, who was the Lutheran minister, and what was the Christian name of Dr Lászik, the dentist? When Goldstein had satisfied him on all counts, Captain Rabák embraced him like a brother. He offered him sausage, bacon, and real home-made bread and was visibly sorry when the cantor declined.

"Kosher, kosher! When there's peace and quiet, you can have your kosher. But now there's shooting. Have a drink at least, a shot of *pálinka*."

In the end, Captain Rabák had ten eggs brought from the kitchen which he hard-boiled himself on the scruffy burner in an aluminium pan. God only knows how he got hold of it. In the meantime, he told Goldstein about his plan.

Their headquarters was in Táborfalva and he would send Goldstein there in an armoured car. He had the authority to do so. "Don't worry," he pulled his leg, "I'll send an escort along. In Táborfalva you'll have two alternatives. You can either find the courier vehicle that's part of the shuttle-service, and tell the driver to take you to Félegyháza, from where you can get across the Tisza more easily. Or you can make your own enquiries once you're there. Maybe a Russian car can take you to Szeged."

A few minutes later, Goldstein found himself in an armoured car wrapped in an army blanket stinking of petrol. There were two severely wounded soldiers with him. That is how his journey home began. While the car was delayed in Soroksári út, Goldstein re-dressed the nasty wounded foot of one of the soldiers. He found all he needed in the first aid kit. The other soldier, with a stomach wound, whimpered quietly. Three coloured flares shot up into the sky, one green, then two red ones.

"Good. The coast is clear," the driver said. But they didn't get far. When they turned into Határ út, they were met by a barrage of gun fire. The car screeched to a halt. Goldstein went up front to see about the driver. He almost threw up. The driver had been shot to pieces. He stumbled back, stroked the face of the soldier with the wounded foot, picked up the blanket and his yellow suitcase, and cautiously clambered down from the vehicle.

"You a civilian?" someone asked standing beside him.

"Yes," Goldstein said, surprised that the unexpected question had not frightened him. Then he automatically added, as if it could fend off danger, that he was the Jewish cantor from Tótkomlós, and he was on his way home with the community's Torah scroll in his suitcase.

He was taken to a strange building site where the concrete pillars and piles of brick formed a fairly safe-looking bunker. Behind the only gap stood a heavy machine gun, its barrel jutting a long way out, the cartridge belt hanging like an endless chord. A middle-aged man was sitting on a low folding stool placed behind the gun.



"Who's this?" he asked turning to the man who had brought Goldstein.

"A Jew. A rabbi. Says he's got a holy something or other with him."

"What is it?" the gunner asked, this time addressing Goldstein.

"A Torah scroll. I'm taking it home to my village."

"A Torah?" the gunner repeated. "Oh, well, I suppose it's better than a shot in the head." And then he added, "Not to worry. You can be my guardian angel."

"What do you mean?" Goldstein asked, taken aback.

"Where the Torah is there can be no death. Would you like to have a bit of shut-eye?"

"I'd be most grateful for a little rest if possible. I've been on my feet since dawn."

"Curl up there a while," the gunner said, pointing to a spot. "Just don't be annoyed if I start shooting and it disturbs you. Also, there's no food. To hell with a country like this. Ammunition, yes. Food, no."

Goldstein didn't care which side he was on. He was more exhausted than he'd thought possible. At dawn he woke to the terrifying sounds of a gun battle. It turned out that at the corner of Határ út a veritable system of fortresses had sprung up overnight. Their line effectually closed off the incoming roads.

"You hug that suitcase like a lover," the gunner told Goldstein. The latter didn't comment. He was much too cold and hungry. He had four eggs with him, but if he were to bring them out now, he'd have to give three of them away, and there was no knowing what was in store. The rattle of the caterpillar tread of two tanks came from Soroksári út. But the tanks did not stop.

"Drink," the gunner urged pointing to the pálinka flask. It was the first time Goldstein wavered. He was about to reach for the bottle when he abruptly jumped to his feet.

"Do you mind if I say my morning prayers?" he asked with resolve. He hoped to make himself and God forget the momentary weakness which had taken hold of him.

"Go ahead," the soldier said. "I've got to cover the boys. They're going to blow up the tanks with Molotov cocktails."

He took a generous swig from the bottle, then fired a prolonged burst. Goldstein got out his fringed *Talit* and pulled it over his head, wound the *Tefillin* round his forehead and arm, and put the prayer shawl around his shoulders. As he recited the first blessing, he had already switched himself off from the present. Fascinated, the gunner watched the cantor rocking back and forth as he chanted his morning prayers. When the first armed boy dashed noisily into the bunker, he signalled to him to be quiet.

"A miracle," he later said. While Goldstein was praying, not a single bullet hit the bunker. Up till then, he had been using the familiar form of address with the cantor. But now, that was a thing of the past. After a while he asked Goldstein to show him the Torah scroll. He was very impressed.



A woman brought hot stew, gherkins, bread and wine from one of the nearby houses. The fighters offered some to Goldstein, but he only accepted the bread. He felt ashamed because of the eggs but thought it self-destructive to bring them out just now.

It was almost noon when the tanks launched their attack.

"What the... They're Russian!" shouted the gunner. They counted them. Eight tanks. That meant formidable fire power. Someone rushed up to them with the news that according to the radio, the Russians were coming back, but that the government was already in talks with Andropov and a cease fire agreement would soon be reached.

"Nonsense," the gunner said. "Get ready to move on. I'll stay here. The Jew, too. His scroll will protect us. Try to aim your Molotovs at the caterpillar treads."

Goldstein watched the preparations for retreat with apprehension. When the boys had finally left the bunker, he took a deep breath and asked the gunner why he was out to commit suicide.

"I wish I knew," the latter said. He was sitting beside the gun on the canvas chair again, drinking his *pálinka*. "Isn't that the best way to go? You talk yourself into some noble aim, preferably one people will admire you for, and off you go. It beats cancer or senility." And he took another long swig at the bottle.

"Hold the scroll over my head," he later said.

"What do you mean," Goldstein asked, visibly alarmed.

"Don't you get it? Like a canopy. I want to die under God's Holy Writ."

"That's not possible," Goldstein retorted. "That's not what the Torah's for."

The gunner turned round and drew a pistol out of his belt. He fired at the ground in front of Goldstein.

"Get lost!" he shouted. "Scram. But the scroll stays."

Goldstein wouldn't move. Then he said, "*Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai echad!*"

"What's that?" the gunner asked in a strange, hoarse voice. "Was that a curse?"

"Of course not," Goldstein said. "When a Jew is near death, he recites the *Sh'ma*. 'Hear ye, O Israel.' In the Middle Ages the Jews recited it at the stake. And in Auschwitz, too."

"Get lost!" the gunner hollered after a slight pause. He wasn't looking at Goldstein by then. He was spying out the Russian tanks through the gap. Eight threatening monsters, for the time being motionless.

"Take the suitcase," he added softly.

Goldstein took a few steps. He was standing directly behind the gunner in the narrow bunker, his yellow suitcase in one hand. The other he lay on the gunner's shoulder.



"God be with you, now and for ever more."

"Sure," the gunner said. "But when you're safe in your village with that thing, could you just say a nice Jewish prayer for me."

"So be it," Goldstein said as he took his leave.

**H**e got out to the road through the concrete posts, sacks of cement and piles of bricks. He pulled himself together, then dashed across Határ út as quickly as he could. He was shot at from two directions at least and was convinced he would not make it in one piece. He flattened himself against the wall and lay prostrate on the ground, sometimes pushing his suitcase before him, sometimes dragging it from behind. The door of one of the buildings was open a crack, and he literally squeezed himself inside.

"Come on in. The street's no place for holy men," said a voice behind him. It belonged to the woman who had brought the stew and wine to the fighters in the bunker earlier that morning. She took him down to the cellar, dank and cramped with about twenty people. Later, he made a reckoning. Five families were crowded together with their belongings, divans, chairs, eiderdowns, blankets, stands, preserves, sacks, suitcases, and other valuables salvaged from their apartments. And the noise! The children crying, the dogs barking, people arguing. Someone was trying to turn the knobs of a radio. Water was being heated on a burner, the only one in the place.

Suddenly, the din was drowned out by the boom of cannon fire. The people in the cellar screamed and wailed. Someone prayed at the top of his voice. The ground trembled, the walls swayed. The cellar door was swung violently open and a handful of Russian soldiers armed with submachine guns burst in. They looked at every face, scrutinized every nook. Then they collected four men, Goldstein among them.

Up on the street, the marching column consisted of at least twenty people marching two abreast. Goldstein glanced across to the other side of the street. The bunker, the concrete posts, the piles of bricks, all shot to smithereens. Where the gunner had been there was nothing. His body must have been buried beneath the rubble.

As the column set off, the men asked each other in a whisper whether anyone could speak Russian, the general feeling being that there'd be no stopping until they reached Siberia.

On Soroksári út, they were led to an unheated workshop on a factory site. They were kept there until nightfall with no food or drink. Then the interrogations started. Three Russian officers were sitting at a table. In front of one was a large notebook in which he wrote down the captives' answers. The interpreter was a young Hungarian wearing a combination of police and army uniform.

Goldstein acted in his usual manner. He related his story. He even opened his suitcase to show the committee the Holy Scrolls. The committee nodded. One of them even gave him a friendly pat on the back.



"You may go. The suitcase stays," the interpreter said. Goldstein's heart skipped a beat.

"Could you please tell the comrades," he said to the interpreter, "that I cannot go home without the Torah."

"The suitcase stays," repeated one of the officers.

"Please go," the interpreter urged, shoving Goldstein towards the door.

"These guys are not kidding."

Goldstein stopped in the doorway.

"No."

The interpreter bent close to his ear.

"Listen to me," he said severely. "At this very moment Egypt is being attacked by the British, the French and the Israelis. Egypt has asked Moscow for help. There may be a world war. And you expect the Russians to be fair to a Hungarian Jew at a time when they are being shot at by the Hungarians in one spot and the Jews in another? Are you out of your mind?"

"The two things have no bearing on each other," Goldstein announced. "I will not go home without the Torah scroll."

The interpreter translated Goldstein's answer for the Russians.

One of the Russians got up. He was a huge man. He grabbed the cantor by the scruff of his neck and threw him out. Goldstein tumbled about ten metres head first before he came to a stop.

He straightened up, wiped the blood from his face, retired to a corner and, turning to a wall, began to pray. Unashamed of the sobs shaking him, he recited a Psalm of David. The other captives stood around him with respect. The Hebrew text eluded them, but they were moved by the cantor's sincere suffering.

Soon the people locked in the workshop grew restless again. In the yard outside, the Russians were revving up the engines of their cars. Commotion, shouted commands, tense movements everywhere. Then someone burst into the workshop. Goldstein could not hear what he was shouting, but he could feel the ripples of joy. The Hungarian and the Soviet governments had come to an agreement. The Russians would withdraw. The UN had just given its approval. Hungary would be neutral. Imre Nagy's positive actions... and also, Kádár had just said...

The door of the workshop was wide open, and those within rushed out into the open. They embraced and kissed. Goldstein opened the door to the foreman's office, the room where he'd been interrogated.

He spotted the yellow suitcase standing in a corner. "May God be blessed," he said, looking at the suitcase from the doorway. It was a long time before he stirred to get it.

**H**ow shall I go on? Perhaps by mentioning that it took Goldstein a day and a half to reach Tótkomlós. But the trials and tribulations of his journey were as nothing to him now. He felt happy and relaxed. Every time he caught sight of the suit-



case, he murmured a blessing. He got off the train with his heart high. He practically ran to the main square. To him the suitcase with the scroll inside it had no weight. He lived behind the village hall in a part of the building that had been converted into temporary lodgings for him and his family after the oil well disaster.

It was dusk, the street deserted. The side door was locked, so he tapped on the window. Ayele, or Dawn, his third-born daughter, looked through the glass.

A minute later, his home was filled with shouts of "Papa! Papa!" Mrs Goldstein, née Eszter Czitrom, was shaken with sobs. When her tears subsided, she put water up on the kitchen stove and brought the tub. She wanted to wash the dirt of the road off her husband as soon as possible.

The Torah scroll, now released from the suitcase, was laid on the table set with a clean cloth. Then each of the girls kissed it in turn.

"I must go round this very evening and tell the people that we can pray as one again," Goldstein said. He was now feeling perfectly at peace. The new Torah was his life's work, his great achievement, a personal act of faith. He wished to crown the sufferings of the past few weeks in an atmosphere of festivity and communal prayer.

He was standing in the warm kitchen half naked in his underpants. The water was steaming in the tub in front of him. The girls were off playing in the other room. For the moment, their presence was not allowed.

"My dear," his wife said quietly. "My dear," she started in again, more gently this time. "There won't be a *minyan*. And you won't be able to pray. Not now. Not ever."

Goldstein pulled on his clothes. He knew that his wife was telling him something very serious, and he did not want to stand before the Lord naked.

"What happened?" After what he'd been through, he was prepared for anything.

"May the name of the Lord be blessed," his wife began, but could not go on. After a short pause, though, she tried again. "One night someone wrote on the wall of the Frölichs' house in Makó, '*Hey, Jew, Auschwitz is too good for you.*' And the Jews of Makó fled that very day. Every one of the Orthodox Jews, and many of the Reform Jews, too."

"And the Tótkomlós Jews?" Goldstein asked with apprehension.

"They went with them. Every living soul except for us. We're the only ones left now."

As Henrik Goldstein looked at the Torah scroll, his tears flowed and flowed. ❧

*Translated by Elizabeth Szász*



# Nobody Comes, Nobody Goes

Árpád B. Gáspár: *Örvény* (Vortex). Magvető, 1994, 333 pp. • László Darvasi: *A Borgognoni-féle szomorúság* (Borgognoni's Sorrow). Jelenkor, 1994, 105 pp. • Lajos Parti Nagy: *A hullámzó Balaton* (Balaton Bars). Jelenkor, 1994, 166 pp. • Lajos Gulácsy: *Pauline Holseel*. Ferenczy, 1994, 161 pp.

**T**his work, which came into being far from any Hungarian literary life, in the solitude of the fringe of the Hungarian speaking area—the author is an economist in faraway Máramarossziget—has been much missed in our literature,” runs the blurb for Árpád B. Gáspár’s novel, *Vortex*, words presumably written by Ádám Bodor, a writer who resettled ten years ago in Hungary from Transylvania in Romania, on the marches of which faraway Máramarossziget is found. My hunch is that Gáspár, whose first novel this is, either knew Bodor back home or went to see him as a fellow-Transylvanian and publisher’s editor. Bodor presumably was taken by the novel and made sure it was published by Magvető. If this is how things happened, well and good, since this is how literary life normally functions. In that case, Gáspár’s book could be reckoned a special event if only because contemporary literary life nowadays does not usually function normally in Hungary.

It would be even more exceptional if a really outstanding work had been born in

the author’s isolation on the Romanian-Ukrainian border. Unfortunately, however, *Vortex* went wrong somewhere. Though it parades great force, huge energy bursting through its sentences, all this spasmodic effort produces little result. From the first sentence to the last the reader witnesses a desperate feat of strength. You can almost feel Gáspár repeatedly buckling down to composition, in order to say something shattering, something overwhelming, something final, and, as the text proceeds, he trails behind him sentences all intensified to fortissimo, replete with bombastic images and chasing wild exaggerations, but without any organic relationship in which a real style can be discerned. The sentences themselves groan under the weight of hysterically accumulated images, attributes and synonyms. “Silence lifted me on to its broad back. It swallowed spoken and unspoken words, overlaid them with the crumbling earth of the furrow of silence and covered them in snow, to have words enclosed in a hard caul sleep peacefully under its white veil.” When the protagonist tries to find the sense of the words of his sweetheart: “I was waiting, just waiting for gold to sparkle among the grating grey gravel. You were plucking boring, hackneyed strings like an old lamenting beggar.” “We gobbled ... the torrent of breezy human idiocy [...] with the

## Miklós Györffy

is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

His collected reviews for HQ have just been published in Hungarian.



voracity of our parched animal cells, and did not give a damn for long-paced history, for ideals, for the fact that this flood overflows the islands of deliberation, carrying away the slim trunked trees of tact and bites into the tumbling banks of goodwill."

Even where less packed and high-sounding, the text still ambles along under a cloak of pretentious declarations. And when Gáspár shifts from his symphony of raptuous sentiment or baleful auguries to jeering and irony, no stone is left unturned here either: we are showered with bombastic exaggeration. Nor is there any discernible difference between the narrator's first-person descriptions and the dialogue between the characters: the whole is dominated by one single, inarticulate high-flown tone. However thoroughly Gáspár eviscerates the various characters and situations by constantly bombarding them with pronouncements meant to be narrative and characterizing, his material remains abstract and elusive, buried under all the verbal crescendo. This of course might be connected with a presumable intention to present a kind of vortex in form.

Compared to this formal vortex, the content vortex, which could be the theme or plot of the novel, is almost accidental. The setting is a small town in Eastern Europe in 1951, and the protagonist, a young man of nineteen, the son of an eminent university professor of the old school, becomes caught up in some obscure vortex which is being stirred around him by the Stalinist secret police. It may be supposed that both his best friend and his girl-friend, a nurse, are informers. The love story is for quite some length the subject of the novel and it is one of the main sources of the over-written, bombastic sentences. A reader does not know what to do with a motif according to which the otherwise not particularly bashful nurse,

who may even be suspected to have taken part in dealings involving morphium, acts like a coy maiden when the protagonist, with commendable patience, would like to bed her. It is possible that somehow or other this virginity is also part of that inextricable tangle which causes the hero's ruin. He and his parents are arrested and, following the familiar scenario, they want to force him into playing a part in a show trial. All one can learn about the girl is that, even if she did perform some service for the security forces, or indeed, precisely for that reason, she does not survive the "vortex". (The boy is released later.) Although the novel is written from this retrospective viewpoint, it does not accomplish that which, even after all the many other novels, films and recollections on similar subjects, could still have been interesting: the unravelling of what at the time had seemed to be mysterious, unaccountable and confused, the tracing of the lines of force. Instead *Vortex* reconstructs the guilelessness and defencelessness of the time and does it with a rhetoric and manner that leaches out all the life from its material.

**A**fter the thirty-two year old László Darvasi published a volume of verse in 1991, he produced a number of new books of short pieces of prose in which the lyrical and the epic are intermingled. It is as if being a poet he can only handle short forms when writing prose as well. However, the converse is also true: a post-modernist approach has made Darvasi a minimalist in verse and prose alike. This short new book, *Borgognoni's Sorrow*, too, is built on minimalist principles. The first half consists of "Hungarian Stories", the second is "Reader of Stories". One of the 49 stories, some no longer than a couple of lines, "Ugo Borgognoni's Illness", concerns a noted 13th century Italian surgeon who, as



his death approaches, is stricken with a mysterious illness: he is unable to write another line. "As if some strange, heavy material had lodged in his heart. And the old scholar, whose every minute had been spent in attention, restraint and respect for science, never encountered such a pertinaacious and strange state, capturing both his soul and body... before dying, he gathered his remaining strength in a final effort and named it Borgognoni's Sorrow."

Even if not always sad, Darvasi's stories seem to be symptoms of Borgognoni's Sorrow. These are the stories of a writer who seems to have nothing left to write about or who suffers from a debilitating disease indeed, that will not allow him to believe that writing has a meaning. It is not the pen that resists "but the meaning guiding the sentences has again and again ended up in the moors of futility." The "Reader of Stories" includes impossible or banal cases which Darvasi recounts here in the style of anecdotes, almanachs and readers, or as newspaper human interest stories. Sometimes the stories seem enigmatic, as if they conveyed some lesson, some wisdom; and, if one were to insist, a punchline might well be found in one or another, but they rather represent the emptiness, constraint and arbitrariness of storytelling. It is as if the events narrated were all authentic, the exact indication of place, time and names gives them the appearance of coming from real life. This might even be more than an appearance, it might be true, but it is of no consequence. "May 2, 1923. One of the great Stockholm clubs plays with the Kiruna iron workers. A scoreless draw is all the Stockholmers need, so they just have fun all through the game. Sometimes they let Wolf, the clumsy but extremely enthusiastic Kiruna forward get all the way to their six-yard box, only to tackle him with a smile at the last moment. Nor would the others score against

them if Olaf Johanson, the referee, who up till the 89th minute had done a faultless job, had not got fed up with this shameless arrogance and had not himself belted a loose ball following a free kick under the bar with tremendous force. Olaf Johanson awarded the goal, and then ended the game." Is it of any interest whether this actually happened? It is not. And what is the story about? It is about the fact that such a story is about nothing other than itself: this is its absurdity and banality all in one.

"Hungarian Stories" are more "about" something, though the word "Hungarian" simply means that here the equally laconic, poor case histories are in Hungarian and come from the familiar Hungarian medium. Perhaps their drab sadness is also Hungarian. In "Forgiveness" a policeman questions a woman who has stabbed her husband to death. As it turns out, all that happened was that at night the man told her in their bed that "he never wants to fuck again". Not with her nor with anyone else. "Sunday Afternoon" concerns an illegal abortion, carried out in a backyard room and kitchen flat by a charlatan on the pregnant mother in front of her daughter. The protagonist of "Koller, the Husband" is a sad bachelor, who is suddenly and peremptorily visited by the widow Viola, a fellow tenant in the block of flats. Aunt Viola has been stricken by a mortal illness, and possibly only needs Koller so that on the night she is going to die there should be somebody to lie down beside her and hold her hand. "In the Amputation Office" somewhat differs from these and the other similarly drab stories. It is a grotesque, beginning in a clinic where demands connected with the amputation of various human parts must be reported and registered. A woman appears who would like to have her amputated leg sewn back on. This of course is not done and she is sent away. The assistant becomes interested in the



woman, visits her and beds her. The woman later tells him one of her childhood memories. Once, a man just like that, without a word, kicked the leg she no longer has. Perhaps she now longingly recalls the pain, but Darvasi does not go as far as to articulate this. As if even the absurd effect were of no importance any longer. As if these denuded, gloomy stories had been brought about by the same sad doubt as the brief stories without rhyme or reason: is there anything left to be narrated?

**F**orty-one year old Lajos Parti Nagy also belongs among the post-modern relativizers of story-telling. He, too, arrived at fiction from poetry, and his lyrical approach decomposes the story. He has not written anything of any length either. For him, however, it is not only the structure and the plot but phrasing and the language, too, that make narration questionable. Often it is the corrupt idiom of the spoken language, phrases expressing modes of life themselves which become the main subject of the story. Parti Nagy treats this cultural flotsam in a virtuoso manner. Some of the pieces in *Balaton Bars* are brilliantly absurd satires which present the shambles of Kádár and post-Kádár Hungary by starting out from the debris of speech habits and various fossilized materials.

The hilarious story "Balaton Bars" (published in *HQ* 130) is a monologue by an over-the-hill athlete. The sport for which he was a licensed competitor is eating. He started his career in the slaughterhouse junior team, attended the Young Pioneer's Olympiad, one-course meal contests, the Championship of Friendly Armies, and on the occasion of a liberation festival he pledged to eat, together with his wife, a quintal of Soviet red caviar within a given time; then his career finished and now he only keeps himself fit at home as a

hobby, for instance by swallowing several hundred Balaton chocolate bars by the hour. The monologue masterfully conjures up the miserable clichés of "socialist" sport, the club career intertwined with Communist Party, and splendidly works in the stupidity and inhumanity of the system into eating as a sport.

"Ski Milieu" is about conditions of a "skiing paradise" in Slovakia, hybrid and confused in the socialist way, somewhat in the manner of Hrabal—a group of Hungarian tourists, a ladies' man skiing instructor, the locals as table-soccer buffs, and just incidentally, a murder the traces of which are for the time being buried by snow and ice. There is no question of a plot, the text swarms with the kaleidoscopic impressions of a narrator who has broken a leg skiing and spends the remaining time of his holiday in the hotel. The characters in "Silk Factory" are inoculated because of some scandalous environmental pollution; after receiving their shots, the factory-girls frighten those anxiously waiting at the door by pretending that they have had their eyes poked out, with the result that everybody runs away. "Goose-pimples in Puppental" is also about sabotage: some mysterious malpractice has been going on in a shabby workshop on the outskirts of a small town, but the investigators sent there do not find anything. "Little Paris" is a grotesque horror story of provincial consumerism. Belgian oilrags are sold by weight for next to nothing in a village, that is the castoffs of rich Westerners, and one of the voracious jostling women is accidentally pushed into the giant container. The unfortunate is fished out with a ruptured spleen only hours later, after her absence had aroused attention.

The events are often even slighter and without consequence, in some stories it is hardly possible to discover any plot.



Everything is buried by fragmentary speech. Nor is it clear who is speaking, about what or whether any chronological or causal relations exist between the various elements of the text. Sometimes it is as if a narrator were speaking with the various layers deposited within him—textual and stylistic layers, memories, impressions, *trouvé* fragments. The narrator plays about with them, chopping them up and varying them linguistically, trying to create something that might resemble a text, out of chance fragments of idiom brought about from them. It is not easy to read these stories, and it would be scarcely possible to translate them into another language.

The closing story, "Waldtrockenkammer Transcriptions", may be bracketed with the title story in terms of its length (twenty pages), its form as a soliloquy and a story-like conception which can be relatively easily followed. The ironical reference to music in the title is no accident: the piece is a monologue by someone who would like to be "transcribed", that is to say to be operated on and transformed into a violin of lovely tone. He submits a "transcription" to the Professor who handles this operation asking him to consider his presenting himself and to put him on the waiting list. In his application, he lists the prospective stages of the future transformation from evisceration through the many years of drying out in the "wood chamber" ("Waldtrockenkammer") to the great moment when the Professor takes him in hand to carve an instrument out of him. Parti Nagy's petitioner, like all of us mortals, would like it if, sometime in a distant, foggy future of salvation, he could sound beautifully, if all the work and experience the Creator invested in him would ring out, although he is aware of the fact that possibly "all the necessary procedures will prove to have been insufficient" and it

may turn out that "I was not suitable to be a violin and not even God can take the off-key pitch out of me."

Finally, there is a strange book, calling itself a "novel" which, like the others here reviewed, tells no story. Lajos Gulácsy's *Pauline Holseel*, written around 1910, has now been first prepared for the printer, using a surviving chaotic manuscript that so far has been thought to be fragmentary. Lajos Gulácsy (1882–1932) was primarily a painter, an interesting and original one, an eccentric figure in Hungarian art in the early years of the century, belonging to no trend or school, who created a singular dreamland in his canvases. Though influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites and touched by the spirit of symbolism and art nouveau, the desire for the new of modernism was alien to him. His paintings portrayed visions of a bygone past or, rather, a past that had never existed, an imaginary world which recalled both the early Italian Renaissance and French Rococo.

His prose is in a style that is weirdly similar to that of his pictures. It creates exactly the same incomparably original world that his canvases do through colour and form. There is no question of any story, logical relationship or reference to reality in this world of words. Everything is mood, sentiment, dream, sketches, and fragments. Nonetheless, the combinations, the variations of their links, the motifs, and the stylistic features are so utterly typical that any single paragraph is recognizably Gulácsy's. Márta Nagy and János Kurdy Fehér have edited *Pauline Holseel* out of the 181 sheets of paper and parchment held in the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library, a manuscript which at first sight seems impossible to put into any sort of order. The sheets are of different size, written in different inks and



pencils, at some places in an immaculate hand and in others in a scarcely readable scrawl. The key for an arrangement came from an original table of contents; according to this, the "novel" has twenty chapters, each of three or four pages of visions or scenes, most set in an imaginary Italy, with a few recurring characters, some ethereal, some grotesque, and above all Pauline herself. She, of the cerulean eyes, golden locks, coral lips, and peach-like cheeks is, in the eyes of the other characters and the narrator, a kind of Beatrice. (In fact there is a marvellous Gulácsy painting showing the encounter of Dante and Beatrice.) These "fictional" chapters are something like paintings with a fantastic pictorial and motif saturation, as if they were to extend the pictures in a different dimension, complementing the naive, dreamlike spatial creation with an equally naive, dreamlike temporal dimension: "Embracing Lavelias, they slowly went up the gravel-walk and the steps. The arc lamps had been turned on in the city, their violet light vied with the beam of the floodlights in the harbour cast upon the infinite plane of the emerald sea. The crimson sky was just like a titter which is absorbed by the vast silence of a night of mysterious beauty..." or, "Louis Gaulois, do you still stain your ivory stockings with black coffee, do you still wear a snuff-coloured coat after the old English manner? Do you still mincingly caress your silky hair and crack out the time with your ivory-tipped walking stick in accompaniment to the semi-soft notes of the virginal? Do you still speak with a smiling half lisp when Pauline Holseel stands before the small round table and boldly stretches forth her ankle tied

crosswise with a little pink ribbon and her pointed silvery slipper for the first step of the gavotte?"

Indeed, the following is like looking at a Klimt painting: "I was lying under one of the pillars of the huge temple of Karnak, stretched out at full length and dropping my head on the ground richly laid out with paving stones. I wanted to tear out with my teeth a large emerald which was wedged in between the stones. My struggle brought no success, indeed I was caught by shiny-black servants and thrown into a low, wet prison where I carved a huge, two-legged stag on the wall. A cedar was growing out of the right leg of this stag, with white cornet-shaped flowers flying out of it which all dropped in front of me and faded away... And you, Ibelon, were dancing around me with bare feet! I threw myself down at your feet, you trampled on my neck and breast, and took my heart away. Yes, my heart, which you put in chains and placed between your two beauteous breasts, taking delight in the dropping of my blood, as the trembling drops trickled in long stripes over your groin, along your legs and body down to the nail of your little finger..."

With its esoteric and bizarre characters, its factitious dialogue, visions blending reality with dreams, and a pictorial approach that rejects both narrative and time, *Pauline Holseel* is very much *sui generis* in the Hungarian fiction of its period. A fully-fledged novelist would not have dared to disregard the conventions that Gulácsy blissfully and without any misgivings ignored, as his foreword reveals, out of a solemn belief in his own calling to create a new art. ■



Péter Hanák

# Two or Three Europes

Reflections on Jenő Szűcs's "Three Historical Regions of Europe"

The medievalist Jenő Szűcs in his time broke new ground. The existence, place and role of Central Europe, which had become the plaything of politics and of a literary argument conducted sometimes with wit and substance, and sometimes without, was restored by him to its proper place as a subject for the scholarly study of history. The timeliness of his essay on the three historical regions of Europe, and the impact it made, turned it into a work of historiographic significance. That was true fifteen years ago, when it was first published, and remains true now, as all its new editions, translations, and the many references to it testify. Providing a remarkable store of facts and substantiated theories, this study goes beyond the mere determination of the features behind the di-

vision of Europe into particular regions and their interrelationship; its novel approach also explores Europe's unique course of development and the structural changes involved.

The impulse and motivation of this work derives from the intellectual legacy of István Bibó, historian, political thinker and a member of the revolutionary government in 1956. In 1979, two years before his students were able to honour him with a *Festschrift* for his seventieth birthday, Bibó died; the birthday gift became an homage. Jenő Szűcs, who had long considered Bibó his master and who eventually joined Bibó's circle of friends, proceeded, after some deliberation, to compile, in a sweeping essay, his own ideas on Europe as a historic region. It was a road not without its own twists and turns. Szűcs was born in 1928 in Debrecen, the city known in Hungary as the Calvinist Rome. He came from a family line that included craftsmen and teachers, Calvinist burghers adamant not only concerning their faith but also national traditions and civic ideals. He attended the old established Calvinist colleges of Sárospatak and Debrecen, and in 1946 enrolled at Debrecen University. In those years when conditions fostered the radical left, young Jenő Szűcs, endowed with a fine intellect, could easily have been attracted by the populists. Or by both com-

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**Péter Hanák**

*is Head of the Department of Modern History at the Central European University, Budapest. His publications include Der Garten und die Werkstatt, Böhlau Verlag, 1992, Bürgerliche Wohnkultur des Fin de Siècle in Ungarn, Böhlau Verlag, 1994, and the chapter on Hungary in The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the 20th Century, Columbia University Press, 1992.*



munists and populists concurrently, since for a time these two ideological and political positions, anti-liberal in Hungarian terms, with their egalitarianism and identification with the people, ran on parallel tracks. Very early, Szűcs actually joined the Communist Party, though he kept his distance from the populists. The reason had surely to do with his Calvinist roots and his father's example; he was a man who rejected magic, myth, and any other irrationality. His father, a learned judge (and his first teacher) took his own life in 1944, when he saw no way out of the war and no hope for bringing to an end the sacrifices demanded of Hungary. (Jenő Szűcs himself committed suicide in 1988.)

Szűcs went to Budapest to complete his degree. There he was accepted by the prestigious Eötvös College. It was at this time that his interest in medieval history became manifest. The first result was a book on the growth of the town in the late Middle Ages, or more specifically, its faltering (*Városok és kézművesség a XV. századi Magyarországon* [Towns and Crafts in 15th-century Hungary]). The book clarified a new aspect in urban development in Hungary, a hitherto unnoticed trend towards centralization, during the reign of King Matthias. Szűcs's first book was so widely praised that, in spite of his participation in the 1956 Revolution, he was in 1960 admitted to the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, then a refuge for people of talent who did not conform.

At that time, the Institute was the scene of a debate on the historical interpretation of national identity and national tradition. Szűcs joined in at once. With his distinct point of view he launched into research of a sweeping scale on the origins of national identity and the concept of nationality in the pre-feudal and feudal ages; in the interests of this project he studied everything from medieval chronicles to sermons.

What he had in mind was an uncovering of the history of Hungarian national consciousness from its very roots. He got as far as the elaboration of what he called "gentilism", the awareness of a clan community (*gens*). To be more exact, he got as far as the manuscript. Having got involved in disputes about an ahistorical approach to the concept of nation, he set out to compile a volume of polemic essays. His research diversified, and further engagement in historical and political dispute induced him to focus more thoroughly on regional aspects and international analogies.

In short, this was the twisted road that led Szűcs to his concept of the regions of Europe. His direct inspiration was, as I have noted, a commemorative contribution. However, indirectly he got much more from Bibó, who was passionate about social and political developments in Europe: about how European nations evolved and the particular place of Central and Eastern Europe within this process; how progress became distorted; the misery of the mini-states of Eastern Europe; and last, but not least, the *cul-de-sacs* of Hungarian history. In other words, Szűcs actually interpreted Bibó's heritage and took it further. The basic concept in Bibó's vocabulary was *structure*, which Bibó's own teacher, István Hajnal, took from Max Weber, F. J. Tönnies, and A. Vierkandt. Bibó "edited" it into Hungarian, or expressed it as "being structured" if he wanted to add special stress to coherence. He considered a society strong if its structure evolved organically and further development was steered not by external rationality, i.e. intellectualism, but by competence grounded in acquired habit. For Szűcs, the German sociological ideas as transmitted by István Hajnal and Bibó joined the ideas on structure of the French *Annales* School of Fernand Braudel, Georges Duby and Jacques le Goff.



Primarily, he accepted the notion common to both, that the European structure was characterized by perpetual motion and capacity for change, in contrast to other, Asian and African, structures which became rigid and have remained almost unchanged over centuries. But what is it that causes qualitative change? Is traditional production and life formed gradually, almost imperceptibly, through small discoveries, wars, new knowledge, and inventions? When, and at what critical point, do these changes break through the social structure and attitudes, which rigidify into a mind set? The question was posed by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Treasure hunters, merchants and entrepreneurs there may have been in the Middle Ages, but what they did was determined by traditional ways by traditional profit margins and work, by a traditional relationship between the merchant and his customers. The spirit of capitalism, then, had to overcome first of all the feelings and habits which might be termed traditionalism. Weber thought that, instead of examining where the assets that functioned capitalistically come from, one must uncover how the capitalist spirit was generated. Unfortunately, this is an approach that can easily be refuted by even the most basic crash course in Marxism, where the claim was made that the capitalist spirit did not come out of the blue but was due to changed production relations. Which brings us right back to the original question—which the French school, with its assertion that structural movement is self-propelling, could not adequately answer either. Observing the unevenness of European integration and disintegration, Szűcs offered a convincing explanation. "The se-

cret of Western development lies not in Spengler's Faustian mind, not even in its 'cumulative' movements opposed to the 'cyclic' movement of Asian civilizations, but in a developmental rhythm in which cumulative changes always brought along a change in structure."<sup>1</sup> What this means is that the most important characteristic of West-European structures is "the innate ability to surpass their own limits"<sup>2</sup>. Following this train of thought, the accumulation of minute changes in group formations and mutual interests, of day-to-day experience and abiding knowledge, at a critical point, will effect change in the structure itself. This is convincing. But what were the distinct configurations and criteria that determined the basic structures of the West and accumulated to spark off qualitative change?

In this study, Szűcs, taking off from Bibó, has worked out a correlated system of criteria. Bibó believed that in Western society the integrational line of force began "from below" and in this sense was democratic, that it rested on a structure of mutual rights and responsibilities—"the small spheres of freedom" that keep each other in balance—of particular groups, individuals and communities. The balance precludes a concentration of power and wealth. This criterion itself may be subdivided. The mutuality of interdependent relationships in feudal society, in its most developed form was based on the contractual nature of vassalage and it pertained to both liege lord and vassal, landlord and peasant. It followed that land obtained or leased by feudal right was secure and permanent. Inherent in that was a tendency toward the development of private property; the regulating principles of pea-

1 ■ "Three Historical Regions of Europe" in John Keane, ed., *Civil Society and the State*, London: Verso, p. 297.

2 ■ *idem* p. 298.



sant-landlord relations became money rent and tenancy redemption. Furthermore, when the contractual forms of mutual dependency became institutionalized in developed feudal systems, the idea matured of a contractual form for the relationship between civil and political society. Even if the legal principle on the duality of power initially pertained to the rivalry between the Church (sacerdotium) and state (imperium), the foundations were immanent in the extended struggle for what Rousseau was to establish firmly as the social contract and political plurality, which was to develop with Protestantism and the Enlightenment.

Closely related to this criterion is the distinct history of Western Christianity. Unlike the Eastern churches, this development was marked by movement and a readiness for renewal. The proof lies in Western Christianity's ability to adapt, whether slowly or quickly, to periodic changes; its ongoing reforms, even the heresies and schisms during periods of rigidity and, notably, the role of Western religious orders in education and culture and their work ethic. Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are the offspring of the Western type of development and, at the same time, its tutors.

**P**rominent among the criteria stands the town, that distinctly communal organization of "the little spheres of freedom". The free royal *civitates*, and some favoured seigniorial settlements, or *oppida*, won privileges from which autonomous towns were able to evolve, as centres of administration, jurisdiction and economic functions—the most enduring legacy of the Middle Ages. Western towns as constituents of feudalism, were a political and cultural factor even by the late Middle Ages. As the Modern Age and the regular exchange of commodities with the villages

drew near, they created a thick network for the flow of capital and for the free movement of goods and labour.

In confronting these questions, Szűcs showed that in Eastern Europe, by which he meant the region in which Orthodox Christianity prevailed, the former Byzantium and what was to be the Russian expansion, these features and criteria showed only an incomplete, if any, development. No contractual form of interdependence existed; there was no duality or plurality in society of power and ideals; the constitutional element of vassalage was missing just as the Church's independence and ability to renew itself, the autonomous town, the local and localized, but growing, spheres of freedom—everything that could have nurtured a budding new structure—were absent.

The real issue for Szűcs, however, was not to show the enormous structural differences between East and West. Those who believe in a simple division accepted, sometimes even exaggerated that, it was rather to substantiate the historical existence of an intermediate, transitional region.

Szűcs began with geographical and political factors. The limes, the borders of the Roman Empire, followed the Danube, and Charlemagne's empire ended at the Ostmark and the Elbe. However, this was the region, along the Elbe, the Vistula and the Danube, in which the 7–10th centuries saw the arrival of new peoples and the formation of new states. It did not take them long to turn toward the West, take up Western Christianity, and become dependent on, or allied with, the German Empire. In the initial centuries of their existence they retained many Eastern features in their social and political structure, but from the 12th century on they gradually established and adopted the basic elements of the Western model.

In this intermediate region are found contractual forms of property and depen-



dency; feudalism developed relatively early, as did the free towns, partly with the aid of Western settlers. The Church, with its Western-style hierarchy was a predominant factor and, from the 16th century Hungary, specifically Transylvania, was the eastern bulwark of Protestantism. All this sharply severs the Carpathian Basin (and at the same time the Bohemian basin, the Polish plain, etc.) from the 'autochthonous' East-European structure. The structure of this intermediate region was, however, less developed, and somewhat warped, as compared to that of the West. In some aspects it was incomplete—the towns are an example—in others overly developed, as far as the proportion and influence of the nobility, and the role of the relatively soon established and rigidified feudal structure were concerned. The structural, socio-economic deviation from western Europe at a time when Europe's centre shifted to the Atlantic (which catastrophically coincided with the Turkish occupation of Hungary and the country's tripartition) was a setback for the whole region. In the final centuries of feudalism, the traditional structures no doubt rigidified, cities continued to decline and serfs were burdened with labour dues (robot), tithes, and their personal liberties were reduced. Even in these difficult years the Central European (Prussian-type) development resembled merely in some elements, not in essence, the Russian-type development, where serfs were regarded more like slaves. Szűcs explained Central Europe's lagging behind the West in the Modern Age not primarily by the inherent structural differences, but by the region's isolation, its geo-economic situation. Feudal Europe overcame the crisis that began in the 14th century by an expansion to the Atlantic and a successful integration in the world economy. Russia, too, had the opportunity to expand towards the east and south. In contrast, the

central region had no opportunity to either expand or participate in world trade; thus, in the 16th century, it was forced to the periphery. Fernand Braudel argues in a similar vein in his preface to the French edition of Szűcs's essay. "Les voisins ont trop d'avantage: l'Ouest s'ouvre sur l'immensité de l'Atlantique, à lui l'Amérique. L'Est s'élargit au détriment de l'épaisseur massive de l'Asie... L'Europe médian n'aura jamais cette chance inouïe de se gonfler d'espace, d'exploser hors d'elle-même. Ses voisins la cernent, l'emprisonnent."

Some years later, probably as a result of criticism and comment, Szűcs again wrote on the features marking the three regions. This time he gave greater stress to the morphological differences of the Russian East, and offered an acceptable definition for his concept of the region: "The state of a historic region depends on its structural characteristics being related." The concept of the region encompasses its social structure, its legal and educational systems, and its political structure, as well as culture in the widest sense of the term. The "regional structure" is made up of the complex combination of all these factors (Jenő Szűcs—Péter Hanák: *Európa régiói a történelemben* [The Regions of Europe in History, Budapest 1986]).

**F**ifteen years after its publication Szűcs's essay is regarded now as a seminal work of historiography. The existence of Central Europe, this "imaginary region", its specific historical features and place within Europe were defined by Szűcs with conceptual clarity grounded in meticulous scholarship which contributes to our understanding of the structure of the other two regions as well. What is equally important is that after him the denial of the existence of Central Europe as a historical region has become no more than academic hairsplitting or journalist speculation.



No less significant is the essay's political weight. Two or three regions? That was neither a merely academic nor a speculative question. Like it or not, the two-region notion supported the division of Europe into opposing blocks, underscored and armoured by historical reasoning. The three-region approach, on the other hand, provided a conceptual base for those who did not wish to be part of the Soviet block, if for no other reason than because of their own different historical traditions. Szűcs's essay made it possible for non-conformist intellectuals to defend that narrow foothold from which the hegemony of communist ideology could be opposed. This message is no less valid today, five years after Hungary's latest liberation.

A key question of our time is whether there is a need or possibility to resurrect Central Europe as an integral region, or whether the region is no more than a jumble of wrangling mini-states. For the region's existence and justification, the initiatives and failures of the 1989 *annus mirabilis* and the five years that have followed are evidence enough. However many the still-born ventures may be, the even greater number of regional and subregional initiatives show how many of today's politicians are coming to realize the viability of Central European cooperation. Western politicians, too, are aware of this century's "settlements for peace" which were gravely miscalculated. The consequences are borne especially in the central region because of the power vacuum caused by its fragmentation and its economic loss of balance.

Looking beyond the burning political issues the historian has to ask what message can be gained from studying long-term and regular changes in history. Szűcs substantiates not just the historical existence of Central Europe but that the main difference between it and the Western model was precisely the weakness of a

"society built from below." The discrepancy is there to this day. The feebleness of civil society constantly surfaces in public life in issues, as the country is undergoing the conflict-ridden process of transformation. Integration following the laws immanent in European development must begin—or perhaps continue—at the regional and subregional levels, in the deep layers of society, and in mentality.

Here are the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia, the former Czechoslovakia, and the whole fragmented region. What is our intention concerning Central Europe and integration? With no strong master, and no dominating power in sight, the whole region is disintegrating. Given such pessimism, a reading of Szűcs offers plenty of scope for discussion. Take for example the concept of cumulative configurations sparking off qualitative changes in structure. In the history of Europe integrations that were forced and inorganic, or outdated and dysfunctional, were followed by disintegration, and then new integrations based on new structures. Szűcs's arguments can form the basis of reasoned optimism. Only converging new formations, new techniques and new experience can provide Europe with that cumulative configuration. But where in Central and Eastern Europe today do we find a new readiness, a new sort of innovation and new experiences? In the past half-century our region has gone through a process of "de-cumulation", which brought to the surface old structures and stale ideas.

Everything points to the fact that Europe must be relearned: its institutions and its peculiarities: its history. We must acquire not only the ideological but the "objective techniques" of democracy that lodge in the fabric of society; how to lay the foundations for institutional self-government; the rules for building from below; tolerance; and last but not least, "the revolution of human dignity." ■



# Hungary on the Threshold of War

György Barcza: *Diplomata-émlékeim 1911–1945. Magyarország volt vatikáni és londoni követének emlékirataiból.* (From the Memoirs of Hungary's Former Envoy to the Vatican and London. 1911–45). Extra Hungaricum Series. Európa Publishers, Budapest, 1994, 2 Vols., 586 and 430 pp.

**"M**y dear friend, I am glad to have the opportunity of sending you a few lines through safe channels, as it is so difficult to keep you *am Laufenden* on confidential matters and the state of affairs," thus begins a letter written by the Prime Minister, Count Pál Teleki, on 12 March 1941 to his envoy in London, György Barcza. "I am aware that it is not only strangers but also people like you, cut off as you are from home, who may look in doubt upon some of our actions, not comprehending their background and context. On the other hand, you see the admirable conduct of the British and the chance of their victory, and you may be worried about the fate of this poor country of ours.—Utassy [the Hungarian military attaché in London who had returned to London from Budapest a couple of days earlier] has seen much. He could see that we are still alive and the Castle of Buda stands as yet. I told him many things so that he could pass them on to you.—The behaviour of the Balkan states will give the people over there some food for thought, I believe. And they pampered these countries and supported them against us up to the last minute (last year)! The difference between

Romania and us is that Romania will have different sets of people—Nazi, Communist, democrat or freemason, depending on the season, and they will replace one with another with ease, always *mit vollen Segeln*. We follow a straight line—a Hungarian one. We are not 'friends' of this sort or that in the first place (*dazu sind wir uns zu gut*), and we talk straight. This nation has already undergone a lot. That is why I remain where I am. I am not taken in, and I can wait.—There is a new, difficult situation emerging now. The Axis, especially the Germans, are lodged in every Balkan state, and they will follow the principle of *divide et impera*, I believe. Everywhere they will demand and desire the same things in economic, minority and perhaps political areas, and then demand the greatest concessions they can manage from each one after the other, thus they will advance step by step.—For us, the little ones, the quicker the war is over the better. We shall not be able to stand it for long—no longer than a year or two, I mean. The large should think of the fate of the small too!—It would be good to make the British understand that they should not reproach others for not resisting. Why have they not brought the small states of the Danube basin and the Balkans closer to each other? Had they done so, they could have formed a self-defending bloc here. But keeping up the conflict to the last minute and demanding resistance from each individually, is sheer nonsense... Now the Germans will impose order here, and yet it had been in their hands. The Little Entente construction was not resistant, but this they would not notice even when the cracks were showing all over. Now with the Yugo-Hungarian pact [An

## Miklós Szinai

*is a historian specializing in twentieth-century Hungarian history.*

*For many years he was Senior Archivist at the Hungarian National Archives and spent eight years at the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna.*



agreement of eternal friendship had been signed with Yugoslavia, the only free neighbour Hungary now had, on 12 December 1940.] we tried to make up for what the Western powers omitted to do.— I do hope that this and Utassy's communication will help you see clearly and you will have the chance to inform a few men accordingly. We do not request anything from anyone! We did not ask the Germans anything, nor shall we do so. Of course not from the British either. All we hope for is sober understanding, preferably now, or from the next generation at least. Ours is not an ephemeral nation, and they are slow on the uptake.—I hope you will be able to cope with things, considering how splendidly you have done so far in this terribly difficult situation and job. It is not easy here, either, believe me... especially for me, struggling, mulling, worrying as I have been—yet also trustful, and I am worried not so much for others as for us Hungarians... I ask you to communicate my words to the gentlemen on your staff, even if not verbatim. It could turn out that all British legations are closed in this corner of the world, including the one in Budapest, and contacts might be broken to our regret, and then I might send one of them over to Washington by way of reinforcement... I am sure you have your lot to bear. I do not envy you. Nor should you envy me!—My troubles are made worse by my wife's illness; she has been very unwell with her heart and liver for three months now, ever since she had pneumonia at Christmas, and she has become incredibly weak.—However, this letter is long enough, and Utassy will tell you much that will, I hope, enable you to pass on some useful information.

Yours cordially, your old friend, Pali Teleki."

This document was only published in Hungary in 1994 as part of the two volumes of memoirs by György Barcza (1888–1961), Hungary's last envoy to London (1938–41) before relations were severed in the war. The letter was highly confidential; not only did the Prime Minister write it in his own hand, so that even his secretary should not know about it, it was also dispatched via the British legation in Budapest, rather than

through a Hungarian diplomatic courier. The importance of the document is highlighted, beyond the person of the sender and the addressee, by the fact that this was the last message Count Pál Teleki, Prime Minister of Hungary, sent to the West, to the free world. In the early hours of 3 April 1941, Pál Teleki took his own life. He was not willing to give in to Hitler's demand and join in the Nazi attack on Yugoslavia, the country with which, barely three months earlier, he had concluded a treaty of eternal friendship. Teleki's self-sacrifice showed the world how Hungary was suffering under brutal Nazi pressure in an Europe dominated by Germany.

**G**yörgy Barcza studied at the famous Konsularakademie in Vienna. His career as a diplomat began before the Great War, in 1911, on the Ballhausplatz in Vienna, the joint foreign ministry of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the war he continued to serve in the Hungarian diplomatic corps, with postings in Athens, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Vienna, and the Vatican. From the autumn of 1924 to August 1927 he headed the Political Department, the most important section, in the Foreign Ministry. Subsequently he was posted to the Vatican for a second time, this time as head of mission, spending eleven years accredited to the Holy See. With his posting to London in the summer of 1938, Hungary was represented there by its most eminent diplomat. After Teleki's death, Barcza, then aged 53, returned to Budapest in April 1941, and immediately applied for retirement. He was not willing to serve the Bárdossy government that was formed after Teleki's death and made massive concessions to the Germans. However, in March 1943 he once again undertook an important task, this time in Switzerland. The occupation of Hungary by the Germans on 19 March 1944 put an end to it. Barcza still did not give up the strug-



gle. Under his leadership, the *Comité des Ministres*, made up of heads of mission and other diplomats who refused to serve Sztójay's puppet government, was formed. As Barcza put it, their aim was "to act as an informative and advisory body abroad and, as far as was possible, inside the country, alongside the Allies and with their support, and to take part in a patriotic and democratic resistance..." Barcza clearly pointed out: "When setting up a patriotic group of free Hungarian diplomats, I was fully aware that this organization could only be useful if Hungary were not to come under complete Russian military occupation and political domination." The last sentence in this section of the memoirs reveals Barcza's credo: "We freedom-loving democratic Hungarians did not want to be the servants or satellites of a National-Socialist Germany, similarly, we could not become satellites to any other power, including communist Russia" (Vol. 2, pp. 133, 135–136).

Barcza ends his memoirs with the year 1946. After 1945 he did not return to Hungary. He died in Australia on 28 April 1961.

Even a sketchy knowledge of György Barcza's career highlights the importance of his memoirs. In them a key witness to the most critical period of Hungary's history in this century (1938–45) tells his story. The authenticity of what he says and the value of the work as a historical source is enhanced by Barcza's vivid personality, rich diplomatic experience, his erudition, and, not least, by his style.

After the Second World War, Barcza tried to publish his memoirs in English or French, but these attempts, made over a few years, failed. In the Hungary of the Rákosi dictatorship and the Kádár regime, a work like his, reflecting historical truth, from the viewpoint of both the anti-communist and the anti-Nazi elite, could not be published. Over the years, however, excerpts appeared in various émigré publications abroad and

in specialist journals in Hungary. Such was its reputation that, by the time it appeared as a book in Hungary, fifty years after its writing, Barcza's work had become almost legendary.

Neither historians, nor the general reader will be disappointed in their expectations. Careful and high-standard editing also contributes to the success of this Hungarian edition. The two volumes are based on some 1100 pages of typescript in the possession of the author's granddaughter, Mrs Maya Cranitch, who lives in Australia. Given the restrictions of space, the editors had to sift through a vast quantity of material. The result meets the highest scholarly standards. There is no reason to doubt that, in both content and spirit, this two-volume compilation is a faithful mirror of the original manuscript. The text of the memoirs is complemented in places by relevant passages from Barcza's diary, their provenance carefully indicated. The apparatus of the book has six parts. A summary of the author's career (1) is followed by an account by John Lukacs, the American historian, of the documents left behind by Barcza (2), which are held by the library and archives of the Hoover Institute at Stanford University, California. The information he provides on the diary Barcza kept for 33 years, between 1914 and 31 December 1947, is of especial value. This is the source for the excerpts complementing the text of the memoirs. "All in all, the value of [Barcza's] diary and memoirs is inestimable," Lukacs writes. An important complementary to the memoirs is a selection, in two parts, of documents connected with Barcza's activity. One contains diplomatic documents (3), from Barcza's active period, between 24 September 1938 and 28 July 1944, the final and most remarkable item being Barcza's list of the 37 dissident Hungarian diplomats who formed the *Comité des Ministres*. A second group contains notes, articles and speeches by the



author (4) during his years in exile (1945–61). Notes, running to some 100 pages, are provided directly after the memoirs in both volumes (5), and the second ends with an Index of Names (6).

The most interesting chapters are those in which Barcza records his work in London (1938–41), his subsequent return to Budapest and Hungarian internal affairs (1942–43), and relates his new mission to Switzerland as a sort of personal envoy of the conservative forces behind Prime Minister Kállay. Given the position of the author, the reader is able to follow the diplomatic efforts made to maintain contacts with the British, Hungary's entry into the war in 1941 and Teleki's suicide as related by Barcza. From 1942 on, important information is given on a foreign policy that aimed at extricating the country from the war, and on the fatal grip in which the alliance with Germany held the country.

One of the reasons Barcza's work is significant is that alongside with a sharp criticism of the sins and mistakes committed by Hungarian governments, and perhaps because of it, it offers a body of information on which a more realistic assessment of Hungary's policies during the Second World War can be based.

**I**n the struggle of the Western powers and Germany, and in that between Russia and Germany, Hungary did not have a great deal of leeway or scope for action. As it had so many times before, the country again found itself in the path of armies. Situated at the centre of East Central Europe, it was an obstacle in the way of Germany's expansion eastward. If Britain and her allies could not defend Austria, nor Czechoslovakia, which was their ally, Hungary could hardly count on any support from the Western powers against German policies. Barcza clearly saw this. "Britain's *désintéressement* in European affairs lasted until the spring of 1940,

in fact until Churchill came to power," he writes (Vol. 1, p. 351). Soon after the *Anschluss* (13 March 1938), when Hitler's Germany occupied Austria, Béla Imrédy, who had become Prime Minister in May 1938, turned to the Governor of the Bank of England. (Imrédy had earlier been chairman of the Hungarian National Bank). In a letter, he requested the Governor to give him his sincere opinion of Britain's policies toward East Central Europe and Hungary. The reply was one of total *désintéressement*—the Governor even used the same word as Barcza did. The appraisal by Barcza of British policies was thus fully confirmed by other sources. Barcza saw this British attitude as set within the framework of Chamberlain's policy of appeasement, and he was right. He recorded that with Churchill's coming to power, the British Empire changed this policy. However, by the time Churchill took over (10 May 1940), the situation on the Continent had radically altered. The German offensive in the West had started on 10 May, and by 22 June France had capitulated. Germany controlled the entire coastline of Western Europe, from the North Sea to the Bay of Biscay. By the summer of 1940, Hitler had the whole of Europe under his control.

Despite the negative communications received from Britain, a delegation of the Hungarian government, on a visit to Hitler in August 1938, refused a German request to provoke Czechoslovakia, thereby creating an excuse for the Nazis to launch war and occupy that country. During the very days when she was thus negotiating with the Germans in Bled, Hungary signed an important agreement with the Little Entente states that were still opposing the Germans. This was a veritable challenge to Germany and was to demonstrate Hungarian sovereignty *vis-à-vis* German aspirations. Hitler never forgave the Hungarians for this step. It caused, three months later, the fall of Foreign Minister Kánya, as it was he who



represented this policy. One year later, after war broke out, during the first days of the German attack on Poland, the Germans demanded free passage for their troops through Northern Hungary, to outflank and prevent a withdrawal of Polish forces. The Teleki government categorically refused to comply with this "request" from Ribbentrop. The Hungarian government even went the other way, offering shelter to fleeing Poles. Polish soldiers were permitted to cross the Hungarian border; they reached the Allies through Hungarian territory. These refugees were later to join the Polish Corps which fought under General Anders.

Beyond geographical reasons, there was one factor among those limiting the Hungarian government's scope for action between 1938–40 which was of decisive importance. This was the issue of territorial revision. Of all the countries affected by the peace treaties that followed the Great War, Hungary had been set the worst terms. The peace treaty the Western powers signed with Hungary in Trianon was much severer even than that made with Germany at Versailles. Hungary lost two-thirds of her territory, and one-third of its ethnic Hungarian nationals, three million in all found themselves attached to neighbouring countries. Revision policy is the name given in Hungary to that policy aimed at achieving a revision of the Paris peace treaties, especially of Trianon. After Hitler came to power, Nazi Germany offered significant support, turning it to serve its own goal of breaking up the post-Great War system as well as its goal of expansion towards the east. Revisionist propaganda the Hungarian governments carried on for twenty years during the Horthy regime divested the Hungarian political leadership of their freedom of action just at the time, between 1938 and 1940, when they needed it most. Hungarian governments became the prisoners of their own revisionist policies.

In December 1939, Barcza returned to Budapest on a visit. He describes his talk with the prime minister, Pál Teleki:

"Revision, and I'm saying this only to you, is the greatest danger threatening us," these were Teleki's words, "and I cannot do anything against it because that would be my undoing. Public opinion here has become crazed. Everything back! [The slogan on all posters at the time.] No matter by what means, from whom, at what cost... the soldiers want to fight alongside the Germans, and the Regent heeds them; revisionism and the army are now one and the same, and they will lead us into trouble." "And the Regent?" I interrupted. "The Regent," Teleki said, looking at me over his large black-rimmed spectacles, "gives credence to the soldiers." "And you?" "I shall fight as long as I can against preposterousness, I shall defend our honour, I won't sell the nation and the country, and if I cannot restrain them I'll shoot myself..." He then carried on: "Please try to make the British understand our situation. I know how difficult, almost impossible it is to explain ... the way things are here, to realistic, fair-minded people as the British are. But they have to understand how this country is caught and struggling between ever increasing German pressure and threats on one hand and its own undeniably rightful national aspirations on the other." (Vol. 1, pp. 445–47)

For those who have some idea of contemporary Hungary and who know the role that Teleki, a leading politician during the Horthy era, played in shaping Hungary's revisionist policies, such words coming from Teleki, the Prime Minister, on the dangers of revisionism, may sound incredible. After the Western powers gave in to Hitler at Munich (20 September 1938), Ribbentrop and Ciano, the German and Italian foreign ministers functioning as a "court of arbitration, returned the southern, predominantly Hungarian-populated territories of today's Slovakia to Hungary (First Vienna Award) in the autumn of 1938. Again, on following German-Italian arbitration, Northern Tran-



sylvania and the Szeklerland was returned from Romania on 31 August 1940. A few days after this, the Second Vienna Award, Barcza again recalls Teleki's words on revision.

To refuse the parts of Transylvania offered to us would have been the equivalent of denying twenty years of the country's revisionist past. Teleki... had earlier said to me that, incredible as it might sound, revisionism would be Hungary's undoing. Saying that aloud would have been tantamount to capital treason at the time, but I understood what Teleki meant... Through the two Vienna Awards, Hitler returned Upper Hungary [today's southern Slovakia] and the better part of Transylvania to us as a gift, but through this we exposed ourselves to the Germans ... We have been caught in the Germans' net ... (Vol. 1. p. 477).

Barcza's whole career, his impeccable behaviour and integrity warrant the truth of his account of a decisive issue at a crucial time like this. The views Teleki expressed are substantiated by other sources as well. The Hungarian public at the time, in the euphoric days that followed the Second Vienna Award, was unaware that on that very day Teleki handed in his resignation to Horthy. The latter did not accept it. The Prime Minister's motives are apparent from his above-quoted words to Barcza. Moreover, the day after he submitted his resignation, Teleki wrote a long letter and memorandum to Horthy in explanation of his decision, which is known through another source. (Miklós Szinai-László Szűcs, eds.: *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*. [The Secret Papers of Miklós Horthy. p. 239] Magyar Országos Levéltár, Budapest, 1965. 3. kiadás.) "I want to point out," he writes, "that we are drifting from the base of legality towards military dictatorship of a certain kind, one that is exerted not from above, but from below.

Yesterday I pointed out [he writes to Horthy], in possession of the patient experience and good consideration of 18 months and a full sense of my responsibility, that in Hungary

today there are two administrations and two governments at work. One is legitimate; the other is a military government that extends to almost all branches of public administration, the workings of which the legitimate government can neither survey nor control. (In: *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*. [The Secret Papers of Miklós Horthy, p. 239]).

Teleki saw the situation that had evolved and the reasons for it absolutely clearly. In his letter he places the beginning of the soldiers' involvement in civil administration in Gyula Gömbös's term of office (1932–36). (Gömbös attempted to introduce a fascist system in Hungary; this was contained primarily by Count István Bethlen, who had been prime minister between 1921 and 1931.) He senses the grave danger in the militarization of the country. "The number of war factories is set at 1,152, far higher than is justified," he wrote (p. 241). He also puts a complaint to the Regent on the High Command of the army carrying on a foreign policy totally independent of the Foreign Ministry and the government. He describes the antecedents of the Second Vienna Award: "The German minister [in Budapest] Erdmannsdorf visited Csáky [then foreign minister], and told him that the [Hungarian] Chief of Staff made a statement in front of Fütterer, the [German] military attaché [in Budapest] to the effect that we desire arbitration. And this happened at a time when *all the policies of the government* were based on the refusal of arbitration on our part, as it did not serve our interests..." [My italics.] (p. 248).

Teleki's letter clearly reveals where Horthy stood in the conflict between the civil administration and the military. "Whenever I tried to warn you," Teleki writes, "I have never been given credence over the soldiers, more precisely over the Chief of Staff." (p. 238). The picture emerging from Barcza's conversation with Teleki and from Teleki's letter is clear: Hungary's policies before and



during the Second World War were determined, on decisive issues and at decisive moments, not by the government, which was accountable to Parliament, but by Horthy, the head of state, and the High Command of the Army acting hand in glove.

**B**arcza, this reliable key witness of the period, also describes the circumstances of Teleki's death, as he learnt them from members of Teleki's family and from trusted friends after his return. At the end of March, Hitler

called on Horthy to provide not only free passage and all support for the German troops marching against Yugoslavia, but also to join in the military operation. The Regent immediately summoned Teleki, who protested against this most emphatically. He argued that by actively entering the war on the German side, we would give up the passive behaviour we had displayed up to then and would inevitably set out on the way leading to eventual defeat together with the Germans. He also pointed out that an attack against Yugoslavia on our part would be a shameful act after the treaty of friendship signed recently, and he would never be willing to accept it. Teleki reminded Horthy of the telegrammes and communications I had sent him of my talks with Mr Eden, Mr Cadogan and other British officials. They had openly told me, as early as the winter of 1940 and on several occasions later, that such a move would incur the breaking off of diplomatic relations on their part, and maybe a declaration of war. ... Horthy was outraged on hearing Teleki's reservations supported by my reports and telegrammes, not only at Teleki but at myself also. Nevertheless, he promised not to mobilize for the time being, and seemingly bowed to his arguments.

Subsequently the Regent summoned to him other politicians, such as Bethlen and Kánya ... and others who held no office at the time. They all expressed views similar to Teleki's. The Regent then spoke to Bárdossy [then foreign minister] and various confidants from the army, especially Werth, the Chief of Staff, who had of course given him advice radically opposed to ours...

Teleki made up his mind to commit suicide when, on the evening of 2 April, beside his wife's sick-bed, he learnt from a telephone communication that Horthy had broken the promise he had made to him and ordered mobilization for a joint attack against Yugoslavia with the Germans... His wife and his daughter, Maya Teleki, Mrs Zichy, suddenly saw him go dead white and shout into the receiver, "so he's done it, he's done it all the same!" He then slammed down the receiver and left hurriedly... Horthy obviously had made the decision under the influence of his military advisers ... breaking the promise he had given to Teleki, and not even consulting him beforehand...

The next day, when Horthy paid a visit of condolence to Teleki's widow, Hanna Teleki and her children received him in the sanatorium so coldly that they did not even offer their hands to him... she, mortally ill, knew that the final push towards her husband's suicide was given by Horthy's treachery as head of state and as a friend. (Vol. 1, pp. 492-94.)

On the day following Teleki's death, Horthy nominated Foreign Minister László Bárdossy as prime minister. As Croatia, which had till then been part of Yugoslavia, declared its independence, he ordered the Hungarian army to join in the operations against Yugoslavia on Germany's side. On 7 April 1941, Britain broke off diplomatic relations with Hungary. In all probability the fact that Britain did not declare war on Hungary at this point can be put down to Barcza's work in London.

**T**eleki's death severely weakened the position of the anti-German political forces in Hungary. In the months following Teleki's tragedy and during the term of his government, barely a year, Bárdossy committed one fatal error after another. Hungarian units participated in the war against the Soviet Union on the side of Nazi Germany after the attack on Yugoslavia, from the end of June 1941 onwards. By the end of that year the country was at war with Britain and the United States as well. It was



only after Bárdossy's fall, when Miklós Kállay became prime minister on 9 March 1941, that Bethlen and the conservative political forces gathering around him regained some influence on the government. Though the Germans kept increasing pressure on the Hungarian government, Kállay made serious efforts to eliminate the bankrupt policies inherited from the Bárdossy era. For obvious reasons in secret, he tried to resume contacts with the Western powers in order to free Hungary of the shackles of the German alliance.

In the context of such policies, Barcza was given a sensitive and important task again, though to maintain discretion he was not given a formal official assignment. Through his earlier good contacts, he was to rebuild the Hungarian government's connections with Britain and the United States. As it unfolds from his memoirs, during this mission of his in Switzerland he acted as a personal commissioner of the conservative politicians behind the Kállay government, led by István Bethlen. Barcza gives an account of a conversation he had with Prime Minister Kállay shortly before his departure for Switzerland in March 1943.

"The Prime Minister, whom I had known for a long time, bitterly complained about his plight," he writes, "which was caused primarily by the military clique, domineering and craving for power. 'Our soldiers have laid their hands on everything,' he said. 'I am the Prime Minister, yet they govern from behind Horthy's back... The Germans meddle in everything, I am surrounded by their spies, who immediately report everything to the German envoy, Jagow, and the High Command. They then run to the Regent and... achieve whatever goal they desire.' " (Vol. 2, p. 71.) The situation depicted and the complaint itself are eerily identical with those under Teleki's premiership. Given such circumstances, what were the chances for Hungary to carry

on an independent, anti-Nazi policy in 1943-44?

As Barcza stated several times in his memoirs, Hungarian public opinion was against a pro-German policy. Despite the Horthy regime being antidemocratic in several respects, liberal parties existed in Hungary during the Second World War; there was a trade union movement; the Social Democratic Party functioned legally, albeit under restrictions. In a Europe dominated by Germany, Hungary was the only country, apart from the neutral states, where a Social Democratic daily paper, (*Népszava*), appeared as long as until 19 March 1944, the date of the German occupation of the country. The pro-Nazi, extreme right parties gathered strength only in 1938-39, when, after the *Anschluss*, Hungary found the Third Reich alongside the whole length of her western borders and Reichmarks began pouring into the coffers of the pro-Nazi parties. But in 1940 the decline of the far right had already set in. By 1943 their influence decreased to a point where it was hardly measurable as a percentage, as a contemporary nationwide survey, commissioned by the Hungarian Ministry of Internal Affairs, shows. The notorious agent who had prepared the way for the various acts of German aggression in Central Europe (Austria in 1938; Danzig in 1939; Yugoslavia in 1941), Edmund Veessenmayer, paid two visits to Hungary in 1943, intent on bringing about the fall of the Kállay government with the aid of the parties of the far right. His attempts met with total failure. As he complained in no less than five different sections of the two reports he made on his missions, the mass influence of the far right parties in Hungary had shrunk to a level of insignificance. Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944 not because the position of the Germans was strong in the country, but because it proved to be especially weak in this decisive phase of the war.



In the specific circumstances of Hungary, however, the power of the parties was of less weight. The influence of pro-Nazi forces was strengthened especially by a reactionary civil service and, as we have seen, the military High Command. The extreme right-wing and pro-German High Command enjoyed a position of privilege under Horthy, and through this they could assert their influence, often in issues of decisive import for the fate of the country.

Though the conservative political elite led by István Bethlen committed many mistakes and even sins, they still represented the largest force in the country lined up against the pro-German far right. Hungary had had three governments between 1921 and 1936. Between 1936 and 1944, however, eight governments followed one another, four in 1944 alone. One of the things this clearly shows is the precarious circumstances in which the conservatives had to fight. Two of the eight governments, those of Sztójay and Szálasi, were helped to power by German arms. The other six heads of government were all the candidates of the conservatives. Three of them, Darányi, Imrédy and Bárdossy, joined the pro-Nazi camp under the combined pressure of the far right inside the country and of the Germans outside. The other three premiers, who did not give in, became in one way or another victims of Nazi aggression. Teleki committed suicide; Kállay and Lakatos (in 1944) were removed by German armed power, and arrested. In addition the Germans took another former prime minister (1917), Count Móric Esterházy, captive and issued a warrant against Count István Bethlen. In the course of these struggles, the Hungarian conservatives were in power five

times between 1936 and 1944. In the list of the victims, the five Hungarian prime ministers are joined by

- two ministers of the interior (Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer and Miklós Bonczos);
- three foreign ministers (Gusztáv Gratz, Kálmán Kánya and Gusztáv Hennyey);
- two ministers of defence (Vilmos Nagybaczoni Nagy and Lajos Csataj; the latter's wife committed suicide);
- the chairman of the Curia, the Hungarian Supreme Court (Géza Töreký);
- three chiefs of counterintelligence (Rudolf Andorka, Gyula Kádár and István Újszászy);
- the commander of the Budapest army corps, Szilárd Bakay;
- the chief of the Cabinet Office, Gyula Ambrózy;
- the chief of the Regent's Military Office, Antal Vattay;
- the Regent's first aide-de-camp, Gyula Tost (committed suicide);
- and finally, on 15 October 1944, the Regent's son, Miklós Horthy Jr., was seized by the Germans. The next day the Regent himself and his whole family, including his wife, grandchildren and his daughter-in-law, who was a leading figure of the opposition, were taken into custody.

After the German occupation on 19 March 1944, some two hundred members of the Hungarian aristocracy were added to these. The Germans arrested them all and sent them to concentration camps in Mauthausen and Dachau.

This is indeed what Barcza's life and work stands for: the conservative national opposition and the silence that has surrounded their fate for fifty years. ■



# Compassion and the Atheist

George Klein: *The Atheist and the Holy City. Encounters and Reflections*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1990, 223 pp. • *Pieta*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1992, 297 pp.

Unlike other well-known Hungarian-born scientists, Eugene P. Wigner and George Hevesy, George Klein is not a Nobel laureate. When it came to Nobel Prizes he was never on the receiving end; he gave them. His name does not call to mind any single major discovery, of the sort that changed the course of the history of science, as is the case with John von Neumann or Dennis Gábor. He did not dabble in politics like Leo Szilárd or Edward Teller. Klein is simply one of the world's best-known and most respected, names in the field of immunology. He is a source of national pride among his fellow countrymen in Sweden, his chosen home, a well-known public figure and, for many years, has been an influential member of the Nobel Committee. His lectures at international conferences have always drawn large crowds, Swedish radio and television constantly vie to interview him, and his books make news in the Swedish book market. He is an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and a devoted patron of research in Hungary. Many

young scientists from Hungary have worked and studied in his Stockholm lab, through which the opportunity to come one step closer to international recognition was offered. To these, the radiant personality, the exceptional erudition, a renaissance scope of learning yet modern sensibility of this workaholic have been a personal experience. To the average reader of *The Atheist and the Holy City*, knowledge of him will only be indirect. The individual chapters in *The Atheist*, just as those in his book *Pieta*, are very different in their character, their importance, and their depth. Some of them are simply popular science and at that, are exceptionally good. Klein's thorough knowledge of his subject and his clear language make such subjects as AIDS, cancer, the nature of viruses, or biological individualism, interesting to the inquisitive layman. While these chapters are among the best in the genre there are other authors who can match that. But these chapters do not make either book.

Some of the other writings are more general in their topic. They are from the pen of a widely read and travelled scientist, who keeps his eyes open and has much of interest to say about the famous places and people he comes into contact with. These pieces, too, are certain to hold their readers' attention. But they are not the real attraction.

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**Pál Venetianer**

is Director General of the Szeged  
Biological Research Centre  
of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.



For me the most exciting and original sections in these volumes are those that are about the moral conflicts a man of science must face. This is also true because interesting and often tragic features of the minds of scientists are much less well known or empathized with than those of politicians or artists. Like Leo Szilárd, an exceptionally interesting personality. Klein, who was close to him and active in steering his fate, has things to reveal about Szilárd that no one else can. First-hand knowledge is indispensable to credibility here because the story itself is incredible. In "Szilárd Plays Chess with Death" the physicist finds a treatment for his own cancer that no one has ever used before and which doctors consider downright suicidal. Szilárd, however, is unique, a curiosity who personifies a certain type of scientist in the extreme, verging on the comic.

But the story of Sol Spiegelman ("Are Scientists Creative?") stands as a paradigm, reaching far beyond the mere tale. The essay tries to get to the bottom of what makes this man tick, while at the same time uncovering the possible, perhaps even typical, tragedy that can befall a scientist of genius. The true scientist confronts God in a high-stake game. (Materialists may substitute Nature for God, though to a scientist there is no real difference. God is not a gambler—He does not change the rules in mid-game.) The aim is to find out the rules devised by the opponent. The scientist's strategy is to guess what the rules are by relying on his creative imagination, his intuition, and if he wins (meaning that experiment verifies his hypothesis) he considers the rules valid (that is, he has uncovered one of the laws of nature). A researcher is thus successful if he is able to find a solution verified by observation or experiment. But Spiegelman, the essay's hero, poses a question: why does this approach require

more genius than the creation of countless other possible rules which might be much more imaginative? Of course with these there is a small problem: they do not stand up to the experiment, that is, to reality. For Spiegelman the conclusion is depressing enough: a good scientist is not creative—that is for the charlatans, who are not bothered by facts and can thus allow their imagination to take wing. (Klein's sarcastic example for this kind of charlatan is a famous compatriot, Arthur Koestler.)

Naturally, Klein disagrees with his hero, Spiegelman. But he understands him. He knows that his friend was a man of exceptional talent, a creative scientist, who, in the course of his career, proposed countless original hypotheses in almost every area of molecular biology and inspired many of his fellow scientists. (The writer of this review knew Spiegelman, and can testify to how inspiring he could be.) The only complication was that his hypotheses proved false. It is his intellectual tragedy that when he finally attained the recognition he so craved, it was for an idea concerning methodology which he himself considered insignificant and, indeed disdained, but which has since become so important that he would surely have been awarded the Nobel Prize had he lived only a few years longer. What lesson is to be learned? Klein's punch-line is an anecdote about Louis Pasteur. Every afternoon, at exactly the same time, the aged Pasteur would stroll for half an hour, back and forth in the yard of his institute. No one was allowed to approach him, his colleagues observed him from afar, moving his lips as he mumbled to himself. On one occasion they got a foreign guest to hide nearby to listen to what the old man was saying. What Pasteur was mumbling for half an hour every day was simply this: *Il faut travailler.*



**M**orality and conscience are ever recurring themes in these essays, either those of scientists in general, or of the scientist and individual George Klein in particular. He is honest sometimes to the point of being embarrassing when he confesses to his little human vices—which in hindsight he disdains—or the major conflicts that confronted him as a young man, like the suicide of his cousin and close friend, for which he holds himself responsible. This deeply moral man is a convinced and deliberate atheist. He is that out of pessimism, and as an article of faith. To him man's belief in God is a weakness stemming from his inability to face the tragedy of life, it is an escape into a mindset where desires are not denied fulfillment. Klein considers that false and cowardly, and poses egocentric altruism as an alternative. He believes that with his intellect and collective foresight, man is capable of overcoming the egotism commanded by his genes. There is no other hope.

Separate mention must be given to the chapter on the poet Attila József, since it differs in subject and character from all the others. For the Hungarian reader the essay fails, of course, to offer a great deal that is new. But the book was originally written in Swedish and subsequently published in English, and for this reason it is impossible to read the essay without feeling deeply moved. For Klein this poet has meant so much that he goes to great lengths to overcome a generally poor translation and to convey the beauty of the poem "Tiszta szívvel" (With a Pure Heart). He attaches the original with the translation, pointing out how Hungarian "gy" or "cs" is pronounced. He explains the poetic power and rhythmic precision of "A hetedik" (The Seventh), and "Magány" (Solitude), which he designates as the finest poem written

on hatred. We know from a newspaper interview Klein gave that he never forgave his home country for what happened to him and his parents in 1944. Questioned on his identity, he answered that he was not a Hungarian, but a Hungarian-born and Hungarian-speaking citizen of the world, of Jewish parentage, who lived in Sweden. This citizen of the world dedicated *Pieta* to the memory of his father's home village of Kászony: "To the memory of Kászony, my father's village—gone forever but ever present, more powerful than the smells and tastes of the past, warmer than love and, unlike pain, unfading." In his most lyrical and forthright essay, Klein tells how in August 1944, when he considered himself a marked man (having read the Auschwitz report and thus, unlike most of his companions in fate, he had no illusions about the future; he also guessed though did not yet know for certain that all the members of his family had perished in the gas chamber) he strolled through the blacked out streets of Budapest, immeasurably happy. He was reciting Attila József's "Hazám" (My Country), which includes the lines: "Dear country, hold me not a stranger" and then, "Let Magyars know their true devotion / and not the German regimen".\* He comments:

German colony, I thought in 1944, sitting between the jaws of death. Attila, the prophetic poet then already dead for seven years, saw what was to come long before anyone else. The dreamy jungle of his soul spoke to me as I was on my way home, filled with the happiness of love and the bottomless despair of today and tomorrow. His hopeful spirit spoke to me, I who lacked all illusions. The desperate poet, in the process of losing his final grip, was crying out his encouragement to me, who had already lost my grip but nevertheless was going to survive and attain the freedom that the poet had sought in vain.

\* ■ Translated by Zsuzsanna Ozsváth and Frederick Turner (Ed.'s note)



The dead poet, helpless as a small child, sustained the survivors and will continue to sustain them for many generations to come—regardless of age, social climate, or political system—through the paradoxes of human existence. This is how I remember Attila, as

he goes over the horizon to stay forever with us who understand his words.

He felt that nothing could have expressed what he felt any more perfectly. 21



*Jacopo Tintoretto: Portrait of a Venetian Nobleman, about 1563-65.*

*Oil on canvas, 117.5 x 95 cm. A major work, probably representing Battista Morosini. Hatvany Collection. Deposited by the owners at the Hungarian General Credit Bank.*

*Now in the Grabar Institute for Restoration, Moscow.*



Sándor Radnóti

# The Book of Immaturity

István Eörsi: *Időm Gombrowiczsal*. (My Time with Gombrowicz).

Pesti Szalon, 1994, 386 pp.

István Eörsi (b. 1931) is an *enfant terrible* of literature, who writes poetry, drama, short stories and journalism all with the intention of shocking readers. A former communist and a disciple of the philosopher György Lukács (he translated Lukács's works into Hungarian), Eörsi took the side of the rebels in the revolution of 1956, and was imprisoned afterwards. Later, he wanted no part of the compromise—motivated by resignation, pragmatism and instinct for survival—the majority of intellectuals entered into with the Kádár regime, including even many of his former fellow prisoners. He found himself continuously balancing on the edge of legality, with his works frequently censored and banned. In the 1980s, when the democratic civil-rights opposition began to organize, Eörsi published a great deal in samizdat. In 1986, his apartment was the scene of an illegal international conference commemorating the 30th anniversary of the revolution. His intransigence, his mercilessly critical spirit and, last but not least,

his highly unusual and offensive unwillingness to complain about his being excluded, making it impossible to appease him with a few pennies' worth of sympathy, antagonized most of his fellow writers. His literary tastes and work also created aversion: his grimacing irony seemed too frivolous compared to the traditional pathos of Hungarian literature, and his directness, political message, didactic quality and his earthbound material was hardly suited to the apolitical norm, sanctioned, in part, by genuinely important works, and also as a result of an opportunism that can be easily understood. Eörsi, when he was finally allowed to travel, began to spend more and more time in West Germany and in West Berlin, where his leftist sentiments and his ironic and *sachlich* poetic manner, inspired by Heine and Brecht, found a climate more comfortable than in Hungary.

Internal exile and his semi-exile in Germany alienated Eörsi from both the political regime and those active in the literary world in this country. His reintegration into these worlds, therefore, was neither natural nor self-evident after the change in the political system. It is not in Hungary that he sought kindred spirits. From September 1990 to February 1994 he read and commented on the journals of Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969). This is what gave rise to a double journal, a double

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**Sándor Radnóti,**

*a critic, teaches aesthetics at Eötvös  
University in Budapest.*

*His forthcoming book is on the problems  
of the fake in art.*



portrait: Eörsi had evidently recognized a kindred spirit in the great Polish *enfant terrible*, whose character and thinking attracted and provoked him. There is much in Gombrowicz to create a feeling of familiarity: the grotesque vision, the provocative spirit, the East European environment, and a life in exile.

The great historical turn of 1989 meant a huge change for almost every East European author, except for the very old and the very young, a change whose impact can hardly be measured even now. It did more than demand that, like all of us, they rethink their lives, it also demanded that they change their attitudes to their material, their language and their poetic approach—or, at the very least—that they recognize this as a problem to be considered. Few documents of the expected changes have become available thus far. *My Time with Gombrowicz* is one of the most interesting of them.

There is a recurring motif in Gombrowicz's meditations which turns into a *Leitmotiv* of Eörsi's book: immaturity. The hindered social progress of Eastern Europe, the treatment of minorities, the co-existence of its peoples, the Jewish question, culture, communism, eroticism and sexuality, and a host of other topics that swirl across these pages all have immaturity attached to them as a principle of explanation. Those who sense that they recognize the sound of an enlightening voice here are not mistaken. That, however, is only one interpretation of a term which has many meanings. The immaturity of the adolescent who rebels against mature, heavy and rigid social forms, literature and life, is something Eörsi cherishes: he nur-

tures this immaturity in himself. Furthermore, in Eörsi's approving words, Gombrowicz "advocates not the overcoming but the open declaration of immaturity. But how can something be declared which, of its very nature, refuses disclosure? Bringing into action the occasionally infernal means of the grotesque, the writer breaks through the veneer of civilization, down to the immature mist, and makes it speak directly."

The composition of this "journal of a journal" is provided by the constant mutual intermingling and disputation of these three interpretations and self-descriptions of immaturity. All three have their highlights: the first of them in brilliant arguments, where the reader often has the feeling that one thing or another is indeed that simple; the second in extended passages of self-confession of a rare sincerity which, at the same time, offer a wealth of stories and experience that few writers can muster today; the third in a writer's plans, dreams or in the splendid memoir-story Eörsi has written centred on his friend Allen Ginsberg. All three are present together, for example, in the fascinating essay on Kleist.

This book is clearly a mixture of genres in which the publicist, the theorist and the belletrist are all given ample opportunity to express themselves. The three years of continuous effort also have a story of their own. I do have some reservations, however: some parts in the second half of the book gave me the feeling that Eörsi had grown tired of the task he had set himself. This, however, does not alter the fact that here is one of the most interesting works published in East and Central Europe in recent times. 21



István Kristó Nagy

# Art in the Auction Room

In Hungary, as elsewhere in Europe, collecting used to be an aristocratic privilege. Here it remained so until the late 19th century, when middle class wealth belatedly made its appearance. The premier peers of Hungary, the Esterházys, owned a valuable collection as early as the 18th century. Purchased by the state in 1871, this collection formed the nucleus of the Museum of Fine Arts. Other aristocrats (the Pálffys) and lords spiritual were instrumental in bringing important pictures to Hungary. A Giorgione portrait found its way to the country through Archbishop Pyrker, an Austrian poet whose conservatism and classicism earned him high acclaim, if only in his own lifetime. István Ferenczy (1792–1856), the first Hungarian sculptor of note, purchased a small equestrian statue in Italy, possibly the work of Leonardo da Vinci. The Counts Andrassy also had a magnificent collection, which, however, came to be dispersed. A fine Turner, which turned up at auction in

Vienna some twenty years ago, was according to the catalogue once part of the Andrassy collection. Not a single Turner has been owned in Hungary ever since.

The end of the 19th century saw the appearance of industrialists and bankers among the collectors of works of art. The resulting Kohner, Hatvany, Herzog, and Wolfner collections included paintings by Corot, Courbet, Van Gogh (*Olive Grove*), Gauguin (*The Call*), and Cézanne (*Still-life with a Black Clock*). Even such random examples intimate what treasures, early moderns as well as classics, came to be auctioned in the West during the depression between the Wars. Early this century there were thirty Grecos in Budapest; today there are seven in the Museum of Fine Arts. Fortunately, many pictures from private collections came into the possession of the Museum of Fine Arts, which covers all periods, countries and styles. While the great masters are generally represented in the Museum's collection by middling work, there are also major works by lesser painters. There are Raphaels, though none of his major works, on the other hand Ferenc Pulszky, Director of the Museum in the last century, purchased a painting attributed to Raphael which turned out to be one of Piombo's major works. Slandered for decades because of this mistake, Pulszky finally emigrated to Australia where he

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## **István Kristó Nagy,**

*literary and art historian, was chief editor at Magvető Publishing House for thirty years until his retirement, and for several years was the Editor of Könyvilág (Book World) magazine.*



took his own life. The Museum also acquired an outstanding collection of drawings, chiefly by the French Impressionists, the legacy of a senior civil servant of means and discernment named Majovszky.

After the 1944–45 siege of Budapest, the Red Army seized many important pieces from the remaining private collections. These, in defiance of law, have not been returned to this day. They included works of art confiscated by government decree as Jewish property. Nevertheless, the Museum of Fine Arts made acquisitions even in the immediate postwar period, fraught with extreme difficulties, such as rampant inflation. Imre Oltványi, an art historian of working-class origins (something of a Hungarian Herbert Read), also a financial expert and Finance Minister of the Smallholders' Party government, purchased major works by Isenbrandt and Monet, still the pride of the Museum, for Napoleon d'or. The Museum of Fine Arts, the Arts and Crafts Museum and the National Gallery (which displays Hungarian works) have made further acquisitions by declaring outstanding works that appear at auctions "protected." This does not preclude free bidding at the auction, but allows the museums the right of preemption at the highest auction price. Protected works may not be taken abroad and the museums may display them on loan, should they not wish to exercise their preemption.

Works of art were not expropriated by the state, not even in the darkest period of Stalinism. It was at that time that I asked a collector why he did not take a job. "Why should I," he said "when my pictures keep working for me on the wall?" The paintings did appreciate in value even in the fifties and he was able to sell one from time to time. Another, earlier story is much sadder. It must have been around 1948 that a young art historian (who worked at the Museum of Fine Arts) told me of a slaugh-

terhouse owner—or simply a wealthy butcher?—bringing a Gauguin still-life to the Museum for appraisal. He wanted to know whether this well-known painting, which had recently been exhibited and reproduced, was worth forty thousand forints. Even though forty thousand was then worth a great deal more than it is now, the answer had to be affirmative. Oltványi had already been removed from his position and, in any case, no right of preemption could provide the Museum with the necessary forty thousand. "If the Museum says it's worth that much, I'll buy it," said the butcher. "And what are you going to do with it?" "Put it in the safe is what I am going to do." "In a safe? But why?" "Because otherwise it might be stolen." "But how can you see it then?" "I don't want to see it, you know. But how else could I keep forty thousand in so small a space?"

On that note the conversation ended; the sausage-maker bought the painting, and put it in his safe, where it did not remain for long, departing for the west with him. No trace of it has been found ever since.

All of the above concerns outstanding works. Since the beginning of this century it has been the art trade and the auctions where the fate of pictures, including some major pieces, has been decided. Even though Hungarian auctions are quite naturally dominated by Hungarian art, the average quality of the works is usually no lower than that of most auctions held in the West. Those artists, however, who failed to make the art trade, have been "underachievers" to this day. There were two excellent painters between the Wars who were wealthy enough not to sell their pictures and whose works did not circulate either in the art trade or at auctions. László Mattyasovszky-Zsolnay was the wealthy proprietor (and designer) of the Zsolnay porcelain factory closely connect-



ed with Hungarian Art Nouveau. He was also an excellent Post-Impressionist painter, subsequently turning to early Expressionism. Yet, Mattyasovszky-Zsolnay is less esteemed than those of his more appealing and fashionable contemporaries, István Csók, for instance (one of whose paintings turned up at an auction in London recently). The same holds for István Farkas, the owner of an important publishing house, who had a good reputation in Paris as early as the thirties. He returned to take over the family firm on the death of his father and died in a German concentration camp in 1944. József Rippl-Rónai, indisputably a painter of international rank, has always been a star at the auctions. Even though he was one of the *Nabis* (if only at the level of Denis), he too returned from Paris rather early. Once home, his development halted and his work reverted to late Impressionism. A painter whose popularity with the art trade has been constant is, curiously enough, Gyula Derkovits, a tough and haughty communist, who would rather starve than sell his peculiarly political and coolly Expressionist paintings cheap.

The history and events at auctions, to which these examples belong, have always played a significant role in Hungarian art, even though they have never quite caught up with the development of art itself. Non-figurative painting has only recently reached the auction rooms (unlike non-figurative sculpture, which is still absent). All the same, the mere existence of auctions has invigorated—albeit rather indiscriminately—art collecting in Hungary since the beginning of this century. Regular auctions were held by the Royal Postal Savings Bank, affiliated to the Hungarian Postal Service. Art objects (usually of small value) that had not been retrieved from the pawnshops which the bank ran were among the items auctioned off. At the exceptional

great auctions outstanding works were displayed as well. The Postal Savings Bank auctions were continued after 1945 by its successor, the State Pawnbrokers and Auction Hall, and later by the Consignment Store Company (BÁV), which is still in existence. The Postal Savings Bank and the State Pawnbrokers continued the series of auctions of the interwar years. Christmas 1948 saw their 134th auction display more than 2,700 items, including paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures, plaques, coins, Oriental and folklore objects, jewels, porcelain, glass, textiles, carpets, and furniture, as well as 1,200 rare books. Four such auctions were held annually up until the Stalinist takeover and the equivalent of 20–30 dollars could buy valuable prints, from Hokusai woodcuts to drawings by Moholy Nagy (whose drawings have not been seen again to this day in a Hungarian auction-room). The forint prices of the period scarcely mean anything today.

Auctions were suspended in the late forties and art works could be purchased in BÁV shops. Good acquisitions could be made, even though the best pieces were offered to members of the establishment by the store managers, whose chief qualification was political loyalty. High party officials with good taste were able to acquire good collections relatively cheaply, and several did. The recent auctioning of János Kádár's rather uneven collection (purchased with the help of capable advisers) was a sensation recently, but the substantial collection of the press-executive Ernő Mihályfi is still more or less intact. Ordinary art-lovers were also able to buy good prints, or even paintings and sculptures, all during this period if they chose what wealthy (or powerful) leaders had not begun to covet yet. Pen and wash drawings by Lajos Szalay, an outstanding graphic artist who had left the country, could be purchased for a few dollars, and the paint-



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## War Booty

The Pest side of the Hungarian capital, which lies on level ground, was occupied by the Red Army in the middle of January 1945. Fighting was still in progress for the possession of the hilly Buda side when the largest banks were visited by the officers of the MVD (Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs) who had the vaults and safes opened. When no keys were at hand, they simply had them broken or blown open. They took everything of value, including money, jewellery and works of art. Hungary now has an accurate list of the works taken away. A single case (No. 13646) contained 27 pieces of the Andrassy collection, including works by Canaletto, Lawrence, Turner, Millet, Corot, Monet, and various Hungarian painters. Other cases held old Italian, Flemish, and Spanish works (including a Greco, and three Goyas), or French Impressionist paintings, such as a fine Manet, a Cézanne, a Renoir.

Boris Yeltsin acknowledged the Hungarian rights "in principle." On his visit to Hungary in January 1993, he even brought with him two Hungarian paintings (one of them by István Csók) in token of this acknowledgement: he declared, however, that the value of the seized paintings does not exceed 3–4,000 dollars. The Russians stated in the course of prolonged negotiations that the works of art had not been stolen, but "taken into possession as compensation" for the damage caused by the German and Hungarian soldiers sent to the Eastern Front. This is supposed to be the origin in law of Russian rights, according to Irina Antonova, curator of the Pushkin Museum, who participated in the negotiations.

The latest Russian wish has been to have the Hungarians return what they "took from the Soviet Union", but there is no Russian equivalent of the Hungarian list. It would be remarkable if there were, since Hungarian troops followed in echelon behind the Germans in the Soviet Union and thus there was nothing left for them to take. Another simple reason why the Hungarian forces could not have engaged in looting is that there was no museum or private collection of any note in the occupied areas (including the areas occupied by the Germans). In any case, if Russian works of art do turn up in Hungary (some soldiers may perhaps have taken a few icons), the Hungarian government will purchase them from their current owners and return them.

In March 1995, the Pushkin Museum mounted a show of 63 paintings under the title "Twice Saved", referring to the astonishing claim of having rescued the pieces once from war and once through restoration. The nine paintings from Hungarian collections were Degas's *Nude Drying Herself*, Giovanni del Biondo's *Saints and Angels* alongside the Renoir, Greco, Goya (*Carnival Scene*), Manet, Tintoretto, and Munkácsy (*Still-life with Flowers*) paintings reproduced in this issue.





*Pierre Auguste Renoir: Sitting Woman ("Bird Song"; "Lise"). Signed and dated 1866. Oil on canvas, 79 x 63 cm. Herzog Collection. Seized by Eichmann, now in the Grabar Institute for Restoration, Moscow. In the photograph taken in the 93 Andrásy út Herzog-Weiss mansion the paintings on its left are a Renoir and a Fantin-Latour, on its right a Gauguin.*

ings of Lajos Gulácsy, a mentally ill pre-Surrealist of the beginning of this century, sold at around a hundred dollars. (Somewhat reminiscent of Redon and Klimt, Gulácsy was a highly individual artist). Klimt's uncharacteristic, but very fine Impressionist portrait of a woman, however, sold at auction for approximately \$3,000 fifteen years ago.

Auctions were held again from 1957, and thus brought more fairness to the competition. All the same, equal opportunity was but one of the many considera-

tions potential buyers had in mind. People were wary of protected paintings for a long time, and it mattered (as it does today) whose paintings were reproduced in the ever improving catalogues. There were additional obstacles too: the thirty year monopoly of BAV and its custom of presenting painters in alphabetical order. Vilmos Aba-Novák, an outstanding religious artist with an affinity to the novecento, has always been appreciated by collectors, yet they rarely made a move at the beginning of the auctions. Jenő Barcsay, the best painter of the last few decades, is another artist who was handicapped by the alphabet. A solid popularity has been enjoyed by the works of some painters who worked between the Wars (and in some cases after the Second World War), such as Aurél Bernáth, Béla Czóbel, József Egry, József Koszta, István Szőnyi, and János Vaszary. Others have remained overappreciated to this day, such as Adolf Fényes and Gyula Rudnay, who represent two distinct types of folk orientation in painting. Naturally, the classics

have always been held in high esteem: Jakab Bogdány (1660–1724), who lived in England, Miklós Barabás (1810–1899), whose oeuvre is a portrait gallery of 19th century Hungary, the exquisite landscapes of Károly Markó (1791–1860), the outstanding 19th century painters László Mednyánszky, Bertalan Székely, and those painting in the *fin-de-siècle* academic style, Gyula Benczúr, Károly Lotz, Mihály Munkácsy, and Mihály Zichy. And there was, of course, Géza Mészöly, who shares the spirit and quality of the works of Corot, his contemporary,



even though Mészöly never saw them. Rumour has it that several Western collections boast paintings by Corot which are actually unsigned Mészölys.

Simon Hollósy, Károly Ferenczy, Oszkár Glatz, and Béla Iványi-Grünwald were fine painters of the Nagybánya school, named after a small town on the marches of Transylvania. Their works, which first brought Naturalism and Impressionism to Hungary, have always been popular with collectors, including those seeking a good investment or buying on speculation. Artists who lived in Transylvania (Romania) enjoy substantial popularity even today. The Expressionist and later non-figurative painter János Mártis Teutsch was a pioneer by any standards. His paintings have increased a hundred-fold in price compared to twenty years ago. Curiously, it was Hugó Scheiber, a Hungarian Expressionist neglected all his life, who rose quite spectacularly a few years ago, because he attracted attention in the United States. This is all the more interesting because his works were not of the pleasant, and mostly Post-Impressionist, kind preferred by Hungarian collectors. Those with whom collectors are unfamiliar—Fülöp László, for instance, whose elegant and attractive portraits are popular in England—are still cheaper in Hungary than abroad. A similar lack of awareness led to a Bonington water-colour, a Lenbach or a Slevogt painting, or a Meunier sculpture last year, being sold for a few hundred dollars at various auctions.



*Domenico Theotokopoulos, called El Greco (and workshop of): The Apostle St. James the Great as a Pilgrim, about 1600. Oil on canvas, 92 x 47 cm. Reproduced in all the major Greco monographs. Herzog Collection. Hidden by the owners in the cellars of the Budafok Laboratories. Seized by Eichmann, now in the Grabar Institute for Restoration, Moscow.*





*Camille Corot: Portrait of Mariette Gambey ("La Songerie de Mariette" "Méditation"). Signed. Painted around 1869–70. Oil on canvas, 80 x 59 cm (or 80 x 58.5 cm). One of the main works of Corot. Hatvany Collection. Deposited by the owners at the Hungarian General Credit Bank. Now in the Grabar Institute for Restoration, Moscow. The photograph shows the painting hanging in Baron Ferenc Hatvany's mansion in Hunyadi János utca, completely destroyed during the war.*

This account of auctions held over a span of more than fifty years may be somewhat rambling, but no more than the changeable taste and eagerness of buyers as well as the available financial resources. (The latter have

fallen quite drastically.) Thanks to the rising interest shown by foreigners, this flightiness has recently turned into a veritable soaring, a development in which Sotheby's as well as a few Hungarian private art dealers have been instrumental. Besides taking works of art from Hungary, Sotheby's has also brought some in. The great auction they held was a failure nonetheless; there were enough rare Oriental statuettes to fill a small museum, but they all remained unsold. One favourable development is that important Hungarian paintings which have not met with appreciation abroad have found their way back to Hungary.

The esteem Hungarian art is held in abroad is the key question for the art market now. Strict measures have been taken to restrict, quite rightly, the outward flow of valuable art objects to the West, marked enough even in the days of Socialism. Yet, restrictions also have an adverse effect on recognition abroad for Hungarian art. Thus, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, probably the premier museum in the world for the 19th century, displays one single Hungarian work. This is a Munkácsy sketch (*Christ before Pilate*) which makes a strong and fresh impression. Many others are absent, however, such as László Paál, who worked in Barbizon, Szinyei Merse who painted enchanting Impressionist works in 1869(!), or Csontváry, even more suggestive than le Douanier Rousseau, with whom his

"naive" work shows a certain affinity. Czöbel, Rippl-Rónai and Lajos Tihanyi, who worked in Paris for most of their lives, are also absent. It is a pity that all these painters are "laid up" at home. They would certainly de-



serve a place beside Simon Hantay, László Moholy Nagy, Gábor Peterdi, Alfréd Reth, who worked and achieved recognition abroad. The same holds for contemporary painters, Ilona Keserű, Pál Deim, Pál Gerzson, or Mihály Schéner. The appearance of contemporary Hungarian art abroad is quite accidental: a fairly good Hungarian work sold very well at a 1993 auction in England, yet the painter, Endre Röder, is completely unknown in Hungary.

The dominant tendency of the last seventy years, however, has been to export foreign paintings. Austrian, Bavarian (those of the Munich school), Italian, and Dutch paintings have been those most frequently taken abroad over the past few decades, since there was an abundance of them in Hungary. They are less popular in the auction rooms today, because prices are comparable to those in Vienna. All the same, three Piranesi etchings sold for about 500 dollars each last autumn. Entrepreneurs looking for an investment or the nouveaux riches seem to prefer jewellery in auctions these days and tend to buy (frequently Art Nouveau or Art Deco) rings, pendants and earrings which, besides being valuable, can be worn by their ladies. A ring with a solitaire brilliant of a few carats goes for a reserve price of 10–20,000 dollars, although there is scarcely any bidding. Small gold objects in the shape of insects, birds or lizards offered at low reserve prices are special favourites and prices here are often run up by enthusiastic bidders. In fact, it is the objects which seem cheap that are bought for the highest prices. There is little interest in more modern or simply elegant

jewellery as yet; silver and clocks are equally unsought.

This is the situation today. The future depends heavily on developments in the Hungarian economy. Foreign buyers can still make advantageous acquisitions at auctions in Budapest, where the auction house also procures the export permit for the buyer. ■



*Edouard Manet: Mary Laurent with a Pet Dog ("La femme au carlin"), 1882, signed. Pastel on cardboard, 56 x 46.5 cm. Hatvany Collection. Deposited by the owners in the Hungarian General Credit Bank, now in the Grabar Institute for Restoration, Moscow.*



# In the Footsteps of the Proto-Hungarians

"Our Ancestors and Kin. The Eastern Heritage in the Culture of the Early Magyars." An exhibition on loan from Russian Museums at the Hungarian National Museum, May 27–July 31, 1994, and subsequently at the Balaton Museum, Keszthely; András Józsa Museum, Nyíregyháza; and János Damjanich Museum, Szolnok.

**I**n 1725 the Academy of Sciences was established in St Petersburg with the study of ancient history as its primary aim. A decade earlier, in 1714, Peter the Great had set up a "Kunstkamera" in St Petersburg, which, beside displaying zoological, botanical and mineralogical curiosities, also showed ancient gold treasures that had been excavated in burial mounds in Siberia. In 1718 the Tsar decreed that people were to "collect all early inscriptions, ancient weapons, vessels, and any other old and even common objects found in the ground or water." Drawings and records had to be made of these finds. From that time on a flow of gilt, silver and bronze artifacts from the wide steppes and the vast mountains of Siberia and the Far East poured into collections in St Petersburg and Moscow.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century a great number of museums were founded in the rural and eastern parts of Russia; this led to much research and

enormous archeological collections were accumulated. The area from the Black Sea to the Pacific produced a trove of finds valuable to all areas of research. The origins of the ancient peoples of Central Asia were studied, as were the Greek colonies on the Black Sea coast, and prehistoric China and India; so too were the tribes of the steppes, such as the Huns and Mongols, who repeatedly and decisively influenced the course of history in Europe. A major chapter in these many decades of collection was the excavation in southern Russia of the burial monuments of Scythians from around the Black Sea. These Iranian peoples are relatively well known through the writings of Greek historians, especially Herodotus. Research on the Scythians preceded that on the Siberian tribes. In 1763 General Melgunov began to dig a huge *kurgan* near Elizavetgrad in the Ukraine. It was a princely Scythian grave from around 600 B.C. and held a wealth of gold and silver artifacts. To this day, Scythian burial mounds are being excavated. The last major discovery occurred in 1971, in the area of Dnepropetrovsk, when archeologists excavated what they called the "fat mound", because of the wealth of Scythian treasures and the fine gold work. With the end of the Cold War, major Western museums such as the Louvre, the British Museum or the Metropolitan

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## János Makkay

is the author of *A tiszaszőlősi kincs*  
(*The Tiszaszőlős Hoard*), Budapest, 1985  
and *Az indoeurópai népek őstörténete*  
(*The Prehistory of the Indo-European*  
*Peoples*), Budapest, 1991.



Museum of Art competed to show a selection of Scythian finds from the Hermitage, or the History Museums of Moscow and Kiev. It could indeed be said that the Scythian treasures played their part in effecting a breakthrough in East-Western relations between museums.

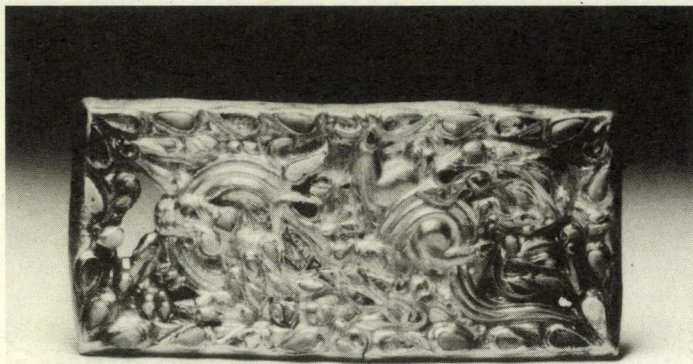
The mysterious and often awesome Scythian tombs (one contains the remains of nearly four hundred sacrificed horses) have proved sensational not merely for their wealth of gold artifacts but for their cultural significance in the history of Eurasia. As regards the Proto-Magyars, their prehistory is tied to this people as for thousands of years they made their home in the same regions where these tombs were found, from the steppes of Europe and across the Urals to Kazakhstan and southern Siberia. Although the National Museum in Budapest has shown gold Scythian treasures from the Museum of Kiev and the Museum of Fine Arts showed a modest selection from the Hermitage in 1985, "The Gold of the Scythians", and although cultural relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union were lively, Hungary has been out of the exhibition mainstream involving Western museums.

After the political thaw of 1989, there was little hope of being able to arrange exhibitions of artifacts loaned by far-away museums in the disintegrating and increasingly crisis-inflicted former Soviet Republics.

Fortunately, one determined scholar refused to settle for that. Whatever the political situation between Hungary and the East, the fact still remains that the ancestors of the Hungarians arrived here under Árpád from the East in A.D. 895 to make their home in the Carpathian Basin, and with this in mind István Fodor decided to stage an exhibition on Magyar prehistory. (His book on the subject has appeared in

English, *In Search of a New Homeland* [Corvina, Budapest, 1982]). Fodor contacted ten Russian museums, from large institutions to small provincial ones, with holdings that are in some way connected with the ethnogenesis of the Hungarians. The territory from which the ten museums have acquired their collections encompasses an area the size of a continent, spanning from St Petersburg and Moscow to Minusinsk, Omsk, Ekaterinburg, Siktivkar, Izhevsk, Kazan, Bolgar, and Stavropol. Two Russian scholars assisted in the preparation of the exhibition, Dimitriy Dimitrievich Vasilev, Vice-President of the Oriental Society of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Ludmila Chizhova, a professor at the University of Social Sciences in Moscow. The extensive area from which the material came spans the region where the Proto-Hungarians merged to become a distinct people, an area they crossed on their passage westwards, and whose many peoples and tribes they were in contact with during the hundreds of years they sojourned. This territory extends from western Siberia and beyond, and touches the northern Caucasus and the Black Sea in the south, the Middle Volga, and Central Urals in the north, and the eastern slope of the Carpathians in the west—an area more or less the size of Europe. In particular in the eastern parts of this area there still live today a number of small peoples who, although they did not directly bear witness to the ethnogenesis of the Magyars, are, like the Hungarians, members of the widely dispersed but small family or Uralic-Finno-Ugric speaking peoples. Thus both their material culture and their spiritual life, as well as their language, preserve features that had once been Early-Hungarian. Archeology and ethnography both contribute to the picture and it is often difficult to say where one ends and the other starts.





*Gilt belt-plate from Sidorovka, 3rd-2nd century B.C.*

This duality was made manifest by ancient archeological and modern ethnographical artifacts of forest-dwelling Finno-Ugrians or steppe-dwelling Turkic and Iranian peoples. What has made the chronological portrayal especially challenging was that at a given point in time the ancient Magyars had quit some parts of the vast region, while other peoples remained to continue using the artifacts that were eventually excavated. The exhibition covered not only an enormous territory but also many centuries, from the fifth century B.C. to the nineteenth century A.D. It traced the regions where the forebears of the Hungarians are believed to have dwelled in the centuries prior to their settling in the Carpathian Basin, and it examined how their nearest remaining kin and neighbours continued to live in those regions after the Proto-Hungarians left.

Thus, in addition to displaying excavated items actually attributed to the Proto-Hungarians, the exhibition aimed to show the ambience in which their culture took shape and against which the Proto-Magyars established their own identity. Since the Magyars were influenced by at least three large geographic regions, located as they were at the intersection of three civilizations, the exhibition tried to provide a se-

lection from all three. One of the three were the Hungarians' Finno-Ugric ancestors, their kin from the deciduous forests on both slopes of the Urals. The second were the Iranian steppe-peoples, from the Scythians with their *kurgans* replete with gold to the Alans who flourished at the time of the Magyar con-

quest. The third were the Turkic horsemen who initially roamed the eastern steppes but came to dominate in areas of Europe after 375 A.D. The waves of Huns, Avars, Magyars, Cumanians, and Mongolians pushing westward determined in many ways the course of European history. An example is the remarkable role played by the Huns in the development of feudal Europe. For its part, the Magyar conquest determined the future of the Hungarian people. As István Fodor noted in the exhibition catalogue, 1995 will be the one thousand one hundredth anniversary of Prince Árpád and his Magyars' conquest of the Carpathian Basin. After the Sarmatians, Huns, and Avars yet another tribe of horsemen entered the plains between the Tisza and the Danube and introduced into the geographical heart of Europe the Eastern steppes' multi-faceted culture and a style of life markedly different from that of their new environment. Like their nomadic predecessors, the Magyars did not receive a warm welcome. The raiding horsemen terrified Europe for over half a century. Western sources believed them to be the descendants of the Scythians, Huns or Avars and assigned them the name "Hungarian." However, the conquering Magyars fared quite differently from the Huns and Avars. A



few decades after abortive raids further west into Europe, they adopted Christianity and soon became the most powerful Christian kingdom in the region and, eventually, the mediaeval Christian state of Hungary.

There are numerous reasons why some history books portray our conquering forebears as a primitive horde. In their husbandry, culture, military and social organization they resembled the peoples of the Eastern steppes, but we also know that they had mastered the most advanced forms of agriculture, allowing us to believe that their farming methods, culture and social structure matched those of their neighbours. Yet they were different; they bore the marks of their thousand-year-old eastern traditions. But as they settled in the Carpathian Basin, they turned into agriculturalists, and were transformed from a semi-nomadic tribal society into a Christian kingdom thus ensuring their survival.

To understand Hungarian history one must know something about the Hungarians' eastern prehistory, including not just the facts concerning their way of life but also the ethnogenesis of the Hungarians, spanning regions and many centuries. The exhibition tried to provide just such an insight. One hundred and fifty years ago Antal Reguly, and some years later János Jerney, ventured into Russia to shed light on the Hungarians' linguistic and archaeological kin. With this exhibition, for the first time, original and rich archaeological



*Obi-Ugrian bone comb with bronze ornamentation, 10th century.*

material had come to Hungary from Russian museums to address the Magyar conquest and Hungarian prehistory.

Most of the archeological material shown came from graves. The life of the Proto-Hungarians and their kin was such that only scarce and inconclusive relics survived from their dwellings. The grave furnishings reflect the lives mostly of the wealthy and highborn, allowing visitors to admire the beauty and wealth of the artifacts. The grave goods from the western-Siberian Sargatka culture (5th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D.) were a fine example here. Also beautiful was the 3rd-2nd century B.C. gilt belt-plate from Sidorovka, which was used by the Turkic, Asian Huns. The horse harnesses of these Turkic people, however, have Iranian features, indicating that the peoples of the three large regions mixed early on and that they maintained strong trade links. When the horsemen of the steppes began to move westward, the local steppe peoples, be they old Iranian or ancient Turkic, were forced to retreat to the north. As these pastoral tribes were meeting the Finno-





*Turkic runic script on a Chinese bronze mirror, 8th century.*

Ugrians of the forests for the first time, they had a profound effect on the latter's simple food-gathering life. Now we find horse burials and horse sacrifices depicted on belt buckles and belt plates of gold, silver and bronze (for example in the graves at Yuvanayag). Similar depictions can be seen on silver platters of Iranian origin, excavated mostly in the Kama river region, an area believed to have been inhabited by Proto-Hungarians. Our forest-dwelling forebears probably paid for these expensive platters with fine pelts. They revered the silver worked into these dishes, in which they collected the blood of sacrificial animals. At this time the Finno-Ugrians adopted the southern, Iranian custom of using gilt or silver plates, a kind of mask set above the eyes and mouth, on their shrouds. (The custom dates back to antiquity, as testified by the Mycenaean death masks found in shaft graves from around 1550 B.C.) The Magyars still practised this custom in the Carpathian Basin: in Basahalom, near Tiszaeszlár, a wonderful shroud has been unearthed from the time of the conquest, in a grave from

around 900–950 A.D. The exhibition showed a comparable artifact of our linguistic kin, the Zyrians.

Other cases displayed artifacts from the Obi-Ugrians, a linguistic kin, from around the 9–13th century B.C., after the parting of ways. They include a bone comb with bronze ornamentation depicting two predators next to an idol, a characteristic motif of the steppe from the Scythians.

Also from this period are the graves which may indicate the stages the Proto-Hungarians passed on their journey before settling in the Carpathian Basin. One is grave 143 from near Bolsie Tigani where the Kama flows into the Volga; from the same region there is a grave dated around 700 A.D. of a man of the Bulgaro-Turkic tribe. This tribe had the greatest influence on the Magyars' forebears, especially on their language.

Other cases displayed artifacts from the 5–6th centuries A.D., graves from the northern Caucasus, belonging to the Iranian-speaking Alans, as the third component influencing the Proto-Hungarians. Ninth century Khazar goldcraft was also on display. The last two groups of items point to the beautiful goldsmith work that also came to mark the Magyars about to settle, such as an exquisite sabretache plate. Finally, the exhibition displayed finds of the desert peoples from the 1–8th centuries A.D. These more distant nomadic cultures were not related to our own nomadic forebears, but they played a significant role in the development of the no-



madic way of life as a whole. Indirectly, therefore, they did influence the ancient Magyars. The material from the Sayan and Altic mountains was not directly connected with the prehistory of the Magyars either, but the region was the cradle of nomadic civilization, and later crossed by the Silk Road. Going east, the road leads to the inner Asiatic Turks who instigated the migrations from the steppes after 552 A.D. Their empire extended from China to Persia and the Caucasus in the west. Ishtemi Khagan was one of their chiefs. He is believed to have been a distant forebear of the Árpád dynasty. Perhaps the Hungarian word "isten" (God) originates from him, as the nomads believed that the Turk khagan stemmed directly from heaven, be-

ing a divine personage. The material in the exhibition, selected from archeological finds in the vast expanse between the Carpathians and the Inner Asiatic mountain ranges, and spanning two and a half thousand years, was thus very wide in range; nevertheless there are numerous meeting points. It serves as an example that, with the break-up of the Soviet Union, the opportunities for cultural contacts have not diminished. On the contrary, from the new contacts not only the world's major museums but also the museums of smaller countries, such as Hungary, may profit. For this country that means more than just the establishing of cultural ties. It is a condition for understanding Hungarian prehistory. 21



*Gustave Courbet: Nude in White Stockings, 1862, signed.  
Oil on canvas, 75 x 95 cm. Hatvany Collection. Deposited by the owners at the  
Hungarian General Credit Bank. Now in Russia.*



# A Typical *Jugendstil* Composition: Bartók's String Quartet No. 1

**A**t the turn of the century a broad current in art swept Europe from Britain to Russia. The artists involved formed groups, drafted proclamations and produced their own periodicals. In Britain they used the French name, Art Nouveau, but called their journal *Arts & Crafts*; in France the English term *modern style* was in vogue and the journal was *La Revue Blanche*. In Germany their name *Jugendstil* was taken from the title of the Munich journal *Jugend*; in Vienna the *Ver Sacrum* group chose *Sezession*, "a withdrawal from", as their programme. These different terms obviously indicated some differences of substance as well; today, however, they are generally used indiscriminately, leaving any explanation of nuances to the treatment of particular subjects.

## János Kárpáti

is professor of musicology and Chief Librarian at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. His books include *A kelet zenéje* (*Oriental Music*, 1981) and *Bartók's Chamber Music* (Pendragon Press, 1994).

The body of writing on Art Nouveau would fill whole libraries; the number of studies expressly treating the relationship between Art Nouveau and music is not negligible either. Among them, the works by Hans Hollander are outstanding; these examine the relationship from several aspects even if not treating it in depth.<sup>1</sup> The question arises, however, whether Art Nouveau can only be applied to furnishings and applied arts objects, or else whether it was the most significant trend in the arts at the turn of the century, evident in every art form. Can one thus speak of a relationship between Art Nouveau and music? Horst Weber's answer, of course, is "yes", otherwise he would not have written his article.<sup>2</sup> It is another matter, however, that Hollander argues for the *Jugendstil* elements in the composers he has selected—Debussy, Schoenberg, Schreker, Berg, Mahler—on uncertain and emotional grounds,<sup>3</sup> Weber's analysis on the other hand is as excessively "objective" and focused as he attempts to show the manifestation of Art Nouveau in music through a single 16-bar excerpt from Zemlinsky's opera, *Der Traumgöze*.

1 ■ "Musik und Jugendstil", *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Vol. CXXXII, 1971, 411–13; see also *Musik und Jugendstil*, Zurich, Atlantis Verlag, 1975.

2 ■ Horst Weber: "Jugendstil und Musik in der Oper der Jahrhundertwende", *Die Musikforschung*, Vol. XXVII, 1974, 171–74.

3 ■ See H. Ch. Wolff's review in *Die Musikforschung*, Vol. XXIX, 1976, 345–46.



Without doubt, *Jugendstil* or Art Nouveau was the most momentous movement in the arts at the turn of the century. It bridged or linked in an interesting manner two styles that can be fairly precisely defined, namely Impressionism and Expressionism. It is no exaggeration to state that no major creative artist of the day was able to shake off its influence; they were all equally in rebellion against petty bourgeois naturalism and mass production, and were attracted to folk art or to the art of the East, to mention just a few of the ideas of international currency in Art Nouveau. Yet, it is also typical that, among those embracing this style, the great artists, without exception, transcended it after a phase, and only the lesser ones remained Art Nouveau artists pure and simple. This division is clearly evident in Hungarian painting, with József Rippl-Rónai, Lajos Gulácsy, Béla Iványi-Grünwald and Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka on the one side and Aladár Kőrösfői Kriesch on the other.

The best examples of *Sezession* in music are undoubtedly offered by the Vienna masters, Mahler, Schoenberg and Berg, confirmed also by their affinity towards the fine arts and literature. Schoenberg's path, for example, runs straight from the Wagnerian musical setting of Dehmel's *Verklärte Nacht* (Op. 4), through the Stefan George songs and to *Herzgewächse* scored for soprano, celesta, harmonium and harp (Op. 20, 1911), in which Maeterlinck's words are interlaced by convoluted and twining parts.<sup>4</sup>

**B**udapest was the twin city of Vienna, but the birth and development of the Hungarian *szecesszió* followed more distant models, such as Walter Crane in England, Baudelaire and Gauguin in France, or Maeterlinck, who was Belgian. The reason

is that, around the turn of the century, the arts in Hungary wanted above all else to shake off Austrian and German influence. This also holds true for the greatest Hungarian musician of the century, with the qualification that at the outset of his career, for a brief period that cannot be ignored, the young Bartók was a devotee of Wagner's, and was also captivated by Richard Strauss. The turn of the century often saw Bartók in Vienna, but there is no information on him having come into contact with any artist of the Viennese *Sezession*.

Despite all this, it can be safely said that Bartók went about life with his antennae at the ready, keeping his eyes and ears open, but influences reached him indirectly or unconsciously. He presumably went through a process similar to what the painter Aladár Kőrösfői Kriesch describes in connection with how John Ruskin spread Art Nouveau ideas. "Ruskin plainly demonstrated the unified, organic nature of the whole, the sameness of every manifestation of life, of the speck of dust, the snow of the glaciers, of flowers and of the human mind, and presented art as the necessary consequence recognizing this law, laying the foundations for a new artistic age. We all are his pupils, whether or not we have read a single line by him..."<sup>5</sup> Bartók needed no personal relationship or reading in order to hear and see what was going on in the world, whether in his immediate or larger environment. As to the former, he started teaching at the Academy of Music in Budapest in 1907, precisely at the time when the Academy's building was completed. This Art Nouveau masterpiece by Alajos Giergl and Flóris Korb is a worthy counterpart to the other great Budapest examples of Art Nouveau, Ödön Lech-

4 ■ Reinhard Gerlach: *Musik und Jugendstil der Wiener Schule 1900–1908*, Laaber Verl. 1985.

5 ■ "A modern művészet apokalipszise" (The Apocalypse of Modern Art), *Művészet*, 1904. Quoted in *A szecesszió* (Secession), Ed. Lajos Pók, Budapest, Gondolat, 1972, p. 463.



ner's Savings Bank and Museum of Applied Arts. We do not know what Bartók's impressions were, but he had to have seen the splendour of the construction, the amazing ornamentation, the stained glass windows, Ede Telcs's friezes and Kőrösfői Kriesch's fresco in the first floor foyer.

It is not certain whether Bartók ever read Ödön Lechner's words: "The Hungarian national style does indeed exist among the Hungarian people, and indeed in a definitely recognizable way. A skilled eye will soon find its typical features. In that narrow circle where the people meet their own petty needs, this formal idiom has become amazingly developed and touchingly preserved to the present day. We must acquire this Hungarian folk style like a language, just as we have learnt the Greek folk style..."<sup>6</sup> What we do know for certain is that Bartók was concerned with exactly the same thoughts during exactly those same years.

The term *szecesszió* was already current in the contemporary press and used in many different ways, often as an object of derision. Even Kőrösfői Kriesch, its most ardent adherent, wrote: "And the word *szecesszió* makes our flesh creep. And I must confess this is to some extent justified. True, the name *szecesszió* is perhaps not a fortunate choice, even though it simply intends to signify a withdrawal from what is traditionally bad and not from what is traditionally good..."<sup>7</sup> Bartók, who clearly had a dread of all fashionable trends and "isms", jokingly signed one letter as "an ultra-hyper-neo-impression-secessionist, the musician of *Tomorrow* (according to the *Budapesti Hírlap*)".<sup>8</sup>

János Demény was the first to study Bartók in terms of Art Nouveau. He concluded that the key to the relationship lay in the influence three composers, Busoni, Reger and Delius, had on Bartók.<sup>9</sup> Reger's influence can indeed be discerned in Bartók's String Quartet No. 1, though the elements he borrowed from him can hardly be taken as Art Nouveau in essence. As far as the other two composers are concerned, Bartók's relationship with them is merely biographical in character, what influence they had on him did not show in Bartók's works. A more effective approach is from the side of music and not from personal links or the influence of the fine arts and literature. It should be examined what musical devices, structures and effects might be linked to the style and idiom of Art Nouveau and what constitute a musical translation, as it were, of the ideas that typify Art Nouveau.

## Lines and ornaments

Under the influence of his reading of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, Bartók developed a singularly plaintive and resigned tone in the first, slow movement of the First Quartet (completed in 1908). With its sensitive harmonies and arched melodic lines it promised to be eminently suited to express his grief, his resignation and his desire for death. The movement opens like a canon: the first violin's downward stepping motif of sixths is imitated by the second violin a fourth lower, but soon it turns out that this is not precisely a canon, as the major sixth is re-

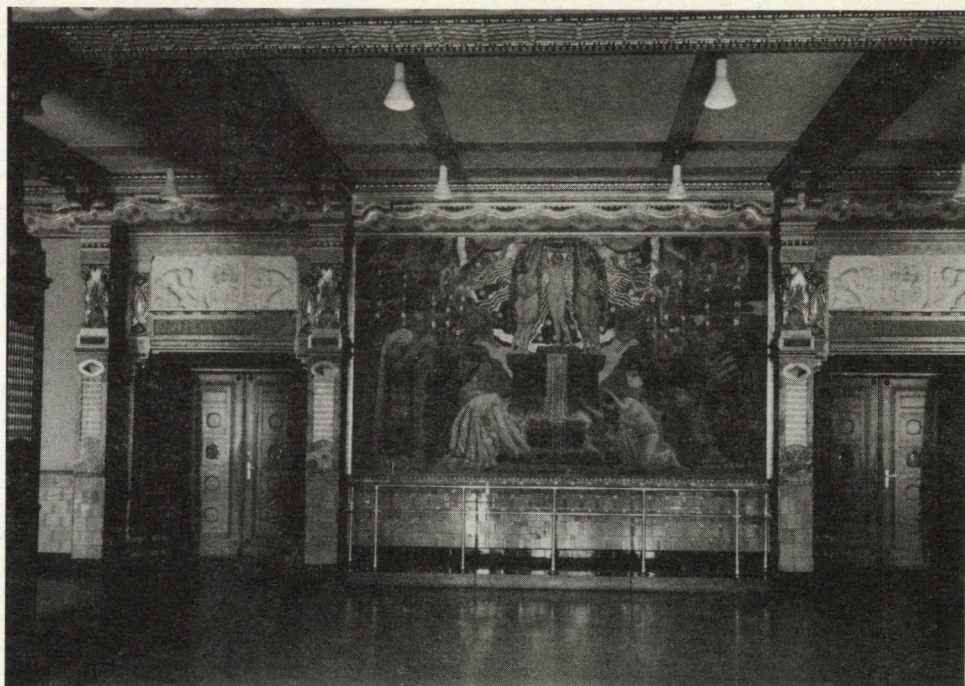
6 ■ "A magyar formaművészet nem volt, hanem lesz" (Hungarian Virtuosity of Form has a Future not a Past), 1972. Quoted in *A szecesszió* (Secession). Ed. Lajos Pók, Budapest, Gondolat, 1972, p. 478.

7 ■ *idem*.

8 ■ To Márta and Hermina Ziegler, December 24 1908. *Bartók Béla családi levelei* (Béla Bartók's Family Correspondence), Ed. Béla Bartók Jr. in co-operation with Mrs. Adrienne Konkoly Gombocz, Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1981, No. 241, p. 185.

9 ■ János Demény: "A szecesszió a zenében" (Secession in Music), *Filológiai Közlöny*, 1967, 1-2, 221-26.





*Kőrösfői Kriesch's fresco in the first-floor foyer of the Music Academy.*

sponded to by a minor sixth, and in what follows the parts do not imitate each other but interweave with one another like lianes extended to infinity. This fabric created by the two violin parts is joined in bar 8 by a similar duo between cello and

viola, repeating virtually note for note the violins' duet, which now takes place in four parts. Here is a singular instance of instrumental counterpoint, in which the musical material is made up of two convoluted parts each:

**Lento** ♩ 60 (56-63)

VIOLINO I

*p molto espress.*

VIOLINO II

*p molto espress.*

5

*c' cresc.*

*mf*

*cresc.*

*mf*

1



Linear construction has always dominated in counterpoint; here, in the First Quartet, linearity dominates not only as a structure but as a melodic principle as well. The parts develop out of soft arched melodic lines, sighing semitone steps and *cambiata* ornaments.<sup>10</sup> Their convoluted character is reinforced by the rhythm: a soft rhythm rolls along *lento* and the parts mostly move in a complementary manner: when one of them stands still, the other steps along.

From more than one point of view, the model is Wagner. Behind the downward stepping motif of sixths can be sensed an upwards tending variant: the opening gesture in the prelude to *Tristan*, and the almost infinite fabric of the parts also refers to that same prelude. Here, inevitably, we turn to a biographical connection, Bartók's relationship with Stefi Geyer, an extraordinarily beautiful and gifted violin student of Jenő Hubay's. "I have started on a quartet," Bartók wrote to Stefi Geyer, who did not return his love. "The first theme is the principal theme of the second movement [of the violin concerto written for her]: this is my death song."<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Bartók literature amply treats the posthumous violin concerto written for Stefi Geyer, its significance in Bartók's life and stylistic development, and its relationship with the First Quartet. It is also well known that the melody outlined by the two parts of the First Quartet is a typical variant on the Stefi Geyer *Leitmotif*.<sup>12</sup>

It needs no special argument to state how expressly this construction fits into Art Nouveau aesthetics. Nevertheless, let

me quote Henry van de Velde, a Flemish architect central to Art Nouveau, emphasizing that he is referring mainly to the fine arts. Bartók presumably was not familiar with this piece of writing, published in Leipzig in 1902, he might, however, have sensed its artistic expression in the structure and ornamentation of the Academy of Music in Budapest. "The line constitutes a force that displays its activity similarly to any other elementary force; several lines linked together but protesting against each other exercise the same mutual effect as do several elementary forces of opposite effects. This fact is of decisive significance, this is the basis, though not the sole basic principle of the new decorative art. I have repeatedly voiced my hypothesis that complementary lines will soon be discovered..."<sup>13</sup> And another quotation, this time from Bernát Alexander, a noted Hungarian philosopher of the period: "The line has a wonderful force: like an iron hoop, it holds together that which would otherwise fall asunder, and it is so vividly mobile, so vibrant with life and so life-providing that it can meet all the aspirations of our spirits yearning for freedom."<sup>14</sup>

There are two non-musical moments that clearly reveal Bartók's particular susceptibility to ornamentation. During a field trip to Transylvania collecting folk song, he made the acquaintance of György Péntek Gyugyi of Kőröső, a joiner and wood-carver; he had the furniture for his study made by Péntek Gyugyi in 1907. "What a delight: the roses of my cabinets featuring on all the gate-posts from Hunyad to Kőröső," he

10 ■ The *cambiata*, a changing note in the harmonic construction of Palestrina's style, became transformed into an independent ornament in the instrumental music of later ages.

11 ■ Denijs Dille: "Angeben zum Violinkonzert 1907, den *Deux Portraits*, dem Quartett Op. 7 und den zwei Rumänischen Tänzen", *Documenta Bartókiana*, Vol. 2, Budapest-Mainz, 1965, p. 92.

12 ■ See József Ujfalussy: *Béla Bartók*, (Translated by Ruth Pataki.) Budapest, Corviná, 1971, pp. 86-87.

13 ■ *Kunstgewerbliche Laienpredigten*, Leipzig, 1902.

14 ■ Bernát Alexander: *A vonal esztétikája* (The Aesthetics of the Line), Budapest, 1909, Quoted: *A szecesszió*, p. 486.



wrote to his mother from Bánffy-Hunyad, enjoying in advance the confrontation between a middle-class home and folk ornamentation.<sup>15</sup> The other episode, in which he even more explicitly shows his predilection for ornamentation is in connection with the title pages of his first works to come out in print. The three Hungarian music publishers of the day, the Bárd, Rozsnyai and Rózsavölgyi companies, gave Bartók's cousin, Ervin Voit, a teacher of applied arts, the opportunity to design the title pages; we know from their surviving correspondence that what he did was based on the clear intentions of the composer.<sup>16</sup> These title pages expressly convey the Art Nouveau folk ornamentation of the period.

### An amalgam of styles

In Bartók's First Quartet, what follows the polyphonic section, Wagnerian and thus German in tone, surprises: the dense complementary fabric loosens up and slim solo melodies unfold above—and then under—the middle parts arranged in parallel harmonies. Contemporary French music permeates the entire section of some 20 bars; even more conspicuous are the few bars which



Frontispiece of the 1912  
Rózsavölgyi edition of  
*Three Burlesques for Piano*.

seem to be a direct quote from Ravel's *Ma mère l'oye*. Yet, this cannot be a quotation, as Bartók simply could not have been acquainted with this Ravel work, written at approximately the same time as Bartók's:



- 15 ■ Bartók Béla levelei (Letters), ed. János Demény, Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1976, No. 134, p. 118.  
16 ■ Idem, No. 241, p. 180, No. 218, p. 225. See also János Breuer: "Bartók és a képzőművészet" (Bartók and the Fine Arts) in János Breuer: *Bartók és Kodály. Tanulmányok századunk magyar zenetörténetéhez* (Bartók and Kodály. Studies in the History of 20th Century Hungarian Music), Budapest, Magvető, 1978, 76–8.



It has become practically a platitude to say that during his 1905 stay in Paris Bartók had no direct encounter with contemporary French music and that his attention was only drawn to it by Kodály. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of Paris must have had some effect on him. Even if it was not during this visit that he became acquainted with the music of Debussy and Ravel, the sheer spectacle of Paris, and, as he wrote in a letter, "the Impressionist pictures in the Musée de Luxembourg," might have induced an experience which only later matured and found expression. In any case, Bartók's meeting of minds with Ravel, which was based on the memories of a visit, made three years before, and on a few scores Kodály gave him, remains an inexplicable mystery of artistic intuition and creation.

This encounter with French music took place in 1907, an important year in Bartók's development as a composer from another point of view, for this was when he consciously started to build folk music into his art. It was also about that time that his opposition to German influence became more marked. It is almost self-evident that in 1908, during the composition of an extended work such as the First String Quartet, the German and the French spirit clashed within Bartók. This was a struggle which did not lead to an absolute victory for either side; it did lead, however, approximately from 1911 on, to the development of an absolutely sovereign Bartók style. In the First Quartet, the two styles still exist side by side. This once again is typical of Art Nouveau; after all, critics more than once accused its followers of eclectically gathering the styles of different ages and different nations. Bartók obviously did not employ a mixing of styles as a deliberately planned Art Nouveau conception. There is a much simpler answer than that: it was the process of seeking out his own devices that led him along this path. Nevertheless, it is

most typical that, even in this respect, he came close to the course his German and French contemporaries were taking.

## Folk art

One of the most characteristic requisites of Art Nouveau, evident practically everywhere, was its assimilation of oriental art and its use of the elements of folk art. These two strands, although having common roots, were clearly separated in European art, including music. The orientalism of Mahler and Zemlinsky, mainly evident in its literary connections, and even more so the oriental *couleurs locales*, Debussy, Puccini and Rimski-Korsakov achieved through musical devices (pentatonic scales, melodic types and sound character) must be considered as typical Art Nouveau traits. On the other hand, turn toward folk music is primarily an Eastern European phenomenon; this is due to the fact that composers there could still find more or less unexplored musical treasures, and also because this could, and did, become a means to developing national styles in music. It should be emphasized, however, that around the turn of the century the use of folk music had not yet reached the climax it was to reach later in the music of Bartók and other Eastern European composers, such as Janáček, Kodály and Enesco.

When Bartók composed his first quartet, he had already completed his early ethnomusicological field work on the Hungarian Plain, in Upper Hungary and in Transylvania; he had recorded many melodies on phonograph cylinders, he noted down and became familiar with the life and customs of the people. He had already used melodic material thus gained in some shorter pieces, and in all certainty intended to do so in such an exacting and complex form as the string quartet. The result,



however, in this case is far from unambiguous. The first two movements of the quartet show no traces of folk music. As pointed out in the discussion of the first movement, a singular admixture and struggle between German and French elements is what it shows evidence of. But in the introduction to the third movement there can be heard a *rubato* cello monologue in whose background it is not diffi-

cult to recognize the first line of a song ("There is only one fair girl in the world"). Up till 1906 these kinds of melodies, composed by amateur composers and termed Hungarian folk songs, signified folk art to the young Bartók; it was only after 1906 that he recognized, through his experience of collecting, that the genuine ancient melodic stock of the peasants was of an incomparably nobler stamp:



The inevitable question to be addressed is how to explain the fact that in composing the quartet, and with this experience and these lessons behind him, he still returned to that fake folk song, at least to the extent of a melodic fragment. One explanation could be that Bartók at the time had not yet turned fully towards the real Hungarian folk song and was perhaps not yet absolutely sure of his judgement of it. However, there is another explanation which seems to be the more probable, but which is of a delicate biographical nature and, as such, remains more of an assumption. Bartók had to accept the fact of Stefi Geyer's rejection of him while he was composing the quartet. It was under the effect of this that he wrote the "death song" of the first movement. But her rejection also invoked in Bartók a different reaction, one of jeering and sarcasm. It is

well known that the second piece in *Two Portraits* is a "grotesque" version of the "ideal" portrait of the violinist, which also expresses the rage and revenge of a spurned man.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the third movement of the First Quartet is a typical example of wry Bartókean humour and cruel sarcasm. In this context, I venture the opinion that the quotation and then distortion of the melody of "There is only one fair girl in the world" is an oblique reference to Stefi Geyer, particularly since this pseudo-folk song was produced by and associated with the Hungarian gentry, to which the violinist herself belonged.

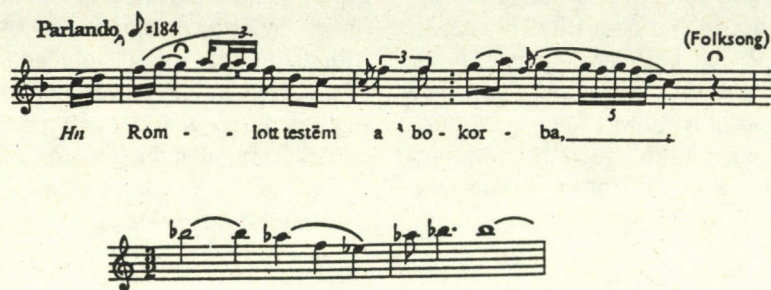
The same third movement, however, also includes a Hungarian folk song reference, one which comes from the most authentic and most ancient layer. After adequate preparation, the *Allegro vivace* material of strict rhythm is interrupted by an

17 ■ A detailed history of the origin of the work can be found in János Breuer's study, "Adatok a Két arckép keletkezéséhez" (Data on the Origins of *Two Portraits*) in *Magyar Zenetörténeti Tanulmányok Mosonyi Mihály és Bartók Béla emlékére* (Hungarian Musicological Studies in Memory of Mihály Mosonyi and Béla Bartók), ed. Ferenc Bónis, Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1973, 279–88.



*Adagio* section (bar 94); above the excited tremolo of the deep instruments the two

violins play a *molto espressivo*, pentatonic descending melody in parallel octaves:



As borne out by Bartók's collection of folk songs published in 1924, this melody is very close to the first line of a folk song he collected in 1907 in Csíkrákos, Transylvania.<sup>18</sup>

At this point of the movement, the quotation of the real, primeval folk song rises out of what has come before and what follows, both sarcastic in tone, like an island which can prevail in a sarcastic, cold world, and which could well be the composer's very own, personal tone. It could be, because in this "insert" of a few bars—which returns once more before the coda, following the laws of the form—the composer is felt not to know what to "do" with the melody he has quoted. In the structure of the string quartet and the sonata form, the Hungarian folk song is still extraneous. Bartók has not yet worked out a method which would enable him to incorporate the melodic and rhythmic material of folk song, as he was to do after 1911.

From 1911 onwards, Bartók's treatment of the folk song, and his whole conception related to this treatment went far beyond the "isms" of the time, including the various notions in Art Nouveau concerning folk qualities. But the Bartók of

1908 paradigmatically accomplished that which the Art Nouveau architects, industrial designers and painters were also doing around him: he inserted random elements of folk art—with good intent and great skill—into a medium developed out of utterly different fundamentals.

## The grotesque

"I cannot imagine an artistic product in any other way than as the manifestation of boundless enthusiasm, despair, sorrow, rage, revenge, a caricaturing jeer or sarcasm of its creator," Bartók wrote to his future wife, Márta Ziegler on February 3 1909. "Before I experienced it myself, I did not believe that somebody's works do in fact mark the events and leading passions of his life more accurately than a biography... It is a curious thing that so far only enthusiasm, love, sorrow or, at most, despair have featured as motifs in music—in other words, only what are called elevated sentiments—while revenge, caricature or sarcasm live or are to live their musical life only in our own time..."<sup>19</sup> The biographical and artistic significance of these lines should not be underestimated. As I have al-

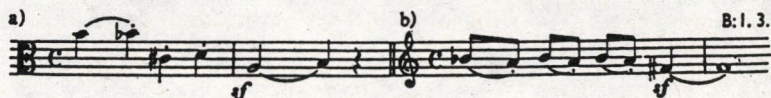
18 ■ "Romlott testem a bokorba..." No. 21. Béla Bartók: *A magyar népdal* (Hungarian Folksong), Budapest, 1924; *Das ungarische Volkslied*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1925.

19 ■ Bartók Béla levelei (The Letters of Béla Bartók). No. 177, p. 145.



ready pointed out, Bartók the composer searched for and found a way out of his disappointment in love through "revenge, caricature and sarcasm". It also says a great deal that these words were written for the woman to whom he was looking for a new bond, for recovery and forgetting. Of course, he disguised the confession, the "self-analysis" as a general, objective and principally aesthetically directed statement—though in fact this is "aesthetics" as well, since expressing the grotesque, the sarcastic artistically was in the air anyway.

Here we have come back to the aesthetics of Art Nouveau. In 1903, the Viennese journal *Ver Sacrum* carried an essay by Arthur Symons on Aubrey Beardsley. On Beardsley's *The Scarlet Pastorale*, Symons writes of a puffed-up Harlequin sprawling in the foreground as a bald Pierrot emerges from the darkness of the stage, lacing his huge stomach with a string of roses and showing a cloven foot. Symons comments that Beardsley is the satirist of an age devoid of conviction, and like Baudelaire, he paints hell without presenting paradise by way of a counterpart.



In the development the listener encounters further surprises: the "grotesque theme" first appears with a "carved" protuberance above the traditional accompaniment of innocent triads (bar 144), and then it runs down in a *grazioso* fugato, with the witty accentuation of the "rolling" elements disentangled from the melody. For a graphic description of this musical picture we turn to Antal Molnár, an expert critic and viola player of the

Schoenberg did not have to see Beardsley's drawing (although he might have read Symons's article since it appeared in Vienna) to compose his *Pierrot lunaire*. For this work is an almost classical embodiment of the rejection of well-mannered views on music and of the demand for the grotesque and sarcastic.<sup>20</sup> Bartók too arrived at this demand as early as 1908, not only in the grotesque waltz of the last piece of his Fourteen Bagatelles ("Ma mie, qui danse"), but also in the closing movement of the First Quartet, a feature already mentioned.

Even the construction, the juxtaposing of the musical material, follows an unusual course; instead of the traditional presentation and development of the theme or themes, the listener is surprised by the harsh clashes in the *Introduzione* (the contrasting of perky anapests and "There is only one fair girl."). Then the *Allegro vivace* further intensifies the contrasts with a tonally uncertain "grotesque theme" and an impertinent motif of refusal:

Waldbauer Quartet, which gave the first performance of the work: "...in between a fugue-like jest, fed by one of the principal motifs, somersaults along. Bartók confuses us with his fugatos: at first we laugh at his jokes, until we begin to feel their sting. Reality asserts itself in spite of the light tone, our dance changes into a dance of death, the gay faces become distorted, the joke is a fatal one, triggered off by eternal misery."<sup>21</sup>

20 ■ Gabriele Beinhom: *Die Groteske in der Musik: Arnold Schoenberg's Pierrot Lunaire*. Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus, 1988.

21 ■ *Zeneközlöny*, Vol. IX, 1911, 1 March.



The humour, the insertion of sarcastic subjects, a playful use of quotations are features of Bartók's oeuvre up till the Concerto (1943). But while these only appear episodically in works basically serious in tone, in the third movement of the First Quartet sarcasm flows over, it envelops everything and only the folk song quotation surfaces above it for a few fleeting moments.

Of the four phenomena treated here, one or two would suffice to make us consider Bartók's String Quartet No. 1 a typical Art Nouveau composition. The four taken together, however, do more than appear side by side, they reinforce one another. This revolutionary trend in the arts at the turn of the century was also marked by a complex density, a compact accumu-

lation of ambitions and ideas, and an impatient desire to encompass everything. This composition obviously does not stand alone in the works of Bartók touched by Art Nouveau. If the posthumous Violin Concerto, as already indicated, is in several respects a twin to the First Quartet, many of the things discussed here are also of relevance to it. The same is true for Fourteen Bagatelles. Furthermore, certain Art Nouveau features happen to occur in some of the later, stylistically homogeneous and mature works as well. An example is the nature music, with its roots in Wagner, of *The Wooden Prince*.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless it is the First String Quartet in which the young Bartók, just setting out on his own road, consciously or instinctively, made the most use of the ideas and the work of this seething trend in the arts at the turn of our century. ♪

22 ■ Tibor Tallián drew my attention to this.



Tea and coffee-set, "solitaire", Copenhagen, late 18th century. A total of 17 pieces, the size of which is not known. It was presented as a gift by Christian VII, King of Denmark to the Ambassador of France in Copenhagen in 1784. Kisbábi Strasser Sándorné Collection. Deposited by the owners at the Hungarian General Credit Bank. Now in Russia.



# A Classic on Bartók Revised

János Kárpáti: *Bartók's Chamber Music*.

Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1994, 508 pp.

**A**dmittedly, a reviewer should not be partial, but in the case of the belated English-language edition of János Kárpáti's basic Bartók book I am predisposed in his favour. I am an old enough participant of the Bartók scene to have seen the birth and decline of analytical systems in the last three decades, and the ramification of approaches without significant interconnection to—or even reflection on—each other's work. Furthermore, I had ample chance when teaching or lecturing on Bartók at many universities in the United States, and thus personally experienced how negligent the English-speaking musician, historical musicologist or music theorist can be if an important book is not easily available in English. Even books printed in English, say, in Hungary without a co-publisher in England or in the US, have no chance of being incorporated into the primary literature. Elliott Antokoletz's

fair and useful guide with annotations (*Béla Bartók: A Guide to Research*. New York, London: Garland, 1988), with a surprisingly rich representation of the Hungarian Bartókiana, could not radically change this ignorance. It is my personal belief that the accessibility of Kárpáti's Bartók studies in a major language in the late 1960s could have considerably changed the direction of later research on Bartók.

With the approach of the Bartók Year 1995, the 50th anniversary of his death, the publication of new and the reprinting of old Bartók books started. Among others, *The Bartók Companion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993) and the third edition of Halsey Stevens's classic, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), both edited by Malcolm Gillies, signalize a growing interest. The 1994 American edition of the Kárpáti book is an important further addition; it is indeed another classic. The original goes back to 1967 when Kárpáti first published a Hungarian book on the six string quartets. At that time it was perhaps the best genre monograph in the Bartók literature. Unlike Ernő Lendvai's unusual approach—music theory of a special kind, with highly impressive systematization of certain constituents of Bartók's style, but overloaded with glossaries on the poetic meaning of technical elements—Kárpáti stood for the

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## László Somfai

heads the Bartók Archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is currently at work on the first volume of Béla Bartók: Complete Critical Edition. His *Béla Bartók: Composition, Concepts and Autograph Sources* will be published by the University of California Press.



mainstream of solid historical musicology. In addition to the section "Analysis," a fairly detailed descriptive discussion of the six scores, the other half of the book, "Synthesis" added five more chapters: on the relation of Bartók's quartet oeuvre to that of Beethoven; on contemporary influences, with special emphasis on the Schoenberg link; on folk music influences; on monothematicism and variation; on tonality and modality. More recent studies have drawn attention to many important facts and observations additional to Kárpáti's survey, e.g., in respect to outside influences, yet the emphases need no basic correction. Kárpáti did not offer sensational theories as Lendvai did (what I have in mind is primarily Lendvai's interpretation of the Fibonacci numbers in Bartók's compositions, a theory justly criticized recently; the axis system with all of its implications; the dialectics of scales). He made, however, highly significant analytical observations on chromaticism (long before Bartók's "Harvard Lectures" became public in 1976), on "mistuning" in Bartók's melody and harmony (in a way a criticism of Lendvai's theory).

After a revision, in reorganized form, the book appeared in English in Hungary twenty years ago (*Bartók's String Quartets*. Budapest: Corvina Press, 1975)—and was no breakthrough. It may be an oversimplification, but this English version is more often quoted in German Bartók studies than in the Anglo-American analytical literature. For instance, the definitive study by Antokoletz, an author I have praised above, (*The Music of Béla Bartók: A Study of Tonality and Progression in Twentieth-Century Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) did not even mention Kárpáti's name. The music theory business, be it Princetonian or the George Perle wing, did not really care about analyses other than their own rival approaches. It is perhaps

the merit of Allen Forte, the head of the third school, that Paul Wilson's more recent study (*The Music of Béla Bartók*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) finally took note of Kárpáti's contribution (cf., however, my critical review in *Notes*, September 1993, pp. 151–153). In the meantime—but this is history now—Kárpáti produced a third, extended Hungarian version of his book (*Bartók kamarazenéje*), which appeared in 1976. He incorporated four more works (the two violin-and-piano sonatas, the 2-piano Sonata, and Contrasts), revised the older chapters again, and extended his views on the polymodal chromaticism and the phenomenon of mistuning. The last is Kárpáti's own special Bartók topic which he still cultivates; in recent years he focuses mostly on the study of the music of the Orient.

The fourth book, the 1994 English language edition entitled *Bartók's Chamber Music*, the subject of the present review, follows the 1976 form in a slightly revised version. A superficial reading may give the wrong impression that nothing has changed; after all even the music examples are reproductions from the old book. In fact a number of new sources are quoted in the second part, and several recent analytical essays are referred to. Kárpáti dated his Preface August 1991—an indication that the editing and printing process was fairly slow. This unfortunately common practice of our days puts the author in an embarrassing position: the reader may think that he failed to incorporate significant recent analytical studies and sources. I suspect that even 1991 marks the approval of the translation rather than the end of the actual revision. Otherwise it would not be like Kárpáti not to discuss in detail the so exciting sketches of the two violin sonatas and sketches to String Quartets nos. 1–2 in *The Black Pocket-Book* (facsimile edition; Budapest: Editio



Musica, 1987); not to refer to the fact that Movement IV was a later insertion in String Quartet no. 4 (cf. my short essay, "Bartók and the Paper-Studies" in *Hungarian Music Quarterly*, 1/1989, pp. 6–13); not to quote from the complete edition of *Béla Bartók, Briefe an Stefi Geyer, 1907–1908* (Basel: Privatdruck Paul Sacher Stiftung, 1979); to refer to the letter of Oct. 20, 1921, as unpublished (cf. p. 290), although it appeared in 1982 ("Bartók's Briefe an

Calvocoressi, 1914–1930" in *Studia Musicologica* 24, 1982, pp. 207ff) etc., to mention a few oddities.

Such critical remarks cannot take away from the merits of the new American edition. In the future, János Kárpáti's pioneering monograph, in its longest and best honed form, will be easily available to English-speaking musicologists. Ignorance of Kárpáti's studies will no longer be acceptable. 20



Francisco Goya: *Carnival Scene*. Late work, about 1815–16. Oil on canvas, 84 x 104 cm.

Herzog Collection. Confiscated by Hungarian authorities as Jewish property and subsequently seized by Eichmann. Now in the Grabar Institute for Restoration, Moscow.



Mátyás Sárközi

# "Animation Doesn't Exist Solely To Make You Laugh"

John Halas 1912–1995

**W**hile one Hungarian, Sir Alexander Korda, had a lion's share in developing the British film industry, another, John Halas, is rightly regarded as the founding father of British film animation. He was a remarkable man. A workaholic, an ideas-factory, and someone who always had the right connections when it came to the realization of one of his ingenious projects. For many years he had his studios at the edge of London's Covent Garden and, as I worked nearby, we often travelled home together on the tube to Hampstead. On these occasions I insisted that we should converse in Hungarian, and this gradually made him a more fluent speaker of his mother tongue, which he had neglected during those years when he had little to do with Hungarians. What amazed me on arriving at Hampstead station was how he ran up the steps to catch the lift. Even at the age of seventy-seven he managed to overtake the schoolboys. He seemed to be indestructible. But one day something snapped in the machinery. His first stroke badly impeded his sight for a while, and instead of running up stairs he could be seen slowly climbing up to the top of Hampstead Hill, where his house was, right next to the Heath. He walked with uncertain steps, aided by an ebony stick. Another old man perhaps would have joined the league of pensioners feeding the squirrels on the Heath. But within a short time he was in full swing again, flying to international conferences—after all he had not only been President of the International Animation Association (ASIFA) and of the design association ICOGRADA, but for a long while he was also Chairman of the British Federation of Film Societies, and a busy adviser to the United Nations on how to use animation as a way of teaching in the Third World countries. And all this time his head was full of new ideas for cartoon-films.

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## Mátyás Sárközi

*is a short story writer and journalist  
living in London and working  
for the Hungarian Section of the  
BBC World Service.*

The celebration of his eightieth birthday in 1992 lasted for months. It began at the Cardiff meeting of film animators, where he received an engraved silver tray with an inscription



thanking him for sixty years in the service of animation. From Wales he travelled to the Bombay Festival of Documentaries and Cartoon Films where he was greeted with an enormous cake decorated with eighty candles. The feasting culminated in a lovely party at his Bauhaus-style bungalow in Hampstead. Sadly, his wife did not live to see how his friends and associates gathered to raise their glasses to wish him better health and further successes.

Indeed, he was a very successful man and was much helped by his wife, Joy Batchelor, to reach the top of their profession. She was an excellent artist as well, and tireless in drawing the frames. They first met when John Halas (still known then in Budapest as János Halász) arrived in London in 1936, not as a refugee or as one seeking his fortune, but as an artist, invited to design the first British Technicolor animation, a ten-minute visual interpretation of Liszt's music. (Unfortunately, this film has been lost.) He needed an assistant and advertised in the papers. Joy, who had worked previously as a fashion artist, applied and got the job. When the film was completed Halas returned to Hungary, taking Joy with him. There is a photograph of John, Joy and some other artists working for the newly founded Pannónia Film Studio, standing on a balcony, with a typical inner-city Budapest street down below. They look happy and ready to do great things. With the cartoonists Gyula Macskássy and Félix Kassowitz they formed Pannónia. They planned to make witty and elegant advertising films and to evolve animation techniques in order to develop the genre as an expressive art form. After all, John Halas maintained throughout his life that cartoon film was primarily there to provide artistic visual experience, and its laughter-making role is of secondary importance.

At the age of eighteen he was already a free-lance cartoonist in Budapest and Paris. Then he struck up a friendship with George Pál (later a household name in Hollywood) who introduced him to film animation. His artistic ideas were developed at Sándor Bortnyik's applied arts studio which was called *Műhely* (Workshop), and heavily modelled on the Bauhaus. At the age of twenty he and his film experiments were welcomed there, and he met fellow group members such as László Moholy-Nagy, Victor Vasarely (known then as Győző Vásárhelyi) and the typographer Tibor Szántó.

In 1993, for a conference and an exhibition in Budapest to celebrate the century of Bortnyik's birth, John Halas returned to Hungary (Vasarely was too ill and frail to attend) and read a paper—in Hungarian—appraising the *Műhely's* avant-garde theories in art education. Before he left for the conference, we made a ten-minute film on him, directed by Hungarian-born Antónia Benedek; unfortunately, the Budapest television stations showed no interest in it. Halas proudly ushered us round his newly completed studio building, constructed in the garden of his house. One half of it is a film archive, storing everything that has been made by the Halas & Batchelor Company, while the other section is a well-equipped work place for two or three animation artists. (John Halas turned to-



wards Hungary with renewed interest during the last decades of his life and set up a scholarship for young Hungarian animators to join his studio and learn the latest techniques).

In the film we made, John Halas talked not only about Bortnyik and the *Műhely* but also of himself, explaining his theories. (Many previously little-known facts came to light during the interview. I, for example, had never heard before that Paul Klee had visited *Műhely* in the 1930s to discuss art with the group.) From what Halas said to me it was clear that his time with Bortnyik had been enjoyable and rewarding, even if at the beginning he was given such petty chores as to put the free-hand lettering on his teacher's advertising-posters, including the famous one for the Modiano company.

It was in the spirit of *Műhely* that John Halas intended to set up the Pannónia Stúdió. Soon, however, Hungarian politics began to shift dangerously to the far right, anti-Semitism became a great deal stronger, and John and Joy returned to England. In context with his best-known film *Animal Farm*, I asked John Halas if he had ever thought of making a cartoon-film mocking Adolf Hitler. He answered that during the times while fascism was becoming increasingly dangerous they made films at Pannónia which focussed on the human follies and social absurdities that facilitated the advance of Hitlerism.

**A**fter his return to London, John Halas tried to be apolitical for a time and concentrated on his film experiments, merging animation with expressive music. As he described this to me, music is quite like film in the sense that it moves forward according to mathematically definable sections. In 1928 two Germans, Fischinger and Richter, tried to pair music and animation. They were followed by the New Zealander Len Lye, who, as a member of the British school of documentary film-making, produced some fascinating musical animations. That would have been a line for Halas & Batchelor to follow: making commercials for the J. Walter Thompson film unit for a living, while, at the same time, producing experimental animated art films. Another new arrival from Budapest, the composer Mátyás Seiber, a pupil of Kodály's, enthusiastically helped their work. But then war broke out. Joy and John married in 1940 and set up their first home in Chelsea, from which they were soon to be bombed out. Some falling debris injured Joy, and to the end of her life she suffered painfully every time there was a change in the weather.

With the war came a demand for propaganda films. The Central Office of Information commissioned Halas & Batchelor to make something like seventy films on various subjects, ranging from scrap metal collection to warning the forces against VD. They were witty little shorts, most of them with music by Seiber. As Halas told me, Seiber proved that a story can be told not only pictorially but, equally well, musically. After the war, the new Labour government continued to order educational films from the studio; Halas was called to Sir



Stafford Cripps or to Aneurin Bevan to discuss how to explain political themes to the general public through animation. When Halas had to deal with a complex subject such as the newly devised British social security system, he invented Charlie, a man of the street, who was a bit slow in the uptake and understood things only if they were explained in the simplest terms. Soon the American government commissioned films of this sort too; one was to explain the Marshall Plan. Through these orders Halas & Batchelor became the largest film animation studio in Europe, and John Halas learned the knack for many years to come of the ways to approach successfully multinational firms and international bodies for orders. (At the age of eighty-two, when he was slowed down by illness, he was still eagerly planning how to make twelve films for the European Community, showing the national character of its member states. He wanted to write the scripts in the spirit of his fellow-Hungarian, the humorist George Mikes, and he hoped to be assisted in this by his son, a successful film writer.)

In 1951, with the purpose of shaking off war-weariness, the Festival of Britain was organized. John Halas contributed an animated series on poets and artists such as Henry Moore. All through his life he was experimenting with technical innovations and his studio made the first ever European 3D film, choosing for its subject Edward Lear's poem *The Owl and the Pussycat*. Mátyás Seiber composed the music to this, as well as to one of Halas's most important undertakings, Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1954). John and Joy made hundreds of sketches to devise the characters of Napoleon and Snowball, the two pigs who rebelled against Farmer Joe, only to become dictators themselves. *Animal Farm* contains Seiber's best film music. In all he composed scores for something like two hundred Halas & Batchelor films before meeting his death in a car accident.

Until John Halas retired in 1980, the studio had turned out 2,400 works, among them 1,500 advertising shorts for cinema or television. As he said: "We in the film world are quite aware of the fact that after three-hundred advertising shorts there is nothing left but the loony bin. However, we far outstretched this number. I must say, by now this made me pretty tired..." That is why he stopped making commercials towards the end of his career.

**B**ecause of his reputation John Halas was able to turn away from one minute advertising quickies and blossom out as an art film animator. His famous characters Foo Foo and Dodo appeared less and less, as he focussed his attention on serious subjects, in the spirit of his credo of "animation is a universal language." Of course, he could not sever himself completely from cartoons and occasionally went back to them, making, for example, a very successful series animating Gerald Hoffnung's whimsical drawings on musical themes. He also wrote a lot, his eleven books include *Art in Movement* and *Visual Scripting*. The last of his longer pieces of writing, *Computer Animation*, was an essential work. John Halas—as many of our conversations proved—was quite a philosopher,



and he saw, right from the beginnings, that film animation could be an excellent vehicle to put across political, religious, artistic or scientific ideas. These he was able to express either in a humorous fashion, as in *Automania 2000* (1963), which ends showing the world coming to a complete halt because the cars have blocked up our living space, or seriously, as in his computer assisted film *Dilemma* (1981).

After trying out three-dimension techniques and holography, John Halas fell in love with computers. In them he discovered a tremendous wealth of possibilities to create dazzling visual effects. For *Dilemma* he needed a collaborator, a graphic artist with a clear line, someone of exceptional draughtsmanship and creative imagination. He found all these qualities in Budapest when he met the graphic artist János Kass. After *Dilemma's* international success, they collaborated in producing many other computer assisted films. Halas admired Kass's artistry and also his speed of work—he could turn out dozens of drawings a day. Kass had great respect for Halas's original ideas and for his organizing abilities.

Once in Bombay, John Halas heard of the plight of elephants in the hands of ivory poachers. Within hours he was ready with the story of an orphaned little elephant. In a couple of days he drew the first sketches of it. From London he soon sold the idea to the World Wild Life Fund. He planned to make an eighty minute film, his first feature since his 1977, *Max und Moritz*, and asked Kass to help him. Unfortunately, ill health prevented his making a film from the story.

Smaller projects he did, however, manage to complete. He produced a fascinating *Homage to Moholy-Nagy* with the assistance of the late artist's American daughter. Moholy-Nagy, who had helped Halas in Budapest and also in London, where they both worked as commercial designers during the 1930s, would have been enchanted to see his Bauhaus constructions gaining new beauty and meaning by being turned round and manipulated with the help of computers in this film. And what could be more typical of John Halas than when, after the death of Joy in 1991, he needed a lodger to keep an eye on him and help him to do his shopping, he tapped the knowledge of the Chinese PhD student who moved into his house to assist him, making an animated Chinese language-tuition film, in which the figure of the wise old schoolmaster was drawn by Kass.

In his old age John Halas was even more ready to share his tremendous knowledge with others. Still a bit shaky after his stroke, he flew many times to Hollywood to advise Phil Mendez—a pupil of Walt Disney—during the making of the feature film *Sinbad*. In János Kass he found an ideal collaborator. Kass helped to make Halas's television film on the life of Jesus, and three interesting biographies on Leonardo, Botticelli and Toulouse-Lautrec. Of course, their best work together came in the award-winning film *Dilemma*, a dire warning to the world that what thousands of years have taken to create can be destroyed within ten seconds.



Still, Halas always had faith in humanity and in human qualities. While fascinated by computers, he maintained that "although one can produce fancy textures, three dimensional movements and perspectives by using various computer techniques, the creative mind and the hand that draws cannot ever be replaced."

John Halas was appointed an OBE in 1972 and awarded the Pro Cultura Hungarica medal in 1992. 🇮🇪



*Francisco Goya: Picadors with Bulls before a Tower, dated 1787. Oil on canvas, 160 x 281 cm.  
Taken by the Nazis from the Herzog-Weiss villa at 93 Andrassy út. Now in Russia.*



# Dancing to the Music of Time

Imre Kálmán: *A csárdáskirálynő* (The Gypsy Princess) • Szőrényi-Lezsák: *Atilla, Isten kardja* (Atilla, The Sword of God) • Ferenc Molnár-Tibor Kocsák: *A vörös malom* (The Red Mill) • Pál Békés: *Össztánc* (Let's Dance).

**R**ecently, Hungarian Television broadcast live Imre Kálmán's operetta *The Gypsy Princess* from the Csiky Gergely Theatre of Kaposvár. Not unexpectedly the production was widely commented on, and opinions were rather divided.

It should be said that operetta in Hungary has legends attached, especially Viennese operetta, which is regarded as possessing mythical powers of enchantment. In fact, Viennese operetta is considered something of a Magyar genre. This is not puzzling once the circumstances are considered, namely that the pieces in question were products of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and many of the composers involved—notably Ferenc Lehár and Imre Kálmán—were of Hungarian descent.

*The Gypsy Princess* was, for instance, considered so Hungarian that in 1945 the then Budapest Operetta Theatre staged it without hesitating to make certain significant changes to the libretto by its original Austrian authors. The changes were made mainly to suit Hanna Honthy, the no longer young primadonna of the company; for her sake this Hungarian adaptation

transformed Cecilia's part, an episode in the original, into a star role. Cecilia, a former celebrated "Gypsy Princess" of the Music Hall cum turn-of-the-century night club, who, having successfully concealed her past, has married an Austrian duke, tries to prevent her son Edwin from wedding Sylvia Vereczkei, the latest Music Hall star. Love, of course, proves stronger than class barriers; eventually the lovers are openly engaged, and Cecilia too achieves triumph: under the aegis of the Emperor of Austria and Apostolic King of Hungary, Francis Joseph I himself, she is awarded the title of Dame of the Star-Cross Order.

Since 1945, this version of *The Gypsy Princess* has had several thousand performances in the Budapest Operetta Theatre, both during and after Honthy's lifetime. There was a time when this operetta enjoyed the distinction of being Hungary's leading theatrical export—chiefly to the USSR and to West Germany. Although the Moscow guest performances are now a thing of the past, the company still travels annually to Munich, performing Hungarian-Viennese operettas in German.

Operetta and its philosophy have undergone considerable changes in the course of the genre's history. French operetta, Offenbach in particular, was not entirely free of political malice, lashing out especially at national illusions of grandeur.

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**Tamás Koltai,**

Editor of *Színház*, a theatre monthly,  
is our regular theatre reviewer.



To a lesser extent, this was also true of the Vienna operetta; for instance, the original of Lehár's *The Merry Widow* had to be rewritten and the Montenegro setting had to be changed to Pontevedro. For those in the know about the doings of the Court in Vienna, the premiere of *The Gypsy Princess* in the middle of the First World War offered tickling allusions to piquant gossip about certain high up personages.

The communist regime after World War II was unable to make up its collective mind on what to do about operetta. Should it be simply ignored, or treated as a farce on bourgeois society? Audiences, however, simply refused to accept these alternatives; though the glamour of the operetta world was illusionary, it offered far too tempting an opportunity for dreaming about something far better than the oppressive reality people had to put up with. The Communist Party ideologues who "guided" art fell into their own trap: they had to either ban operetta or declare it of "national value". With a sour face, they picked the latter, for one thing because the ideologues who ultimately won were petty bourgeois themselves in their hearts and generally secretly in favour of operetta, as against the brand who voiced disdain and even contempt on behalf of "aesthetic merit".

In other words, it proved impossible to eradicate operetta; on the contrary, it even grew and flourished, coming into its own, like most musical plays. Why? Apart from what has already been said, probably because theatre-going itself had altered; classic drama was no longer so popular, but operettas, musicals and rock operas seemed suddenly to have a heightened attraction for audiences. The commercialization of the theatre was soon to become an accomplished fact. Performances were measured by their box office success, by their ability to pack the house.

Each theatre company had to find its own answer to this box-office imperative.

Musical shows like *The Gypsy Princess* were one kind of solution. The Kaposvár Theatre was the first to take operetta seriously and meet the challenge it posed as a national genre. Already at the beginning of the seventies, the company was trying to treat musical productions as critical documents of their respective eras. The company's by now legendary early effort, a revival of *Állami Áruház* (The State Department Store), a silly operetta typical of the early fifties, was a success—and a scandal when a guest performance in Budapest literally turned into a riot—a riot of success—which required intervention by the police.

The *State Department Store* was supposed to be about class-conscious shop assistants rallying to prevent "the subversive activities of the class enemy". All the director of the new production did was to remove the blinkers—the rose-tinted spectacles through which the authors were more than expected to view reality. All at once, the world depicted appeared gray and, illusions removed, rather scary. Dull it was not: the combination with the sugary music clothed the play in delightful irony and turned it into its own parody.

The success spurred the Kaposvár company to follow up with similar treatments of several other operettas and musicals, including the end-of-the-seventies version of *The Gypsy Princess*. The most recent revival breaks with the 1954 adaptation and goes much farther into history than the original did. What it does is something for which Miklós Jancsó, the film director, created a precedent in the early eighties when he used the motifs and some of the play's tunes for a theatrical squib. The current production by János Mohácsi is similar to Jancsó's in that it takes the First World War as its starting point. It differs in that it is no



deliberately outrageous montage; it is an X-ray photograph of the original plot, supplemented with period elements in conflict with the glamorous world of the operetta. Mohácsi is justified in this by the fact that the original premiere was in November 1915, during the first of the major wars of our century. (The tempest of the War in the original version is barely a breeze that wafts a command to "join your unit immediately" into the action. The duchess uses this summons to war to separate her son from the music hall star; in reality the war to which the order refers led to the collapse of the same Austro-Hungarian Monarchy that provides the glamorous background to the operetta story.

The production throws light on the unpleasantness behind the charmingly frivolous nightclub and behind the front put up by an aristocracy, here depicted with gentle irony as entirely harmless. Among the fun-bent fops and chorus girls of easy virtue sways Endre Ady, the luetic poet genius of the times, slumped dead drunk in his chair. The sultry atmosphere is thick with the latent nationalisms of the multi-ethnic Monarchy. Some object to the fact that the music-hall star Sylvia Vereczkei—her name itself suggesting history—dressed in a Hungarian gala costume and flaunting traditional Magyar headgear, is in fact of Romanian and not "pure Hungarian" descent. The aristocratic Edwin—despite his love for a girl outside his class—yells at the doorman to throw out the Gypsies, acceptable when playing music into his ears but certainly not acceptable when they linger on after hours for their own amusement in a "Magyar" nightclub.

So, comedy this is not. When Edwin receives his call-up for the Army, he finds himself not among happy-go-lucky friends but surrounded by a chorus of people bent on sending him off to the mincing machine of the front. In the second act, a few

months later, Hungarian officers on leave—or simply AWOL—from the Italian front crash the ducal ball and provoke the fun-seeking aristocrats with tales of real battles.

The two music-hall stars are not averse to any lies or ruses to further their ascent up the social ladder. The cathartic grand finale does not take place in an Austrian spa or luxury hotel (as in earlier productions) but at Fiume (today Rijeka), the Monarchy's port on the Adriatic on the occasion of the launching of the *Novara*, Admiral Horthy's (later to be Regent of Hungary) famous warship. While guests are arriving for the festivity, there are a few scathing comments on Croats and "Schwabians", who are, "to be sure", all Austrians "since we are in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy". After the Austrian and the Hungarian anthems are heard—smartly blended together into a single melody—the dedication ceremony begins. A small boy recites a poem. Born in 1910 in Fiume, he is called János Csermanek—later to be János Kádár, the communist leader—and he is now six. The two Princesses sing, champagne pops; at the height of the festivity a messenger brings the telegramme announcing the death of Francis Joseph. Fortunately Charles, his successor, is present (he happens to be Sylvia's most recent lover) and he quickly brings Edwin and Sylvia together in matrimony. Although Edwin in the meantime has succumbed to catatonia, they all board the *Novara*. The hulk shivers and, with the festive crowd on board slowly sinks to the accompaniment of the well-known Dream Waltz of the operetta. The grand finale is both a break with illusions, together with a brief preview of history.

Of course, this televised production was not received with equal admiration by all viewers. (The average live transmission from a theatre at Sunday peak viewing



time generally pulls in at least two million viewers, but the chance to see *The Gypsy Princess* probably brought a considerably larger number, for the beginning at least.) What is clear is that the production marked a change of course in interpretation and direction, with the aim no longer being to enchant, but to dispel illusions.

**A**lmost the complete opposite is observable in a new Hungarian rock opera, *Atilla, The Sword of God*. It began life last summer in open-air performance; after a series of these it was broadcast on television, and recently had a production at the Erkel Theatre, the larger of the two houses of the Hungarian State Opera Company. The production makes no secret of its intentions to propagate Hungarian national illusions.

Even the spelling of the Hun ruler's name in the Hungarian title (*Atilla, Isten kardja*) reflects this, as this spelling is believed to be more Magyar-like. Levente Szörényi and Sándor Lezsák, the two authors, are both close to the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the previous Government party. Szörényi, the composer, is committed to the MDF, but Sándor Lezsák is generally regarded as *the* party ideologue, and for a while was acting chairman of the MDF. (Obviously, no work for the stage should be judged by the party affiliations of its creators, but the information does serve as an explanation for some elements that colour the piece, written under the previous MDF-led government, not long before the parliamentary elections of 1994.)

Atilla (or Atilla) was the ruling prince of the Huns, whom Hungarian national mythology—though not recent historical works—regards as a people related to the Magyars. Hungarian literary tradition is permeated with various reinterpretations of the Hunno-Hungarian material. According to one present-day historian, "The

person of the Hun ruler unified important prerequisites of a national identity image for the nobility: the *grandeur* and the *gloire* won and maintained by the force of arms and the similarly guaranteed sense of social superiority, all these aged and matured through exposure to the passing of centuries." This perception of Hungarian nationhood, which gradually gave place from the middle of the 18th century to a different kind of national consciousness based on the ideal of liberty, is emphasized in *Atilla, The Sword of God*.

Atilla is presented as a founder of state, creating a mighty empire unifying peoples of the East and West. He is not a conquering warlord who "pacifies" by leaving behind mounds of corpses, but a precursor of the modern European ideal who pursues a moral mission, preaches tolerance and works for peace.

István Nemeskürty, the historian who was an advisor to the piece, says that the approach is in accord with the most recent research on the great Hun. Not that this is of great significance; there are plenty of theatrical masterpieces on historical figures who on the stage bear little resemblance to their originals.

*Atilla* is problematic because it was written with perceptible political motivation and with not a great deal of imagination or ingenuity. The songs' lyrics are crude, the music is bombastic.

Gábor Koltay, who directed, did what he could to lend impact to the piece by turning it into a sumptuous stage spectacle. One reviewer wrote that the production, with all its crowds on stage and dry ice, did not manage to rise above being "the moderately symbolical self-expression of official politics." The general response—or rather lack of it—to the piece's move into the confines of an indoor auditorium suggests that it has lost even the appeal it may have had as a programme piece.



**M**any companies now include a number of internationally known musicals in their repertoire, because, as pointed out, musicals and operettas can be relied on for greater audience appeal.

The National Theatre, much aware of its mission to stage the classics and promising modern plays, but managing lately only to put on poor productions, finally resorted to staging *My Fair Lady*. (A year ago, when the management were proving its commitment to "issues of the nation's fate", such a frivolity would have been inconceivable.) Elsewhere, works by Michel Schonberg and Andrew Lloyd Webber, pre-eminently *Miss Saigon* and *Cats*, are very successful indeed. The latter recently had its 800th performance in the Madách Theatre.

The Madách Theatre, ten years ago still maintaining its reputation for productions of a high artistic standard, had a musical written from Ferenc Molnár's *The Red Mill* to "enliven" its repertoire, already largely based on musical comedy. The original was first staged in Budapest in 1923, and the following year in the Burgtheater of Vienna. Since neither production inspired rave notices, the play was completely rewritten for its New York premiere, by no lesser a dramaturge than David Belasco, the librettist of *Madame Butterfly*. Even so, it was less than a success. Nonetheless, the Madách Theatre thought that it might be suitable material for a musical.

The Red Mill (also called Corruptor Magnus or Psychocorruptor Infernalis) is an infernal machine operating in Hell that Magister, the inventor, is about to present to his superior, Rex Infernus. The purpose of the machine is to corrupt any person, however virtuous. You put into the top slot "homo moralis" and an hour later get "homo immoralis" from the bottom. But the chosen victim happens to be a simple forester, János Jánoska, who proves unwilling to forgo the stuffed cabbage his

wife prepares at home. Admittedly, he does yield to temptation and manages on six of the seven deadly sins, but he recoils from the seventh, murder, and is consequently spared eternal damnation.

"Devils, people and puppets are in the cast," Dezső Kosztolányi, the poet and critic wrote in 1923 in his report on the premiere, "but actually they are all in the latter category. There is no doubt the writer has treated his subject superficially, choosing the path of least resistance even though he has the talent for a *tour de force*. He could have written the work to be effective even on a Shakespearean stage. In this form, however, it remains a slipshod effort."

And that it has remained as a musical. In the first part, Magister, virtually anchored to the same spot on stage, as if hung from the auditorium ceiling, sings to Rex Infernus who is out of sight, somewhere in the dome of the theatre. This definitely does not make for animated action. In the second half Imre Kerényi's direction makes up for the earlier lack of spectacle. The stage is replete with a resplendently costumed cavalcade, a chorus of attractive dancers, carriages pulled by dragons and electric carts. The spectacle is rich but, as there is no real action, no real dramatic conflict, what we see is more like a pageant, a revue. Tibor Kocsák's music is loud and effective, probably soon out on CD, and in video, and there will be Red Mill caps and T-shirts to be had in a lot of shops. The Madách Theatre is skilful at the commercial promotion of its productions. The credits show that the Theatre has pinned its hopes on the play achieving an English version.

**T**he Vígszínház, of long and high standing, will be a hundred years old in 1996, and it was where the plays of the young Ferenc Molnár had their premieres. The



building itself, designed by the renowned Viennese architects Fellner and Helmer, was just recently renovated and restored to its old splendour.

It too commissioned a new musical piece, a nostalgic musical reminiscence.

Pál Békés adapted his *Let's Dance* from the dance play called *Le Bal*, by the Theatre du Compagnol of France; a film version directed by Ettore Scola has been widely distributed. Not a word is spoken and even the music is taped. It might be called a history lesson in dance: as if in a workshop demonstration, the great turning points of the past are presented through the dances fashionable in each era. The original version recalled the French experience of the past, the Hungarian adaptation, of course, relives our own history. There are both similarities and differences.

The setting is a dance hall. There is a bar, a waiter, and a juke-box. Women enter, one by one. They preen themselves before the mirror and then sit down on the lookout for a partner. Men come in, alone and in small groups. There is something caricature-like about both the men and the women. As the records change, pairs move off and separate; behaviour, movement, and pantomime hint at their characters. Slowly time winds back.

We are in the ballroom at the turn of the century, where the etiquette of our grandparents choreographs dance and behaviour. Pictures dissolve into a succession of new ones. War follows the years of peace, the first Nazis with their arms in the Hitler salute, and the first yellow stars marking

Jews appear, we witness deportation and liberation, the sighs of relief soon giving rise to fear as freedom turns into new slavery, the tedious and frightening fifties, the 1956 Revolution and the reprisals, the dissidents and those who stay at home, consolidation and "Westernization"—until we are once again back in the present. All this is told in song and dance, in settings typical of their times. The deportees withdraw in huddled groups into nothingness, the crippled soldier, back from the war, dances on one leg in a rapture of survival, the dissidents try to catch the rainbowy bubbles of happiness left at home, a collaborating Hungarian seeks a partner in a Russian officer, and the rock craze achieves arcane satisfaction at a dizzy coca-cola party. All this in a colourful sequence, a choreographic ritual of familiar events.

The play has no philosophy, nor does it pretend to have a message. László Marton, the director of the production, appeals to memories and nostalgia. He relies on an understanding of the wordless message of history on a common reflex and shared memories to what movement and melody call to mind. He can do so in the assurance that there are few people over the age of fifty who fail to recall in Hungary the events of the 1956 Revolution on hearing the Egmont Overture, played over and over again on the national radio during the first days of the Revolution. In a sense the production is a ritual of remembrance, and musical theatre proudly shows its best side: an atmosphere free of ideological polemics unites actors and audience. ■



# A Long Shadow

The 26th Hungarian Film Week

**T**his is not yet the end. The Hungarian cinema is not dead yet even though, considering the circumstances, it should have been interred some time ago. There is simply no precedent for the financial and artistic crisis it finds itself in and yet, for some reason, important works have continued to appear.

After 1948, the year of the communist takeover, film production was financed directly, as a whole, and more and more generously, by the state. This was the situation until the late 1970s. By the early 1980s MAFILM, the state film studio, was customarily bringing out twenty feature films a year. In the meantime, as state resources were dwindling, MAFILM was compelled to turn to domestic and international coproduction. In so doing, the number of productions was more or less kept up until the final bankruptcy of state socialism. From the 1989-90 change onwards, state support took the form of a foundation, whose available funding represented a massive cutback. Previously

films had played an important role in the tussle with censorship. Thus they helped pave the way for the historical change, while at the same time, the industry was actually under the protection of the post-Stalinist state. The further irony was that the industry was in danger of perishing alongside the ancient régime, as if it had been its very product. MAFILM's once bustling Budapest premises looked more and more like a factory about to be closed down. The studios lethargically deserted, one or two directors or producers here and there huddled in some of the rooms. The highly experienced technical and production staff was scattered. The dominant activity would become the struggle to find sponsors.

Nothing much has changed since. Even holding the Hungarian Film Week, an annual event since 1965, has been in doubt. The festival (originally held in Pécs and then brought up to the capital) presented the entire current crop of Hungarian films; it never failed to arouse interest and gradually became a symbol of continuity in the country's film-making. Of course, masterpieces or "interesting and important" works were never in the majority among what was on show, but there was no dearth of them, either. When, however, only four or five directors are able to make a film in a given year, as now is the case,

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Film critic **Zoltán Ardai**

*is on the staff of Filmvilág, a Budapest film monthly and is an editor of the trade paper produced by the Budapest art-cinema network.*



the chances of any great artistic breakthrough are massively reduced. Documentaries (shot in black and white) now have ascendancy in numbers in Film Weeks; indeed the latest Week even had a great many video works—as films (after reprocessing for the big screen). The directorate of the Film Week has for quite some time been haunted by the spectre of being unable to offer more than a tragically poor quantity of films, sprinkled with a few unsuccessful attempts at making features.

Fortunately, this has remained a spectre for the time being. Hungarian film is still breathing, if in a laboured manner, and with a single breath lasting a whole year. As far as the standard of works on show went, 1991 was a bad year but 1992 saw new energy (with films such as Attila Janisch's *Shadow on the Snow* or András Salamon's *Je t'aime*). The next breath, in 1993, again was a fairly wretched, even if not entirely bleak year, but 1994 proved to be better even than 1992. Béla Tarr's *Satan's Tango* and János Szász's *Woyzeck*, both shot in monochrome, slow in pace but strong in visual invention and atmosphere, brought international success—*Woyzeck* even carrying off the European Felix Prize. The 1994 week included other memorable pieces as well (e.g., Ferenc Grunwalsky's *Utrius*).

This year again seems to be one of an ebbing tide, but it is possibly also a time of preparation for bright years to come. However, since the crisis in the Hungarian cinema is also an artistic crisis, relative stabilization of finances would not give immediate grounds for great hope. What is being built up can still collapse. Perhaps the Hungarian cinema will never again have enough capital for spectacular productions attracting large audiences. The studios cannot count on great box-office success at all, nor have they money to happily redistribute for the production of

art films. Nevertheless, the situation would be somewhat eased if at least some filmmakers could hit upon some way of reconciling their intellectual values with popular taste. There is no necessity for the Hungarian film and the great majority of film-goers to turn their backs on each other as much as they do. Audiences have given up expecting any delight or moving experience from Hungarian films; however, at least here in Hungary, this recognition has been a slow and unwelcome process. At the same time, film people have abandoned the audience (attendances in the past which, even if not highly profitable, were still not inconsiderable) or so it appears. It is not mainly a question of defiance, film-makers have lost their bearings, directors are searching for subjects and attitudes. In keeping with a fine tradition, they would like to make films on things that concern many people, in a way that touches upon many of them but one that is also of more than stereotyped or transitory value. But in a world turned upside down, which sees a multitude of confused and inaccessible processes taking place, they are constantly forced to turn out something different. They repeatedly return to making art films which portray social erosion and express an atmosphere of gloom and despondency. For this kind of film-making still provides a foothold: it is an established, particular type which constantly offers a chance to create values, even if the values in question are only of interest to a few. Paradoxically, this doomsday trend yields fine, even beautiful works, without giving justification for the accusation of masochistic affectation, lacking real compassion. Masochistic moments are present in all dark toned art, including Dostoevsky. But even this doomsday trend is liable to moral wear and tear if it is to progress all by itself. It has already begun to be devalued by repetition; the



best specimens are often acrimoniously referred to in Hungarian as "rainy films". A depressively soft rain falls in them—in a dilapidated setting. This kind of landscape is by no means confined to films in Hungary, nevertheless it is not general in real life. But the suggestion is that this increasingly becomes general, as this kind of landscape carries the essence of the time. Today nobody is able to refute this—at most what they do is steer clear of films by Béla Tarr, János Szász and the others.

During the 26th Hungarian Film Week in February, the feature film section once again contained twenty productions, albeit the numbers were made up somewhat deceptively. Films made by foreign directors in Hungary, and even one very short film, were included. Four of the remaining sixteen are shot on video and another two were not fully completed. In the year since the previous Film Week, a total of four films were financed out of purely Hungarian resources, and six were coproductions. This totals ten "real" films and, remarkably enough, one is clearly a very good film indeed—Péter Gothár's *The Section* (Hunnia Studio). This was quickly selected as Hungary's entry for Cannes. So the Budapest Film Week once again got away with it.

This time it opened with a real attraction: *The Witness Again*, a contemporary sequel to Péter Bacsó's 1969 *The Witness*, which had been banned immediately. This time Bacsó has made a dynamic comedy, in which it is not the absurdities of Stalinism that are exposed but the various characters, pushing and climbing together, in our brave new world. A fairly sad set of topical themes provide the entertainment. The story is centred on József Pelikán, the very same amiable, naive innocent whom those in power in Stalinist times manipulated and tried to exploit in the 1969 film (which has since become a huge success).

In the present version, Bacsó has not succeeded in repeating the balance the earlier film had between the realistic and the caricaturistic. The hilarity of *The Witness Again* is outweighed by its improbability, the feel of a rather poor cabaret review it has. All the same, the way Ferenc Kállai plays Pelikán almost saves the film—the corpulent fool he presents throws off an energy all of its own. *The Witness Again* will presumably not lose more money than expected.

Good comedy has been rare in recent Film Weeks. Some of András Szőke's post-avant-garde burlesques are indeed splendid, but since they are seen as part of this new "erosion cinema", they draw only a narrow following. Due to their local esoterica and determinedly scruffy production values, distribution abroad is highly unlikely. The best of them is *The Little Mole* (1994), in which the title role is played by the director himself, splattered in mud. He is extricated from his absurd adventures in the big city by an elderly suburban housewife (also played by a male film director). The Szőke film this year, *C'est la vie*, is a string of episodes and was originally shot on video. Péter Gárdos is a director of more traditional subtle comedies, and his gifts and dexterity have been recognized since the mid-1980s (*Whooping Cough*, 1987). In the 1990s he has not fastened upon any story to enable him to repeat that success. This year's *The Brother from Brooklyn* is still not the jackpot, simply maintaining his earlier level.

A general shortcoming of dramatic films with an expressly topical story line on offer this time was that they did not have anything to add to what we read in the papers. Their makers seemed to have lost their independent ideas on the problems of this topsy-turvy region, as if so far they too have only encountered people in



press photos. Among the older generation, Barna Kabay (*Europe Is Far Away*) and Ferenc András (*Bastard*), and of the young, Zsuzsa Böszörményi (*Red Colibri*), came out with contrivedly naturalistic works. Of this group only György Szomjas achieved an individual style and message (*Kisses and Scratches*); however, this he did in a manner we have long been used to, even perhaps too used to.

Of the films conjuring up the past, mention should be made of Judit Elek's autobiographical *Awakening*, set in 1952, and the young József Pacskovszky's retro-view in pastel, *The Wondrous Voyage of Kornél Esti*, which goes back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Both directors owe much to an actor. Some of the dialogue in *Awakening* can grate, but Judit Hernádi, as the mother, is able to make us forget this. The protagonist, however, is a thirteen-year old who clings to the memory of her dead mother, constantly conjuring her up in her thoughts. In the other case, Gábor Máté as Kornél Esti carries Pacskovszky's film on his back. (Kornél Esti is an important character in the literature of the first half of the century, the creation and alter ego of the charismatic poet and novelist Dezső Kosztolányi, a Central European variation on Baudelaire's *flâneur*, who appears in a string of short stories.)

Szilveszter Siklósi, the director of *Mao, the Real Man* appears to be seeking out the facts of the past in this pseudo documentary report (originally shot on video). The series of contexts "revealed" here is in fact nothing but deft fiction, despite the boisterous "authenticity" of some of the episodes reported. *Mao, the Real Man* reveals no secrets about Mao, what it does is expose the questionable nature of television documentaries. Although pseudo-reportage as a genre to expose a genre was not invented by Siklósi, his work is much more than simple imitation.

Two festival films stand out, both being timeless in atmosphere in their own way. One, *The Magic Hunter* by Ildikó Enyedi, a film maker with an alternative approach, is a playful renarration of Weber's opera *Der Freischütz*, transposed from the romantic age to the present. Enyedi's latest cinematic nocturne is a bit of a disappointment after her earlier and enchanting *My Twentieth Century* (1989). However, if this had been her first film, it would presumably have gained loud praise. A detailed attention to the construction of motifs and a nicely unbridled imagination mark this harassing yet happy tale. The opera's protagonist is replaced here by an anti-terrorist marksman. He unsuspectingly accepts the magic bullets from the Devil in the guise of a police officer, little knowing that the last bullet is to be directed by Evil. But the Holy Virgin is also on her guard and, at the fateful moment, she steps out of a painting and takes action. The overlapping blues, blacks, purples, and yellows of the film produce a pleasantly thrilling effect. That said, *The Magic Hunter* moves far less smoothly than *My Twentieth Century*, and it does not carry such weight either.

More weighty is Péter Gothár's *The Section*, an adaptation of an Ádám Bodor short story. Bodor, who came from Romania to settle in Hungary, describes a nightmarish world in a classically terse and unemotional style. In the narrow sense, it concerns Transylvania in the days of Gheorgiu Dej and Ceausescu, but essentially it concerns a much wider region, from the Carpathian Basin to Nagorni Karabah and from Macedonia to the Kola Peninsula. His short story, (which was published under the title "The Out-Station" in *NHQ* 101) is set soon after Stalin's death. The various characters receive the news of the death with resignation, at least those who actually hear of it do. Totalitarianism has turned into a



massive medium that envelops them: the buildings, the roads, the hills, the forests are all of Stalinism, even the sky above. The film expands the space and time of the short story, it opens into a universal future by way of a negative Utopia. It is as if the collapse of the dictatorships has only brought forth nightmare societies, which slowly assimilate to the past, this time in even more hopeless images. As if those who have been squeezed into the heart of darkness, remained at the centre of a full human existence. "How long have you been living here in the border region?" runs the question in the film. "This is the centre of the world," comes the answer.

Gothár has been directing since 1979, and has more than one excellent film to his name, but his presentation has never been as serious, as disciplined or as dense

as here. From the opening shots on, there is a tension which keeps building, slackening and building again with a slow undulation of peaks and troughs. The olive green and reddish brown images penetrate the depth of the darkness with the soberness of nature itself. Before long you forget that the characters are in fact actors.

The Hungarian writer and the Hungarian director on location in Romania worked with a Romanian cameraman. The cameraman, Vasile Vivi Dragan, was unknown in Hungary before, but from now this is a name that will be hard to forget.

Never before has Budapest seen a festival so modest as this year's and still the mood was more optimistic than at previous occasions in the 1990s. The public discussions accompanying the Film Week concerned financial instead of artistic questions—and this was what was new to it. ■



*Paul Cézanne: Bathing Men, about 1887. Oil on canvas, 54.5 x 65 cm. Herzog Collection.  
Hidden by the owners, now in Russia.*



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