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György Kocsis

Stabilization through Restriction

"We want to be the government that avoided bankruptcy, not a government of bankruptcy," declared Finance Minister Lajos Bokros shortly after the Socialist-Liberal government—in power since the spring of 1994—had announced a set of measures, regarded by even its supporters as the most radical step towards reform taken in the last twenty years. The number of those supporters, however, is dwindling; the government has not only come under intensive fire from the opposition within and without Parliament, but other organizations, especially the trade unions, have also gone on the attack. Not only that, the soundness of the government's thinking is disputed by several think-tanks regarded as independent, and the public opinion polls indicate a significant decline in the popularity of the coalition which has been in power for a year now, with a greater than two-third majority in Parliament.

There is little doubt that the general public was largely unprepared for the announcements made on March 12 of this year, which are regarded as the last stage in the dismantling of Socialism, or rather of the Kádár era. The Conservative coalition in power between 1990 and 1994, while making relatively rapid progress toward developing a full-blown market-economy in the areas of privatization, the importing of working capital, liberalization and the partial development of a modern legal and institutional environment, seemed curiously hesitant where the dismantling of one of the fundamental features of Socialism, the "cradle to the grave state", was concerned. The extremely high ratio of income redistributed by the state (60 to 65 per cent) hardly changed over the years; in fact, it actually grew, since despite a 20 per cent drop in the GDP, caused by recession, the government did not change the proportions of welfare spending by any significant measure.

Hungary had a gross external debt of some $20 billion in 1990 when the change to a new political and economic system begun. This was be-

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cause in the previous decade, the one-party regime, fearing for its power and popularity, had financed its welfare spending—a system of old age pensions, health aid and child support—magnanimous even by international standards and unsupported by the performance of the economy. Large-scale investment projects, undertaken for reasons of prestige and judged wasteful by the market were, of course, also funded in that way. In the circumstances of a general economic recession and the difficulties due to the changeover to a market economy, the performance of a burgeoning private sector could not make up for the production lost because of the breakdown of the state sector. As a result of market liberalization and the lack of experience of the bureaucracy, a "black economy" rapidly gained more and more ground. As revenues declined, the obligations of the state remained at the accustomed level and, with the arrival of large-scale unemployment, these were actually on the rise. For political considerations, the Conservative government dominated by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) did not react to this contradiction by starting on a reform of the structure of government spending, a reform overdue by some twenty years, but actually borrowed even further, so that Hungary arrived at the threshold of the 1994 parliamentary elections with an external debt of $28 billion.

While every one of the competing parties emphasised in their election campaign the importance of badly needed economic growth, most were very cautious in calling attention to the unavoidable social costs. Of the two victorious parties in the present governing coalition, it was the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) that spoke more openly to the topic; however, for the less educated sections of society in particular, what they had to say was more or less "coded" rather than easily understood. Within the larger party making up the coalition, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)—which actually won an absolute majority in parliament on its own account—the future finance minister, László Békesi, regarded as the party's chief economic policy-maker, remained practically alone in his effort to expose the real situation. The more populist-inclined majority still hoped for an easy way out, and they were headed by the future Prime Minister, Gyula Horn.

This vague and eclectic combination of reality and hope was mirrored by the June 1994 programme of the coalition government. While promising resolute, swift legislation and government measures in privatization among other fields, and mentioning prospects for reforming government spending, the government made pledges unsupported by realistic economic calculation. The actual composition of the government may also have been misleading. Yielding to the demands of the liberal SZDSZ, László Békesi, considered by many as a "closet liberal", was appointed Finance Minister while the majority of his fellow Socialists in the government were protegés of the party's left. Thus the illusions cherished by many were not entirely without grounds: that the new government would accelerate economic growth with greater skill and with less social tension than its

predecessor, and that along with the advantages of a developing capitalist system—individual and entrepreneurial freedom—some of the popular features of the dismantled Socialist system could be retained, in particular the wide-range of benefits extended by the state in an egalitarian manner.

The first six months following the elections were spent in an effort to cope with that contradiction. While the dynamics of the changeover, the "spirit of the times", the international organizations so important for Hungary—mainly the International Monetary Fund and the European Union—were all demanding a speed-up in the development of the market economy, the overwhelming majority of the voters and members of the Socialist-dominated government were expecting the opposite: in other words, the preservation of the "achievements" of Socialism and compensation for the injustices suffered as a consequence of capitalist development. These dilemmas produced running arguments between the liberal and left wings of the MSZP, recurring disagreements between the parties in the coalition, and a kind of permanent warfare within the government, mainly between Prime Minister Horn and Finance Minister Békesi. The result of all this was almost complete paralysis of legislation and government.

The first thing to fall prey to the ideological battles and the clash of party and organizational interests was the new privatization law, high in the priorities promised by the government programme. This was meant to accelerate and put the process of privatization onto a clear and transparent basis; under the previous political cycle dominated by the MDF, privatization had been interwoven with a web of political favours and corruption. A final parliamentary vote was expected in May 1995 at the earliest; due to a delay of around nine months, privatization revenues, of key importance for the budget, have dropped to a fraction of the amount foreseen. Especially large losses were suffered due to the personal intervention of the Prime Minister in the near-completed privatization of the Hungarhotels chain, when, arguing that the negotiated price was too low, he vetoed the deal that had been made with American General Hospitality.

Among the few concrete measures the Horn government made early on was the 8 per cent devaluation of the Hungarian forint in August of 1994 and an energy price hike announced at the end of the year—long delayed by the MDF government for political reasons. None of this, however, was enough to prevent the processes in the economy that give cause for concern from accelerating. Most important, the balance of payments deficit, grown to $4 billion by the end of 1994 and the budget deficit (more than 8 per cent of GDP), could not be reduced, and an even greater deterioration is forecast for 1995. Expert analysis indicated that the modest, 2 per cent growth in 1994, the first in years was, in fact, the increase of external debt, in turn due to monetary and fiscal policies more liberal than necessary.

The Hungarhotels affair, stage-managed at the turn of 1994–95 for political reasons, provided the Prime Minister with a good pretext for getting rid of

Finance Minister Békesi, who had continued to spell out uncomfortable truths and was being regarded as his rival. However, this event also produced a turnaround in government policies. The extremely negative reaction abroad to the slowdown, and even standstill in privatization, the fall in foreign capital investment, the decline in the international competitiveness and reputation of the country, along with the apprehensions of the Socialist Party's coalition partner, all appears to have brought some of the party's leadership (and its president, the Prime Minister) to a major recognition. They realized that genuine economic growth, the impact of which would really be felt, could only be achieved through releasing the domestic resources of the country, something which could not be done without taking further reform measures to transform the whole system and demanding sacrifices on the part of the country. Contributing to this recognition was, of course, the fact that in financing its debt, Hungary is permanently dependent on the international money markets. They therefore keep a watchful eye on the relationship between Hungary and the IMF. Yet, since 1993, (since it failed to fulfil the conditions of the last agreement) Hungary has no valid agreement with that institution, and the signing of a new one (one of the priorities in the government's programme) is inconceivable without a genuine improvement in the macro-financial processes.

One of the major signs of the turnaround in approach was observable in the filling of two key economic posts. In February, Lajos Bokros, a technocrat from outside the party who, in his former positions as chairman of the Budapest Bank and, earlier, of the Budapest Stock Exchange, and still earlier as a leading official at the Hungarian National Bank, had won a reputation as an adherent of liberal economic policies and as a man of resolution, was appointed Finance Minister. At the same time, the President appointed to the Hungarian National Bank was György Surányi, Bokros's long-time friend and "comrade-in-arms" who had already filled that post between 1990 and 1992. He was dismissed from office by Prime Minister József Antall for political reasons. These two musketeers soon made it clear even to those who, at first, had doubts at the time of their ambitious start, that the rapid steps promised would not fail to materialise.

In fact, they did not have to wait for long. Following a surprise government meeting on a Sunday three days before March 15, one of Hungary's most popular national holidays which commemorates the 1848 Revolution, a set of measures that jolted the majority of the country was announced. The first, and large, section of the resolution ("The 1995 Adjusting Measures of the Government to Promote Economic Stabilization") was aimed at improving the external balance. As part of this—making up, as it were, for the previous failure of the Hungarian National Bank which, instead of reducing the budget deficit, had one-sidedly sought to curb inflation by the use of a restrictive exchange rate policy, thereby reducing the competitiveness of Hungarian producers on foreign markets—the forint was devalued by 9 per cent immediately.

This was complemented by the announcement of an exchange rate policy of crawing-peg devaluation: in order to reduce speculation, the bank declared in advance that in the first half of the year, the forint would be devalued by a daily 0.06 per cent, and, in the second half, by a monthly average of 1.3 per cent, prooducing an overall devaluation of 25 per cent for the whole year. Simultaneously with this, an extra 8 per cent duty—to be abolished in 1997 according to the official announcement—was levied on all imports, with the exception of carriers of energy; this, however, could be reclaimed by purchasers of investment goods and by exporters. Another measure aimed at reducing exporters' costs is that, just like private citizens, firms registered in Hungary are entitled to hold their own foreign currency accounts, which means that they are no longer required to offer the foreign currency acquired from exports to the Hungarian National Bank but can now use it for financing their import purchases. As the Chairman of the National Bank pointed out, with this liberalizing measure—to be followed, he promised, by a modernization of the foreign currency code this year—for businesses, the forint became practically convertible. In addition to all this, the government also plans to support the development of Eximbank and the Export Credit Insurance Company, which help finance exports, and promised extra support for specific purposes to the agricultural sector.

The next large section of the stabilization package contains measures directly affecting the balance between government income and expenditures. Among other things, wage ceilings have been imposed on state-owned firms in an effort to reduce expenditure; similar requirements have been set for central government agencies and even local government authorities, which are obliged to reduce their staff by 15 per cent. The number of enlisted men in the armed forces is to be reduced by 5,000, and even Hungarian Television is to reduce its four-thousand-strong staff by a thousand.

The most sensitive area of the measures aimed at cutting spending is, of course, the curtailing of welfare benefits. According to the resolution, the family allowance, available to every citizen up to now, would be restricted to families with incomes below 25,000 forints per head, the child benefit provided to mothers would be considerably narrowed or income-linked, and state benefits in support of building homes would also be restricted.

Alongside reduction of expenditures, measures were also announced to increase revenues. The largest item—apart from the extra income deriving from additional customs duty—is the extension of the basis of social security contributions, the introduction of fees for certain medical services hitherto free. On the other hand, operating costs in the social security system will be reduced, part of the burden of sick pay will be transferred from Social Security to employers, and hospitals will be required to cut their expenditure. In addition, from September 1995 on, the government plans to introduce a tuition fee of 2,000

forints per month in institutes of higher education, the tax benefits for domestic heating have been abolished, the turnover tax on automobiles has been raised, and some other tax benefits have also been withdrawn.

The third group of measures in the stabilization package is aimed at "whitening", that is reducing, the black economy which now makes up, according to expert estimates, some 30 per cent of Hungary's GDP. This will be achieved mainly by changes in laws and regulations which would both encourage the unemployed to take up employment and grant more room for movement to the customs and tax authorities. (In fact, the latter are among the very few institutions which may expect significant additional funding this year.)

The government expects from these measures, which have been constantly "explained" by the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and the President of the National Bank ever since, that they will help to reduce the government deficit by Ft 170 billion, and thus the deficit will not exceed Ft 200 billion, that is, 5 per cent of GDP. At the same time it is also expected that the balance of payments deficit, which would otherwise be, in all likelihood, in the neighbourhood of $4 billion, will not exceed $2.5 billion at the end of the year; this, it is hoped, may be covered from the $1–1.5 billion worth of working capital import now regarded as "usual" in Hungary and from this year's privatization income. This means that in 1955, Hungary's total debt would not increase. All this—adding that these measures, effective for only six months this year, in theory, may save twice as much money next year—in the words of the Finance Minister is meant, "to make room" for enterprises. The resources of the economy are being made—partly directly, through the reduction of government spending, and partly indirectly—to move from consumption to investment and income production. This may furnish the basis for lasting economic growth, hoped to reach 3 to 4 per cent in 1996–97. The welfare system would also become more rational and just, since it would help only those in need at the cost of the more affluent—so the official argument runs.

The announcement of March 12 does not at all mean that the problem of stabilization in Hungary is as good as solved. Some of the risks are economic. Several experts consider it doubtful whether restraining domestic demand will indeed force businesses to move toward expanding exports rather than simply cut production even further. On the other hand, the government's expectation of a privatization income of Ft 150 billion, regarded as a key item, is far from assured. According to the plans, the bulk of this income would originate from selling off the large firms in the energy sector—electricity, and gas utilities and the oil industry—and the banks that are state-owned. Progress here, however, is greatly impeded, apart from the lack of a privatization law, by conflicts between various political and interest groups, professional disagreements, the slowness of bureaucracy and unfavourable market conditions.

Political and general public support for the stabilization programme is also hedged by question marks, especially as apart from devaluation, the introduc-

tion of additional customs duties and a few other changes that can be carried out simply by government decree, it will require parliament to modify some two dozen laws for the majority of measures to come into force. Even the session of March 12 itself took its toll on the government: unable to identify with the programme, both the welfare minister and the minister without portfolio in charge of national security resigned (both ministers were from the Socialist Party). The junior partners in the coalition, the Free Democrats appear to be the staunchest defenders of the government's package, although the leading figures in the Socialist Party until now have also supported the measures. This, however, is far from true of the largest trade union group, MSZOSZ, which has a peculiar double role, since its leaders also sit in parliament under the Socialist Party whip, and who accuse the government of "coup-style action", of a deliberate neglect of the institutional forums for the reconciliation of interests. Although thus far the strong men of MSZOSZ have not left the party, and have never spoken about any move openly, this did not prevent, for instance, Sándor Nagy, the president of the biggest trade union federation, from entering into a friendly exchange of views at the end of April with the leaders of the opposition MDF, attacking the government package head on, and in every one of its details. Nor did membership of the MSZP prevent the militant leader of the Teachers' Union from actively organizing demonstrations against the government. Observers, however, are pointing out that the militancy of the unions may be influenced by their forthcoming shop floor elections and that in the competitive sphere of the economy, the level of trade union organization is rather low.

The hasty announcement of the government programme, still vague and sketchy in several details and yet to be discussed with the social partners of the government, undoubtedly contributed to the uproar with which the measures have been received by a major part of the population, which finds it hard to accept the argument that the new sacrifices (a nearly 30 per cent rate of inflation, higher than last year, an expected rise in the present 10 per cent rate of unemployment) are needed—at least in the short term—not for the sake of a foreseeable improvement in living conditions, but "only" in order to avoid an apparently imminent economic disaster.

It was a sign of this rejection that in March and April, a wave of protest, quite significant by Hungarian standards, swept the country. Students demonstrated against the introduction of tuition fees, railwaymen were on strike for four days, teachers marched, and representatives of several other professions—medical staff, civil servants—have threatened similar action. The appropriacy and methods, especially in the welfare and social security restrictions, of the package are disputed by a number of eminent intellectuals. Knowing the uncertainties in the Hungarian statistical system, it is questioned by many whether benefits would indeed be received by those needing them rather than by tax evaders. Strangely enough, even the one group apparently gaining most by the package, that of en-

trepreneurs, appear far from enthusiastic about the measures. Judging from statements so far, perhaps the only people to have expressed complete satisfaction with the stabilization plans of the government have been foreign investors.

The head of the government and his team are unyielding on the magnitude and direction of the restrictions. They have also declared that if the expected privatization incomes fail to materialize, the public will have to face a new batch of restrictions at the end of the year. The parliamentary debate in May led to the government accepting a few minor amendments, mainly as a concession to the trade unions, before having the restrictions package passed. Obviously, in June, Prime Minister Gyula Horn wants to travel to his meeting with President Clinton with the stabilization measures already accepted, so that he may have proper ground for asking him to help Hungary in winning the goodwill of the International Monetary Fund. ❧

Levente Szepsy Szücs

A Sylvanus altar, very likely from Aquincum, early third century A.D. Sylvanus was a deity of particular local significance in Pannonia. Hungarian National Museum.

A Steep Road

A Conversation with János Kornai

Professor, apparently the government's announcement on 12 March 1995 caught even some members of the government by surprise. Did you play any part in drawing up the government's economic measures?

I am an independent researcher and an independent teacher. This means I have not been an adviser to this government or to the last. Nor am I an adviser to any political party, and so in this sense I did not take part in preparing the government programme. I consider my main way of contributing to be that I write. With public thinking and politicians as well, I seek to influence them by putting my ideas in my writings. They may have been influenced by my writings, but you would have to ask them about that.

In general terms, how did you receive this package of measures?

Well, I have some critical comments to make, there are some things I miss in them... But these are secondary. I would like to emphasize, and this is the most important point, that I agree with the underlying ideas behind the government programme now put forward, and I look upon them as necessary, correct and inescapable. I must add straight away that these measures will be accompanied by many trials and sorrows, many people will suffer by them. I feel that fully and I sympathize with those who are placed in a difficult situation. Nor do I consider the government programme as a piece of good news, but as the beginning of a course of therapy that is essential and needful for the country's good.

What in your view is the reason why we have come to this?

The problems have a long history. We actually have to go back to the 1970s and 1980s, when Hungary's economic policy was typically one of living for the moment. The Western press at the time, with a measure of admiration and of irony, called Hungary the land of "goulash communism". We in Hungary often called it "frigidaire socialism", because there began to be some rise in the standard of living—everybody was pleased about that, everybody saw only the advantages of that. But even at that time we were running up debt to accomplish this. By debt I mean here primarily foreign debt, but to this must be added the debt built up by postponing action, putting off tasks of investment and conservation of social wealth. So as we lived for the moment, we were rolling before us a body of debt that placed greater and greater burdens on later generations.

The problem was that no government had the courage to set about dealing with that body of debt or even face up to it at all. That was typical of the 1980s. Then came a great, and in a way unrepeatable occasion: 1990, the first freely elected Parliament, the first democratically elected government. But the new government too missed a great historical opportunity of setting about resolving this complex of problems. It would have been unpopular at any time to do so, and the government preferred to keep postponing the unpopular measures. Then there came another chance, although not such a great one as in 1990. But as everyone knows, the best time to take tough measures is the beginning of every term of governmental office, during the honeymoon with the public, the first hundred days. Once again, the opportunity was not seized. So the present package of measures has come at last after successive postponements.

You mentioned in a paper in 1993 not just postponement, but a kind of transformational recession as well. What is this transformational recession?

Several factors are combined here. The change of system itself causes economic difficulties. Prices are freed, with new prices replacing the old, compulsory ones set by the state, which means that the economy, production and consumption need realignment. And the conditions are not immediately ripe for such restructuring, so that a great deal of capacity goes unutilized. There are macroeconomic changes: the shortage economy gives way to an economy of surplus. The queues vanish, but at the same time the general proportions between supply and demand alter. This also leads to recession. Moreover, it takes time to set up new mechanisms and new legal regulations, and a coordination vacuum appears for a while. So there are a great many factors whose result tends to be, as every post-socialist economy shows, that production falls to a greater or lesser extent, normally to quite a large extent. And this has compounded our problems. It is the habit of living only for the moment and putting problems off until the future, combined with the presence of transformational recession, that has placed the country in a very tough economic predicament.

Yet you wrote down very precisely, in 1989, in 1992 and in 1994, what tasks had to be accomplished at all costs in order to bring about a recovery from this recession. Perhaps you could sum up the essential points in these writings of yours.

You are asking too much of me; I would like to sidestep that to some extent. I wrote a short book on the economic transformation in 1989, and thereafter a succession of studies. It would be hard to sum them all up in a couple of sentences. Perhaps I could mention just as an example the question of the budget. I already put very strongly in my 1989 book the proposal or demand for radical settlement of the budget deficit. Then in 1992 I published a study that centred on the budget problem. There I referred to fiscal traps, in other words I put forward the idea that the transition causes very grave and almost inescapable fiscal difficulties. The old, simple method of collecting state revenues—the national bank simply deducting tax payments due from the accounts of a few thousand state-owned enterprises—had come to an end. Suddenly there appear a hundred thousand new participants in the economy, in the sphere of company taxation, and several million individuals paying personal income tax. Some of the actors in the economy move into the grey and black

spheres not covered by the tax authorities, which causes grave difficulties on the revenue side. Meanwhile on the expenditure side there remain the great welfare commitments made earlier, plus some new welfare tasks like the payment of unemployment benefit, which did not have to be faced before. This occasions severe fiscal problems. So several of the problems to come so much to the fore today were raised a good while earlier in economic writings, in the writings of other authors and of myself.

If the problems were so obvious, why is it, that these measures are being taken only now?

I am fond of using metaphors from medicine and health care in my writings—let me resort to one now as well. Take the case of a heart patient. And as we know, heart patients quite regularly arrive at a situation where they eventually have a heart attack, which is either fatal or at least causes severe damage to their health. It depends on the patient when he starts doing something about the heart disease. There are some who start protecting themselves very early on, turning to a healthy way of life, giving up smoking, drinking only in moderation, not eating too much, and so on. But there are some who do not do this, not even when the doctor presents them with worse and worse ECG results. Then, perhaps when a neighbour has a heart attack, they bring themselves to do it after all. But there are some who do not draw the right conclusions even then, only when they themselves succumb to a heart attack. I think what has happened in Hungary now is that the doctors—at home and abroad—have been putting more and more baneful results on the table before the patient. And there have been cases here and there in the world of a heart attack, which have served as a warning that we could suffer one too. The forecasts of a catastrophe, the early warnings of really big economic trouble probably play a part in the fact that the cup starts to run over and the ones who have to make the decision start to feel that action cannot be postponed any longer.

No doubt certain economic indices contributed as well. Which are the main figures that show the situation has become untenable?

I think the most serious of the short-term stabilization problems is the question of the external balance, which appears directly in the disturbance to the balance of payments. Hungary's balance-of-payments problems are mainly linked with the problems with the balance of trade—the proportions between exports and imports. I feel this to be the most dangerous area. Clear signs have appeared here that the situation is untenable. Already in 1993, Hungary had a strongly negative balance of trade—it imported substantially more than it exported. It still might have crossed our minds in 1993 that this could be a temporary occurrence and that better proportions would return. The situation became really serious and very worrying when 1994 brought the second very strongly negative balance of payments. The figures are well known: the deficit is equivalent to 9–10 per cent of GDP, which is intolerably high. When a country produces a balance-of-payments deficit and accompanying trade deficit like this two years running, something has to be done. There is no longer a sensible economist in the world, I think, who would say it can just be ignored.

It is interesting to hear you say this, because in 1992 you were more lenient about

the balance-of-payments deficit, although even then you wrote that we must not allow it to precipitate any kind of crisis.

My view all along has been that a sensible and acceptable level of deficit on the balance of payments can be borne under certain conditions. In fact I would go further and say I consider it quite normal and healthy at a medium level of development, in the throes of a great transformation, to draw upon foreign resources for internal development purposes. When matters stand a little better, we can readily do so. That is one thing. The other is when a situation develops, cumulatively, through the steady building up of problems, in which the threat is precisely that the normal flow of foreign resources into the country will dry up. We cannot afford a situation in which not only does the capital stop arriving, but investors start taking it out or fleeing with it in panic. At that point there has to be a change. At that point measures must be taken to bolster the country's creditworthiness, reliability and attraction for investors.

Perhaps we could return for a moment to the stock of debt, which you mentioned earlier in connection with the balance of payments. What connection is there between the balance-of-payments deficit, the stock of debt and economic growth, the growth in gross domestic product?

What is desirable for Hungary at present is a change in the structure of the utilization of GDP. And there is a danger now, in the midst of stabilization measures, of the idea of this structural change becoming lost in the debate. The desirable change in the structure is for Hungary to export more and invest more. And a substantial proportion of our investment should be designed to assist exports—in other words to create capacity for exportable production. This can only be done in one way at a given level of GDP: to raise something, something else has to fall. Consequently, the relative proportions of consumption have to be reduced. Within consumption, it is desirable for the cut to be in state consumption, budget-financed consumption, rather than in the extra-budgetary sphere of consumption. And another desirable change is for imports to fall. To be more precise, looking at all this in dynamic terms, the part that grows dynamically and relatively faster should be exports and investment, while the part growing far more slowly, or even stagnating for a while, should be imports. This will restore equilibrium to the balance of payments, primarily the trade and current-account balances. These are the desirable structural changes.

I would like to avoid two things. I want to avoid putting the question in an "either-or" form, because I disagree with those who do this. Choose sides, they say. Are you a stabilization-ite or a growth-ite? But I would not like either to fall into a kind of Orwellian double-speak, twisting things round so as to say that what is good for one is good for the other—we want both at once—and then acting as if this were self-evident. The situation is that these are complementary objectives to some extent, but there is also a conflict between them. That is why it is so dreadfully difficult to pursue economic policy and comment responsibly on economic policy. But what are these things that preclude each other? We cannot say on the one hand that we will now set the balance of payments quickly to rights—or rather, not even set it to rights, just get it into tolerable shape—and, on the other hand, say at the same moment that we will go full steam ahead with boosting production by fiscal means, and produce some immediate spectacular results. Anyone promising both of these at

once is being frivolous and irresponsible. So I did not promise or recommend both at once. Nor would I recommend anyone to make such a promise now. I consider it important for there to be a kind of parallel thinking. First of all this parallel thinking has to be understood and then it has to be applied.

But what do you mean by parallel thinking?

There are some measures to encourage growth which need to be taken now, which cannot be postponed, and which will not conflict with the stabilization tasks now urgently on the agenda. I begin purposely with an example of something contained in the government package: development and support of special banking institutions to back up exports and imports. This is extremely important, and eventually, if not immediately, it will help to produce export-led growth. Provision of long-term credit for investment has been an unresolved problem for years. This requires building up a credit system—and a start has been made here, but it is not proceeding with sufficient force, I think—a system to promote the extension of long-term investment credit. Some measures to boost investment have now been built into the tax system, but these may well need augmenting with further measures. With the customs surcharge—and this too has already happened in part—it may be possible to give preferences to imports for investment purposes, and so on. There are many measures whose postponement would retard the onset of growth; these have to be taken now and there is plenty of room for them in a short-term package of government measures. Here let me voice one of my misgivings. I have the impression that this is not receiving enough attention, not getting enough emphasis. Perhaps it gets enough emphasis in the actions taken—I cannot follow these sufficiently closely to judge. But it is certainly not underlined enough in discussions or in statements intended for publication. Somehow everyone has been gripped by the fever of doing and debating the immediate and short-term tasks. The champions of the present government package and its critics, both moderate and strong, are all arguing about the short-term problems, forgetting that the country has medium and long-term problems as well. Even if the short-term programme succeeds as well as it possibly could, there will still be several matters outstanding. I would make it compulsory—and I mean this partly in jest but partly quite seriously—for everyone from the prime minister, through the finance minister, down to the trade-union leaders and members of Parliament to devote a specific percentage of their working day to dealing with the country's medium and long-term problems, joining in discussions, helping to compile materials and debating such materials that look beyond 1995 and 1996 and contribute boldly—for no small courage is required here—to the medium and long-term tasks.

This kind of long-term thinking is all the more necessary because the talk so far has generally been confined to how drastic the measures are. You used to be a believer in gradualism. What do you say now to the suddenness with which they have been introduced?

I hope you will not mind if I correct slightly one of the comments in your question, about what I used to be a believer in. Very often in debates of this kind people like to use two pigeon holes, one for those known as believers in gradualism and the other for those thought to be believers in swift, rapid answers, shock therapies and big-bang solutions. I feel personally that I do not fit

easily into either category. Let me begin with an earlier example. I recommended in the book I wrote in 1989 that privatization and the transformation of society should go ahead gradually, but at the same time I took the decided view that forceful and quick surgical operation was necessary in the matter of macro stabilization. Later I recommended gradualism over several questions and over macro affairs as well. I can only say in this respect again what I mentioned before, that I am neither an advocate of gradualism nor an advocate of sudden, drastic action in everything, once and for all. My approach depends on the prevailing situation and the task concerned. Gradualism has many advantages. One is that it causes less upheaval to those affected by the measure concerned. It is also an advantage that it makes adjustment easier. If a small, gradual step turns out not to have been made in quite the right direction, it is comparatively easy to correct. It is more difficult to correct sudden and major steps. On the other hand there are circumstances in which a drastic step is inevitable. That is the case when a measure cannot be postponed any longer, because further loss of time will cause mounting problems. That is the case in Hungary: we have to move quickly to avoid greater trouble. The other case, which also has to be considered in relation to this country, is when the very force and courage of a measure has an effect in itself. I think this is most important for Hungary now. The world is watching anxiously the various countries undergoing post-socialist transition—or other kinds of transitions from dictatorship to democracy—and it has occasional doubts about whether they will succeed. Hungary has a national interest in demonstrating its commitment to setting its house in order. So the commitment behind a move is in itself an economic factor.

But will this set of measures be capable of restoring the confidence of the international public and international investors?

Many of the Hungarian public feel we pay too much heed to international public opinion, that Hungarian public opinion is far more important. They consider it a kind of servile humiliation to pay any attention to international opinion whatever. I think this is a rather childish attitude. The question of paying heed to foreign opinion is not one of national pride or national awareness at all. The world, as they put it, has globalized. The economic activity of the world has become completely interwoven. Hungary needs the foreign business world as a creditor—for we have a constant need to raise loans, among other reasons because some of our debt servicing is done by borrowing. We also need investors. We need the kind of buyers in the privatization process who can bring in new technology. We also need foreign partners as exporters and importers. So we have a strong national interest in ensuring that we retain the confidence of the world around us. And if the country's macroeconomic figures have entered a very bad state, it will help to restore confidence or prolong confidence if people feel the Hungarian government has set about overcoming the problems energetically. And it helps, in fact, a great deal.

But I imagine a restoration of confidence is necessary here at home as well as abroad, on an international plane.

Quite so. And here let me emphasize a connection that is usually forgotten. When investors are mentioned, it seems rather as if almost everyone thinks only of foreign investors, although domestic investors are just as important to us. In fact it is time we gave up drawing this kind of sharp dividing line between them. Money,

whether for investment or lending, does not need to apply for a visa or show a passport. If a Hungarian investor's faith in the Hungarian economy should be shaken and he (or she) feels there is some great problem threatening, there are ways he can take out the money, legally or illegally. It is possible to slow down or confine this flight by administrative means, but not really to prevent it, and it is not worth doing that in any case. The way to keep domestic investors' money in the country is not to forbid them to export it—if administrative restrictions are necessary, they have to be applied, but that can never become the main means. The way to keep it is to ensure that investors feel their money is in a good place and will bring them a yield.

The government measures which have aroused the most protest are those that will whittle down the welfare provisions. Often quoted in this connection is an expression you used in 1992: a "premature welfare state". What did you mean by it?

What I meant and still mean by a premature welfare state is a country ahead of itself by comparison with its realistic economic potentials.

And this has happened in our case, at least in the social, the welfare field?

Yes, and it has not happened all at once, it has built up over a long period—I have to say a period of one, two or three decades. It began back in the 1970s and 1980s, and it continued in the 1990s. So it started while the country's production was tending upwards, but continued when the country's production began to stagnate and then fall. This opened still wider the gap between the country's load-bearing capacity and the state's activity in providing welfare services. I am not a believer in winding up the welfare state and I am certainly no enemy of the welfare state. On the contrary, I consider the welfare state one of the great achievements of 20th-century civilization, a thing of value that must be preserved, and something for us, as members of Western civilization, to be proud of. But it is one thing to say this is an achievement which must be preserved, and another to think it must be preserved in an unchanged form and on an unchanged scale. The welfare state has outgrown its desirable extent. It needs cutting back and reforming, and at the same time preserving to the extent that is desirable and needful.

Along with the concept of a premature welfare state, your 1992 article referred to applying the principle of need. This has now been incorporated almost word for word into the government programme. But what is the principle of need and how can it be applied?

There are many different ways of influencing the distribution of income. The state has many ways in which it can intervene in this, and it has to decide who to favour and at whose expense. Redistribution does not mean the state just distributes money benevolently from an infinite fund. When it gives money to one person, it takes money away from someone else. Underlining the principle of need means that the state should refrain if possible from giving money to those who are not in need. In fact expressing the principle in negative terms like this makes its ethical content clear. There is no need to extend state bounty and benefits to those with no need of them, because if they are included, the needy are deprived—the money does not fall like manna from the sky. Nor can we continue indefinitely to fund these disbursements with foreign loans, as this

amounts to depriving future generations. So that is what the principle of need means. Another principle is that most economists, myself included, look critically on all mechanisms based on a monopoly situation. The trouble with the welfare system developed in this country is that it has a monopoly. It used to be an exclusive state monopoly. Later it passed in some areas from the hands of the state into the hands of structures of a corporatist nature, the social security boards. But these also have the backing of the state, and they are absolutely centralized, with a full or almost full monopoly. I am convinced that monopolies are not a good thing, for several reasons. For one thing they reduce efficiency. If an organization has an absolute monopoly, it has no inducement to perform its task as well as possible, and there is no real way of gauging this in any case, as it cannot be compared with the activity of any other, competing organization. Another very important thing about monopolies is that individuals supplied by them are at their mercy, without any freedom of choice. A Hungarian pensioner is at the mercy of the pensions institution. And the pensions institution is always at the mercy of the Parliament and government in a given year, which decides whether pensions are to be raised by 11 per cent, 9.5 per cent or 14 per cent. The pensioner rightly feels that his (or her) pension does not depend on how he worked throughout his life and what happened to his money, but on what decision is reached by politicians, the government, the opposition, or political forces which happen to be engaged in day-to-day struggle. This defencelessness has to be lessened by the reform of the welfare system.

And how can this monopoly situation be changed?

The way to eliminate it is not just to have a single state-controlled or semi-state-controlled welfare, social-insurance system, but to have non-profit institutions and enterprises working on a commercial, profit-making basis alongside it. So in this sense a three-sector form is needed. There is a need for a state-controlled redistributive welfare system whose revenue side is covered by levies collected in the same way as public taxation. But there is also a need for non-profit institutions based on voluntary contributions by employers and employees, and for institutions operating on a commercial, regular market basis. These three sectors have to complement each other, but to some extent they have to compete with each other as well. In ten or twenty years time, when the multi-sector system is quite developed and operating in a mature form, members of the Hungarian public of the day should have a choice about how far they want to rely on the state service, and if they are able and prepared to devote their savings to it, in what ways they can exceed it.

But for most of the public, the whittling down of social expenditure comes as a curtailment, because the institutions you mentioned still only exist as initiatives.

These institutions cannot spring up from one day to the next. Establishment of them can only be gradual. Basically they have to rest on the self-interest of the actors in the economy—by which I mean both the firms, the employers, and the employees—and the principle of voluntariness has to apply, and this requires time. So I do not imagine them being able to fulfil from tomorrow the role they have to play. But perhaps this is a good example of what I said earlier, of how we cannot neglect the long-term tasks as we deal with the short-term ones. I think it is most regrettable

that development of this non-state sector should only be coming on to the agenda now. We have wasted several fruitless years in this respect. If it had been placed on the agenda in 1990, how much further ahead we would be now. If only questions of reforming the welfare system had not been treated as taboo for four years, if only people had not tiptoed around them. Nobody dared discuss them. Every politician approved in a general way, saying there was certainly a need to reform the public-finance system, but no one dared stick his neck out and say what this meant. If this had been done earlier, we would be further ahead now. Unfortunately there is no way to avoid there being losers while this transition takes place, people who lose by it temporarily and those who lose by it permanently—those who lose and those who gain. The aim must be to ensure this occurs in a differentiated way. It must be done tactfully and humanely, with understanding for people's problems and consultation with them about them. Though there are painful aspects of the transformation, let it take place in a way that mitigates the pain as far as possible, not in a brutal way.

You mentioned that politicians did not dare to or want to lay hands on the welfare state. Perhaps this was also because of an image in the public's mind, whereby anyone touching the welfare state is in effect sinning against the employees, the workers.

When I hear the word employee or worker, coupled with questions about income or earnings, the first question that comes to my mind is how much real income working people are receiving for their work. How much are they paid for working? We have not overburdened this conversation of ours with statistics, but let me quote one figure here. In 1960, 80 per cent of total real income was income derived from work. This proportion has been falling year by year ever since, and by 1992 it was down to 52 per cent. I think this is a staggering figure. It deserves a great deal of thought. It means just one forint in two of the household income of Hungarian society derives directly from work. Now I ask you, how can this be squared with respect for work? How can this be squared with a set of values whose prime object is to reward and encourage work and performance? It is high time, absolutely necessary, in fact inescapable from the economic and incentive points of view, and from the ethical point of view, for work to receive greater respect and for earned incomes to achieve greater proportion in total income.

This would require, on the other hand, the availability of work. Unemployment in Hungary has risen to a very high rate. Can this problem be solved?

A certain degree of unemployment is a concomitant of a market-economy system. But it is not immaterial whether this is 3, 5, 10 or 20 per cent. The present rate of unemployment in Hungary is high, although there are European countries where it is higher. The first thing we have to strive for now is defensive in nature. We have to blunt the edge of a situation in which the Hungarian economy could reach a serious, catastrophic situation, entering a production crisis in which production began to plunge. That would bring much higher unemployment than today's. The other thing is to strive to reduce unemployment. We will become really, permanently and reliably able to bring the customary level of unemployment down to much lower than the present level if Hungary embarks on a growth path and if

the country manages to increase its GDP at a rate of 3–4 per cent over several years. This is what will lead to a lasting reduction in unemployment.

Finally, referring back to the title of this conversation, can we actually begin to climb the steep road ahead us?

That depends on how we measure its steepness. I am a prisoner of my own metaphor here, for having played with the word "road" in so many of my earlier writings, and now this has become the title of the conversation today. On the one hand, we are already on it; we can feel its steepness, if steepness is taken to mean that we experience the fatigue of climbing. Anyone climbing and doing something else at the same time begins to pant and gasp—this we can feel, and in that sense we are on the steep road already. And we also feel that it has become steeper, because we were on a flatter road before. We often said about the road we were on that our feet were squelching in the mud and we were floundering about. It was also said often that we were just dawdling along this road. Now we suddenly feel it has become steeper. Of course "upwards" can mean something else as well. When will the Statistical Office announce, not just once, but several years in succession, that the country's production is growing, the country's consumption is growing, and the average per capita consumption is growing as well? All I can answer is that I do not know. I would not like to make any kind of forecast in this respect. And I would warn anyone else against announcing now that there is only a year or two to go, and then there will be lasting growth. Growth is a process determined by anonymous, unnamed forces, and it takes some kind of prophet to stand there and make a prediction. GDP growth, production growth, consumption growth are the ultimate result of activities in which millions take part—in which a part is played by the government, by every member of Parliament, by every union leader, by every member of the press, and by every Hungarian employer and employee. They depend on the combined performance of all these. Every one of them can singly or together commit small mistakes or fatal blunders. And in that case we shall still be where we are now in three years' time, or in an even worse position. But I do not exclude the possibility of all the participants doing what they have to do in this difficult situation, on this steep road. In which case the results will soon be apparent. Not necessarily straight away in every index, but in several indices, and not straight away for everyone, but as soon as possible for the benefit of as many as possible. The chances are there, and the rest depends on us. ❧

László Zsolt Szabó

Mihály Kornis

Lifebook

The Hero of Our Story

(The opening of the novel of the same title)

1
to die

A hot, muggy day. The minute he opens his eyes he feels his bad temper, the lead settle on him. Lying hairy and naked on the sheet he blinks his eyes, surprised as always at the suddenness. Surprised that the pleasant taste of some inconsequential dream is still in my mouth, he's already thinking that every moment of the day will be pure hell. That once again defeat lies waiting for him at the starting line. All is lost, the world's gone mad, Hungary is lost, I'm forty-three, and not writing... Try as I might, it just won't come. It won't. What should I do? What can I do? My writer's cramp. I loathe it. I've made a thorough mess of my life, writing plays out of impotence, while the knowledge, the knowledge, it's stuck inside, fossilized in some dark recess of the heart.

He climbs out of bed.

My wife sees his face and tactfully retreats to the kitchen.

She gives him fruit. She pretends she's reading the papers. We say nothing.

The aggressive sun shines through the kitchen window. Yellowish-red shafts of light. Back perspiring, last night comes to him, when after hours of fitful desperation worse, even, than usual, he stands up pale as a ghost from his desk and gropes his way to the bathroom. I hang my head.

He's terrified of sympathy.

Still, later on they quietly sat down side by side anyway and something he did not usually do, he spoke to his wife of his literary wasteland, how awkward! He said to her, listen, if I can't write, I don't want to live. But the thought of suicide is obnoxious to him, you know, it's the coward's way out... He's been at a loss lately, honest! Altogether too

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Lifebook, *in this translation by Judith Sollosy, will be published by Quartet Books, London, in 1996.*

bitter to play the fool, the addict, the alcoholic. Or to weep... It's just that I have no idea what I'm doing here! His parents, his relatives, they're all dead. My friends have deserted me, and I have deserted them in turn. He won't chase after women, I wouldn't want to break your heart, nor mine neither, for that matter; besides, as he gets on in years, the diminishing casual bouts of cheating—need he spell it out?—lie heavy on his conscience. In short, it's just not worth the bother.

Not to mention AIDS.

It was a bitch, but he even gave up smoking. He needed his strength to work, should it ever come to that. For the same reason, he wouldn't allow himself to smoke grass either—goodness, I've got to watch the purity of my infertile thoughts, if you know what I mean; besides (it's no use hiding it from you) literature bores me to tears, politics ditto, while the atmosphere's turning more fascist by the hour, there's no stopping it; which, considered together—his writer's dementia especially—leads to himself catching himself flirting with the notion of sudden death as if it were the grand prize in the state lottery, an unlooked-for stroke of good fortune, a legal escape hatch, and that this morning, when he went to the cemetery to see his parents, because he hadn't been out there in years, I caught myself counting how many headstones I could find of people who had died younger than me, and he was relieved to note that on this earth it did not count as bad manners to die at the age of forty-three...

Naturally, I will not give in, he kept repeating as he paced up and down in front of the terrified woman, no sirree, not me, it's the sheer improbability of it that makes me want to believe in my rebirth. Besides, running scared is against his principles; having come this far I want to see it through, and he wants his wife to understand, the fact that at times he is capable of writing something promising while at other times he is blocked for years on end, not to mention the fact that he's got to vacillate between these two extremes all his life, having to put up with the curious—and at times malicious—prying of others, well, this is pure torture, my daily bread!

And our lives, too, Manyika, gone bad, in the past year or two everything's gone bad. Or have we simply grown old?

Jumping to my feet, I get into my clothes—in the sweltering heat he's heading for the pool, he, the writer who does not write...

Should I turn back now that I am here? Why did I come?
So I can go home, he thought.
Swimming bores me to death. It always has.
I want to die, he thought.
He'll go home and lie down on his bed, never to get up again. Manyi's going to beg me in vain, no, I'll say, no, no, stop pestering, and if you won't support me, have the kindness to lock me up in an asylum. But she won't. She's going to feel sorry for me. And support me until I croak.

Of course it's just a thought, the foolish Tábor thought.

And then the Jewish cemetery came to mind on that muggy, stifling morning yesterday, all that dark green around him, and a light intermittent drizzle, the foliage oozing, "death perspiring, death,the good, death the inconsequential, sluggish non-existence on the periphery of town, etcetera, etcetera; food for thought when I write my novel, he thought at the far end of the cemetery as he was looking for his aunt's grave, stroking the blackened gravestones under the heavy foliage moist under his palms despite the sweltering heat, except just then something terrifying—though considering the unrelenting failures of the past fifteen years, the terrifying certainty was only natural—crept into his heart, to wit, *you will never write about it because you cannot write novels, it's all you can do noting down what you remember, the fact that you had a family, you know, they're all dead now to the last man, your father, your mother; keeping a record, tallying! the Book, Writing... badly, but the main thing is that it be done, you're the last of the lot, you scum, it's not the novel but their favourite food and their laughter, that's what you should be noting down!*

Sure, sure, but what's the use of remembering for its own sake, the foolish Tábor asked himself. Who cares about my family's history? These people don't, the fascists don't, while Gyuri Perl, all he does is drink, and as for the rest, I don't give a damn. We have no children, we have noone, tomorrow or the day after it's the end of the world, I'll never write anything ever again, I am bereft of hope because I have no hope, though who knows, possibly this afternoon, a miracle... that's how I launched into **a handful is not enough: in praise of over-developed honkers** back in '75, and though he'd been walking along the narrow corridor for some time unawares, heading for the exit, the foolish Tábor changed his mind once again and, gaping into space, turned around and trampled into the locker room, an obese mouse, after which for forty straight minutes, desperately gasping for air, he agonized over how he would start this thing in the afternoon.

To be perfectly honest, he hadn't the foggiest.

2
niht fordem kind

The cemetery, all that green, dark green, poison green, death green!

When they first took me I was just a child, though not to a dead relative, but so we could probe, sound and fathom the wall of the martyrs, the Wall of the Martyrs—or however it's got to be written!—the newly finished wall of the martyrs (Wall of the Martyrs), or at least my father did, to be precise. Anxious Sunday morning preparations; before starting out they brushed me several times, my hair, my clothes, Grandad put on spats, mother checked my teeth in a small compact mirror, and her own, too. Dad she just warned to do likewise. I was made to grin into a small hand-held compact and she grinned, too, then took me to the bathroom. Healthy we were, that's for sure, but by the time we

got on the tram we were at loggerheads, Dad whacked my bottom, his bass baritone booming on the back platform so his head turned purple, with Grandad hissing at him, which just made Dad bend into it all the more, "I want to get off, my family hates me, my lot is misery!" he ranted, the sweat trickling from under his hat as we got off on the outskirts of town.

That's when I saw how far out they had put the cemetery of the Jews.

In '55—or was it '57?—a couple of days after the unveiling of the Wall of the Martyrs, driven by curiosity, Dad took the family to the Jewish cemetery.

Where I had never been before.

Or who knows. You never know. Kozma utca number 6.

They were stumped. What were they going to say to me? I could see that right away. We're going to the cemetery, they said, but don't you worry, it'll be very nice. While I felt sorry for them thinking I don't know about death, so I decided to be tactful and not ask any questions. Instead I turned my back to them and played hop-scotch on the parquet floor.

They said, too—it was Dad who said, I guess—we are going to visit grandmother, what I mean is, you're going now to visit both your grandmothers, while I added to myself, "who are in the ground", though I couldn't see it too concretely in the mind's eye, or anything, see what it's like. "Like the dead are." Or who knows. As I've just said, it was going to be my first time. I didn't bother my head much about it. Not that there wasn't plenty of furtive jabbering about the Wall of the Martyrs for days beforehand, during dinner, for instance—**niht fordem kind**, not in front of the child!— but for some reason I figured this Wall of the Martyrs was like a statue, except it wasn't a statue but a wall, because the government had at long last bowed to an old and legitimate demand of the Working Masses, a bunch of grown-up nonsense, nothing to fret about.

At the time I had no very clear notion of the Jews, who they are. I still don't. And yet I wracked my brains a lot more over this problem than anyone would expect, or (especially) expected at the time! Poor Mum and Dad. Because for one thing, it was around this time that Albert Russell's book on the history of the liquidation (a quaint contemporary expression) of European Jews, THE SCOURGE OF THE SWASTIKA, was published, and it being profusely illustrated with a bunch of riveting pictures, Grandad spent months pouring over it without losing interest, ever, but having to make frequent visits to the loo, he'd often forget it on the couch, alas!, which is how I got my first glimpse of mountains of corpses, death marches, sterilized twins, and charred skeletons.

Or whatever.

I had this thing about photographs, you see, and generally pictures of all kinds, and I'd sneak a look at such stuff with trepidation, as if I'd seen it before but wanted to see it again, whereas this book (among others) was strictly off limits to me. Yes indeed. Naturally, I got all worked up and queasy, knowing

right away I shouldn't have looked, what's more, that it was really very thoughtful of my parents forbidding me in no uncertain terms, because it really was not for my innocent soul, I might get scared witless thinking I was a Jew myself.

Because it just so happens I wasn't. Just my folks. Like in those Jewish jokes.

For one thing, I was not circumcized, ha-ha!, and no rabbi ever saw me, and I wasn't given a Jewish name or entered in the congregation records, which means I'm non-denominational, my parents explained, only to repeat it over and over again later, around '56, should anybody ask, you are non-denominational, and don't you forget it!

But this is just an aside to this other incidental cemetery episode when... but where was I? ...when at the gate I had to take their hands, and I was excited and a little awed because right by the fence I saw all those mausoleums with the sooty walls, a bunch of shitty old death houses, the graves—which of course I didn't know at the time—of barons and bankers' families, and so I said, could we please leave and go to the two grandmothers instead?

In short, where are we headed? And why are we headed that way?

Because we were keeping to the side wall, you see, stubbornly to the side wall, as if Mum and Dad had no intention at all of visiting the graves. But they wouldn't answer this question of mine either, which scared me. They had changed beyond recognition, the skin taut around their faces; they had grown old, their shoulders stooping in such a strange way, my father taking his father's arm, whereas usually he wouldn't even talk to him! I turned to Mum, but she didn't hear me either, or pretended not to, her pretty lips becoming repugnantly thin, as if she had meant to close them once and for all.

She yanked me along by the wrist. I felt the heat.

A hot autumn day, not too hot but hot enough, a broody, misty day, leaf-cluttered, stifling. And no one heard me squall! They dragged me along the ground, no reproaches, no whacking my behind, they just stared ahead, into thin air. They had also turned sooty, or so it seemed to me... Also, I would have liked to ask something I had pointedly and conveniently forgotten till then, namely, what was I expected to do when we got there? On the playground it's playing on the swing, at kindergarten it's being a good boy, on the bus it's looking politely out the window. But now? What are we children expected to do in a case like this? But by then I was breathless from the excitement—no, it was fear!—the picture before me shattered into a thousand fragments, as it always did in moments of panic, the air like oatmeal, and brown; I might have even shrieked, I'm not sure, but no, because Dad's turning to face me after all, I can see it in the mind's eye, his lips ashen, he stamps his foot, he's promised himself to turn a deaf ear to my histrionics at least here, within these walls, but too much is too much and I'd better come to my senses or else, but it's him who is not in his senses, I see, his eyes flashing as if the roots of his hair hurt, a blue flame darting in his eye! and he's trembling like an aspen leaf, trembling, and on the verge of tears...

Then suddenly we're there, on a clearing, abruptly, a colossal emptiness as if somebody had first bombed it, then carefully raked it. **Somebody. The Hungarian fascists, the Arrow Cross. A janitor, to ease his conscience.**

"The death wall," I hear.

Which makes me prick up my ears. And wouldn't you know. There, to the right, something that looks to me like gigantic walls of stone. **Death walls.**

At their base hunch-backed couples, married couples, Sunday people. Children hardly any. But plenty of bow-legged old women, though, with glass jars and flowers, and men like my father, in hats. But the way they move about, it's really peculiar, first sneaking up to the wall real close, as if trying to sniff it, then backing off hurriedly, as if they didn't really want to see, just make sure... Sure of what?

Hands clasped behind their backs, necks craned, puny bird-folk, Jewish cranes, glancing at the wall one minute, blinking cagily at us the next, what do we make of it? **You people are Jews, too, are you not? Well, the boy's bound to grow out of it. Besides, you are lucky. It hardly shows by the size of your family! We should have it so good. However, let us not look at each other any more, you mind? It's too obvious!** Some of them kneel by the wall, murmuring... I feel sick to my stomach.

"The death wall," Grandad repeats matter of factly.

Mum and Dad swallow hard. Their cheeks ashen, they assume the cagey bird posture, then gingerly ease up to the wall, all the way up... For some reason I decide it would be best after all if I ran off to play at a distance, a familiar, comforting game, nothing to worry about. Make myself scarce. It's just another one of those excursions, really, when grownups get themselves muddled up in those ridiculous self-consciously grown-up things; but they're bound to stop after a while, no need sticking to them, "death wall," what a way of putting it! Well, let them have their fill of looking, a monstrosity, but they'll stop sooner or later, and then we can go visit the two grandmothers in the ground.

But I can't resist the temptation and go up to the wall myself.

Why?

Because even at the gate I was probably squalling because it struck me—never mind that I didn't want to know—**that I know, though it is strictly forbidden, yes, we were liquidated in the war. But fine, I don't know, I pretend I don't know. Except I'm mature, grown old before my time, and when they first told me I already knew how it's these camp Jews that were jammed into the wall, slapped into the brick, poor souls, first carefully slapped into the brick by the sadistic fascists then fired in a kiln, but it doesn't hurt because once you're dead nothing hurts any more, so it was no use them wanting to hurt, except now they can't be let out again, it can't be done, these ashes-and-dust Jews, Auschwitz Jews dragged home against their will, but why, I wonder?, so the survivors can see and touch the wall, at least? they've piled their relatives up to make a wall for Sunday-morning**

strollers, monstrous, they come here then haven't got the nerve to go up close, they're secretly afraid of it, for all they know it might bite, the anger, the anger of the innocent stuck inside the wall; of course, if I were to ask them—you can bet your sweet life they'd flatly deny it, and when I grow up I'm going to flatly deny it in front of my children too, let the dead do their thinking in the ground, what did they go die for, why, when I have hardly lived!, that's the sort of miserable Jews we are, except the proletarian state has graciously allowed us to join the ranks of the workers and if we don't act up, we might even survive, not to mention a cemetery, way out in shitsville but our very own, but the main thing is not to make an issue of it, going round bragging from pillar to post, poor mother, too, where is her other husband? and Dad's fat sister, what a disgusting, pitiful lot we are, if only I knew what there was in that wall worth gaping at, what a laugh, first they bring them here, then they goggle at them like a shop window, phew!, contemplating their own deaths with other people's eyes...

In short, I tiptoed over, you might say, and—now comes the interesting part—I saw... I see the death wall is scribbled full of names, hundreds of thousands of names, **names and names and names** like ants marching in thick columns up and down and sideways, the names of all those burnt Jews, I realize with a shudder, and as if that weren't bad enough, **these names got incised into them, into the wall, as if dying wasn't bad enough, their bodies written on, some religious dictate, perhaps? one of those batamt Jewish things?** I wonder; however, as I draw closer, hopping on one foot to get a better look at the Sunday morning survivors, curious to see what Jewish custom prescribes must be done in front of one of these whatchamacallit martyr walls or whatever, because I happen to know from Grandad's goings-on that they have some real queer customs, **or had**, the Israelites, **who are they?**, a good thing it's been discontinued, legally banned, otherwise the family would be kept busy all day, like Grandad in the closet, when nobody's looking —

so then: I look and see the poor things standing by the wall, feeling more and more familiar, not looking at each other quite so intensely, most of them not even concerned with the dead names, the newcomers, it's they who are trying to make them out with a faint blush, with guarded interest, lest some unauthorized stranger should think they're also Yids, God forbid, **oh, no, they're just studying this thing or whatever out of idle curiosity, isn't it fascinating, those Hitler victims, the ovens, all those names, is that a fact...?** while their heads covered with handkerchiefs Dad and Grandad, for instance, are murmuring something on their knees, Grandad's flung his greatcoat on the ground, he's kneeling right up against the wall, gesticulating vehemently and talking —

talking?!

yes, bowing and muttering

and doing stuff with his arms

and Dad too!

But by then I hear the droning. Like a circling band of insects, louder and louder, I'm all ashiver, yes, it's coming from the wall, and those that come here secretly come for this.

They're all chit-chatting with the wall!

Especially the elderly, shouting soberly, but impatiently, WHAT'S WITH LICI, TELL ME ABOUT LICI, MRS ÁRMIN RÓNA, BORN LICI MINK, LISTEN, ÁRPÁD'S GONE OUT OF HIS MIND, HEADING FOR AUSTRALIA WITHOUT A PENNY TO HIS NAME, LEAVING A SECURE LIVELIHOOD BEHIND, AND THE PARTY, TOO, WHAT SHOULD I TELL YOUR DAUGHTER, FRIEDMANN, HOW DID YOU DIE, DAD, HELP ME, PLEASE, THAT CHILD'S A NERVOUS WRECK NOW THAT YOU'RE NOT AT HIS BECK AND CALL, THEY WON'T TAKE HIM AT UNIVERSITY BECAUSE OF HIS PAST, AND THAT MANCI BÍRÓ, COMPLAINING ABOUT EVERYTHING, IT'S ENOUGH TO DRIVE ME NUTS, THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT NATIONALIZED THE ENTIRE STOCK, UNDERSTAND? EVERYTHING WE EVER HAD! THEY'LL MAKE NO EXCEPTIONS, BUT YOUR STROMAN, HE'S A DECENT SORT, GIVING US BACK WHAT HE COULD, TELL ME, YOU DO EAT FROM TIME TO TIME ANYWAY, DON'T YOU? I AM LOOKING FOR ATTORNEY-AT-LAW SAMU HAJÓS, BÉRKOCSIS UTCA 17/B, SECOND FLOOR, APARTMENT THREE, BLUE EYES, BROWN HAIR, ALL GOODNESS AND PURITY PURPOSE and the like

but the chatter, the feverish answers coming from the wall I couldn't make out very well partly because the excited cackle of the living, husky with emotion, drowned out the hundred-thousand-million voices of the dead, and partly because, to be perfectly honest, you couldn't make it out even if there were a deadly silence around the wall, there being too many of them talking all at once, **inside the wall too squirming and writhing baked together in a raving frenzy probably all hoping someone would come specifically to them begging giving name and address pleading for news of lost relatives just in case but never oh it's out of the question** in this infernal din it's always somebody else the relatives are looking for and the dead too are looking for somebody else, their numbers so great they have to outshout each other till their lungs burst, all those Jews screaming themselves hoarse and beyond **ah! at last I understand** but of course I don't, repulsed, I sneak a furtive look at Grandad Miksa, his palm pressed hard against the wall, his head, mad-relentless, lowered towards the ground, shouting on his knees **who to I wonder, did others in our family also die in the war? did everybody? and not just Magduska and Uncle Poldi? except they didn't have the nerve to tell me to my face before, poor Grandad, he's probably trying to introduce me to the family right now, but it's no use screaming and shouting among these millions, and it's no use pretending that he can**, a handkerchief tied into knots at its four corners trembling awkwardly on his bald pate, I'd like to run over to him, he's not far, but just then Dad bars the way, picks me up and kisses me feverishly on the cheek, he's pulled off his coat too now and sits me on his arm, covering my eyes with kisses drooping with saliva and emotion, "let him be, it's what he's been pleading for, let him bark himself hoarse, well, how do you

like it, what have you got to say," peevishly I stretch myself in his arm, "nothing, and how much longer is this going to last, and where is Mum," I feel a profound depth of shame, I cling to his arm, "put me down," wonder of wonders, he does as he is told, he puts me down, what's more, he runs to the other side of the wall, his shirt ridiculously bobbing over his belly, he must have heard something, his name, most likely, yes, **they're calling out to him, it's his turn now, but who?** I sneak after him but at the corner of the wall I bump into my Mum, she's out of sorts, her eyes cold and empty, looking in her handbag for a cigarette, "leave your father be, why don't you run on back to play, and don't mind about us," she's pacing up and down the symmetrically raked gravel, leaning slightly forward, her light coat flapping in the resurgent lukewarm wind, I'm thinking **she won't even look at me** and **her lipstick, it turns her lips the colour of raw meat** and it also strikes me how **her other husband is here, too, the one she loved more** and I forget to go search for my father, I stare back at that horrible wall, it's so brazen which is something else I mustn't talk to anybody about either, I bet.

– – – And it was no use me wailing on the way out either, let's go to the two grandmothers in the ground! – – –

...On the other hand, Dad made a special point of taking me to the glassed-in iron cage across from the entrance-exit, it's still there today, a stone's throw from the mortuary

and unhappily it transpired that in that ear-splitting din and cloud storm of frayed nerves whirling around the memorial candle I thought I heard that the red tongue of flame Dad said would never die away, that this feeble, greyish, nothing of a flame burning in the iron cage, that it is truly **eternal, eternal fire**.

In short I believed that it was never lit and would never be extinguished, and that it was burning for us. What's more, that possibly it's us Jews burning in there, in our very own cemetery, as a warning, what I mean is, a warning to others how **never again, Europe, take care**, and the like. Because at the time that's the sort of spiel that was in vogue.

Yes, this is us—there I stood, a bundle of confusion and none too happy either—puny enough as flames go, but eternal.

A Jewish flame

3
green graveyard fields

In the morning, headed for the cemetery.

I set off, perky as can be, yes indeed. In the passage leading to József Boulevard he even catches himself heading for his father's and mother's grave with such lithe steps, holding his tears together like an orator his say or a future bridegroom his bouquet of posies. But between Stáhly utca and Népszínház utca

the metropolis, gone bad, launches its relentless assault on him, it's like trying to keep from bumping into some old beggar woman grown oblivious to the world around her who'd like to pick his pockets too, but it is too late, death in the offing, my native town a filthy baglady dropping greyish clumps of cotton from her panties onto the sidewalk, or what is this, this morning's head-on collision. The thing is not to look. Autumn in mid-summer, the July sky the colour of whey. The atmosphere oppressive.

The muted melancholy, the newspaper stands on Blaha Lujza Square with their frightfully bad atmosphere. He just stands there, asking for nothing, looking the hoodlums that call themselves newspaper vendors resolutely in the eye. But cowardice wins the day and in the end, he buys a *Kurír*. He's profoundly disappointed. He'd hardly set out, and already he's forgotten to grieve. As I approach Kőbánya I stash the paper away, under my bum, and I look out, at nothing, then preoccupied I take it out again, nothing there either, I put it away again... He's there before he knows it. Beyond the Christian plots the semolina dumpling sky is yellower, perhaps, than here. Leaning more to yellowish-grey, though legally the same. We do not discriminate here: this is one jail-house Globe, with Hungary on it, and the so-called cemetery block, the size of an ant's supper, if that. A pin prick. It won't hurt. He trips over the streetcar rail overgrown with grass, springs hurriedly to his feet, and is soon inside. The trap is sprung.

Past the gate, the small office building, in the rain. Around it steaming paving-brick and the cement path leading to the inner gate, where it is not raining. Which is only natural. The office, it's wicked. Always has been. It's legendary. I'd never seen it when it wasn't raining. Even the sky's got to put up defences. It's always pouring on top of the office. Just ask anybody. It's a bad place, an evil place, pernicious and pestilential, mean, corrupt and vulgar. A while back, seven years ago, Mr Havasi's hypocritical, grovelling Gypsies, at my mother's funeral, some rotten deal, lousy, the whole thing, and that shamus too in the opaque heat of the mortuary, who for the furtively presented tip from me furtively uncovered the "recently deceased" laid out in the furtively presented coffin, and that lady clerk with the nasal voice sitting behind the glass contemplating her two hands atop the catalogue as she worked, not to mention the long lines...

For them. It's raining for them.

I wasn't in the habit of visiting the place before because we weren't in the habit of dying before. For decades I didn't even know where it was, much less that there were disguised jail offices such as this, various forms of payment, plus windbag-rationalist priests. So-called rabbis.

I storm in.

Past the gate, though, he hesitates, stopping in his tracks.
A middle-aged woman in a white smock hurries past him. She's heading for the office. She looks at him, her eyes the colour of fading forget-me-nots.

Can I help you?

She has pulled a hood over her head. A transparent raincoat is stretched over the office whites.

Jahrzeit?

It's not a question but a statement, sad, understanding.

No! Of course not! I'm here to visit my relatives

the hero of our story mumbles in his embarrassment, then quickly looks away, looks at nothing

"it's not that embarrassing"

but it's embarrassing all the same

"it's just silly"

it's not that silly

"...I wish I knew, *year-week*, what could it mean, *year-week?*"

he wonders

Excuse me, you seem familiar with the place, could you tell me how frequently the grave-sites need to be renewed. Or will I be notified by mail?

he asks with a tentative, fleeting smile

"why is this woman so familiar, this beauty past her prime, who on her cheeks uses crrrr-reams, a middle-class widow who came here in hopes of finding employment, a volunteer, possibly, the victim of her state of mind, it wouldn't be the first time, **the widow and the soldier**, mother appeared in it at the National in forty-six or whenever"

"yes, it was this woman who provided the proper ritual nightgown for Mother's corpse back then! it was this woman who amidst profuse apologies sold me those whatchamacallits for a couple of forints, I have no idea what the Hebrew name is for them, for anything, and I had to decide about mother's hair, could it be? her hair? yes, that's when this widow told me how **after a bereavement in her own family, in her profound grief she offered her services to the congregation for the remainder of her days, and ever since, day and night, without a word of complaint, there is nothing for her but this, and**"

"she recognized me, yes, it's her, letting me know, even back then, that I am famous, oy oy"

the hero of our story continues in his reflections

Never, my dear sir, what are you thinking! For the Jews there is no renewal! Our final resting places come with a guarantee. As long as this country goes by the name of Hungary, at any rate, and is a sovereign state!

but even the kind-hearted volunteer realizes that this may have been a little too much

In short, put your mind at rest, honoured sir, we will never lay so much as a finger on them, it's been our way ever since we're Jews

and now she places her hand on the foolish man's arm

"she's on this side of sixty, and pale forget-me-nots swimming in her eyes"

"her lips, too, light and soft, the upper and the lower, too, while her body, it's one of those eternally youthful types; but why is she resting her hand on my muscular lower arm, where will this lead, oh, tell me, what's the use"

You know, I don't like coming out here because, for one thing, I keep running into the mafia...

"yes, yes, yes!"

Pushy types, moonlighting

"that's what I am"

It's bad enough them cheating me out of the money for the grave tending, but I can't get rid of them, I haven't got a moment's peace alone with...

the woman waves me off, it's coming out of her ears, this shoddy excuse

Put your mind at rest! We have a new director, new men, they're different, or so I'm told. Just ignore them is my advice! And if they talk to you anyway, talk back in some foreign language...

her light hand is only just now stirring from...

"then she rests it on my arm again, how about that!"

then she withdraws it again with a sad little laugh

"groping relentlessly for my hand, why, I wonder? **hers like a big, obese butterfly, mine like a hypersensitive, languid worm**, it makes me smile, albeit fatigued from the dirt of the morning and from all that's waiting for me in this cemetery; it's not unpleasant, I wouldn't call it unpleasant, but all the same I'm glad none of the dead are passing by just now"

...If they stop at hiring new help, tell me, what has changed? It's just a matter of time before they band into a new mafia, don't you agree?

the hero of our story goes on with the embarrassed conversation

the lady grips foolish Tábor's wrists with both hands like a vice

her head bent to the side, looking to meet his eyes

"as naively melodramatic as a rebellious-libertine orphan girl of the Belle Époque who wishes to penetrate to the heart of her corpulent uncle's reliability; oh, right into the very centre of his pupils, as if this weren't the dismal entrance area to the Israelite city of the dead at Rákoskeresztúr but the farther end of the garden of a Swiss girls' school on a sunless summer's morn when the suffragette, having grown tired of her involuntary incognito, has made a decision past recall to give vent to her wild passions behind the handy pile of bricks, the degree of freedom of which—not to mention its mere existence!—this foolish man can have no inkling of!"

Well...

and good! Well and good, my dear sir, still, you mustn't be surprised, it's inherent in the nature of the thing, is it not?

"yes, yes"

the lady drawing ever closer, well and good,

her glance in tow and her impish, rueful smile

sidling up to the man's lips, he'd left them parted
from below, eagerly, with a song in her heart, wet
behind the pile of bricks, where they'd dumped the rubble from some truck
next to the eternal light, what breach of etiquette! still, he feels a pointed
and jabbing excitement in the pit of his stomach which he can never quite
suppress in short, the most potent, the most pernicious kind
"who will disappear, who should I be ignoring?"
he stammers, but by then there's pawing
hurried and intimate, as always
"what I mean is, not always!"
that's what's so nice about her, she's so "Jewish, so graveyardish!"
greying wisps of hair above the soft upper lip
must be around fifty, NO, MORE—MORE!
"just seven years more than me"

the foolish man reassures himself, and reaches under feeling the warmth, everywhere the warmth, a lukewarm breeze wandering among the ornate gravestones, the sky made of lead, the soil damp, the soil greasy-black, graveyard soil

"she's in heat" he thinks idiotically, and "lost," meaning him, **he's lost, and I can't find my way back, I've lost my way, nothing but grey vaginas for me now and neglected cemetery paths, I'm not even Jewish, my parents wanted me to be Hungarian, like the patriotic poets Petőfi or Attila József, I-prostrate-myself-before-thee-my-sweet-sweet-homeland-take-me-to-your-bosom** and the like, then alarmed, he concentrates under himself, "in the mud" **I am lost if you are lost**, the Jewish soil of Pest trembles, sad-eyed mirage, soft-lipped lady, oh, how she nabbed me, right by the gate, the body coated with dew, the skin parched and covered with forest litter though the thighs are smooth, a homeland without luster, I'm not used to this, he wails, I'm not accustomed, I crave young women who squeal with delight while this woman of Rákoskeresztúr screeches, belying her age, the effort paling her face, a network of wrinkles, hot little veins in the furrows of her thighs, it is early in the day and humid, and let's assume I've got myself entangled with this petal-eyed woman of the graveyard crying with no end in sight behind the pile of bricks – – –

...though her outpouring of generosity was not unwelcome, to be sure, its hidden significance upset and outraged me all the same, that the mere fact of my "origins" should make somebody, anybody, more intimate, helpful and excited, somebody who as far as I'm concerned is a total stranger and who from this moment on I should respect for at least two reasons, firstly because she respects me, too (though she knows nothing about me) and secondly, because I ought to be joining her in the self-glorifying ritual of a shared fate which she has initiated with certain melancholy and cryptic exchanges of the eye and other trifling...

...nauseating and in bad taste, I thought even as a child, and if in my presence someone hit a tone like this with my parents—because luckily they did not

do this themselves, but clearly thought it natural coming from others—well, at such times I'd run away from them without a second thought, out of the room and to the next corner where, taking several deep breaths, I'd wave with annoyance when they called me, the way Jewish children who are taken too seriously by their parents, so-called spoiled Jewish children, have a way of doing... – – –

– – – In the end I was almost sorry we hadn't become better acquainted, two birds of differently frenzied feathers ...

I studied the layout of the cemetery carefully to make sure beforehand I wouldn't lose my way.

I'd lost my way not once in the past and was determined not to do it again. I didn't feel like it. Staring at the signs painted on sheet iron he repeated over and over again: I must head for the Wall of the Martyrs, head left, because we're all lying that way, to the left, Father's and Gran's graves are both to the left, and Mother's and Granny's and Erzsi's, my favourite relative who was my aunt, what I mean is, she still is, she's also lying to the left of the main path with her parents, my great grandfather, the shoemaker Dávid Klein, and his wife, Franciska Pilisi (who according to family lore kept a kosher kitchen), they live off to the left, yes, at the end of the cemetery, plot 38, sheer coincidence, we had our share of family problems to be sure, but our participation in left-wing politics was negligible, whereas my going ga-ga and not being able to write THE BOOK in thirteen long years, let's face it, now there's a problem of far greater proportions; he just stands in front of the cemetery layout, anxiously memorizing our grave sites, "I am going to lose my way, I am going to lose my way";

his face ashen, he shrugs off the woman who is still clinging to him and sets off; when he reaches the vast desolate area in front of the mortuary he practically breaks into a run, it's so awkward passing the Corpse Showroom, it invariably brings back his mother's burial and his former self, unburiable, indigestible, unbearable, as he's looking at his mother in the metal coffin, for instance; as he passes the dromedary-gray ballroom with its bestial function he thinks, again and again, **I told her to show me, and she did, the pig**, but by then he's running past the Wall of the Martyrs, not stopping, though, why should he, "he's otherwise engaged," but he glares at the ocean of names, like he's done at the Directory set up by the entrance, the marble is dirty, he notes, and not from the sacred, convoluted, angular pencil marks of the elderly either, the likes of "and also Izidor Tauber and Irén, Mór, Lili, Gyurka, Gyula, Réga, Heliane, Carrys," or, "we're back from Montreal, Pál Spitz and his wife," and so on and so forth, but because "nobody bothers to clean it any more," *how shall I put it*, "these people have been written off," not in the cemetery, or not just in the cemetery, but more of that – – –

– – – It was easy finding Dad's and Gran's grave. No. 11/A, fourth from the left.
Even if at first I generally don't remember, still, my feet will take me there every time.

It's one of your so-called preferred spots:
aisle row along the pedestrian path,
so you don't even have to walk into the plot.
Right away I embarrassedly smoothed the earth from the stone slab
"some sort of storm"
my soul suffocating, I also forced a branch of ivy to the side
so I could see the slab, the slabs.
Two marble slabs, a smaller one,
ISTVÁN TÁBOR (1909–1970)
on top and under it
a yellowed larger one
which he had had made for his mother when he finally got the money together
in the mid-sixties,
because until then Gran had nothing but a sort of slip,
a sort of sheet iron slip,
and Dad was awfully ashamed on account of it
and so he had the stone inscribed with:
My beloved mother MRS MIKSA TÁBOR
I remember how he agonized over what should go on the stone,
once he shoved a crumpled piece of paper in front of me
where under the name that was on her ID
it also said among other things
née Regina Weisz
"is that how it's done?"
he asked gravely, stabbing a finger at the slip,
and when I crossed out née,
"are you quite sure? won't it lead to complications? is that the proper way?"
and when with no small effort I put his mind at rest
he ran to the phone to call the gravestone man,
"it's too impersonal, understand? you mustn't, I will not allow it, you just leave
Regina Weisz 1880–1970
and under it
these nine Hebrew letters"

וחלנתשלמה

which he then insisted on
though he couldn't read or pronounce them himself,
but he knew what they meant,
his mother's Jewish name, I think.
Sitting in an armchair, wheezing, his head tilted to the side, through glasses
slipped partway down his nose he stared at the badly crumpled tombstone plans,
at his mother's Jewish name,

if that's what it was,
and these characters shaped themselves into a woman's name.
I should ask a Jewish rabbi from Pest
but don't feel like bothering.
"I will not let anyone talk me out of this!"
he warned, whereas I had no intention of talking him out of anything,
"this has got to go on there!"
he said repeatedly before he shoved the tattered cemetery slip
into his wallet, I thought as I forced the green leaves of the ivy to the side
to make the writing visible.
Suddenly I found it all so domestic,
this cleaning up around the grave,
like an old mammy who finds peace only in the cemetery,
I laid my *Kurír* on the ground, knelt down on it,
pulled the small black cemetery pamphlet from under my arm
and slapped a piece of ragged silk on top of my head which I got here
in the office, once, in lieu of a capelle.
I looked ridiculous, I knew,
as I kneeled with that piece of capelle lining on my head, turning the pages
looking for a Jewish prayer I could read, printed in an adulterated
form, but now it didn't bother me somehow,
this time around, my looking ridiculous,
it felt almost good,
a rare thing for a man as vain
as the hero of our story, "and **the Lord's Prayer** too
I will not go home without it, so even if I don't find anything suitable
in this thing here, it's okay..."
but I did, for **he who seeketh shall find**, and **he who asketh shall receive**, and **he who bangs loud enough shall have the gates thrown open onto him**,
as a likeable martyr rabbi once said.
And so I found the ***maskir***.
Which is what I ended up reciting
first over the graves of Gran and Dad, though later, as I discovered at home,
in a wholly sacrilegious manner,
because according to the exegesis of the Law
maskir is to be said
"during devotional prayers in the synagogue,"
"but why can't this dark-green stroll through the cemetery,"
I later reflected stubbornly,
"be regarded as a devotional prayer in the synagogue,"
why not, why on earth not; besides,
"maskir"

I'd heard this atmospheric-ugly word first as a child,
I don't know from whom,
nor on what occasion,
but hear it I did many times, with a sense of shame due to the aura
of the word? or was I ashamed of myself?
it could well be, nothing could be more typical,
but that's another story.
Anyway, this time around it felt good rolling the guttural sounds around my tongue
as if I were shovelling pear compote into my mouth by the spoonful, careful
so the mealy, sugary syrup shouldn't drip down the corner of my lips.
I said maskir three times for Gran and three times for Dad, too,
and then the **Lord's Prayer**, once,
not because it's any less important in my heart than that other,
or anyplace else, it might even be the other way around,
anyhow, I don't know how it happened, but as I ground it out, bowing repeatedly,
I could feel that due to some extraordinary circumstance wholly independent of me
this time the prayer hit home,
ripping open that certain generally unreachable caul,
and my plea fell where I had intended.
Not so at other times.
But this time, definitely. Who can explain?
And then, taking heart, I even asked them in my own words
for help. Help in my present state of distress!

– – – After what happened, it was easy as pie finding his mother's grave. All he had to do, he knew, was retrace his steps on the path that lead to the grave of his father and paternal grandmother, then turn right the first chance he got, counting out twenty-six rows, then stride headlong through the mounds run riot with weed, careful not to trip as he stares eagerly ahead in anticipation of spotting the sandstone obelisk with the cone top that in 1950, after the funeral service, his mother had put up for her mother, a memorial carved out of some pitiful, perishable material for which later, when the builder herself was placed under it, the Gypsies, shaking their heads, said they would take no responsibility, "it's going to crack, if we so much as touch it, it's going to crack in two," we were told with something that verged on real feeling, though with blank, bright, gleaming eyes. "Think it over, Mr Tábor, an injection of concrete is what you need if you want to avoid catastrophe," "why don't you go fuck off," the hero of our story said facing the line of gravediggers, his suit drenched in sweat, careful to avoid their eyes – – –

Dried-up rabbit shit. Chirping crickets. A foggy summer. The sky like the greyish, tattered rubber flesh of a hot-air balloon burst asunder. "We writhe, we

squirm. But soon it's over..." He stumbles over to his mother's grave. For the time being he feels nothing. Panting, he glances up at the sky, then timidly puts his fingers to the obelisk. He has to pee. But he doesn't. – – –

My dearly beloved Mother
Mrs Zoltán Kelen
born Ilona Klein
1880–1950
Katalin Kelen
1915–1985

According to family lore, they had a horrendous fight over the memorial, too.

By 1950 rampant nationalization and the secret police divested his father of whatever little he might still have had. You want to spend the money on a dead woman when we're starving? He has no trouble imagining it, he'd seen it a thousand times, it's the only thing he ever saw: the merchant, hurt to the quick, screaming at the top of his lungs at the actress who had been kicked off the stage because of her bourgeois origins, not to mention her "bourgeois beauty," *between '45 and '48, she was a real star beauty in Pest!,* the delicate, blue vein he could never take his eyes from bulging at her temple, he's standing with belly distended like a schoolmaster, stabbed to the quick in his pride, slamming his fist on the coffee table, roaring, knowing he's in the wrong, his head crimson, even if he's right he shouldn't, he reflected, *it's no way for a dignified man to behave*, he could easily become an object of ridicule, he feels it himself, *like some sort of fool.* Across from him, in her armchair, his mother bows her head, shielding her eyes with her arm, sobbing bitterly, a cigarette trembling between her fingers, but she's holding it extended sadly over the table somehow so the ashes should fall into the alpaca ashtray, "Oh, mother! my darling! the light of my life!" he blubbers like a babe, it doesn't suit him, but the pain is real, he's not pretending, at times like this he is calling his mother in earnest – – –

I prayed, just like before.

...and already on the way here, traipsing along the path to the grave, a sense of great joy welled up in him, yes, an enormous fount of joy; it is what he felt in kindergarten when he was waiting to be reunited with his mother. When I hadn't seen her for half a day anywhere at all and wasn't even absolutely sure, perhaps, if he'd ever see her again, and whether it wouldn't always be like this from then on, with him stuck in this much more credible darkness, this bleak waiting outside the apartment door or in kindergarten, stuck with the usual hypocritical neglect on the playground or in the hospital, the dark neglect at home. And then, when someone would finally call, "your mother's here," I didn't even hear her voice yet, but the mere thought—"mother's coming!"—it was like, oh, it was like being freed from a subterranean dungeon every time, and me working my

way blindly through a mist of ecstasy from which now, now! she's coming! coming! and she folds me in her arms at long last, this whiter, brighter, more precious life, for whose sake it is worth going through it all, for this more noble, more comforting fairy tale ending, this joy and hope, this refinement of soul. **A better world**. What's there to be surprised about?

– – – ...Once I was among the graves, it was like slowly, familiarly, penetrating a fragrant cloud, sweet and heady, my heart jumping for joy, for nothing, for no reason at all. Just because I was at my mother's grave! Near her disintegrating body... Still, though his heart was beating merrily, he felt his anger just the same, he's angry with my mother, even in her grave! How distressing, really, there's no finding her, grabbing her and telling her in no uncertain terms... but what? And what for?

Good Lord.

Moving aside, I relieved myself in the misty sunshine.

I have no will-power. Besides, I couldn't hold it back.

...I'll just step aside a bit, I thought, and pee, it can't harm anybody around here any more.

But I prayed, too.

...so back I traipsed to the gravel path after I'd peed my fill near my mother's grave, like an animal, and goggled with my bulgy eyes until I found a couple of suitable memorial pebbles for her grave, and her mother's grave, too...

– – – ...But as I reached the heap of stones, my feet passing noisily over them, I saw a graceful wisp of ivy. It had crept up over mother's name. I urgently pulled it away, down to the ground. But I was immediately sorry.

"Maybe it was her."

"Inspired by her sense for beauty."

"Her love of life... She was peeking out of the ground."

And so on.

4
Grandad

It was not easy finding Grandad's grave.

I never can find it. I catch myself running up and down the cemetery paths, alarmed I won't find it. This feeling, however indistinctly, has me in its grip every time: "Grandad. He's lost." *Kidnapped. Gone. Never was here to begin with. Your life the product of a fevered imagination. You are not even alive. And you never had a grandfather to begin with. You are not who you think you are. It is high time you woke up! Cock-a-doodle-do*! You have grown old. *Want proof*? Just look at yourself, wandering through a cemetery, for kicks, searching for relatives un-

der the heaped-up mounds, a battered briefcase under your arm, and constantly losing your way... You should start wearing a notebook where your head is. Comes from eating too much meat. Consuming his own brain. He'll croak faster than his ancestors... His belly, too, bulging like a barrel, a man pregnant with Death. That's where he hides all his sadness, stuffing it all in, hey?

...I'm traipsing frightened, and very lonely, too, in this section of the cemetery to the left, my soul howling at the sight of the rusty sector signs, *he's surrounded by the dead, they've been watching him, he knows, for some time now, testing him*, uncanny, how the cemetery is testing him! Then, when pale as a ghost, muttering and panic stricken he counts yet again the sectors of the row in question of the lot in question, something comes unexpectedly to mind, and he stops in his tracks. He's found it. He's standing on it. I couldn't find it before either only because even the possibility that there is NO TOMBSTONE here I had erased from my mind. No tomb. Not for him. He hasn't got one. What he's got is a heap, a tentative little mound, an ocean of weeds. Plus what's left of the former lilac bush, planted out of love, long since gone wild. Also what the caretaker mafia perpetrated against it under the guise of "ivy planting"... This is what I constantly forget, that there's no sign of any sort here to stand as a reminder that below lie hidden the ashes of a human being. Even the provisional sign with his name is gone. What remains is a thinnish marble slab behind the irregular heap or mound, sunk into the ground, and even that not fixed in place...

I did not attend Grandad's funeral in '59.

He did not attend. They asked him if he wouldn't like to attend, his father no doubt asked him, and he must have felt the need to come up with some sort of serious-sounding excuse, like oh, my goodness, I should go, really, seeing how Grandad always loved me. But...

But what? What did I say?

Something like, "You know how upset I get in a cemetery"? If that's what I said, I was aping my father, who had a bad heart. "So just this once, don't make me think of how sensitive I am, think of my soul." Yes, I was quite capable of saying even that. And still am. Or: "Look here, Dad, don't make me go, just this once, please. Leave me out of it. A person mourns with his heart anyhow, not his actions, his whatchamacallit, his..." Yes, I said plenty of things like that even when I was ten, I am sorry to say. But maybe I just sighed and said, "I don't know how to put it... The thing is... no fooling... I'm not inclined."

I must have made a special point of saying that, I just know it.

This whining in imitation of the grownups, this searching for the right words.

But that's not what he remembered, but what it felt like saying no when my father had brought it up, nervous and in passing, a day or two prior to the funeral, barely just touching upon it one winter's morning; he was in the dumps and was in the devil of a hurry to be off someplace; he was in his topcoat and hat

and he barely just stopped behind me for a second, and after I'd started hemming and hawing by way of an answer in a sing-song manner, having been startled from my reading, because I had jerked my head up from some book or other, which means I had to turn around, and—but he wouldn't even let me finish—"I don't want you to either, I just thought I should ask, it's better if you don't," he cut in brusquely, irritably, then averting my eyes he hastily fixed his scarf, and was off

and then, but afterwards, too

yes, even as I was making my excuses

I felt a burning sense of shame! Burning, raging...

Inextinguishable!

I felt my cheeks burning, then to my surprise I started whining inside, God forbid father should notice how "his cheeks are on fire, he's blushing, lying, he's lazy and selfish and thumbs his nose at us, he's spoiled rotten," that's what he's thinking, so while I was making my excuses I never took my eyes off his, "will he buy it," but he didn't look like he wouldn't, still, with every word things went from bad to worse, it sounded worse, and maybe it was, and that's why the hero of our story found this so utterly shameful, among other things, because...

because...?

because for days I'd been expecting the question; I even suspected that it would be popped in an off-handed manner, and so, pretending I didn't even know what I was doing, feigning preoccupation, I rehearsed over and over what I hoped would be an artless and unstudied sort of answer which, when I actually got to say it, turned into a monstrous lie, and this surprised me all the more because when I had rehearsed it inside I was pleased as punch, what's more, I even thought how suitable it was, *what a sensitive child, he couldn't even say why, still, he just balked at seeing his grandfather's coffin, poor thing, how he stammered, lost for words, grown old before his time, he knows too much, alas!, the Jewish cemetery, it gets him down*

and I couldn't see why this good little alibi

should sound so implausible, even in my own eyes

not to mention Dad's

but when he stormed out of the house and I began pacing in front of the window, shivers like lightning zigzagging up and down my back, and I found myself incapable of digesting what had just happened, chewed over the dialogue between my father and myself, replaying it as it were, over and over again, the shame, it ate into me something awful.

Or whatever. Not just the shame. But the shame, too.

I couldn't have said what. It was too indistinct. Besides – – –

Father hadn't even asked what he had asked. What he actually asked was, should I get rid of the corpse all by myself, or are you going to lend me a hand?

And I said, I'm sorry, forget it, no way, do it yourself. Do you imagine just because you made me is no reason I should do your dirty work for you. Not now. Or ever.

Grandad lies on your conscience. You made your bed. Now lie in it.

I was heartless because I am heartless.

And unfair. (Really? It's not *my* problem.) Still, that my own father—that I should be ashamed of a Zeus, when I should have been ashamed of myself. Those old wives' tales about children and innocence! Must've been thought up by sentimental evil doers to ease their consciences, the old shitheads. To lie about something, as if in a trance, when it is too late...

Whoever loves the light and prefers clarity knows that a child is a wolf. A child is the most heartless of all creatures.

I have not changed.

Possibly, what made this impertinent and cheeky laziness of mine so surprisingly laden with shame was the fact that my father did not bawl me out right away, that he didn't smack me, backhanded, on the spot...? Because the one thing he never would tolerate, then or ever, was for me to say something I did not mean!

What a father. A foolish father. I lied, and he didn't smack me on the kisser. Out of a sense of fair play. Because he was lying too. Why did he have to ask if I felt like going with him?

By then, Grandad hadn't been living with us for years. He was wasting away in a Jewish old-age home in Óbuda, a victim of cerebral sclerosis. Dad had him taken there in the winter of '57, when he accidentally set fire to the sheets.

Our visits to him were wide and far between.

I didn't miss him either. – – –

"...and then, stumbling, I wedged my body behind the grave, no easy feat when you consider the effusive growth of the wild lilac bush—not that it was all that difficult either, though it was unpleasant—you try wrestling with the unyielding bushes behind a grave is all I say, go try it!—then with a groan I bent into it, grabbed the marble slab, but no, sorry, that's not how it was, because I pushed through the waist-high weeds, panicky-blind, to see if it's still there, if it's him, my grandfather, am I with my grandfather, lest I end up trampling over the grave of some so-called strange Jew, and so, first bending down, the blood rushing to my head, I pushed my livid countenance forward and down and studied the slab, brushing the sand off with my hand so I could see in the greenish half-light—it felt rotten, by the way, not knowing whether I'm desecrating a grave or bending over Grandad!—but there he was, I'd found him, in person!, I let escape a self-satisfied groan, my nether lip covered with sand, a wisp of hair in my eye, I'm old, I'm worn out, **I've arrived**, in a manner of speaking

Miksa Tábor
(1879–1959)

"I'm here dear, don't worry, it's all right," I whispered idiotically at the ground, exasperated and embarrassed, there, I did it again, I had to go search for him again in this accursed place, this ant-ridden mound, under weedy-infested wild lilac bushes, and I had noone to blame but myself, seeing how I must like to forget, forget the tough break we gave him even in the matter of his resting place; in short, as nerves on edge, I bent down among the weeds looking for the pitiful marble slab made long after my father's death, because as long as he was alive he wouldn't have it, he sabotaged it

but it's no use ransacking my brain, was it Mother who had it made or I

sometimes it seems to be Mother was still alive, in fact, we had decided together

I was the one who was scandalized, but she supplied the funds, on the other hand, it was I who took care of it

or was it in '79, on my thirtieth birthday

memorable because I was engaged in writing ***Miserere***, and I decided on my own about it

later paying for it myself from my less than modest salary

behind my family's back, or was it Mum who got tired of it after Dad's death

and out of revenge for Dad, now there's something that would be just like her

if only it were true

I don't know

but one of us took care of it

making sure he'd have a marble slab over his grave at least, the old fart, as my father used to call his father when the old man lost his mind; in short, as I bent over and with a groan grabbed the marble slab to see what's on it, though I could see plainly enough it was his, and possibly I just wanted to lift it up because I was happy, or maybe heave it partway out of the black cemetery soil so it shouldn't be sunk in so deep, anyway, that's when the fortuitous craving got me, and I dug into the sand with my nails and greedily fell to gobbling up the earth, and on a sudden impulse I stuffed a handful into my mouth as voracious as a midnight glutton sneaking out to the fridge for a bit of half-frozen ham

or a rodent on the trail of a scent, helpless, all control gone

I dug myself into the mound of earth and swallowed without bothering to chew, gorging myself, like always, indiscriminately, the tiny crampons and decayed pieces of bark notwithstanding, the way I eat the celery in my chicken soup, the mellow tubers, the soft snail's shells

but not Grandad, *don't get me wrong*

that never entered my mind, besides, I didn't find a single piece of him, no bones, shoes or shreds of clothing; it would have been horrible, but in any case

also impossible, because I was standing between two graves, there was nothing there but this good, greasy black earth which Rákoskeresztúr offers up to you as far as the eye can see; I'm going to have my fill for once, I thought, you never know, and I was right, it was delicious!, me shovelling it in, the wet mud trickling down the corners of my mouth; gorging myself at length and with satisfaction, though with plenty of bad conscience, too, I couldn't stop, it's a problem I've got but I've learned to live with it, I can put up with it reasonably well, provided the ogling rabble does not surround me while I'm eating and refrains from making sly remarks like *each to his own, Diaspora Jew*, and the like, and so

I dug myself ankle-deep into the cemetery soil
then knee-deep, then waist-deep
and I clawed
and I craved the soil
looking for the choicest, moistest bits
then flung the earth above my head, I screeched
I burped, I sobbed, I had a grand old time, but then I threw it right back,
the soil I had clawed out of the ground in my great enthusiasm, my colossal infidelity
and loving care, an unhappily *Hungarian Jew*, and agonized
about what my shadow was doing up there in the sky *WHY AM I SO BIG?*
these days
I can be seen far as Milan
with this unsavoury cannibal-face of mine

Which is what I got.

Because as I was wrestling with Grandad's sunken marble slab behind the graves, well, I'll be, miracle of miracles, my shadow started growing, it got bigger and bigger, gigantic, the size of an entire country, flag unfurled, what a fix.

Not me, mind you. My shadow! "A shadow-ape. Goliath Klein, the Golem—so he's underfoot, after all. In which case, though, how come he's alive? He'd expired long ago, it said so in the telegramme. So what's he stirring like that for? What is he up to? What is he after?"

Like the hero of a Fellini film at the end.

A genie let out of the bottle. A premonition of disaster. A shadow over the city. Some minor mishap the continent should have no trouble recovering from—provided it survives the Felix Krull-like convalescence!—but this massive *tsuris*, this Jewish vegetation is virulent. I am still alive.

The *tsuris*. It's me. Grandad was merely its cause."

".. anyhow, propelled by a sudden thought, I heaved the marble slab up from the ground and staggering, rescued it from the thick weeds so the next time I could

spot it with ease, not to mention the fact that I wanted for one and sundry to see: this is the home of that famous writer's grandfather, *where the brave come to pay homage*. Then as he bent down over the grave with it, his spine cracked. No kidding.

For a second he thought he wouldn't be able to straighten up. He decided he'd ignore it. I carried the stone forward. So far so good. I put it down in front of the grave graced with insect nests. So far so good. I brushed the sand off my hands and cleared my throat...

Time for prayers.

"Grandad would be pleased, seeing I was a believer." His back hurt. He said the Lord's Prayer. He must have said it three times, at least. And as he ground it out, wailing oh ever so exquisitely, the way only a Jew knows how, he suddenly remembered how back to '79, before he started on ***Miserere***, when he came to pray at the foot of the graves of his mouldering forebears, he even cried.

He was crying now, too."

"...and the pebbles I collected for Grandad, too, I managed to leave at mother's grave! And the pebbles I collected for mother's grave I forgot at father's grave! Everything. I forget everything. How interesting. I forget my best thoughts and ideas in the same way. And not just the short stories either, but the manner of their writing, even, and the inspired technical trouvailles, too, down to the last one, oh Lord

down to the last one.

Never mind. Now too

I made up my mind to leave the graves and go out to the gravel path so that with bowed head I could start traipsing again, up and down, looking shamefacedly for a so-called Jewish stone. I couldn't find any, of course, despite my painstaking effort to come up with a piece of Non-Porous Everlasting Lump, because it's laid down that the pebble must be firm, but invisible when seen from above, and also I must be careful and not use for Grandad's grave a pebble that's fallen off somebody else's because that doesn't count, which means that on two occasions I even had to chide myself in no uncertain terms, throw it away, you prick, repeatedly bending from the waist down and groaning profusely, I scavenged the field of corpses with a fine-tooth comb, the dirt, the ashes, and for what, for nothing..."

Sometimes it would hit me on the street. It was all right back then, even on the street.

"Please let's stop. I got to."

Grandad held my hand securely, we were on his business rounds, heading for Paulay Ede utca. It was such a beautiful spring back in '54, in that world of the fortballing Mighty Magyars. Dewy and warm, the good weather came early, and Andrássy út, it sprang demonstratively to life.

"Hold it back."

"I gotta pee!"

He stops. He gives me a look. He jerks up his thick, angry eyebrows. He wants to move on...

"Sure?"

I force some whining sounds out of me, but they lack conviction.

"Unbutton your fly."

I go for my pants, hastily I tug at my buttons, then hesitant, desist.

"I won't do it just anyplace."

Which surprises Grandad no end! I've got my share of chutzpah. We finally stop just past the Párizsi Department Store, under the walnut tree, or whatever, where there are these flashing shadows and a pleasant medley of smells in the midst of the impatient street noises. The crowds are pushing and shoving, whizzing past, their heels eagerly knocking against the asphalt, they're out to meet their quarterly production quotas.

This urgency, it's something I can sympathize with.

"Let's go to the corner."

"What on earth for?"

I burst into tears. Grumbling, Grandad grabs my wrist, his salesman's valise in one hand, in the other me and his walking stick. He drags me along, and though I'm whining angrily, I can't help being surprised: when Grandad forgets to shuffle his feet, he walks like a stork. This is all he needed! But the urge which this time will brook no delay has me in its grip again, and under a tree across from the door of a local dive across from the popular Abbázia restaurant I stop and clutch Grandad's knees:

"This'll do. Cover me!"

Grandad covers me. Which was strange now that I think back on it not so much because of the fact that a six-foot tall elderly man should stand cover for a tiny child, and not because while I pee on the hot asphalt with my pants wrapped around my ankles, some of the stupid passersby make snide remarks about Grandad's educational principles and his irresponsible attitude to life in general, but because while I am relieving myself I am not standing with my back to Grandad—if indeed he is covering me with his back—but facing him, and while I am trying with not much success to land the hot trajectory of my small weenie as far away from Grandad's heels as I can, I am sniggering derisively into his two huge palms, which he holds crossed behind him, as always, among other things, so I should kiss and caress them with my breath...

The last grave is Erzsi's, my maternal aunt's, and her parents'.
Oh, Erzsi. If you knew Erzsi like I know Erzsi...!

"There's no need to go there, Erzsi's with me anyhow," I think. *Anyhow? What is that supposed to mean?* He is feeling perky again, though the temperature is climbing and the dew is evaporating from the cemetery trees. Gleaming puddles, leafy lights, trembling ozone. Supposed to be lethal. That's good, *that's what makes it effective*. And so, drinking it in, I walked to the far end of the necropolis where in the late thirties some room was made for the indigent Cohainist cobbler and his wife from Vörösmarty utca, and where in another thirty years their incredibly ugly fairy-tale daughter, *oh, love of my life, Erzsi!* aspired to join them in their slumber... God only knows why, but I was happy that morning in the Jewish cemetery of Rákoskeresztúr, for one fleeting hour my soul relieved of its burden, and I marvelled at what I saw. For instance, I blinked up at the sky, which he keeps his caring eyes on, too, everywhere and at all times—a mysterious, vital relationship. Besides, even laymen—the infidels—must admit, a so-called noonday graveyard sky is *nothing to scoff at*, an eddying swirl of mist, a legion of leaping sun-rays on the lukewarm, moist pincushion of grass and shrub; clouds of silver, prickly fluffs of light swathed in fragile air-coverlets, and each little cloud a fairytale.

I squatted down on top of their grave. No pebbles for them either. On top of the grassy mound.

At first, we were very poor. The poorest Jews in the city. According to family lore Dávidka came from around Érsekújvár, fifty-two inches tall he was; he read Hebrew, knew Yiddish and had a smattering of Slovak. He was devoutly religious and thought of himself as a high priest from the House of David, but more often than not, his larder was empty. He mended shoes. Apart from the Torah, he was good at nothing. He couldn't find his way around Pest, nor did he wish to. He never went out on the street. And money meant nothing to him. Then by degrees, he lost his hearing. And my great-grandmother the light of her eyes. Their ugly daughter became their arm. Their eyes, their ears... All they had.

Erzsi, *Erzsi*.

But never mind. That's not what I... "That's not what he meant to talk about."

On the paternal side, too, he's as poor as a church mouse. *They used to live in Szerecseny utca*. Today, people don't know what that means. The dull-brown fleemarket. How did I ever break away? A yammering Yid's nest, a street of cheap shops behind Andrássy út. Dark, narrow spaces with hot, stale air, indigent, obsequious merchants, shop windows with spats and thermal underwear. I worked there once myself. Battered cash registers, thresholds worn down to a shine with use. Squealing, yelling, hollering. Where Grandad tortured Grandma half to death...

But that's not the point.

The point is that it was the first time that it hit him how in the foreseeable future his own body would also be lying there. He'd go the way of the others. And that it would be good. And not tragic at all. Why did he ever think it would be?

Once you've done some living, it's not so bad to die.

Up to now he thought it wasn't right, wanting it. But why not? His Majesty had lived and has now got over it, thank the Lord. He's seen the predator, had even been its victim, and its servant, too. Just great. His literary life's work a failure. Just great. Still, I had my share of glory. The fairy lights dancing on the surface of Lake Balaton. And skipping school and going to the Cave Movie Theatre instead, alone, in a track-suit, with a crispy pretzel. Sliding over the ice on Rózsadomb, in the freezing cold. Women, excited opening nights, roast duckling. The twist under the Christmas tree, in Parliament! *The change of regime. Democratic opposition. Horse-shit.* We're going to die. – – –

"...as I was making for the gate, though, the crowded silence of the cemetery was all around me. With every step the silence of the graves weighed me down. A dark-green army. Advice from all directions. Authority in incognito. The droning of the dead, coming thicker and thicker... I heard it! I couldn't very well pretend I didn't hear it! They talked and talked, they bickered and comforted, kissed and threatened, they made promises, they oy-veyed and lied without shame as I trundled towards the gate, they bragged and belly-ached, wailed and wept, those who had once lived, with their silence, and they applauded and advised, implored and tormented, insulted and flattered, distrustfully, fucking with me all the way to the exit, and when I reached the wrought iron gate at long last, I ran to the ritual water bucket in which the over-scrupulous Jew—people who respect the Law—wash their hands before leaving the cemetery, *three splashes on each hand before we leave*, at the bottom just a finger's-width of water, I shot a glance at the evil office, grabbed it and gulped it down, that stale water, nearly hot, in the heat of the noonday sun every visitor, every devout old man had already washed his hands in it, "I deserve it," but of course I had this thought before too, without concretely making a beeline for it, taking a detour, so to speak, just like now, with shamefaced self-loathing, since I have eaten I might as well quench my thirst too, because in the end I'm going to have it all, because, you see, it is mine, everything here is mine, my damnation, oh, my soul, this is my homeland, and so I gulped it down, I gulped it down..." ❧

Translated by Judith Sollosy

Béla Pomogáts

A Poet of His Community: Sándor Kányádi

Sándor Kányádi, a Hungarian from Transylvania, is a committed poet. His poems are the messages a community sends to the world. Awareness of an essential link between his poems and the national minority to which he belongs is characteristic of his work. This awareness became stronger and richer over the years, a natural sense of belonging was validated by experience and the recognitions it brought. Convictions go hand in hand with a passionate identification with the drama of history. Sándor Kányádi does more than merely aim to express the situation in which the two million Hungarians of Transylvania find themselves, he also gives voice to their hopes and disappointments.

In his younger days, his poems expressed a natural joy in living. His was a world that he experienced as the natural order. He was born in 1929 in Nagygalambfalva (Porumbenii Mari), a small Székely village in what was then the county of Udvarhely. He studied in Kolozsvár (Cluj) where he has lived ever since. He qualified as a teacher of Hungarian, and worked for a number of literary journals including a magazine for children. For many, the immediate postwar period were years of confidence in the future of Transylvania and this included Kányádi. Kolozsvár was a town pulsating with progress but his imagination and dreams took him back to the village of his birth. His early poems looked with gentle nostalgia to a village childhood. It was these memories of a true humanity that shored him up in times of trouble, and he sought in his poems his true home amid the willows by the river bank and forest glades. What you could always rely on in life were simple joys and work honestly done in the fields.

The village, its harmony and calm, the serenity of the workaday world, placed Kányádi's early verse firmly within the folk tradition in poetry. A new wave in Hungarian poetry in Transylvania, which got under way after the Second World War, adhered to

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the folk conventions. The aim was simplicity and clarity. Kányádi's poems were in the descriptive and depictive manner the folk school in Hungary and other Central and East European countries practised between the wars.

His village genre pieces and descriptions of nature were coloured by memories that were bathed in an idyllic light. Descriptive poems generally ended in a personal meditation through which feelings and recognitions were expressed. In these early pieces, more dramatic feelings rarely interrupted a poetic mood in the folk tradition. Here was a young poet, finding his way in the world, who felt at home on his native soil, expressing natural joys and basic recognitions in pure verbal images, well-proportioned structures and through the traditional Hungarian rhythms and assonances of the folk school of poetry.

Nevertheless, certain signs of a dramatic character showed in this harmonious view of the world. Traditional folk forms occasionally broke, or were handled more loosely; thus the poem "Nagyküküllő" (the name of a river near Kányádi's native village) stressed the ideal of the interdependence of Hungarians, Romanians and Germans, the three nations of Transylvania. Shorter lines break into the double-stressed octosyllabic structure that suggests an epic mood, and there is an unexpected comparison of the meanderings of the Nagyküküllő to a famous modern poet: "flow (like a Neruda-line) freely, though measured nevertheless." "Téli alkony" (Winter Dusk) is also a stylistic interruption of the voice of his early poems; here a mysterious dramatic tone of the romantic tradition replaces the idyllic mood. All this indicates that the young Kányádi was looking for his own voice, exploiting the conventions of the folk school in a novel way. At the very start he attempted to make a break from the norms of simplicity that marked the folk school of his time.

Two powerful influences helped Kányádi later: one was more recent poetry written in Hungary, the other was a closer familiarity with the traditions of Transylvanian poetry.

From the early sixties what had been and was being written in Hungary after the Second World War, particularly by Gyula Illyés, László Nagy and Ferenc Juhász, came to be better known in Transylvania. Thanks to the slowly improving media of cultural exchange, Hungarian poets in Transylvania were beginning to study Illyés's verse grounded in personal struggle, László Nagy's soaring visionary and mythological poems growing out of the folk tradition, and Ferenc Juhász's grandiose epics that wrestled with the universe and history.

At the same time, poetry that had been published between the wars by *Erdélyi Helikon*, a Hungarian literary journal in Transylvania, enjoyed a revival after years of neglect. This involved a romantic and elegiac tradition created by Lajos Áprily, László Tompa and Jenő Dsida. Due to the fresh experience of being a national minority, Hungarian poetry in Transylvania was imbued by a historical nervousness and a tragic sense of communal identity. In the new situation, as hopes for a solution to the anxieties of a national minority began to evaporate,

the nervousness of old reappeared in the poetry produced by writers from this minority. It was then that the darker side in the work of older poets like Ferenc Szemlér, István Horváth and Jenő Kiss, came to the foreground, it was then that József Méliusz's avant-garde inspiration again turned nervous and passionate, and younger poets like Domokos Szilágyi and Aladár Lászlóffy began to face up in their writing to the hardships of being members of a national minority. Sándor Kányádi, as his work developed to maturity, showed himself committed to the same reckoning.

A changing view of the world was indicated by a disquiet present in the experience. He painted nightmarish visions of blood-soaked events and murderous wars. His world turned feverish and disturbed, the idyllic harmonies of before were cracked in the sixties by the fear of war and the pleasures taken in simple joys were ravaged by the disquietening experiences in the life of his community, by what Hungarians in Romania were undergoing under Ceausescu's ethnocratic form of communist dictatorship. The world Sándor Kányádi reveals in his poems became suffused with dramatic tension, showing the disruption imposed on his harmonious view of life.

The appearance of irony also pointed in the same direction. Irony in modern poetry is generally a sign of socially accepted values being questioned, or of a poet seeking something new. In Hungary the ironic approach and attitude became more marked as the result of philosophical debates, as the poems of Gyula Illyés, Sándor Weöres, László Kálnoky and the younger generation show. Something similar strengthened irony in the work of Transylvanian poets such as József Méliusz, Domokos Szilágyi and Aladár Lászlóffy. Ironic overtones were beginning to appear in Kányádi too: figures and events of classical mythology were up-dated in poems of an epic character. The ironic perspective precisely was provided to the ancient stories by the blatant up-dating.

Irony questioned principles and attitudes that had been considered important. What Kányádi highlighted was not only his ironic doubts but also his genuine scale of values. Two ideals were placed at the centre among his values: his commitment to the community and a poetic catharsis for the dramatic conflicts experienced in society. Kányádi's commitment now became more deliberate and, as a historical context was given, as can be seen in his poems evoking heroic episodes in Székely history. Catharsis was shored up by the expression in poetry of the social and political experience that weighed heavily on everybody. Kányádi's poems offered an authentic picture of the oppression the villages suffered, and of the aggression the authorities directed against Hungarians in Transylvania. All this was expressed in metaphors, in a language recalling Aesop, thereby side-stepping the heavy hand of the censor.

Commitment to the community helped shape the persona of the poet. In this way, a natural (naive) persona with a view of the world as harmony became a consciously committed persona with roots embedded in the present and past of

a community defined linguistically and ethnically. Every manifestation of this committed persona bears the sign of a declared direct responsibility for the fate and survival of his people in Transylvania. All this charged his poetry with a special moral role.

Kányádi's verse is the formulation of a manly responsibility to search for the truth. As he puts it in "Függőleges lovak" (Vertical Horses), it is up to art to express, and in this way resolve, the great human and historical contradictions of the age. Poetry must seek justice and catharsis; this entails an unremitting defence of the discovered truth, and a battle for the catharsis which will bring relief.

A longer poem, "Fától fáig" (From Tree to Tree), written in 1968, expresses the voluntarily undertaken duty of personal responsibility and struggle. The poem has a key role in Kányádi's oeuvre. Its themes are prepared, and then repeated, by a great many poems. "Fától fáig", which brings to life the fears and anxieties of childhood, is built of concrete images and memories, has a structure which allows much to be left out and produces an expressly dramatic effect. The oppressive atmosphere of a night of long ago is recreated and turned into myth. A boy who is just beginning to find his way in the world is sent to search for the family's horses which have strayed into a dark wood, a place to induce anxiety. The childhood memory turns into a poetic parable. It stands for a duty accepted and performed in spite of fear and anxieties, for a responsible and active attitude which lends character to a man, and meaning to a life.

A growing engagement in public life and increasingly heavier communal responsibilities chart out the duties of art for Kányádi, the kind of language used and the structural order. Form was in keeping with the image of the world. Once a poet of the folk school, Kányádi now familiarized himself with the modes of modern poetry, in particular of the avant-garde. At the same time, he dug into the deeper layers of tradition, into myth and folk language, a heritage modern poetry often makes use of. The influence of the avant-garde shows not only in looser rhythms and more daring verbal images, but also in the shaping of the attitudinal foundations and the structure of the text. The epic replaces the song-like qualities, the poem is dramatically shaped and the structure becomes fragmentary.

Avant-garde formal elements are given a role by Kányádi in his long poems. The long poem was an important genre in Hungarian poetry in the 'fifties and 'sixties. Its two main types were developed by Ferenc Juhász and László Nagy. Juhász lent epic forms a lyric character and Nagy stretched the length and receptive capacity of traditional lyric forms, the song and the elegy. Kányádi's was a third version, based on the avant-garde montage which includes both lyric and epic elements: images of memory, fragmentarily narrated stories, poetic commentaries and personal declarations. Kányádi adds folk-song fragments, spells and saws from the folk tradition: the results include the already mentioned

"From Tree to Tree", and two later poems, "Fekete-piros" (Black and Red) and "Halottak napja Bécsben" (All Souls Day in Vienna), published in this issue.

Kányádi's new poetry, welding folk traditions and avant garde techniques, and both out of the suffering of his community, played a leading role in Transylvanian Hungarian literature in the 'seventies. Meanwhile, Kányádi's horizons grew. Going abroad for readings allowed him to familiarize himself with what was happening in the arts in Hungary and in the Hungarian diaspora in Western Europe and overseas, lending a new meaning to his commitment. It became wider, covering the whole of Hungarian history and culture. Poems written in hommage of great Hungarian creative figures, such as Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, Gyula Illyés, Sándor Weöres, Áron Tamási, Károly Kós and András Sütő bear witness to this.

Kányádi now saw the situation of Hungarians in Transylvania in the context of a close familiarity with the history of the entire nation and its cultural heritage. His true home, of course, remained his native land. His commitment as a Transylvanian poet was always well-grounded in firm convictions, he knows himself to be competent in the business of his community; he had no need ever to fear solitude, the great temptress of modern art, but harmony cannot dominate his thinking. The very being of the community to which he has sworn his loyalty is in jeopardy, his experience tells him that his native language, and the culture of those who speak it, is on the slippery slope of decline. As a witness, he must record the silent tragedy of his native land.

A brief commentary below the title of "Black and Red" tells us that this long poem describes the afternoon gathering of girls from the village of Szék in Transylvania, all clad in black and red. It is a silent gathering, the village girls, mostly servants, working in the city, meet the memories and culture of the village they left behind in a silent dance. Acute contrasts contribute to the mosaic-like structure of the poem. Village girls evoke folk traditions in an urban environment, surrounded by the gadgets of civilization. There is no song to go with their dance, the gathering is silent, indeed sad. In the sea of the Romanian majority in Kolozsvár today, the girls are a Hungarian island, their lives are part of the anxieties of the present but, for the poet, their shy dance evokes the values and tragic memories of the past. The contradictions express the self-awareness of an abandoned community. The dance of the village girls is symbolic, indeed myth-making. The title is symbolic, black being the colour of mourning, red that of life; the dance is symbolic, referring to the troubled history of a small community. The mythopoetic dance of these girls, who barely move, conceals the fate of a small people, and what the poet sees is this lurking fate.

"Black and Red" uncovers the historical depth of the fate of a national minority, "All Souls Day in Vienna" is a lament for Hungarians dispersed all over the world. The poem is a requiem with, once again, the moment of its conception precisely recorded. The poet is in the Augustinerkirche in Vienna, listening to

Mozart's *Requiem*, and, leaning against a white column, he abandons himself to the waves of thoughts and memories piling up in his mind. The broad sweep of the montage is constructed of these remembered images and fleeting thoughts, the figure in the carpet is a lament for the dead and fragments of an ancient Transylvanian carol. Loud and strong, he gives voice to the hurt caused by the dispersion. "we're scattered like grains of sand in the wind / we're still alive though turning into dust / from this mountain-hamlet to San Francisco / from this mountain-hamlet to San-Francisco." History has dispersed Hungarians all over the world.

The poem presents serious problems for the translator. Where Kányádi uses an ancient Transylvanian carol, Ádám Makkai, a Hungarian poet and linguist who lives in Chicago, uses an English children's rhyme. (See the poem on p. 55)

The dread of mortality and the hope of resurrection are the two limits emotion is given in the poem. Grief and joy, anger and devotion, disappointment and hope: the tides of emotion flow between these. There is a bitter reckoning made of himself, his own mortality, the survival of the nation, and the national minority. He wrestles with the shades of dispersion and puts humanity and the universe itself under siege in the hope of finding solace. In sombre requiem in "All Souls Day", he bears witness to the human dignity of history's victims.

Sándor Kányádi is now a poet of international standing. The distinctions he has been awarded include Austria's Herder Prize. His art is defined by a self-devouring struggle and by a witness which has included consciously accepted personal risks. This is service, and it has some of its origins in the Protestant ethic and some in the literary tradition of Transylvania. The duties taken on are not light. The cruelties of the twentieth century have been forced upon him, not only in his own personal history, but in the fatal tests to which the community in which he lives, has been subjected. Kányádi cites Ecclesiastes 4,1: "So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter." His vocation as a poet is to be a comforter to his community, and to confront the intolerance of the Eastern regions of Europe with the spirituality of humanity. ❧

Sándor Kányádi

Poems

Translated by Adam Makkai and Bruce Berlind

All Souls Day in Vienna

Halottak napja Bécsben

English version by Adam Makkai

You, too, will some day soon be woven
into a splendid funeral wreath—
everything then will look as strange and frozen
as this Vienna street—
like a street-car you'll roll away,
the rails will all curl up behind you

dandelions, weeds of fern
pierce the pavement's bony urn—

who cares if you ever walked this way?

My back against a column—I weak and weary am—
I'm listening by the white-washed church-wall's border
of Saint Augustine's order
I'm listening to Mozart's Requiem

For the loneliest orphans are those
who don't even have anyone to mourn
vinegar's their wine and horse-radish their tear
their candles, too, burn only soot, smoke fear;
with a single stem of flower there they stand
idly staring at their hand
for the loneliest orphans are those
who don't even have anyone to mourn

They say there raged the Judgment Day's own weather
that cemetery and sky did touch together
that ditch and footpath were equally flooded

the coffin-bearers blind, as they were muddied,
slipped and sloshed in sleet from knees to waist
though no one saw it, the words took off in haste—-
(with all the graves, like vessels chained at berth,
beginning to toss their madly dancing sterns)
that gurgling jars and mouseholes there abounded—-

and that the coffin swam away, ungrounded

from the Danube to the Sea
out into the Ocean
from the Danube to the Sea
out into the Ocean

the coffin swims a-floating
the sail is spun of music
the coffin swims a-floating
the sail is spun of music

"Get lost, you little red dumpling"
the pug-nosed little choir-girl spat out the words at him
and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
even redder in the face from being thus shamed
stole his way out sideways from the dressing-room
the Gnädige Frau was most impatient as she was waiting for him
"the coach will soon be back"
the Czech porter said bowing to the ground
and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
stepped out into the street
looked up to the stars
while the stars just then started to take their evening bath
in the music that had arrived from down below
and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
wiping away at his forehead
struck out on foot

from the Danube to the Sea
out into the Ocean
the coffin swims a-floating
the sail is spun of music

What can God possibly offer in remark
when it's but a bunch of castrati who bark
intoning His Glory exclusively in voices of the neutral
neutrum ne-utru-u-u-m

It is said—well, actually, it is so written—in the Histoire de la musique: Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*—otherwise, as a matter of fact, my friend Dr. Rudi Schuller who lives in Kolozsvár at No. 10 Vasile Alecsandri Street, will gladly translate the French into Hungarian, Rumanian or German for anybody who can't get the original—particularly the part where it says about great travellers—*Les grands voyageurs*—stating that even in the most god-forsaken—*les plus lointaines*—civilizations the natives who were totally disinterested in the tom-toms of even the closest tribes started to prick up their ears solely upon hearing the music of Mozart*

White prayers in
white churches:
ring around the rosie—

Black prayers in
black churches:
pocket full of posies—

White prayers in
black churches:
Ashes! Ashes! All fall down—
(...God rest ye merry gentlemen
may nothing you dismay...!!!)

With geese a-gaggling
and ducks a-quacking,
surrounded by lice-ridden chickens
and a little pig covered with bloody scars
filthy little brats
conceived in an alcoholic delirium
stare in a crowd
from a palm-sized tiny common yard
at the sky of planes
arching away at supersonic speed

World! You've got to get off your high horse!
World! You've got to stop!
We shall never catch up with you!

My back against a column—I weak and weary am—
I'm listening by the white-washed church-wall's border
of Saint Augustine's order
I'm listening to Mozart's Requiem—

Dies irae dies illa
let the pitchfork hit the miller
painted eyebrows saved a killer

Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!
Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!
Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!

If That Dread Day ever happens
clouds will light up in the Heavens
burning forest all life deadens

For we've seen many a fire
flaming towns we did admire
down we dove to Hell's quagmire

Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!
Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!
Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!

But the judge kept not arriving—
sin from under sin's deriving
snake-skin-sled on Time's a-riding

Held without judgment or trial—
won't our torment be the final
proof "we're guilty!": proof's denial?

Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!
Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!
Dig it! Fire! Bury it now!

Doubt has our senses ravished
as we waiver, unreplenished,
do transgressions go unpunished?!

On the second of June in nineteen hundred and forty-four during a total aerial bombardment of Nagyvárad the four beautiful children of a young mother got stuck under the ruins they were killed at the respective ages of two four six and eight every year my wife tells the same story when she reaches this point in her periodic turning of the calendar this is her peace-poem

Who trembles the hells of anguish
for the victor and the vanquished?

Sin's from start to end—unfinished.

I am beginning to get used to the fact that my hand stirs rather slowly to the familiar handshake—the merry slapping of palms becomes rarer and rarer and I gaze into empty space
the words still start out as meek but the sentences are rather scratchy
foreshadowing the alarm that brings calamity onto our heads
it would be so good to be able to shake hands again, brother,
before, stupidly, I should fall
before, stupidly, you should fall

Gracious Sire, Matthias Corvinus,
who in Kolozsvár hast seen us
't is for Thee I've lit my candle
flower in hand, I touch your mantle

be our spokesman in Heaven and Hell
speak for us—we naught can tell!

Gracious Sire, Matthias Corvinus,
from our fear and shame do wean us—
if up there, by any chance,
God should grant a furtive glance,

please let his Majesty ponder
why our lives have sunken under,
what we need is, most of all:
an end to the protocol!!!

punished for our race and language
subjugated, we must languish,
fear and shame have squashed us hollow
our tongues in shame we swallow...

Kolozsvár-Gettysburg
Danube-Mississippi
Kolozsvár-Gettysburg
Danube-Mississippi

"some day I will go home"
he, too, disbelieves it
"some day I will go home"
he, too, disbelieves it

we're scattered like grains of sand in the wind
we're still alive though turning into dust
from this mountain-hamlet to San Francisco
from this mountain-hamlet to San Francisco

Our Father who art... and who art not,
do not forsake our measly lot,
my child-like prayer, fearing defeat,
scrapes at the door beneath your feet;
my wings are broken, but all the same,
I stammer and mumble "hallowed by The Name"!

Are we such a dreadful nation
doomed to burn in shame's damnation?!
others still rattle their sabers—
have we still outsinned our neighbours?

Language of the ancient Jews
would we need, to speak our blues,
but such price we can't afford
No one dares to sass you, Lord!

Strike up, Bartók, wild percussion
must replace all stale discussion
flames shoot out from your choir-master's gown:
...Ashes, ashes, all fall down!!!

I was thirty-something old when Christina the almost totally naked
girl from Steiermark beckoned to me and called me in for a glass of
whisky on the corner of Singerstrasse—"look honeybunch, I'm broke and a
foreigner besides"—"macht nix"—said she—"ain't this All Souls Day?"—so
we proceeded and each one drank twice two halves Suzanne the beautiful
German girl lives in Vienna at Tiefengrab Strasse, was für ein Gedicht, vier
Jahrhunderte alt, *a red rose shined gloriously*
on her cheeks, marvelling at her eyes' deep fire,
she, whom many braves desire...
It is, of course, indeed quite in vain that so many men are in love
with her—I'd be your Suzanne gratis *today, but the morning is the*
morning and today is All Souls Day, so there's no more need to talk
about your past affair. She gave me a kiss, a juicy and sweetly loud
one, and motioned with her hand that it'll be quite enough to leave two
Schillings in the plate by the cloak-room

My back against a column—I weak and weary am—
I'm listening by the white-washed church-wall's border
of Saint Augustine's order
I'm listening to Mozart's Requiem—-

We used to have a smallish patch of land,
more like a garden, really, a narrow strand,
we wouldn't kneel down, pray or nod,
not even in front of God;
we were fussing with titbits, but somehow we managed;
our words came through clean, and by complaints undamaged.
More by habit than due to faith we'd say an occasional prayer
and particularly that He may spare us the Grim Reaper.

Please remember me, too, when my time comes!
The shirt sponged up water on my back
like on Louis Kossuth's, when, while hiding as a refugee,
he turned to the Turks —
the shirt did sponge up water on my back
as I cut out the finest possible figure of speech
putting my bad foot down in the crack of the doorway
in order that the Master cannot shut it in my face
for in that case it would have been in vain that I stayed up all night
the Morning Star was
still in the sky when

I sat down in front of his gate
in order not to miss him today as well
the shirt did sponge up water on my back
just like the back of poor Louis Kossuth
with one fist on the handle of the main entrance
and the other grabbing away at my walking cane
as the words were grabbing away at my throat,
words that were swallowed down backwards—
I knew I had to be delicate
otherwise I'd fall much too short off my desired mark
and my tiny batch of hay would then get stuck and just rot there
just like the hay from last year did
that I harvested with my scythe from the meadow
for but one third to keep as my share—;
in the old days the sexton would get this gratis
from the village in addition to a bushel of wheat
for ringing the church bells in warning before a storm—
the shirt did sponge up water on my back
while I begged His Excellency the Engineer
kindly to issue a coach and a pair of horses:
"the village folk are all out harvesting
everybody is out in the fields
the yokes are standing empty, idle
uselessly the horses gobble
and it is, after all, in the public interest as well
that the bad little batch of hay should get under cover;
only one third is mine,
one third only—"
"we'll see then... maybe towards noontime!—
OK my lad? You there, you there... by noontime..."
he slung his words at me
—maybe towards noontime!—
how I longed to throw a big stick in reply
but then I might as well have forgotten my poor little batch of hay
"OK my lad? You there, you there..."
the shirt did sponge up water on my back
quite enough to ring it
like on the back of Louis Kossuth, the refugee,
let the fire burn the hay—
let it rot till Judgment Day!
And so it's no longer his own two feet carrying him
but his crooked cane

that brought me my father, well beyond seventy,
and humiliated down into the dust
as in my dreams he came —

Sweet Lord Jesus, hear my fervent
prayer: save Thy humble servant;
Thou didst come to Earth for him, too,
please remember and save him, too!
Draw his wish—and do not trump it
ere Thou soundest the Angels' trumpet.

A diamond dew sits on the petals
of shrill brass petunias
while the conductor swats the bottom
of chubby Angels dipping into their baths

Fairy tales and High Masses trickle down together
the voice of the Soprano keeps warbling away
and embalms me in Eden's
other-worldly calmness

the milk's a-whispering
the milk's a-rustling in the pail
the flow of milk's cascading down
the milk is velvety and sweet

this is but all you need
this is but all you need
this is but all you need
for the redemption
of evening-time

Fairy tales and High Masses trickle down together
kegs and jugs of earthenware
chatter on audibly from a distance
and the milk ponders the kindly
water-buffaloes chewing the cud
while it curdles

Tu eşti văpaie fără grai
de dincolo de matca mumii
you are the flame, the wordless pledge,

the one beyond the blessed mother-womb,
the one who lights up from the winged swoon
of Angels touching the world's outer edge.

Give me the strength to stay put here
may I be blessed here forever,
where in dark, Mozart's music will sever
the murderous futilities of strife and fear

No century can know and no eye can see
far or deep enough to detect where I will rest
when a fire-fly comes to rescue me
from death and puts me down in my nest

You, too, will some day soon be woven
into a splendid funeral wreath—
everything then will look as strange and frozen
as this Vienna street—
wie die Glocken ihren Schall verloren
all of your joys will be left beneath—

Although there looms not a single
cloud, and nothing blocks my sight,
stars above don't make a wrinkle
lone the Moon shall here alight,

willingly or unwillingly
here is where we have to quit:
something's covered up the skies
and our guiding star in it.

Towers fall and gables waiver
soundlessly they all collapse—
happily the Earth shall savour
no more wrinkles in her apse.

He who started all, will end it
here it stops, the grand commotion,
not one more thought to defend it
our feet tread on the Ocean.

I forget quickly all my former pleasures
just as the bells forget their chiming—

pour me some wine, you little Angels, here in front of my door
I want to shed this world
I want to soar among the free!

For after this nothing can follow
only the floating—so lonely and poor
as the flight of a single hydrogen atom
though Fear may tempt us one last time by
making us think: "what if they should
confiscate our last remaining electron?"
At least this way
we might still have some hope for a resurrection
ten to twenty billion years down the road...
...or for something similar

1978

After-Midnight Language

Éjfélutáni nyelv

there are regions where
in waiting rooms at night
as if a fire smouldered from
the stench's fumes and the half-lit air
a semi-nomadic after-midnight
language pitches its camp
groans and curses cleave the air and
gold-toothed and toothless horselaughs
climb the wall reach to the ceiling
stifle the outside shuntings and clatter
shoo the shocked engine whistles away
grow and swell nearly breaching the roof
from behind your cape you peep out anxiously
a vision of what's going to happen in let's say
two or three centuries haunts you
dangling their feet in the gothic window

of saint michael's church they toast each other
with the tabernacle chalice just as now
they bite off the caps of bottles
drink my gypsy brothers
and they drink and you peep out while
the booze gurgles and look for a handhold
no peter no matthew is witness only john
suddenly an infant shrieks then
with both hands grasps the swollen
exquisite spurting breast
it sucks as if it was booze grows huge
beneath your closed lashes the infant
is the big-headed shaggy voracious
christ of the after-midnight language

Translated by Bruce Berlind
with Mária Körössy

Levente Szegsy Szilcs

The sarcophagus of Saint Stephen the King. 1083 or later.
Székesfehérvár, Saint Stephen the King Museum.

Gábor Havas—Gábor Kertesi—István Kemény

The Statistics of Deprivation

The Roma in Hungary

This is a study which covers the entire Roma (Gypsy) population of Hungary, regardless of whether they speak Hungarian, Romany or Romanian, whether they live in towns (including Budapest) or villages, whether their lifestyle is traditional or not, and of whether they belong to the top or lowest income groups.

The last representative survey of Hungary's Roma population was made in 1971.[1] The survey conducted in 1993–1994 followed the same basic principles.

This survey, like that of 1971, defined as Roma those taken to be such by their non-Roma environment. Such a definition does not ecxlude those who proudly declare their Roma identity, nor those taking resolute steps toward assimilation. All the evidence points to the fact that the Roma origin of even the most successfully assimilated is kept on record by the non-Roma environment. Thus, a survey of the Roma population defined in this way omits only those who have been assimilated without leaving any trace.[2]

If we assume that in the places selected our survey was complete, that it covered 100 per cent, then we can estimate the number of Roma households in Hungary at 97,050 and that of the Roma population at 433,800. A complete survey, however, exists only in theory. We presume that our listings were 90 per cent correct. On that basis, the number of Roma households comes to 107,833, and the Roma population numbers 482,000 or half a million, if we round up the figure. The ratio of Roma in the entire population is 4.69 per cent, or 5 per cent rounded up.

Abridged version of the report on the 1993–94 survey carried out by the authors on behalf of the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

1 ■ István Kemény: *Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó 1971-ben végzett kutatásról* (Report on a Survey of Gypsies in Hungary Conducted in 1971), Budapest, 1976.

2 ■ We have questioned 2 per cent of the Roma population. The basic unit of the survey was the household, more precisely the community of persons living under the same roof. The households were selected by a several-tier, multi-layer sampling method. In the villages or districts selected, we made complete lists of the Roma households with the assistance of local government and social and educational institutions. Following certain criteria, we then took random samples of the households listed. The survey involved 1941 households and 8,663 persons. The average size of the households was 4.47 persons.

The Roma population was studied in terms of six regions. These were: the East (including counties Szabolcs-Szatmár, Hajdú-Bihar and Békés) the Great Hungarian Plain (counties Csongrád, Bács and Szolnok), the Budapest industrial region (including Budapest and counties Pest, Fejér and Komárom), the North, where, like in the South Transdanubian region, the growth rate of the Roma population is extremely high, (counties Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Heves and Nógrád), and Southern Transdanubia (counties Baranya, Somogy, Tolna, Zala, Veszprém and the West counties Vas and Győr-Sopron).

Table 1
Regional distribution

Region	Number		Percentage of Roma population		Percentage of entire population	
	1971	1994	1971	1994	1971	1994
North	65 th.	116,900	20.4	24.3	6.5	9.0
East	75–80 th.	95,100	23.0	19.9	5.0	6.3
Great Plain	50 th.	57,833	16.0	12.0	3.0	4.1
Budapest agglomeration	60 th.	87,611	19.0	18.2	2.0	2.4
South-Transdan.	65 th.	109,889	20.0	22.8	4.0	6.5
West	5 th.	13,944	1.4	2.9	1.3	2.0

There have been considerable shifts between types of settlement as well. In 1971, 25,000 Roma lived in Budapest, less than 8 per cent of the entire Roma population. The number today is 44,000, or 9.1 per cent. Movement into the other towns has been even greater. In 1971, 45,000 Roma were town-dwellers, a figure that has more than tripled since, their proportion increasing from 14 to 30.4 per cent.

Table 2

Settlement Type	Numbers		Proportions (per cent)	
	1971	1994	1971	1994
Budapest	25,000	44,000	7.9	9.1
Provincial town	45,000	146,000	13.9	30.4
Village	250,000	291,000	78.4	60.5

In 1971, the Roma population was estimated at 320,000. Our present estimate, as was said above, is half a million, giving the equivalent of a fifty per cent growth.

In the same period or, more exactly, in the second half of the same period, the entire population actually declined. In 1970 the figure was 10,322,000, in 1980, 10,710,000, in 1990, 10,375,000, and in 1994, 10,278,000. In 1971, the Roma population made up 3 per cent of all the country's inhabitants, at present 5 per cent. A further shift in proportions must be expected in the future.

In 1971 the number of live births per thousand inhabitants was 32 among the

Roma, and 15 for the population as a whole. At present the number of Roma live births per thousand inhabitants is 28.7, and the next 5 to 10 years are likely to see a continuing decline at about the same rate. For the population as a whole, the number of live births was 11.8 in 1992, and 11.3 in 1993. The death rate, on the other hand, has been rising for decades and is very high indeed: the number of deaths per thousand inhabitants was 14.0 in 1991, and 14.4 both in 1992 and 1993. It is quite unlikely that the death rate will fall in the coming years, so a further population decline can be expected. Taking the mean value between a more pessimistic and a less pessimistic forecast, in 2015 the country is going to have a population of 9,800,000. At the same time the Roma will number around 750,000, around 8 per cent.

In 1992, 122,000 babies were born in Hungary; in 1993, 116,000. In that latter year, 13,800 Roma babies were born, accounting for 11.9 per cent of all births.

Schooling

At the time of the 1971 survey, of the Roma in the 25 to 29 and 20 to 24 year age groups, some 26–27 per cent had completed 8 years of general school; effectively this meant that some 73–74 per cent of the Roma young were practically illiterate.

The report based on the 1971 survey also called attention to the fact that in the 1950s and 1960s, the educational level of the non-Roma population had grown rapidly with the gap between Roma and non-Roma widening.

Schooling levels are different today but the tendency of divergence continues and has actually intensified. The efforts of the past two decades have been successful in that the majority of Roma children today finish general school.

Table 3 shows that 75 per cent of the 25–29 age group had completed the 8 years of general school, while in the 50–54 year age group (the 28–32 olds of 1971), only 28.9 per cent had succeeded in so doing.

The widening of the gap can be observed where higher education is concerned. After completing general school, there are three ways for young Hungarians to continue studying: in skilled worker training school, vocational secondary school and *gimnázium*, that is general-education secondary school. In Table 3, we can also see that of these, only the skilled worker training schools really opened up to Roma youths. This type of school was completed by 7.4 per cent of the 35–39 age group. The rate rose to 17.2 per cent for the 30–34 age group; it was 13.2 per cent for the 25–29 age group and was 15.6 per cent for the 20–24 age group. The problem is that the majority of the skilled workers' traning schools provide occupational skills for jobs for which there has been no demand on the market for years and will not be in the foreseeable future either; with the certificates they provide it is practically impossible to find a job. The worst position in the job market is that of those who have not completed the eight years of general school. Next come those who finished those eight years, and those who studied in skilled workers' training schools are hardly better off.

Most elder Roma—mainly those above 50—lose their jobs because they never completed the eight-year general school. The reason the young cannot find employment is that on today's labour market even an eight-year general school education plus a skilled workers' training school is not sufficient to find a job.

As far as the relationship between education and unemployment is concerned, the two great watersheds are secondary and tertiary (higher) education. According

to the April 1993 data of the Household Panel, the national rate of unemployment was 13.6 per cent; among those having completed 6 to 7 years of general school it was 43.6 per cent and among those who finished the eighth year, it was 23.8 per cent. The unemployment rate was 17.4 per cent among those who have attended a skilled workers' training school, 11.3 per cent among those who have attended secondary school, and 3.7 per cent among those with university or college diplomas.

The proportion of those completing secondary school is extremely low among Roma of all age groups. Roma children are already very strongly disadvantaged where admission to secondary schools is concerned: nearly half of all children finishing the eighth form of general school continue in secondary schools; for Roma children, the rate is only three per cent. The gap widens further during the years at secondary school: by the time the fourth and final form of secondary school is reached, the drop-out rate among non-Roma children is less than 14 per cent; for Roma children it is close to 40 per cent.[3]

Regarding general schools and skilled workers' training schools, a definite improvement was observed whereas no progress at all could be observed where admission to or completion of secondary school were concerned. Among the 50–54 year age group, the ratio of those with a complete secondary school education is 1.2 per cent, among the 20–24 age group, it is 1.5 per cent. Thus the chances of Roma children going on to secondary education have not changed at all since 1971.

The situation is even worse in higher education. In the Roma age groups of 60–64, 55–59, 45–49, 40–44, 35–39 or 30–34 the rate of higher education graduates remains steadily around 1 per cent; for the 25–29 year old age group the figure is even worse at: only 0.6 per cent. And this in a period—the last four years or so—when non-Roma young have demonstrably had better access to a higher education.

The participation of young Roma in higher education has always been marginal. In recent years, however, it has shrunk to the point of near invisibility.

Employment

The depression that started in the mid-1980s and the economic processes accompanying the political changes and the development of a market economy (the decline of outdated industries, the rapid devaluation of unskilled labour, the loss of East European markets, the chaos in the agricultural sector, privatization, etc.) has affected employment conditions of the Roma population considerably more severely than those for the population as a whole. In 1971, when the previous and until then only nationwide representative survey of the Roma population was carried out, the economic activity of Roma and non-Roma men of working age (15–59) showed no significant difference.

On the basis of the above data, the 1976 report concluded: "In the last ten years, tremendous changes have taken place in the life of Roma men of working age: where men are concerned, the Roma population has come close to full employment."

The decade since 1980, however, saw a reverse process. According to the present investigation, the general fall in employment in the last few years has affected the Roma and non-Roma populations very differently. In the full male population, the employment rate for non-Roma men today is more than twice that of Roma men.

3. ■ Cf. Gábor Kertesi: "Cigány gyerekek az iskolában, cigány felnőttek a munkaerőpiacon" (Gypsy Children at School, Adult Gypsies in the Labour Market). *Közgazdasági Szemle,* January 1995.

Table 3

Age groups of the Roma population by level of education attained in the sample (number and percentage)

Age	0 year	1st–7th year	8th year	skilled workers' training school or vocational school	vocational secondary school or *gimnázium*	institute of higher education or university	no data	case number
14–19	12	254	434	82	3	–	1	786
	1.5	32.3	55.2	10.4	0.4	–	0.1	15.3
20–24	8	168	452	118	11	–	–	757
	1.1	22.2	59.7	15.6	1.5	–	–	14.7
25–29	16	143	378	84	13	–	2	636
	2.5	22.5	59.4	13.2	2	–	0.3	12.4
30–34	22	184	349	120	19	3	1	698
	3.2	26.4	50	17.2	2.7	0.4	0.1	13.6
35–39	40	250	284	47	15	1	2	639
	6.3	39.1	44.4	7.4	2.3	0.2	0.3	12.4
40–44	39	172	211	40	7	2	1	472
	8.3	36.4	44.7	8.5	1.5	0.4	0.2	9.2
45–49	41	141	111	18	4	3	1	319
	12.9	44.2	34.8	5.6	1.3	0.9	0.3	6.2
50–54	58	114	60	5	3	1	1	242
	24	47.1	24.8	2.1	1.2	0.4	0.4	4.7
55–59	81	70	29	11	3	–	1	195
	41.5	35.9	14.9	5.6	1.5	–	0.5	3.8
60–64	71	68	12	1	–	1	1	154
	46.1	44.2	7.8	0.6	–	0.6	0.6	3
65–69	41	77	6	5	1	–	–	130
	31.5	59.2	4.6	3.8	0.8	–	–	2.5
70–	52	41	8	1	–	–	2	104
	50	39.4	7,7	1	–	–	1.9	2
No data	1	2	2	–	–	–	–	0,1
Total	482	1,684	2,336	532	79	11	13	5,137
	9.4	32.8	45.5	10.4	1.5	0.2	0.3	

Nearly 65 per cent of previously employed Roma men became unemployed or inactive earners (disability pensioners, aid or regular welfare recipients, etc.) following more than 10 years of continuous employment, and 67.6 per cent of Roma men over 54 but still below pensionable age had held jobs continuously for more than 20 years. At the present level of data processing, it must be regarded as very likely that a considerable proportion of the various schemes of early pensioning in consequence of some kind of illness or disability and other processes to establish reduced working capacity in a manner entitling the person concerned to some kind of permanent social support was also used as a means of helping to cope with employment problems. A sign of

this is that in the 30 to 54 age group, 32 per cent of inactive men are disability pensioners or recipients of some other pension-type aid.

The squeezing out of the labour market of the Roma began in the mid-1980s. More than 40 per cent of today's inactive workers had lost their jobs before the end of 1990, i.e. before the coming into force of the Employment Act regulating, among other things, the system of support provided to the unemployed.

The employment level of Roma women was, in contrast to that of the men, well below the national level even at the time of the 1971 survey. The traditional Roma life style also played a role in this, as did the circumstance that the Roma population was considerably larger in those regions where the number of jobs available for unskilled women workers was very low, even at that time.

Despite the fact that the employment level of Roma men has declined dramatically during the last few years, that of women is still considerably behind.

In the country's total population, unemployment among women is in every age group lower than among men. In the Roma population, the unemployment rate for men and women is practically the same.

While the employment level of Roma women never reached that of men, they too are being squeezed out of the labour market as dramatically as the men are. The evidence of the survey clearly shows that a considerable proportion of Roma women now inactive held jobs for a shorter or longer time in the earlier period.

Settlement and housing

At the time of the 1971 national survey, the Roma lived under extremely poor housing conditions. All the indices were behind not only the average of Hungarian society as a whole but also behind non-Roma of similar income levels. The determining crucial element in housing conditions then was a very powerful tendency of segregation. Nearly two thirds (65.1 per cent) of Roma housholds were located in separated colonies. In 1971, the majority of these could be described as spontaneously erected, family-built shanties, traditionally situated away from, or on the fringe of, towns or villages. They lacked even the most basic facilities. This explains why 44 per cent of all Roma homes had no electricity; only 8 per cent had tap water, and another 16 per cent had a well or some other source of water belonging to the site of the house. The other type of segregated Roma housing was made up of groups of buildings which were in the lowest category of the entire Hungarian housing stock; these were often built originally for other than residential purposes (former labour quarters on estates, run-down workers' colonies, housing in temporary huts, shanty towns, dilapidated city slums, workers' hostels, abandoned slaughterhouses, etc.) where Roma families had been moved—more often than not with the deliberate intention of segregation—with the assistance of the authorities.

Following the Communist Party Resolution of 1961, a large project was launched in 1965, aimed at eliminating the traditional Roma settlements and at securing major improvements in housing conditions for the Roma. The most important means to this was a ceilinged loan at highly favourable interest rates through which Roma were able to build new houses, in two to three approved design types; these were somewhat smaller in size than the average single-family home in Hungary, and were therefore called "CS" houses (the Hungarian abbreviation for "reduced value"), or with the help of which—especially in villages with falling populations—they

Table 4

	Entire population	Roma
Active earners	87.7 per cent	85.2 per cent
Inactive earners, invalids, learners, others needing support	12.3 per cent	14.8 per cent
Total	100.0 per cent	100.0 per cent

Table 5

Proportion of working-age men employed (per cent)

Age group	Total population (1)	Roma (2)
15–19 years	12.9	17.7
20–29 years	68.0	35.0
30–54 years	76.9	33.8
55–59 years	43.1	15.4
Total	63.4	30.8

Sources: (1) Central Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey, 1st quarter of 1994
(2) National Roma Survey

Table 6

Proportion of working-age women employed (per cent)

Age group	Total population (1)	Roma population (2)
15–19 years	12.3	12.8
20–25 years	70.1	15.6
30–54 years	73.1	20.2
Total	63.1	17.5

Sources: (1) Central Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Survey, 1st quarter of 1994
(2) National Roma Survey

Table 7

Unemployment rate for women of working age (per cent)

Age group	Total population (1)	Roma population (2)
15–19 years	24.9	46.6
20–29 years	9.9	31.6
30–-54 years	7.6	31.0
Total	8.8	34.1

would be able to buy houses vacated by their original peasant owners. Even by 1971, when the project was only a few years old, the evidence of the nation-wide survey pointed to the fact that eliminating the traditional settlements in such a manner, carried out often by the use of force by the authorities, did not do away with segregation in many places but simply created new forms for it. Most of the "CS" houses were located in colonies, on adjoining land allocated for the purpose by the local authorities; it did not take long for them to recreate the overcrowding so typical of the

traditional Roma colony. In addition, the houses so built had hardly any market value; the majority proved unsellable and therefore bound their inhabitants for good, unable to leave. Old peasant houses could be bought mostly in villages abandoned because of extremely poor conditons. These were small villages that had been declared "functionless", and thus deprived of their communal institutions and ignored in all infrastructural development: "associate villages" as they were called. In these villages, the exodus of the local population was speeded up by the continuing decline in facilities, closely connected to the inferior status of the village concerned, and by the moving in of Roma families; a process started whereby these settlements rapidly turned into ghettos.

The processing of the data gained from the present survey has not yet reached the point where it can be discerned how large a part of the Roma population lives in villages of this type today. However, in 1987 in County Baranya, a typical tiny-village region, 15 per cent of the entire population and 36 per cent of the Roma lived in "associate villages".

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that since 1971, the housing conditions of the Roma have significantly improved not only compared to their own former situation but also in comparison to the total population. This is partly due to the major social and economic processes of the period (the rise, until the mid-80s, of the employment level among the Roma, the general improvement in living standards until the early 1980s, also affecting the Roma, etc.); it is also clear that, despite all its negative features, the programme aimed at eliminating the colonies, and the favourable credit conditions if offered, played a major part too. That type of credit was available from the mid-1960s up to the end of the 1980s; it helped a great number of families to acquire higher-quality housing, homes at least closer to what may be considered 20th century standards. Many members of the higher-income or more integrated groups of the Roma used extra loans to build homes of a higher than "CS" standard. In the big cities, in certain periods—especialy in the second half of the 70s and the early 80s—due to large-scale construction of prefabricated housing and new housing developments, the chances of the Roma also improved, epecially of families with three or more children. They obtained council-owned flats in the new housing estates or in older apartments vacated by those who moved to the new housing developments. Those chances were improved even more by the slum clearance projects, "urban planning by bulldozer", as it was then called. In such slums, the ratio of Roma was, in most cases, higher than average, and Roma moving into towns were mostly able to strike roots in these areas. It is, however, worth mentioning that during slum clearance, recent arrivals always faced a difficult struggle with the authorities to have their entitlement to resettlement recognized. (2.1 per cent of the families have been, at one time or another, involved in evictions, and 3.8 per cent in settlement liquidation operations.)

In consequence of the developments outlined above, the ratio of those living in traditional Roma colonies has declined radically. In 1971, 65.1 per cent of all Roma lived in separate settlements. The figure today is only 13.7 per cent. The number of traditional Roma colonies or those regarded as such on the basis of their structure and dominant building type, as well as the proportion of the Roma population living there, has shrunk to a minimum. The overwhelming majority of the existing colonies was newly established with the assistance of the authorities, and consists mostly of "CS" houses. Just as in 1971, the ratio of

those living in colony-type housing was highest in the provincial towns and lowest in Budapest. Beyond the large-scale decline in ratios observable in all types of communities, another major difference is that, as compared to the 29.5 per cent ratio in Budapest in 1971, settlements no longer exist in Budapest.

Table 8
The ratio of colony-type housing by locality type

Settlement type	1971	1994
Budapest	29.5	–
Other towns	70.0	16.4
Villages	69.4	14.5
Total	66.0	13.7

The differences by region are also considerable. In the Northern region the ratio of colony homes is 28.9 per cent, in South Transdanubia it is 5.7 per cent, and in the central region around Budapest, 3.0 per cent. In North Transdanubia there are no colony homes at all. The reasons are mainly historical. Even in 1971, significant differences could be observed between regions. The ranking has hardly changed at all. It is, however, worth noting that in 1971 the ratio of these homes was highest in the Eastern region (84.8 per cent), followed by the Northern region (73.3 per cent). Today it is the other way round (16.5 and 28.9 per cent, respectively).

In general there has been a decline in the ratio of Roma families living on the urban fringe or the outskirts of villages. Their ratio in inner city areas has grown. In the course of the survey, information was recorded not only on the present but also on the former home of the head of the family. A comparison shows that housing conditions were modified considerably even by their last change of home.The last move may, of course, involve very different dates; some people moved quite recently to their present home, others have been living there for decades. It is, nevertheless, illuminating to see how significant a shift in proportions is caused by a single move per family. Among those in villages, for instance, compared to the present 14.5 per cent, 27.5 per cent of the previous homes were in colonies. In the Eastern region that rate was 31.4 per cent as opposed to today's 16.5 per cent.

Table 9
Location of previous and present home

	Previous home	Present home
Inner city or village	68.1	80.5
Separate colonies	23.2	13.9
Farmstead	2.9	1.4
Puszta, manor	3.7	0.8
Other, no information available	3.3	2.2

The considerable decline in the rate of settlement and other outer area homes does not mean that the segregation of Roma has diminished at the same rate. The questionnaires also recorded whether in the closest vicinity of the families visited (large apartment house, settlement, colony, village street, etc.):

- Roma families were living there exclusively or in an overwhelming majority (29.7 per cent)
- Roma families were living there mixed with non-Roma families (29.1 per cent)
- there were some Roma families but the majority were non-Roma (29.4 per cent)
- not even a few Roma families were living in the neighbourhood (8.7 per cent)

In nearly 30 per cent of all cases, the neighbourhood was inhabited exclusively or overwhelmingly by Roma families. Another 30 per cent lived in neighbourhoods where Roma and non-Roma lived in more or less equal proportions. With the Roma forming a mere 5 per cent of the total population, such a position implies considerable segregation. This is even more obvious if one considers that in neighbourhoods where the proportion of Roma has reached such a level, a major drop in real estate market value can be observed, along with the rapid moving out of the non-Roma population.

It can thus be established that today, too, the residential location of nearly 60 per cent of the Roma population is still determined by segregation.

The ratio of those in whose neighbourhood only Roma families live, or where they are in an overwhelming majority, is lowest in Budapest (6.5 per cent) and highest in other towns (35.6 per cent). In the villages it is 30.5 per cent.

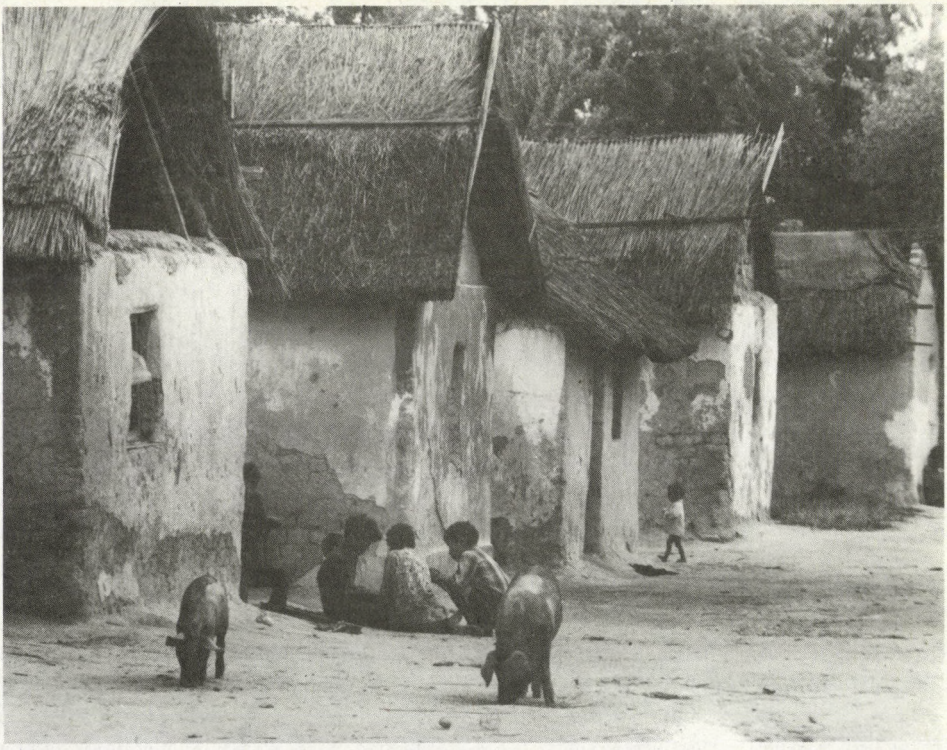
"CS" houses, old-type (gable-roof) peasant houses and detached houses together make up 71.2 per cent of all homes. In Budapest, the ratio of dwellings in old, delapidated tenement houses is very high (62.7 per cent).

32.8 per cent of homes consist of a single room only, 42.7 of two, and 24.4 of three or more. The same proportions characterized the homes of the the lowest-income groups in 1985 (See *Háztartásstatisztika,* 1985 [Household Statistics 1985], Central Bureau of Statistics). Of homes in Hungary today, 15.4 per cent are single-room homes, 43.4 per cent consist of two rooms, and the ratio of homes with three or more rooms is 40.2 per cent. (*Magyar statisztikai évkönyv,* 1991 (Hungarian Statistics Yearbook, 1991)

On investigating the quality indices of homes (public utility supplies, facilities, etc.), a leap forward can be observed in comparison to 1971 conditions. The question is rather whether the disadvantageous position of Roma compared to the rest of the population has changed in consequence of all these improvements. As far as housing conditions are concerned, the answer is yes, even though the disadvantage is still considerable. At any rate, however, Roma have successfully broken out of the archaic housing conditions the majority of them had in 1971.

In 1971, 61 per cent of their homes were earth-floored. Today only 10 per cent. In 1971, only 56.1 per cent of Roma homes were connected to electricity supplies, today 97.9 per cent. (Electricity is not installed in 1.2 per cent of the homes, and in another 0.7 it has been cut off because of arrears in payment.) In 1971, 38.8 per cent of homes were not only without running water but water had to be carried from a distance of more than 100 meters. Today the ratio of such homes is only 5.3 per cent. In 1971, only a tiny minority of Roma homes had flush toilets, today the figure is 42.2 per cent. Then a full third of the homes did not even have their own latrine, today the ratio of such homes is below one per cent. In 1971 the number of homes with a bathroom was insignificant. Today, 47.6 per cent have one. True, 78.9 per cent of all homes in Hungary have a bathroom, and 75 per cent have a flush toilet.

The main problem today is not unbearable housing conditions, but the difficulty of maintaining existing housing standards, employment and depleting incomes. More than a quarter of families still owe part of the



Tamás Révész

A Gypsy Colony, Salgótarján, 1975.

Judit M. Horváth

Eviction in Budapest-Józsefváros, 1991.

favourable building (or house buying) loan they borrowed before 1988. The amount to be paid back monthly on debts of this type has been considerably raised in the meantime, and this in itself means an insurmountable problem for the families concerned.

Prospects and options

It has to be recognized that the present, disastrous employment conditions of the Roma will be improved to any significant degree only if considerable progress is made in education, and if, due to an economic upswing, more jobs are created.

The most effective means of improving educational standards in the long term is to raise the school-leaving age to eighteen. Some improvement may be achieved by the introduction of the ten-year general education aimed at in the Education Act and the government programme. However, in the case of those in the worst position from the point of view of schooling (i.e., those with the poorest chances of upward mobility), further benefits are also needed for any extension of general education to make a genuine impact. Without these, because of the increase in the number of 6- and 8-year-*gimnázium*, children with this kind of underprivileged family background are most likely to spend their ten years in general schools in the company of other under-achievers. As a condition for support, criteria have to be applied which guarantee that the grants under offer will indeed reach the children with the worst chances of extended education. Subsidies of this kind will inevitably favour the Roma but anyone meeting the criteria, Roma or not, must be guaranteed access to them.[4]

At present the overwhelming majority of Roma children do not continue in education after general school, and more often than not they have no chance at all of finding employment; especially, since they are not registered by the labour centres. According to our findings, 81 per cent of the unemployed Roma between the ages of 15 and 18 are not registered in spite of the fact that records could easily be provided by the general schools themselves. The Higher Education Act provides compulsory support for the training of young people who have left school but have not reached the age of 18 years. According to the survey, however, less than one per cent of young Roma in the age group specified takes part in training.

It is generally true that a considerably lower proportion of unemployed Roma are "reached" by the "active" means of employment policy than unemployed as such. Only in the rarest of cases are they assisted by the forms of support encouraging employment of the jobless, and they hardly ever take part in vocational training. The opportunities for public work is what they are likely to take advantage of, but in the majority of cases (especially in smaller villages) this is nothing but pseudo-employment or quasi-welfare support. This means no reintegration but the maintaining of the unintegrated state or of the segregation existing in the labour market. Local government authorities often can-

4 ■ We propose two kinds of support: (a) extended education grants must be provided for families where neither of the parents has had a schooling higher than 8 years of general school, at least one of the parents is unemployed, and at least one child is taking part in secondary or tertiary-level education. The size of the support may be differentiated according to the unemployment rate of the settlement where the family lives. This criterion will benefit the crisis zones and the small villages, from where the children of the above-mentioned families are least likely to go on studying. (b) A "per head quota" type bonus must be granted for every child meeting the above criteria to the general schools from where they were admitted to a secondary school, and to the secondary school from which they were admitted to university.

not, or do not really want to, provide them with "meaningful" work, and the organizational, "supervisory" problems remain mostly unsolved (once again, especially in the smaller villages). For this reason, local-governement authorities are usually content with taking advantage of what benefits them in this type of support, burdening funds available to the least possible degree.

It would be desirable to work out a programme which, based on cooperation between local government and labour and training centres, would aim at a combination of job training programmes and public work. More precisely, participants should be trained for things which are needed in the particular local government areas, so they can be provided with "meaningful" work afterwards.

Adapting to local possibilities and demands, the number of variants is huge indeed. One area where there may be a high potential for the co-ordination of training and public work is that of services—especially social services—which are the responsibility of the local government authorities. Here there are a number of existing jobs or jobs still to be created—home care, social meal supplies, village caretaker system, school or nursery services, etc.— which do not require high standards of training where jobs can be created. The Social Support Act demands that a nation-wide network of family support centres must be established, in keeping with given population figures, by 1997. There is a growing trend in social policy to encourage local government to carry out as many of the social care and welfare duties as possible in the form of community care, and to use in-house care in institutions only as a last resort. These changes require a well-thought-out strategy and thorough professional preparation. Through the cooperation of the Ministries of Labour, Welfare and Culture, several conditions may be met as part of labour policy training programmes. This type of employment, as compared to the forms of public work predominant today, has a much greater integrating effect. The more complex kinds of small-area development projects offer similar possibilities.

By combining training wih public work, "maintenance" brigades may be established to carry out simpler implement jobs on public buildings and family homes.

In order to implement the above ideas, the training system must be made more flexible. Of the regional job training centres it is precisely those villages that are most out of "reach" of regional job training centres—often because of their georaphical isolation—where the rate of unemployment is highest and the situation the most hopeless. Those who live there almost never get to the courses organized by the centres. Therefore, in every case where it is possible, the courses themselves must be decentralized. Practical training can be continued in conjunction with the job even when, following the completion of the course, trainees are already working on a communal project.

Obviously, the ideas outlined above may be realized—even if the other conditions are fulfilled—only if there are "players" ready to take care of organization and managing on the local and area level. The proposal of the Ministry of Labour, included in its action programme for 1994, which aims at the employment on communal projects of labour assistants/organizers of this kind, is therefore appropriate. On the other hand, rigid ethnic coupling (Roma programmes, Roma organizers) does not seem advisable, nor does the idea of tenders called from county/Budapest Roma organizations.

The idea of tenders for regional-level Roma organizations is unsound because it is likely to reinforce a peculiar feature of Hungary's autonomous Roma organizations. They are, to a considerable degree, hydrocephalic structures organized from the

top downward, and usually get stuck at the regional level. Grants and subsidies are swallowed up at the upper levels, and the effect of the organizations' work remains unnoticeable in the communities living in the direst circumstances. The findings of the nation-wide Roma survey are that the level of familiarity with even those organizations that describe themselves as nation-wide, boasting several branches and memberships of tens of thousands, is low. In fact, most are hardly known. Only two of them, Phralipe and Lungo Drom, have some kind of broad base. To the question "Do you know of any Roma organizations, and if you do, what are these?", nearly 90 per cent of those asked were unable to name a single one. The greater part of the remaining 10 per cent named either Phralipe or Lungo Drom. Of the Roma population over the age of 14, 5 per cent are members of one or another Roma organization. The larger part (2.8 per cent) of those who are members is equally divided between Phralipe and Lungo Drom. The familiarity level and membership of the other organizations is insignificant, and there are organizations enjoying considerable financial support of which nobody interviewed knew anything at all.

The issue is often raised that in the self-employment of the jobless in villages in disadvantageous positions, including the Roma, agricultural production should be given some kind of a role, and that cultivable land ought to be provided. However, apart from some sporadic initiatives, mainly by local government and foundations, nothing significant has yet happened in this area.

Just as they had been left out in 1945–1946, Roma did not share in the "second distribution of land" of recent years either. Since, with few rare exceptions, they had owned no land earlier, they could not obtain land through the compensation coupon scheme. But very few received entitlement as "part owners" either, even though in recent decades many had been long-term employees of various cooperatives or state farms, earning their living through agricultural labour. It is also worth noting that while less than 40 per cent of the total population now live in villages, more than 60 per cent of the Roma population still do.

The Ministry of Labour proposes the use of lands owned by local government for such purposes. Local governments were given only lands formerly owned by the state within the village perimeter. These may, in certain places, ensure a minimum-level self-support for families in the greatest need, but can hardly do more than that. Even this may mean a great deal to families vegetating on income-replacement aid or other forms of welfare support. It is questionable whether, taking into account the knowledge of farming of Roma families, plans more ambitious than that have any justification at all. The findings of our survey show that regional differences are very important also in this area. In Transdanubia, and especially in the South Transdanubian region, the prospects for household farming are significantly better than in the other parts of the country. The main reason for this is that in these regions, Romanian-speaking Roma are in the majority; because of their different history and traditions, they are versed in farming.

In the present critical economic situation, it is important that in South Transdanubia (mainly counties Baranya, Somogy, Tolna and Zala are involved) where the rate of the Roma population is growing very rapidly, a programme be worked out by which land could be provided to families ready to undertake farming in a more serious manner or on a larger scale. Criteria for selection should include entitlement to an ownership share on the basis of longer employment which, for some reason, was not asserted. ❧

Péter Szuhay

Arson on Gypsy Row

In September 1992 things flared up in Kétegyháza. In the Újfalu, the village fringe, the Csurár brothers demanded melons with menaces but the grower was only willing to give them a few. Allegedly the brothers then hit him over the head. On the following day, after nightfall, nine local young men, peasants, using a Jeep-type vehicle, broke into the brothers' home, set fire to it, and then did some damage to the house of their father. After the police arrested the young revenge-seekers, the villagers assembled in the village House of Culture, where the meeting lasted till dawn, and they demanded an explanation from the county police chief and from the Mayor. There was an all-night meeting the next day too, and the villagers insisted that the young men held on remand be released, and that the Csurár brothers and their parents, rowdies and criminals in their eyes, be run out of town.

At the meetings, but also before and after, whenever two or three discussed things, emotions ran high. Most people lost that self-control which keeps one's true feelings and opinions secret. These were publicly expressed, thus revealing hosts of conflicts in the existence side by side of Gypsies and Hungarians that are normally concealed, laying bare the difficulties in reconciling the two ways of life. The situation also allowed many aspects of the reactions of the Gypsies to be seen, aspects that are typical of opinions kept to oneself, and reinforced other aspects that are part of other-directed behaviours. Light was thrown on significant elements in the defence and survival strategy of Gypsies. Conflicts between group solidarity and the need to secure that tolerance on the part of the peasants which was necessary for their local survival were seen to be acute. For a time the local peasants insisted that the conflict was not a "Gypsy problem", but simple trouble with the Csurárs, with a single family, perhaps a clan. All the same, much was said at the public meetings which made it quite clear that, basically, Gypsies as such were the issue. To disguise this, an attempt was made to get the local Gypsies to sign a petition which asked for the release of the young men held on remand, and they were also asked to agree to the Csurárs being run out of town.

A Gypsy Chief was hurriedly appointed in the village, with the collaboration of the police and the Town Hall. He was expected, a point that was made quite clear to him,

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to persuade the Csurár family to quit the village, and to help keep the other Gypsies in line. At the second meeting, there were some who wanted to compel the representative of the Roma Parliament—a nationwide Gypsy organization—to speak to the Csurár family and to persuade them to make good their escape. At the third meeting, which was much shorter, the villagers were given the good news that the young men had been released. There were voices, however, which reminded the crowd, happily making its way home, that this was only one of their demands: some of the Csurár men had been repeatedly seen in Kétegyháza, even though a number of the members of the family were hiding in neighbouring villages.

That evening, not long after the crowd dispersed, a fire broke out in another Gypsy home, allegedly started by a Molotov cocktail thrown into a woodshed. Although this was soon put out by members of the several hundred strong Riot Police Detachment, who were present, the alarm lasted almost an hour. Some fifty Gypsy neighbours had gathered and they expressed a response to what had been said at the public meeting. Before that, for several nights, the Gypsies of Újfalu had slept in the streets, or in the fields, and a number had taken their children to stay with relatives in nearby villages. By Sunday, a relative calm had been restored. The young men had returned home, the Csurárs had sent a message that they would leave Kétegyháza, and the police had withdrawn a large proportion of their force. The county constabulary promised that a police station would be established in the village. The peasants no longer held public meetings and the Gypsies had fetched their children and had moved back into their houses. Fear and anxiety, however, have not passed and that week is still remembered and spoken of as the time of the ethnic war.

In what follows I shall try to describe 1) what the peasants allege about the Gypsies, 2) what the Gypsies have to defend themselves against, and what they have to say about themselves in response to outside expectations, 3) how the Gypsies see themselves in terms of their own norms and, 4) what the peasants wish to achieve in relation to the Gypsies and what the Gypsies wish to achieve in relation to the peasants.

The Kétegyháza Gypsies as seen by the peasants

According to the peasants the Gypsies maintain themselves as horse-copers. Without land of their own, they cannot grow the necessary fodder, they systematically steal from the fields, or glean wherever they can. These acts could be tolerated as long as they only pilfered lucerne or maize from the State Farm or Collective Farm, but not when they damaged the crops of the peasants. Breaking hayricks, or digging up harvested and buried beet was also unacceptable. Nor did the peasants approve of the Gypsies stealing or smuggling horses in addition to trading in them. The peasants claimed that most of their horses were bought cheaply or stolen in Romania, and then smuggled across the border at dead of night. It was also alleged that the horse-coper Gypsies cheated their peasant customers at the fair, boosting their profits beyond what was reasonable. The peasants' explanation for the aggression of the Csurárs was that they were so noisy coming home with a loaded cart so that the peasants in their street would withdraw indoors and not notice the stolen goods. The Csurárs' loud-mouthed threats are generally interpreted as an instrument of terror. People do not dare to resist, to speak up, or to lay information against them. However, it is not only horses that Gypsies are accused

of stealing. Whenever a hen or a lamb goes missing, or a couple of rows of potatoes are dug up, the Gypsies are blamed, before the evidence is even considered. It is generally held that they are not overfond of work, and welfare assistance is said to be their other major source of income, be this state social security benefits or grants to the needy from local authorities. Their large families are also looked on as part of a scheme to get something for nothing. Remarks about lack of cleanliness are commonplace, as are those on noisiness. The peasants also object to the drinking habits of Gypsies and to their profligacy. They immediately drink the little income they have, or the welfare benefits they get, and cannot make their money last to the end of the month. But it also bothers peasants if a Gypsy proves to be successful, and they doubt the honest origin of any Gypsy property. They object to them being generous or free with their money, be it in the village inn, or at family feasts or church functions.

There is no old established Gypsy area in Kétegyháza, no *Tziganie* with its own typical housing. Initially the Gypsies bought houses on the fringe of the village, mostly those that had been inhabited by the poorest peasants; there, in the district called Újfalu ("new village"), a street little by little assumed the character of a Gypsy quarter. In the past ten years they have also bought houses in the hub of the village, which put an end to their previous de facto segregation and established more direct contact with the peasants. In these farmhouses the Gypsies continued to raise cattle and deal in horses. By that time the peasants had given their homes a quasi-suburban character, in keeping with the norms of the "clean courtyard, tidy house" movement of communist times. One effect of the appearance of the Gypsies was to shatter this new image of the peasant habitat. There is no doubt that the Gypsies irritated the peasants, both by their economic activity and by their social life, the kind of meeting place they turned their homes into.

How the Gypsies present themselves

The goal of meeting the social expectations of the majority is a key aspect in the self-definition of Gypsies. They are fully aware of peasant prejudice, both articulated and expressed in body-language. The messages which Gypsies send out about themselves therefore move within the discourse of peasant opinion, which looks down on them. The Gypsies' primary endeavour is to present themselves as proper persons, as human beings, keeping their profile as Gypsies low, stressing their Hungarian citizenship and membership of the political nation. An important part of their self-image is the itemized denial of all that is said in their condemnation. Their claim to be "proper persons" is backed by asserting that they do not steal, that they have no prison record, that their way of life is not that of Gypsies, that they are in regular employment. Such claims are underpinned by references, you are told to ask around, everyone will tell you that what they say is true. If these were not denials of others' claims but simple self-descriptions, one would say that they protested too much. For instance, Gizi Faragó, the sister of Lajos Faragó, the man appointed as Gypsy Chief, who lives with her two sisters on a homestead a few kilometres from the village, is a workaholic and likes to stress that she has been a reliable employee of the Munkácsy Collective Farm for thirty-five years now, listing all the people in the village who call on her to do their plastering, or to whitewash their walls, and the number of animals she owns. She speaks of the high esteem in which she is held by the Curator of a Homestead Museum in the neighbourhood, who often has visitors from abroad to call on her, her home being a liv-

Kamill Erdős's 1959 classification[1] is reckoned a standard work in Hungarian Gypsy studies, even though others had previously defined the three most important groups. Thus Heizinger[2] had already distinguished the largely nomadic Vlach Gypsies, the occasionally nomadic trough-making (wood-carving) Beashi Gypsies, and the Hungarian-speaking Gypsies, settled for some time, who made their living from making music and mud bricks (adobe).

Kamill Erdős divided Gypsies in Hungary into those who spoke a Gypsy language, and those who did not. Gypsy-language speakers belong to two groups, one major group speaks Carpathian Gypsy. This further divides into subgroups: those of the County of Nógrád, those on the Budapest environs and Transdanubia, and those of the tinker and fairground Gypsies. Vlach Gypsies are the second major group; Erdős divides these into thirteen tribes or races, some of whose names originally referred to occupations: *Lovara*—horse copers: *Colara*—rug merchants: *Khelderasa*—tinkers: *Cerhara*—"dwellers in tents"; *Masara*—"fishermen"; *Fodozovo*—blacksmiths (gimlet makers); *Romano rom*—"coppersmiths"; *Bodoca*—metal workers; *Kherara*—"casual workers" (house owners); *Bugara*; *Curara*; *Patrinara*; *Drizara*. Of those who did not speak Romany, one of the principal groups is that of Hungarian speakers, they are the descendants of Carpathian and Vlach Gypsies. The other major group speaks Romanian, which is further subdivided into Romanian Gypsies and trough-making Gypsies.

It is primarily the Gypsy-speaking communities—those defined exclusively as Gypsies by anthropologists—which lay claim to being ethnically defined as Gypsies. In keeping with this approach, Gypsies (Rom) are defined those who use the Gypsy language, and *romungro* those who changed themselves from Gypsies into Hungarians, i.e. into non-Gypsies. What we have here is a non-acceptance tendency—though they accept being defined as Gypsies by society, they apply a fine distinction, and will not accept those who in their view are on the outside.

Inter-group relations are clearly apparent in a rigid application of endogamy. Gypsies more rarely intermarry with other Gypsy groups than with non-Gypsies. Social isolation is also relatively well exemplified by spatial arrangements within the Gypsy quarters of towns or villages.

A hierarchical approach can also be established in the social image of Hungarian-speaking Gypsies. They accept the judgment of the outside world, and place themselves on the top rung of the Gypsy hierarchy. In the interests of maintaining their status, they use numerous marks to distinguish themselves from Vlach Gypsies.

Though respecting and perhaps envying the Vlach Gypsies, they are well aware that their own strategy (of integration and even assimilation) de-

1 ■ Erdős, Kamill: "Classification of Gypsies in Hungary" in: *Acta Ethnographica* 1959, pp. 449–457 and *Acta Orientalica*, 1960, pp. 79–82.

2 ■ Heizinger, János: "Adatok a falu cigánykérdéséhez" (Facts Related to the Village Gypsy Problem) in *Népegészségügy*, 1939, No.18.

mands seeming isolation. For a long time, they adopted the norms of the gentry and the peasantry, and expressed numerous symbols of identification. They place the Beashi Gypsies on the lowest rung of the hierarchy. Beashi Gypsies figure on an equally low level in the thinking of Vlach and Hungarian Gypsies.

Gypsies in Hungary make up, at the very least, three ethnic communities. The general public, however, thinks of them as homogeneous. The image of Gypsies in the 19th century showed more distinction, people were familiar with at least two kinds of Gypsies. The way Gypsies appeared in the novels of the time also helped. One ideal type were the Gypsy fiddlers of settled abode. They lived in shacks and took a living from the music they provided for gentle folk and peasants. They showed themselves to be humble, forelock-touching, indeed self-abasing. Perhaps they were an idle lot, but as regards music they were masters of their trade and carried the country's fame far and wide. The other type were wanderers, vagabonds, caring for their freedom and independence. They were a rough and wild lot, on the road with their horses and carts, maintaining themselves by doing a little work, much begging, and perhaps a little thieving. By the end of the century they were clearly taken to be an administrative and a police problem. The authorities did all in their power to put an end to vagabondage and to force Gypsies to settle somewhere.

The first conscription of Gypsies in Hungary was indeed prompted by the gendarmerie. In 1893 Antal Herrmann[3] was in charge of a conscription of Gypsies which covered everyone in the country—outside Budapest—whom the authorities or their own neighbours thought of as Gypsies.

This official and general attitude reacted on the history of Gypsies, and on the shaping of the ethnic process. All those who are considered Gypsies are defined so. In the long term, this also means that Gypsy families, or local communities who, over and above their membership of the Hungarian political nation are also ready for complete social and cultural integration, find that this road is closed to them. Even if they define themselves as Hungarians, they are still called Gypsies, with all the implications of a term of abuse.

There are still three kinds of Gypsies: Romany-speaking Vlach Gypsies, Romanian-speaking Beashi Gypsies and Hungarian-speaking Hungarian Gypsies, which are endogamous and which compete with each other. They clearly establish their separateness whenever they define their identity. In recent decades Gypsy intellectuals have recognized that, in spite of their differences, it is the duty of these various kinds of Gypsies to grow into a single united national minority, showing solidarity with other Gypsies. The "creation" of an integrated Gypsy culture is taking place under our very eyes.

3 ■ Herrmann, Antal: Magyarországon 1893. január 3l-én végrehajtott Czigány összeírás eredményei (The Results of a Conscription of Gypsies Carried out in Hungary on the 31st of January 1893) *Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények,* New Series, 1895, Vol. 9.

ing homestead museum. Gizi Faragó's aim in life is to be accepted because of the way she has done her work. Another basic characteristic of a proper person is ownership of one's own home and of domestic animals, which assure your independence. Stressing your status as a trader or horse-coper has a similar role. In this connection they are likely to boast—perhaps even in comparison with the Romungros—"we're not people who think in terms of five hundred or six hundred forints." It is part of being a proper person to have enough money to buy a house, car or horse whenever the opportunity or the need arises. The rearing and schooling of children, and their clothes, are often mentioned. A man's body is also the measure of the man, the appearance of being well fed, being stout. Being described as an "upright man" is an indication of wealth. Respect is something that much store is set by. Gypsies do all in their power to ensure a mutuality of respect, they wish to be respected as they respect the peasants. Demanding respect as an individual also implies the acceptance of Gypsies, which is a necessary condition of their self-respect.

Gypsies primarily want to present themselves to the world as citizens and Hungarians, thus achieving acceptance as social equals. Part of this endeavour involves speaking of an active role in Hungarian history, in various revolutions and wars of independence. Messages addressed to the majority, aimed to boost the status of Gypsies, or to express their human value, often feature at family or social functions. Ádám Faragó's 1990 funeral, videotaped by the family, can serve as an example. Ádám Faragó was killed by his father-in-law, in self-defence according to the judgment of the court. The young man was reputed to be the most cunning and successful of horse-copers, his parents' favourite son, and himself the father of a three-month-old baby girl. Ádám had a monster funeral, his body was embalmed and the wake lasted a whole week so he could be buried on Christmas Day, his name-day. The open coffin, on a flower-bedecked cart, was taken in procession right round the village, with stations at every house he had ever lived in, the schools he had attended, public buildings, shops and village inns. Tables were laid at every inn, and food and drink was provided for all those in the procession, and for the peasants of the neighbourhood. The young man was lamented at every station, until they finally arrived in the cemetery at nightfall. A crypt was dug out before the burial vault, lined with rugs, and furnished. The peasants experienced this funeral as a display in the worst of taste, by far transcending the limits they held themselves too. If that were at all possible, the funeral further whipped up anti-Gypsy feelings.

The Gypsies and their norms

There is much that the Gypsies hold dear which functions primarily for internal use, which—as against integration in accordance with the expectations of the villagers—serves to strengthen their cohesion. Help given as an expression of solidarity is frequently mentioned. The obligation to serve the other, be he brother, friend, or even stranger, is often spoken of as a moral constraint. "If you've got 500 forints, give half to him who turns to you for help, he'll return it some time. You may well find yourself in need of help tomorrow." Many a time what matters is not how much money was lent or given away, but how fortunate the giver was in business and in life in general, since good fortune can be shared, or passed on to the person who received the money from the fortunate man.

A kind of hierarchy can be observed among men which, regardless of age, places the most fortunate and cunning in

business at the top of the ladder. Cunning has the highest priority. What matters is not how wealthy a man is at any given time, but what can be expected of him thanks to his cunning and good fortune. A cunning person can do well in a deal even if he only starts with a hundred forints. Amongst the Vlach Gypsies of Kétegyháza, business primarily means horse-coping, trading in cars, and the exchange, and accumulation, of real estate. Such activities are often of equal standing. Other Gypsies also trade in shoes, clothes, drink, cigarettes, audio- and video-cassettes and much else, but so far, this is not common in Kétegyháza.

Cunning is much as it is ascribed to the smallest hero in fairy tales, whose success is not due to his strength but to his brains and cleverness; a cunning person is like a hero who seems simple-minded but has good luck, and is always ready to help others. Wealth obtained thanks to such qualities is much more valuable than wealth deriving from perseverance, self-denying or hard work.

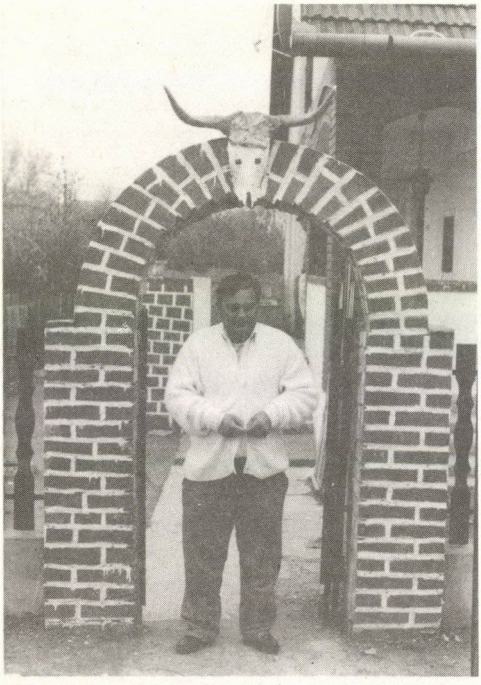
It follows that what Gypsies have to say about hard-working peasants is not exactly flattering. A particular example can illustrate this. A gang moved onto a maizefield which had just been harvested, they were the very first. Fertilizing had already begun at one end of the field. A man on a motorbike gave them permission to glean, and they asked so cleverly that they were able to obtain permission to set fire to the stalks. This they did so at several points. (It is much easier to gather the remaining cobs if the leaves and stalks burn to cinders. Work is quicker, more effective, and less bothersome.) When the tractor drivers asked them to put out the fire, they did so, and moved on to another place, saying their work would come to nothing there and that they were out of luck. Therefore it was time to go and look for something else. At this actual time, in other harvested fields, peasants were hard at work, gleaning without setting fire to the stalks.

Gypsies are not interested in large incomes at any price, they prefer to go hungry for a time rather than undertaking a hard and tiresome job. Large-scale employment, in the years of socialist industrialization, was a temporary side-track for many Gypsy communities. Perhaps, for a time, they really did believe that social integration was possible in Hungary, that all those ready to conform would be accepted. It turned out, however, that it did not matter how keen you were, and how strong your desire to see yourself as a Hungarian, you had to face up to the fact that, all the time, you'd be called a Gypsy, not as a description, but as a term of abuse. The problem was not that the Gypsies would not let you go, that the cohesion of the community was too strong, but that the majority would not accept members of the minority who wished to integrate. The result was that they either floated between the two cultures for a time, or else returned to their origins. Gypsies who aimed at becoming peasants fared likewise.

The central role played by good fortune and cunning protects Gypsies against taking too tragic a view of the losses they suffer from time to time. They do not despair if their property, or their livestock, suffers damage, they tend to shrug it off, saying that it's no good crying over spilt milk, you can't bring back, or change, things, it goes as it comes, and, thanks to our cunning and good fortune, we'll get it back. Nor do they discipline children the way peasants do. A five-year-old may, within minutes, utterly destroy a name-day present he has just received. Security of property entrenched in the law is an irrelevant category as far as they are concerned. Of the house or car-owning families we know, a number, perhaps the majority, have not legally registered their title. The fact that they paid for the house or the car means

Endre Friedmann, MTI

The funeral of a famous Gypsy-orchestra leader, 1990.



Péter Szuhay

The successful entrepreneur, 1992.

that these are their property, and they are prepared to face future legal complications. Many drive without a licence. Completing eight years of primary school is a condition for holding a driving licence; this many Gypsies have not done, but they still need a car to ensure their mobility. They are fully aware of the possible consequences whenever they drive without a licence or under the influence, be these a fine, or even imprisonment. Looking at things in this way, gaol is a possible, temporary scene, where life goes on and where you may well find happiness and fulfilment, just as in any other place.

Possible legal consequences are rationally thought through whenever taking revenge, or swearing revenge. Following the death of a relative or the suffering of a serious offence, it is a greater loss to have an unquiet spirit for some time, or not to lay the soul of the deceased at rest, than to spend ten years behind bars because of

Béla Kása

Horse trading at Martonvásár, 1992.

Judit M. Horváth

The demolished house of the Csurárs. Kétegyháza, 1992.

the act of vengeance. Vengeance and curses appear as threats to the majority, to the outside world. They are therefore used to obtain concessions, or to induce self-restraint.

Marriage too is arranged by Gypsies according to their own law, rejecting outside prescriptions. Marriages are basically celebrated within the community, and it is rare, even today, to have civil marriage, let alone a wedding in church afterwards. In fact, those about to be married are frequently too young to obtain permission to contract a civil marriage. This, naturally, in no way implies any laxity in family relations. A Gypsy family is a rigid, conservative institution. The order of marriage rites, however, allows greater freedom to the individual than customary in peasant society. Supposing the young man is rejected by his future father-in-law, he may still elope with his bride, and can reckon on forgiveness after a time, especially after the first child is born. Parental authority, the father's over his son, and the mother's over her daughter, essentially comes to an end with marriage. But grandparents have a similar authority over their grandchildren; that too, naturally, only lasts until marriage. This multigenerational thinking and its acceptance implies more powerful ties of cohesion, care and support than is customary amongst peasants.

Various rites of purity also serve to discriminate between Vlach Gypsies and the Gazho (non-Gypsies) and Romungro. Women have to wear a headscarf and may not show bare arms or shoulders to strangers of the opposite sex, nor may they give suck in the presence of strangers. To this day great care is taken that not even male family members should see female body-linen hanging out to dry.

Their treatment of the dead—funerals, memorial wakes on their birthday or the rite of the Easter of the dead—are also marks of their ethnicity. On such occasions, the dead are treated as present, they are offered food and drink, cigarettes are lit for them.

Such rules and customs also serve as symbols of separation from the majority; in some cases, however, customs and actual conduct are instruments of self-respect, and defence mechanisms against suffered discrimination. This includes mischief, certain kinds of pranks that come close to roguery, such as fortune telling and magic charms. These, however, are based on a reciprocal relationship. The Gypsies, in an authenticated performance, provide solace for peasants in need of psychological help in the form of a rosy image of the future, for which they expect payment in cash. Theft as punishment is an accepted form of getting your own back and teaching a lesson; putting your hand on some of the property of the person you quarrelled with offers you some satisfaction. That type of theft should not be confused with the increasingly frequent thieving for subsistence. The punitive character of theft is a way in which of young males can display. Thieving as a display of cunning and good fortune can become a standard by which the worth of a man is judged.

Gypsies and peasants: conflicting aims

The immediate aim of the Kétegyháza peasants during the ethnic war was to get rid of the Csurár clan, cutting the links between the Csurárs and the other Gypsies in a way that forced the latter back against the wall, minimizing the options of Gypsy solidarity. The—illegal—expulsion of the Csurárs also serves *pour encourager les autres* Gypsies to keep to those limits thought natural by the majority. The kan-

garoo court justice to which the Csurár family was subjected also erects barriers to the expansion of the Gypsies. What is expected from the Gypsies is behaviour that adjusts to the desires of the decent majority. To enforce this, resort was made to the instruments of arson, damage, threats and expulsion. There was an attempt to make the latter appear legitimate by enlisting the other Gypsies as collaborators: if they wanted to continue living in the village they had to agree to the expulsion of the three Csurár families. Even people related to the Csurárs were included in this blackmail. The father-in-law of one of the Csurár sisters, who was proclaimed Gypsy Chief, was threatened. All possible ways in which the Gypsies could have appealed to the general public during the days of the war were blocked. The Gypsies unambiguously got the message, and spectacularly played the dual role forced on them. In the presence of outside observers, they showed themselves to be partisans of a charmed, patriarchal way of life who lived in perfect harmony with peasants, who are their employers and helpful neighbours. The same Gypsies, behind the backs of their patrons, made obscene gestures at them, and cursed them, but not a word of this before the cameras or the microphones. A few months after the events Picis, the wife of Lajos Faragó, who had been proclaimed Gypsy Chief, told us that when—in the days of the war—we wanted to talk to her husband, she shooed us off so spectacularly because her husband had been threatened by a number of speakers at the public meeting. "We'll bury the Chief so deep the ploughshares will not turn him up" if he does not collaborate with the peasants, or if he talks out of turn in the presence of journalists, if he does not get the Csurárs to clear out. Under these circumstances, she stood in the middle of the road and told us to be off, and to leave her husband alone. Here, Gypsies and Hungarians lived in perfect harmony, friendship and good neighbourliness. In the course of conversation she had several times appealed to the honest and respectable behaviour of the Gypsies. They naturally did not agree with the intended expulsion but it was quite clear to them that the two options open to them were to confront the peasants and show solidarity with the Csurárs (in which case they themselves were also in danger of expulsion), or else to take the side of the village against their will to ensure that they could continue to live there, and to obtain the good will of the peasants. They mentioned that, in addition to the three sacked houses that had been set on fire, Molotov cocktails had also been thrown into, and the windows broken of, two uninhabited houses owned by the Faragós where the Csurárs were suspected of hiding. That is the context in which the spectacular fire of that night, when the rowdy young men were released, should be interpreted. The presumption is that in this case the fire was started not by the peasants, but by the Gypsies themselves as a means to obtaining police protection, preempting further pogrom-like events. The alarm raised by the fire was an opportunity for them to shout their fears to the high heavens, an opportunity for a ritual . swearing of vengeance, forcing the peasants to retreat and exercise restraint. The message of the fire was: "we agreed to the expulsion of the Csurárs, just as you wished, but let us live in peace now." One may presume that this fire has put a stop to the carrying out of the long-term aim of the peasants to expel the other Gypsies as well. ❧

Katalin Bossányi

Taking Stock of the Economic Transition

The Facts and Figures

Hungary's transition to a market economy has turned out to be a protracted process. The reason for the longer than expected period of transformation to capitalism lies partly in the contradictory character of the reform process that began after 1968 and partly in hesitant and inconsistent government policies over the last few years. What was positive in the country's legacy was that the economic players had not been entirely unprepared for the changeover of 1988–1990; the "second economy", the web of semi-legal operations and second jobs tolerated during the "soft dictatorship" was well-developed, the number of small and medium-sized private businesses was increasing rapidly, and the institutions of a market economy were well on the way to being fully in place. What was negative in the same legacy was the high national debt—the gross figure was $21 bn in 1990—and a production structure dependent on the old Comecon countries.

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The government returned after the first free elections promised to develop what it called a "social market economy". However, in an effort to speed up market-oriented reforms through radically transforming the structure of ownership and in stabilizing the economic equilibrium rather than a shock therapy, it chose a peculiar mixture of drift and centralization, based on rapid growth. The philosophy behind this policy was discernible in the attempts to grant ownership to the "national middle class" and in the protecting of the corps of civil servants and government officials. The first is clearly seen in the manner of carrying out privatization and in the compensation laws, the second is evidenced by the constant postponement of the reform of government spending, a reform frequently declared but never actually carried out. On the whole, the feature of the economic changes between 1990 and 1994 was that while the structure of ownership and the real processes of the economy underwent profound changes, a deep crisis unfolded in macro-financial matters. While trying to catch up with the West, Hungary was unable to exploit the fact that it was already a great deal more market-oriented than the rest of Eastern Europe, it has therefore lost a great deal of that advantage. Nevertheless, according to outside observers, it is still one of the leaders

(along with the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia).

Structure of ownership and economic growth

In 1980 the private sector accounted for 10 per cent of GDP, in 1994 the figure was 40 per cent. In 1994, 65 per cent of GDP came from foreign and privately owned domestic sources: the position of private ownership in Hungary is now dominant. At the same time, the share of the government sector in GDP fell between 1990 and 1994 from 65 to 14 per cent. (The ratio of budget-financed institutions rose from 14 to 17 per cent in the meantime.) The number of economic organizations increased six-fold within four years: at the very beginning of 1995, 103,000 economic organizations of legal personality were registered. The number of businesses employing less than ten persons showed the most rapid rise, and the number of single self-employed entrepreneurs also increased three-fold. Thus an extremely fast transformation was being carried through on several levels at the same time, with only a fraction of it actually due to privatization.

The rapid change in ownership relations was rooted in the reforms of 1968. Since the end of the 1960s, a legal private sector had existed in practice in Hungary; at the same time there had been ample opportunity—in the "second" and even "third" economy—for wage-earners to supplement their income in a wide variety of forms. From 1982 on, beside the status of small-scale manufacturers and traders, regarded as private entrepreneurs, certain government-regulated corporate forms of private and group enterprise were legalized. In 1986, a merchant banking system was developed; from 1988, a capital market evolved, and regulations were introduced to provide a legal framework through which enterprises and businesses could turn themselves into corporations.

Because of all this, the change-over in Hungary may be regarded as an organic market development, in which ownership reforms were speeded up after 1989. Yet, now, in early 1995, a stable ownership structure has still not taken shape. The considerable shift between state-owned and private property has been largely due to the rapid development of private enterprise and to a group of joint venture companies bringing in foreign capital—and much less to the government-led process of privatization. The relevant state-owned assets were estimated in 1990 at a book value of two thousand bn forints, which meant that approximately 2,000 companies have been wholly or partially privatized. By 1995, property to the value of 644 bn forints has gone into private ownership. The state lost control over somewhat more—some 700 bn forints' worth—through the process of liquidation. Another 13 per cent of state property went into foreign ownership. Due to inflation, the state's enterprise assets at present, including the entire banking system, are estimated at 3,000 bn forints. Of this, 700 bn is made up by small and medium size companies which may be rapidly privatized. The assets of the public utility enterprises, which may be privatized to a 30 to 50 per cent degree, are put at 1,200 bn, and the banking sector, 75 per cent of which may be privatized, at 800 bn.

In the past four years, Hungary's GDP fell by more than 20 per cent. (By 3.5 per cent in 1990, 12 per cent in 1991, 4.5 per cent in 1992, one per cent in 1993, while in 1994 there was a two per cent increase.) In 1990, per capita GDP was $3,300, in 1994, $4,000. This performance ranks Hungary among the world's medium-developed countries. The fall in GDP was largely due

to the collapse of the former Comecon markets, to a deep structural crisis and, to a lesser degree, to an economic policy that was slow in addressing the crisis. At the same time, however, Hungary's GDP, and consequently the country's living standards, cannot be viewed independently of the rapidly expanding hidden economy. Some researchers estimate that, in 1994, 30–32 per cent of GDP was being produced by that hidden economy. (In its official calculations, the National Bureau of Statistics attributes 20 per cent to the performance of the hidden economy.) This is a consequence of both the dysfunctions of the tax and social security systems, and the already mentioned habits of "moonlighting" in the "second" or "third" economy. Students of "transitology" have also observed that the transition to a market economy in Hungary is proceeding along the lines of the Latin models. In 1994, after many years, Hungary's economy began to grow again. But an interpretation of the 2 per cent growth in GDP, however, must take into consideration that last year the hidden economy expanded twice as fast as the legal. The new government has declared war on the black economy. Such a war has no chance of success if the police measures employed do not go hand in hand with a comprehensive tax reform; that, however, takes time. An abiding form of coexistence must therefore be reckoned with between the legal and illegal economy.

Production, export, investment, privatization

Between 1990 and 1993, industrial production fell by a third. (Production of companies with more than 50 employees fell by 40 per cent.) Industrial production decreased by 7 per cent in 1990, 13 per cent in 1991, and 10 per cent in 1992. In 1993, however, growth in industrial production was already 4 per cent, and in 1994, 9 per cent. The large state-owned manufacturing companies were the worst hit by the plunge. State-owned heavy industry practically liquidated itself, the bulk of light industry went bankrupt, and the little that has survived earns its livelihood from sub-contracting. Within three years, heavy industry was reduced to a quarter of its former size: more than half of the coal mines closed, production in the metal industry shrank to a third, the heavy chemical industry partly went bankrupt, and what was left was privatized. Construction industry figures showed a plunge of 60 per cent; the entire sphere of state-owned companies simply ceased to exist, while the number of small and medium-sized private companies grew spectacularly. (In 1994, construction engineering activities grew by 19 per cent compared to the previous year.)

The agricultural sector is in a protracted slump, partly because of the misjudged policies on the co-operatives and of the compensation laws, and partly because of the shrinkage of the export markets. Between 1990 and 1993, agricultural production dropped by 40 per cent. That decrease was 4 per cent last year: while plant production expanded by 6 per cent, animal husbandry decreased by 13 per cent. (The new cabinet, taking the EU and GATT norms into consideration, increased export subsidies for agriculture, which is now receiving extra investment support compared to the previous period.)

Between 1989 and 1993, investment into the national economy decreased by 23 per cent. The decline was worst in 1991 (12 per cent). In 1993, at current prices, investment grew by 15 per cent, and in 1994, by 28 per cent (at comparative prices this is the equivalent of a 10 to 15 per cent growth). Construction increased by 23 per

cent, and investment in machinery by 33 per cent. A major role in growth has been taken by infrastructure investment based on concessions, but investment in the form of the instalment of machinery by joint venture companies has an even larger share. It was also last year that the green field investments made by multinational companies turned productive.

The sharp drop in production lasting until mid-1993 was mainly a consequence of the change in export markets; the foreign trade deficit may be partly explained by the excessive need for imports to boost production. In 1990 Hungary shifted over from settling accounts with the former Comecon countries in transferable rubles to payment in US dollars. It quickly turned out that the obviously crucial Soviet market, absorbing nearly half of the country's exports, was incapable of paying. Companies—under government pressure—withdrew from the C.I.S. countries. (They are now battling to return there through barter trade and debt buying, but earlier positions can no longer be restored even in such ways.) The commodity base could not be simply switched to the markets of the highly developed nations; this was the reason for the plunge in production in 1991 and 1992. By the second half of 1992, however, some of the manufacturing industry managed to stabilize its markets, mainly in the EU countries, and to a lesser degree in the United States and the Far East. Competitive exports, however, were increasingly accompanied by a constant rise in imports. (Factors responsible for the increase in imports included a policy of reckless liberalization, a rapid import growth for consumption purposes and, in close connection with that, the role of multinational companies in privatization in Hungarian trade and the food industry markets.) In 1990, the foreign trade balance was still positive but in 1991 it closed with a deficit of 91 bn, which went to 342 bn forints by 1993. The year 1993 was the blackest in the history of Hungary's external trade. Exports dropped by 14 per cent, and the country seemed to have exhausted all its resources. In 1994, partly under the effect of exchange rate policies and other export incentives, and partly because of re-exporting by privatized and joint venture companies, exports rose by 22 per cent, imports only by 17 per cent. (Over 60 per cent of exports went to the OECD countries, from where the imports also came.) Nevertheless, the trade balance still showed a deficit of 300 bn forints, for the narrowing of the gap rests on very poor foundations. For the first two months of 1995, the dynamism of exports continued. So did that of imports. According to some observers, even though the profitability of exports is still low, their structure appears to be shifting in a positive direction. (Exporting of raw materials and semi-finished products somewhat declined, while the ratio of more highly processed goods has grown, and the volume of sub-contracting has expanded rapidly.) All this allows us to conclude that the much-needed structural transformation has indeed started. Although a further impetus is given by the association agreement with the European Union, joint venture company investments and the arrival of working capital have an even greater role. Structural transformation, however, is not sufficient to change the medium-developed level of the economy, and the country is still lagging in the struggle to catch up.

The pace and direction of privatization has been determined in the last few years by constant changes in ideas and policies. In 1989–1990, the period of spontaneous privatization, a fast but uncontrolled process was dominated mainly by company managers and by members of the old Communist Party nomenclature. After the

1990 elections, this was halted by the MDF-led government, and replaced, alongside the pre-privatization initiated in catering and the tourist trade, by large privatization projects for the large company sector, the failure of which became obvious by 1992. In that year, two privatization laws were enacted. One was aimed at a fast sell-off of state property through the State Property Agency (SPA), using a variety of preference techniques. The other concerned the handling of the state's retained property and its partial privatization. This brought the State Property Holding Company into being, to be in charge of some 160 firms, including the largest companies and banks. In 1993 and 1994, SPA privatization typically showed a reduction of cash revenue and a predominance of quasi-gratis solutions. (In 1993, altogether 43 bn forints came in cash, "E" (Existence) Credit (a type of preferential loan) accounted for 21 bn, and compensation vouchers for 16 billion. These rates were even worse in 1994: cash 22 bn, "E" Credit 30 bn, and 45 bn in compensation vouchers. That "give away" spree was a result of the MDF-led government's policy of supporting domestic capital, and of artificial, (non-market) ways of making small-time owners out of those compensated, and of some of the employees of large companies. (Employee Share-Owning Programme, Small Investors' Share-Buying Programme, leasing, exchange of compensation vouchers for shares, etc.)

These techniques not only slowed down the privatization process but were meant to be instrumental in the creation of a new clientele; in many cases—although this was impossible to prove—politics and the economy became interwoven, and the result amounted to corruption and a waste of assets.

One of the major election promises of the new Social-Liberal government was to speed up privatization, bring in new legislation, and to increase the ratio of cash-paying and capital-raising ownership changes. The meeting of that promise, however, is seriously overdue. In March 1995, in the parliamentary discussions of the privatization bill, the original objectives—under pressure from various interest groups and trade lobbies—have become softened a great deal. The outlines that are seen to be taking shape indicate that the smaller and medium-sized companies in the SPA's portfolio are to be privatized fast, through competitive bidding, mainly under the direction of the management. The privatization of the banks and large public utility companies (electric industry, oil and gas, telecommunications, etc.) will be decided on by the government on the merits of every single case, while the organization and carrying through of the ownership change will fall to a new organization, the State Privatization and Property Holding Company. Mainly cash and capital raising is expected, with foreign investors involved in the overwhelming majority of cases. For 1995, the central budget targets revenue from privatization at 150 bn forints, a target not regarded as realistic by experts.

Special attention should be given to the privatization of the media. The bulk of the press is now in private hands, German and Swiss ownership being predominant. (The national dailies *Népszabadság* and *Magyar Hírlap,* as well as the majority of provincial papers.) The market of printed media sees major Hungarian groups battling it out with each other: for instance, the struggle between the Post Bank, the Vico Company, the Kordax Company, Tamás Forró and Béla Tóth's empire for the residue of the old state press company. The object is twofold: profit (*Expressz,* an advertising paper) and political influence (*Magyar Nemzet,* a quality national daily). The dividing

up of radio and television is proceeding partly through the development of local cable channels or through the "spontaneous" appearance of production studios once the moratorium on frequencies was lifted. The long-delayed media law, the lack of proper regulations greatly favours those fishing in troubled waters.

Working capital

Capital coming into the country between 1990 and 1994 totalled $7 bn, out of which capital investment through the banking system was $5.5 bn (to the end of 1993). According to estimates, capital imports reached $1.1 to 1.5 bn in 1994, and for 1995, $1.5 to 2 bn in incoming capital is assumed in the state budget. Of all the former Comecon countries, the greatest amount of working capital was invested in Hungary, but the rate is slowing down. The largest investors are the US, Germany, Japan, Austria and Italy. In the past four years, Hungarian firms invested a total of $293 million in companies abroad.

Employment, wages and salaries, inflation, living standards

Between 1990 and 1991 the number of employed declined by 1.1 million, the equivalent of a 20 per cent drop. By then a quarter of all wage earners were already employed by privately owned enterprises; that figure is now half of the active labour force. The number of registered unemployed was 24,000 in 1990, 158,000 in 1991, 449,000 in 1992, 620,000 in 1993, and 580,000 in 1994. In February 1995 the official figure had reached 620 thousand. For 1994, the official unemployment rate was 14 per cent. As opposed to the official figures, however, sociologists estimate the number of unemployed at about a million. One of the reasons for the discrepancy between the registered and observed numbers is that many drop out of the welfare system—those permanently unemployed receive 6,000 forints per month from their local government authority and some (mainly because of the considerable number of "black" jobs), do not keep themselves on the welfare rolls. More importantly, however, the rate of young school-leavers going straight into unemployment is rapidly growing, a large part of whom, for want of adequate regulations, never become registered either.

Between 1989 and 1992, inflation accelerated, in 1992 and 1993 it stagnated, and in 1995 it started to grow fast again. (17 per cent in 1989, 28.8 per cent in 1990, 34.9 per cent in 1991, 22.8 per cent in 1992, 22.3 per cent in 1993, 19 per cent in 1994, and in 1995, at the time of the cabinet's restrictive package in March, a rate of 24 to 26 per cent was predicted.) Between 1990 and 1992 the exchange rate policy of the Hungarian National Bank was one of mild revaluation; after that, in addition to larger periodical devaluations, it adopted a sliding devaluation and exchange rate policy, meant to create a balance between external and internal inflation. Between early 1994 and March 1995 the real exchange rate of the Hungarian forint declined by 40 per cent as compared to the international currency "basket". From March 1995 on, the Hungarian National Bank switched to a policy of crawling-peg devaluation with fixed figures declared in advance, equivalent, in the first half year, to a daily devaluation of 0.06 per cent.

In the three years between 1990 and 1993, real incomes shrank gradually: by 12 per cent. In that same period, however, money incomes doubled compared to 1989. The per capita fall in the real value of wages and salaries was 16 per cent. In

1994, the average gross income earned in the national economy was 33,289 forints per month. Real wages grew in 1994, by 4.5 per cent compared to the previous year. (The severe restrictive measures introduced in 1995 are calculated to result in a 9 per cent drop in real wages.) At the beginning of 1995 the official monthly minimum wage was 12,500 forints.

In 1989, the official subsistence income for an average urban family (two children, two incomes) was 16,000 forints. At that time, 8 per cent of the population lived below subsistence level. By 1992, the number of those living below subsistence level doubled. By 1993 it had reached two million. In 1994 the ratio was 25 per cent. In December 1994, the official subsistence level for the average family was, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, 56,00 forints. Most sociologists, however, agree that at present a third of the population is living below poverty level. The reason for the rapid growth in the number of those sinking below subsistence level lies partly in the anomalous demographic composition of the Hungarian population, and in the fact that the normal proportions between providers and those provided for has become upset. In 1994, the number of old-age pensioners in this country of ten million was 2.9 million, while the number of the active work force, including the jobless, was 4.2 million. The faster than average rise in food prices and household and service expenses is also responsible for the rapid rise in the subsistence level income. By now, a one third—two thirds society has developed, where the brunt of individual and social burdens is being borne by the middle classes. The differentiation of incomes has taken place extremely rapidly: the households ranked, on the basis of their incomes, in the top ten per cent, earn seven times as much as those in the bottom ten per cent.

In 1990, the country's gross external debt was $21.7 bn, the net external debt $15.9 bn. In December 1994 the gross external debt was $28.5 bn, the net figure being $18.7 bn. At the moment 30 per cent of current budget expenditures goes to cover the debt servicing for 1995. (Domestic debt—the bulk of which is produced by financing the budget deficit—has tripled.)

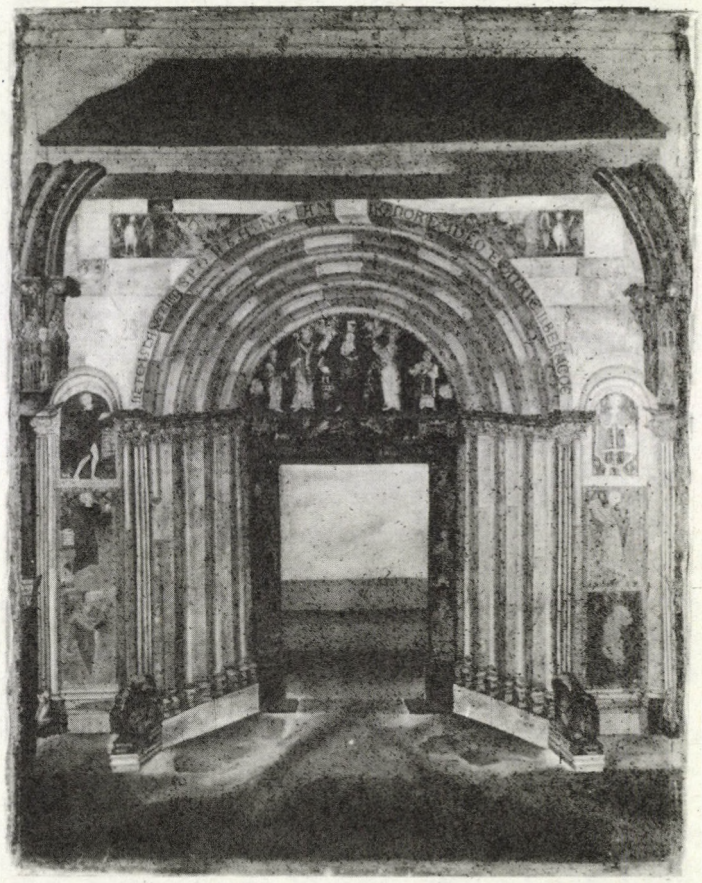
The increase in the budget deficit has been continuous. In 1990 it was 1.4 bn forints, in 1991, 114.1 bn, in 1992, 179.1 bn, in 1993, 199.7 bn, and in 1994, 322 bn. The 1995 budget envisages a deficit of 282 bn.

There was a balance of payments deficit of $1.4 bn in 1989, and a surplus in 1990, 1991 and 1992. However, in 1993, the deficit shot up to $3.4 bn, and, was even higher: last year at $3.9 bn.

In 1995, a deficit of Ft 450–460 bn was created in public finances, amounting to 9 per cent of GDP. This is what the government aims to push down to 6 per cent by the restrictive package it made public in mid-March, cutting public spending by 170 bn forints. If it fails to do that, the government—and the country—has to face the threat of insolvency. A 6 per cent GDP deficit provides an acceptable basis to negotiate a new bridging loan from the IMF, and to sign a stabilizing loan agreement. The government measures are mainly restrictive in character. They are meant first and foremost to cut public spending, mainly by downsizing state and government bureaucracy, but they will also limit consumption. (A top wage limit will be introduced for state-owned companies.) The measures—involving incomes, staffing and institutions—planned in the exchequer-financed and civil service sector are to be accompanied by a comprehensive reform of state and public finances. As part of this, the state's role would be slimmed down in the welfare, so-

cial, cultural and health areas. The transformation of the welfare system aims to replace the granting of a considerable portion of welfare services as a citizen's right, while extending them where there is genuine need; the intention is to base the health service and pensions on partly social and partly market considerations. The restrictive measures are complemented with incentives for enterprises and for exports.

It seems that the long-standing dilemma, dividing the makers of economic policy, of "to restrict or to revitalize" has turned into a policy of "sustainable growth" underpinned by tough monetary policies. The chances are that, in the short term, economic policy will have to cope with a growth of discontent. It is, however, also observable that, based (also) on the market-oriented changes that have taken place in 1995, after hesitation and delay for four years, the economic transition appears to have begun also in the entire area of government finances. It is one of the peculiar ironies of history that in Hungary the job of consolidating the base of modern capitalism has to be carried out by a socialist-dominated government. ❧



A painting (1741–1751) showing the Porta Speciosa (around 1190) of the old Saint Adalbert Cathedral. Esztergom, Balassa Bálint Museum.

Levente Szepsy Szücs

György Heimer

The Information Industry

"Hungary is at an economic crossroads. The traditional industrial structures have disintegrated, the majority of the products labelled "Made in Hungary" have lost their markets, unemployment is growing, imports are not balanced by exports, all of which means that a radically new economic model is needed, in which the information industry plays a key role," said Miklós Havass, Chairman of the Federation of Scientific Associations (MTESZ), who went on to say, "The problem is that while the products of Western societies are now inseparably interwoven with the information economy, in Hungary only the vestiges of this kind of attitude can be observed. In America, Vice President Al Gore made a campaign issue of the Information Superhighway, the European Union devoted a special volume of studies to the strategic objectives of the information industry, whereas in Hungary, not a single political group has found room in its modernization programme for the information industry," Havass complained, adding that "Hungarian Television grants long minutes of public appearance to every second-rate politician. Yet, in this period of transition, no one pays any attention to the views of the strategists of industry."

In Hungary today there is no government-level information policy to set priorities. At the same time, however, the information society, including computer technology, is not in that tragic a situation. Analysts keep pointing out that in the recession of recent years, computerization in Hungary has not slowed down but in fact has made considerable progress. Between 1989 and 1993, the computer market grew by an annual 20 per cent calculated in dollars. In 1989, 0.81 per cent of GDP was spent on computer technology, in 1993, that figure was 1.3 per cent.

These figures for the Hungarian computer technology market are supported by analyses by the International Data Corporation (IDC). Between 1992 and 1997, double-digit growth is predicted in sales in every hardware category (PCs, workstations, printers, etc.); they also add that the Hungarian information industry is anything but an industry in the real sense of the word: it simply sells products imported into Hungary. Only estimates are available on the value added in Hungary. These indicate that this value—services, development, consulting, systems integration—does not yet exceed 20 per cent of the total sales of the information industry.

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an economic weekly.

According to the 1993 sales figures, the latest available, in almost every area of the trade, sales are headed by the big multinationals. The only exception to this is the PC market, with a turnover of $198 million. In 1993, as in previous years, the greatest number of PCs sold in Hungary were sold by the Székesfehérvár company Albacomp; nearly 18 thousand out of the 106 thousand PCs bought in Hungary in 1993 had been assembled and sold by them. The company left both Compaq (7,400) and IBM (7,000) far behind. According to IDC, in the market for printers in Hungary, Hewlett Packard has overtaken Epson, the front runner for years. The list of small, medium and large computer systems, compiled according to the number of units sold, as well as that of workstation-servers', is headed by IBM; while the industrial workstation-servers' ranking is headed by Sun Microsystems. Despite the presence of these leading companies, experts agree that there is still much potential in the Hungarian market, since the country is far behind the highly developed countries in computerization. In 1993 in Hungary, with its some ten million inhabitants, the sales per capita for the information industry was $60.6. In Austria, with a population of 7.5 million, the same figure was $371, in 4.7 million strong Finland it was $348.8, and in Sweden, with 8.2 million, $561.

Dry figures, however, do not reflect the turbulent times, with their dramatic events, collapses and bankruptcies, that the Hungarian computer trade has been going through in recent years. Not long ago, in the daily *Népszabadság*, Péter Vadász, Deputy President of the Federation of Hungarian Industrialists and President of the Microsystem company, which soared like a comet in the mid-eighties before falling back to earth, gave a passionate account of developments in the industry; this was then disputed by the above mentioned Miklós Havass, the Chairman of MTESZ. Vadász begins his story back in 1981, when the law on small businesses was passed. As he sees it, computer scientists and engineers were the first to take advantage of the new opportunities. Businesses mushroomed all over the country, since software development required little capital—a couple of thousand forints, some pencils and grey matter were the only essentials. The success stories of the eighties were businesses like Controll, Microsystem, Műszertechnika, Optimum, Rolitron, 5G, Kontrax and Albacomp. These were the stars shown off to esteemed foreign guests by the reform-communist government, which had furnished the foundations for their rise. Havass comments that in the meantime, the often hydrocephalic, state-owned computer technology organizing institutions, with hundreds on their staffs, have faded away into silence. Towards the end of the eighties, the electronics industry, which provided jobs to more than a hundred thousand people, suddenly collapsed; the impact was traumatic since companies in this industry had been manufacturing products successful in the former socialist market, but which were of poor quality and too expensive compared to their Western counterparts. Other sectors of the computer industry were swamped by thousands of gifted engineers coming from the collapsing state-owned companies. That also explains why, out of the first six thousand small private enterprises, three thousand came into being in the computer business.

That boom, however, took place in the "reform-socialist" world, where the Hungarian computer market was still closed and Cocom (the embargo on high technology products to the East) was still very much alive. Vadász admits that the successful companies were buying at a very

high price the expensively produced dollars of the money-losing branches, like the metal industry, but even so the imported equipment produced extra profits. However, with the change to a new political and economic system, with the liberalization of imports and the lifting of Cocom, two and three-man firms sprang up by the hundreds, importing all kinds of fax-machines, copiers and PCs without providing any proper servicing back-up and at minimum discounts, to take advantage of people's hunger for PCs. These "piranhas", to use Vadász's expression, were the ones to first wound the "goldfish" that were becoming too smug, the first privately owned computer businesses. Then the giant Western computer companies also entered the fray. As Vadász explains, their local subsidiaries were bolstered by the patience and vast capital of the mother companies; it did not matter if they lost hundreds of millions of forints annually, provided they acquired a sufficiently large share of the market. This was what finished off the capital-starved Hungarian companies. These former exemplary companies were swept away in the wave of bankruptcies that came in 1993. Controll, Kontrax and Microsystem were among those that went under.

The series of spectacular failures is explained by Miklós Havass through the inexperience of Hungarian management. They lacked the experience and subconscious instinct that could have helped them to survive. These they did not have the time to develop, and crisis management techniques, which are routinely learned in the West, were simply unknown. Thus they perceived the need to change markets, the signs of crisis too late, and handled them unskilfully. The real "sharks", the large Western giants had arrived, slicing off the lion's share of the market. The process could not, and still cannot, be halted by any kind of restrictive industrial or government policy. All this, however, did not mean that the entire Hungarian computer industry was punctured. What was punctured, Havass remarks, was inflated self-confidence, the conviction that a Hungarian mathematician-engineer would be a major player on the market as long as he had a pencil and a piece of paper. Today, with the illusions lost, a host of small and middle-size businesses are able to carve out a living in the shadow of the giants. These enterprises do not appear to be falling stars but protostars. The performance of a number of them is very promising.

Albacomp of Székesfehérvár is a good example. During the past ten years the company battled step by step into the middle rank, and with a staff of 153, has achieved a turnover of over Ft 5.5 billion, per capita production of over $400 thousand, which is good achievement even by international standards. Their biggest sales figures still came from their original, electronics-related activity, the assembling of PCs, but in the meantime the firm has established a window factory, and has bought and rebuilt the Centrum Department Store in Székesfehérvár. Under the name UP Hungary, they have established a Hungarian-Taiwanese joint venture in computer parts. It was through the Taiwanese connection that their first export results were achieved: from July on, jointly produced goods to the value of one million dollars will be exported every month.

According to their chairman and chief executive, János Minárovits, the secret of the company's survival is that the profits on sales were ploughed back into production. They spend Ft 160–180 million a year on research and development. At the same time, they did not borrow for development, since credit in Hungary today is intolerably

Home-grown babies

The first home-grown babies of the Brave New Cybernetic World have arrived in Hungary. The network called Green Spider, for instance, was created in 1993. The developers of the system set themselves three goals : to help a fast and efficient flow of information between environmentalist organizations in Hungary, to establish international telecommunication contacts and to build up an information bridge spanning the green movement, the official organizations involved in environment protection and the research and development institutions. Another new initiative is the Hungarian TeleHouse Federation, aimed at spreading "teleworking", that is distance work, especially in the country's more backward regions, through a TeleHouse operating in settlements as source of information and a communication centre. The role is somewhat similar to that of the "incubator houses" operating in towns, aimed at nurturing starting businesses. The TeleHouse offers a variety of services: it provides computers for the use of village businessmen, organizes computer operating courses, edits publications, extends legal advice, supplies translations, xeroxing services, etc. The first TeleHouse in Hungary was established in Csákberény. Another fifteen villages are now considering founding one.

Thus there is no shortage of initiatives from below. What is badly needed, however, is a national strategy on information technology which embraces commercial and non-profit initiatives alike. The spending of the Hungarian economy on information technology is estimated at about one third the amount desirable. The proportion of information technology in central R & D spending is about 10 per cent, as opposed to the average of 35 per cent in the Western countries. That is partly why only a fraction of our computer and information experts are truly up to date today, and the introduction of up to date applications is also far behind of what is required, why proper legislation and regulations on information technology and its uses are lacking.

Experts see a possible breakthrough—apart from spreading tools of information technology—in software production. The export potential of the Hungarian software industry is estimated at $200–400 million annually, which is several orders of magnitude higher than the present level. In addition, software is an ideal area for a country like Hungary, rich in grey matter but less so in capital. It mainly requires human resources, it has no harmful effects on the environment, it has a rapidly growing market and foreign investments, once committed, are not easy to withdraw.

expensive, and neither in legally conducted production or trade is it possible to extract the extra profit needed to pay for credit. They have not employed staff above the number that can achieve maximum production through maximum performance. During the first six years, for instance, the sales staff consisted of the

chairman/CEO alone, and even today the number is only four.

The former socialist giant, Videoton, which is also located in Székesfehérvár, has run an entirely different course. After it had gone bankrupt in 1990, the company with more than 10 thousand employees was acquired by one of Hungary's star entrepreneurs, Gábor Széles, President of the National Federation of Industrialists—some say, without actual investment. There is a widespread belief that changes in ownership are so closely interwoven with politics that the economic processes are very hard to separate from the political and social. On the other hand, in the liberal daily *Magyar Hírlap*, a journalist wrote that if the events taking place between 1988 and 1995 are examined without political bias, it will be clear that immense values had been saved and created at Videoton.

At the end of the 1980s, IBM, which already had strong positions in Hungary said that Videoton (the biggest manufacturer of entertainment and professional electronics in the 70s) was the only firm which posed a real challenge to it. Of course, protectionist policies, the subsidies obtained in the Eastern markets, state orders, all had had a major role in Videoton's ability to compete with IBM. All the same, Videoton did have a manufacturing culture and intellectual potential which made it capable of adopting highly developed technologies. It was no accident that from the end of the 1980s, multinationals like Philips, Bull and Alcatel toyed for a time with the idea of buying the Székesfehérvár plant. Those initiatives, however, evaporated with Videoton's bankruptcy in 1990, or more exactly with a campaign aimed at making an example out of the company, through which to demonstrate the professional and industrial policy misjudgements of the past forty years.

In December 1991, Széles and his team took over a battered company. Sales were estimated at less then Ft5 billion, and there were hardly any orders for 1992. At the start, Széles nevertheless pledged to employ 6,000 people, and accepted the bank's condition of having to cover production needs with a mere Ft400 million worth of operating assets. When it became clear that if he kept Videoton's original range of products he would not be able to fulfil either of these conditions, he took the only option available, that of exploiting the company's premises. He reduced his own production to what could actually be sold on the market, leasing the remainder of the staff and premises to companies like Philips, IBM, Akai or Alcoa-Fujimara. With the help of his "tenants", he was able to sustain the complex of plants, and even to renovate a couple of plants. Some of the sub-contracting work became co-operation, since Videoton was able to provide intellectual add-on value as well as premises to its leasees. In 1994, the company was able to show nearly Ft14 billion worth of sales. Currently with 6,700, it expects to have a staff of some 8,000 in 1995. Between 1990 and 1994, $1.4 billion worth of capital was invested by foreign companies in the Székesfehérvár region, and a third of this went to Videoton.

In 1995, Videoton plans to launch several greenfield investments with its foreign partners, which may introduce new labour cultures and technologies to the region. Last December the company was given a ten-year tax exemption by the government in recognition of its efforts to increase employment. Clearly, apart from 1990 and 1991, Videoton has continuously enjoyed support from the government in power, but the same may be said of several large Hungarian companies. It is, however, to Videoton's credit that it has always been able to take advantage of its opportunities.

Data doctor

Some two years ago, there was a fire in the Budapest fair centre. Hungexpo, the trade-fairs company, seemed to have had its records, stored in computers, consumed by the flames. However, experts managed to conjure back to life the information in the charred computers. The feat was accomplished by Budapest's Kürt Co. Ltd, which specializes in the salvage of computer data believed to be completely lost. In April 1995 the small company won the title "the most innovative business in Hungary".

The achievements of Kürt are regarded as unique even by international standards. "A short time ago we were contacted in a rush by the town hospital of Győr, because they were unable to gain access to the therapy data stored in their computers, which was literarily a matter of life or death," says Sándor Kürti, the company's 48-year-old owner. A similar disaster befell a Swiss bank. "If we had been unable to retrieve the information from the bank's ailing hard disc, the loss of the data would have threatened the collapse of the bank." Clients of the company have also included the Hungarian police. What had to be established was whether a computer programme, thought to have been erased by the culprits, could still be used for producing banknotes. From fragments of surviving data, Kürti and his company not only proved that the data programme could be used to make banknotes but that it had actually been used as well.

Even in Western Europe, no more than two or three companies are engaged in data recovery. Paradoxically, Kürti and his company owe their success to the circumstances under which computerization has gone ahead. János, the elder of the two Kürti brothers, began his career as a computer engineer by tinkering with hard discs which he learned to repair. In the West, these were simply thrown away if damaged, and a new one taken from the shelf. In Hungary, however, there was such a shortage of hardware at the time that purchasing a new one could take a year or two. At the end of the eighties, as opportunities for private enterprise were increasing (and the Hungarian computer market expanding), the Kürti brothers were developing a business based on their data recovery skills. Turnover of the company rose from Ft6 million in 1990 to 540 million in 1994, with net profits reaching 40 million.

However, most of the profits go back into the business. "If we did otherwise, our two-year advantage over the competition would soon evaporate," says Sándor Kürti, a former chemical engineer who was goaded into switching professions and delving into the mysteries of data recovery by his elder brother. Now the entire staff has acquired extraordinary skills that can be sold in any part of the world. Kürt Company has recently started to operate in Western Europe as well. They can offer their services at a lower price than their competitors, given that labour costs in Hungary are still cheaper than in the West. They have intermediaries in several European countries who send them potential clients, plucking them mostly from their biggest rival, Ontrack in the U.S.

Graphisoft: a high-tech feat

This year, for the first time, the American magazine *MacUser* awarded its Eddy Prize to a product originating from outside the United States. The Eddy Prize, referred to by many as the Oscar of the international software industry, went to ArchiCAD, a software package developed by the Hungarian company Graphisoft for designing buildings.

What this recognition really means is that it is not impossible for an East European enterprise to develop into a high-tech company with a world-wide reputation. The small software developing company, established in 1982 as a modest private business for the development of engineering design software, brought its architectural design programme ArchiCAD out in 1984. The easy-to-use, yet very smart and versatile programme has already sold 16 thousand copies in some 60 countries. Today, ArchiCAD is available in 15 languages, including Japanese, and with an income of $11 million last year, Graphisoft became the world market leader in architectural programmes written for Apple Macintosh PCs.

The most important, universal element of Graphisoft's software philosophy is that it aims to be astonishingly simple. It keeps the user in mind, who, according to the company, must not notice that he is operating a huge programme with enormously complex algorithms. Learning it is easy, yet it suits many purposes. The programme must be able to do everything that an architect needs—to design, scale, calculate, draw (including sketches, designs for approval and the documentation for execution), as well as to create elements separately, to store and then use them, and to integrate special parts (stairs, roofs, etc.) into already existing designs.

In addition, every side of the building designed can be viewed from above, in a bird's eye view, and even the inside of the building can be "virtually" visited. The programme produces videos as well as still pictures. Thus the exterior and interior decoration can be viewed and changed in various lighting conditions even before the first hole is dug in the ground. What makes it better than other programmes is, first, that its use requires no special computer skills, and second, because it keeps in mind the way an architect thinks. Years of consistent work went into the development of every single detail. Great care was taken to keep the existing modules constantly up to date, to integrate the observations of users into them, and to work out new ones.

Today the main driving force of growth is buying by government and public institutions rather than by small and medium-size companies, which would be more desirable. In last year's budget, Ft450 million were allocated to the development of government information technology; however, if the projects sponsored by the World Bank, the British Know-How Fund or the EU's Phare programme are taken into account, the money spent on information technology development in government and public administration is estimated at Ft30 billion. In the last few years, to give

Behind the success of Graphisoft is the restless spirit, always looking for something new, of Gábor Bojár. "Of course, like others, I was also driven by the desire to make a decent living at the start," admits Bojár, 46, who still heads Graphisoft, "but even then there was the ambition to produce something the whole world would notice."

The physicist-turned businessman started his career in 1982 at a state research institute but, on seeing all the impotence and inertia, took advantage of the opportunities to engage in small-scale business, permitted then for the first time in forty years. He founded a two-man business, engaged mainly in computer-aided design (CAD). In 1983, Bojár learned that the atomic energy plant at Paks needed a three-dimensional tube network model, for which a competition was going to be announced. He and his companions decided to hire a computer and began work. By the time the competition was actually announced, they were able to hand in a partially finished work but—characteristic of the times—they could only get the contract with ministerial approval. They carried out the commission successfully, and used the money they received for it to travel to a computer exhibition in Munich, and to show their achievements there. The time was right—it was the beginning of the PC era—the programmes they demonstrated created a great interest, and that was the start of an international success story.

Today, Graphisoft is a group of companies employing a hundred people, with interests in several areas of computer technology and with branches in Munich, San Francisco and Japan, as well as independent agents distributing its software products. In September 1993, ArchiCAD for Windows, the version of the programme written for Windows 3.1 came out. This meant the beginning of a new era for Graphisoft since in the previous ten years it sold software only for Apple Macintosh machines. From now on, however, Graphisoft's programmes can be run on IBM compatibles. Bojár declares, "The goal of the company is to have ArchiCAD accepted as an industry standard, and to make it usable on any computer." This, however, also means that Graphisoft has to compete now with the real giants of the architectural CAD software industry, mainly with the American companies Autodesk and Intergraph. The question is if it will have the strength to retain its global position rather than bleed to death in a fight with its competitors.

one example, the Inter-Ministry Committee on Information Technology, operating under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office, set up an electronic mail system (System X 400). Similar infrastructural programmes involving information technology are a $29 million investment by the Tax Bureau (APEH) aimed at modernizing the tax administration system, a $9.5 million project of the Central Bureau of Statistics, or the $4.8 million tender aimed at computerizing main police stations, which will set up some six thousand workstations in 150 police stations.

The problem, though, is that in these ambitious projects—as in many other areas of the national economy— rationality and waste can be seen at one and the same time. These systems, despite their similar purposes, are the products of parallel developments, and linking them into a single integrated system is impossible. In 1993, the Central Auditing Office reviewed the accountancy systems (book-keeping, wages accounting, inventory) used by public administration, and found 335 different programmes were being used for the three activities. The software packages had usually been purchased individually, and therefore more expensively, since software companies offer considerable discounts, often as high as 50 per cent, to large buyers. In the light of all this, a government proposal points out that co-ordinating applications is far behind what it could be, the individual ministries are inclined to seek more autonomy in information technology than is desirable, the hardware in use is heterogeneous, its development random, while the use of government information collected out of public money for public purposes has not been resolved and the exchange of information between ministries is a form of bargaining.

Thus it is hardly surprising that Hungary's computer culture is generally regarded as very poor. One disquieting sign of this is the widespread use of stolen software. According to the estimates of BSA (Business Software Alliance), the organization established at the end of the 1980s by the large software companies to curb illegal trade, in Hungary, the black market accounts for 87 per cent of all software sales. In the neighbourhood of Austria with its 42 per cent, this is not good news even if the same figure goes to 98 to 99 per cent in Russia, Taiwan, Peru or Indonesia. Producers earn some Ft2 billion on software sales in Hungary but lose at least Ft10 billion through forgery and unauthorized use.

A new sales strategy introduced by Microsoft last December may contribute to boosting the legal software trade. It pays larger attention to OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturer), that is to software systems bundled with hardware. The Hungarian hardware assembling companies after signing an agreement with the Microsoft centre in Redmond are authorized to pre-install the operating systems on their machines along with some highly popular applications like DOS 6.22 UK, Windows 3.2 or the Hungarian version of Words for Windows 3.0. The agreement lays down that this software may be installed only together with a complete hardware system (base, processor, casing, mains or battery unit, keyboard and monitor hook-up options).

During a recent visit to Hungary, Martin Bangemann, the official responsible for the development of information technology in the Brussels commission of the EU, exchanged views with Prime Minister Gyula Horn also on the information superhighway. Although it is most likely that this superwide and fast network system will only reach Hungary later, it is, nevertheless, quite certain, that efforts to build the tracks leading up to the highway—as initiatives coming from below—have already begun here. Demand for Internet and the other networks is increasing by leaps and bounds, and the number of users is expected to mushroom from today's few thousand to tens of thousands very soon. At the moment, four firms are competing for their custom—EUNet Hungary, CompuServe Hungary, Odin and Magnet—but others are also waiting in the wings, ready to leap. ❧

Csaba Békés

The 1956 Revolution and World Politics

Much has been published on the international aspects of the Hungarian Revolution in the close on forty years that have since passed. In the absence of primary sources, however, much of this was based on speculation. From the mid-eighties, documents in American, British and French archives became accessible; then, in 1992, much of the material in Soviet archives also became available to historians. Conditions are therefore present for scholarly work based on the methods of modern research.

I propose to use the research carried out in the last five years to discuss the world political aspects of the Hungarian Revolution.

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Hopes and illusions

Despite repeated claims by communist propaganda, the West was not directly responsible for instigating the Hungarian revolution. However, the young workers and students who risked their lives in taking up arms against the overwhelming power of the Soviet military and the ÁVH, the dreaded political police, were, for the most part, convinced that the West, and in particular the United States, would make good on promises to provide armed assistance to the Hungarian people if they rose against Soviet domination or, at the very least, that all the political weapons at the West's disposal would be deployed to force the Soviet Union to acquiesce in the Hungarian desire for independence.

The principal foreign policy demands made by Hungarians at the time of the Revolution were, for the most part, not founded on an awareness of political realities. This is due partly to the fact that the general public held illusions which hindered and, in some instances even precluded a clear assessment of Hungary's international situation, and partly to the general propensity to make unrealistic demands during revolutions.

A significant portion of Hungarians mistakenly believed (and still believes) that the spheres of influence established in Europe

after the Second World War were temporary arrangements and that the Revolution offered the Western powers an exceptional opportunity to change them. The majority of Hungarians only perceived those trends in international politics that encouraged their own aspirations. Although the new orientation in East–West relations was leading to a rapprochement between the two superpowers, Hungarians continued to believe in the unchanged American propaganda line that emphasized that the United States would never write off the "captive" nations. The armed freedom-fighters in particular counted on military intervention since they were generally aware that their taking on vastly superior Soviet forces would fail without outside support. Consequently, the insurgents appealed both personally to Western journalists or diplomats and *en masse* before the Budapest legations of the Western powers for political and military intervention as well as for arms and ammunition.

It is important to note that the non-military political entities which sprang up at the time of the uprising, such as the revolutionary and national committees and the workers' councils, did not make similar requests for Western assistance. This was due partly to a general self-restraint characteristic of the initial stages of the Revolution—most people were aware that any exaggerated repudiation of the Soviet Union would provoke immediate Soviet intervention—and partly to the fact that most of these revolutionary bodies were directed by intellectuals and workers who tended to advocate an essentially socialist "third road" for Hungary, which precluded the idea of Western military intervention.

The widespread illusions regarding the will and ability of the United Nations to mediate a settlement of the Hungarian crisis are reflected clearly in the various revolutionary organizations and the press. The Hungarian people viewed the UN (of which Hungary had become a member in 1955) as being the pre-eminent forum for the resolution of international conflicts in general, and not simply as an agent for conciliation between the great powers. Hungarian expectations regarding UN mediation were of a most diverse nature. There was a universal hope that the Security Council or the General Assembly would be able to induce the Soviets to find a peaceful solution to the Hungarian crisis; others went even further in their expectations, calling for UN observers or immediate intervention by UN military forces—there was even an "eye-witness" who claimed to have seen a UN advance guard at the border.

Practically from the very start of the uprising, the various revolutionary programmes gave special prominence to the demand for a Soviet troop withdrawal, a contingency which was commonly regarded as an essential condition for the restoration of independence to Hungary. Public opinion at the time of the Revolution was unanimous concerning the question of sovereignty; all political programmes were based on the wish to remain outside the great power blocs. This desire was reflected in two interrelated actions taken by the revolutionary government at the end of October: withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and proclamation of Hungary's neutrality.

Contributing greatly to the general popularity of the notion of neutrality was the seemingly rational (though it was to turn out to be erroneous) premise that the Soviet Union would not see any increased security threat in a neutral Hungary. It was also a general belief that, as the Soviets had assented to a negotiated withdrawal from Austria, they might very well consider doing likewise in Hungary. The flaw in this logic was that the Soviet withdrawal from Austria had come about as a result of a carefully negotiated compromise between

the great powers: a similar action in Hungary would have required unilateral concessions on the part of the Soviet Union, a variable which was, naturally, not part of the great power equation.

The foreign policy of the Imre Nagy government

From the very moment Imre Nagy became prime minister on October 24, he was faced with growing radical demands for both domestic reorganization and the restructuring of the country's international position, namely its position within the Soviet alliance.

Though few were aware of it at the time of the outbreak of the Revolution, Imre Nagy had circulated a treatise among his friends written in January of 1956 (later included in his *On Communism*) which expressed support for the *pancha sila*, or the five basic tenets of the non-aligned movement with regard to peaceful coexistence—mutual respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in domestic affairs, equality, reciprocal good will, and fraternal cooperation—identifying the totality of these principles with national independence. Nagy also expressed his conviction that national independence was not simply a question of achieving international autonomy, but had a social dimension as well. In more specific terms, Imre Nagy believed that it was the Yugoslav model, that is a socialist domestic order coupled with a non-aligned foreign policy, which offered Hungary the greatest chances for achieving national independence. It is important to note that none of Imre Nagy's thinking was based on Hungary taking any sort of unilateral action; he hoped that the encouraging trends perceptible in international relations would eventually lead to the dissolution of the contentious power blocs, thus enabling the countries of Eastern Europe to continue to build socialism on a new foundation of national independence and equality and non-interference in internal affairs.

Nagy considered the latter scenario to be all the more possible in the light of the Soviet Union's apparently friendly disposition toward the non-aligned movement at that time. Above all, it was the Soviet Union's rapprochement with Yugoslavia that fed the general illusion that the Soviets were prepared to accept the principle that building socialism could be based on a model other than their own.

It was Imre Nagy's thankless task as prime minister to reconcile his measured vision of the restructuring of Hungary's international relations with the increasingly radical demands of the Revolution. Nagy was well aware of the fact that the fate of the Revolution was entirely in the hands of the Soviet Union; from the very outset of negotiations held with a high-ranking Soviet crisis management team led by Mikoyan and Suslov, Nagy attempted to convince the Soviets that, with adequate support, he would be capable of stabilizing the internal situation.

The peaceful resolution of the Polish crisis very likely strengthened Nagy's conviction that the Soviets were interested in finding a similar settlement in Hungary, even if they had to make a certain number of concessions in order to do so. It was for this reason that on October 25 Nagy suggested that calling for Soviet intervention had been a mistake and that, in the interest of calming unrest, it would be wise to announce the government's intention to initiate negotiations regarding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. Despite vigorous Soviet objections, Nagy made this very announcement later that day, in the course of a radio address. On

the following day Nagy, playing up the extreme social pressures under which the Hungarian leadership was operating, attempted to convince the Soviet delegation that over and above suppression of armed resistance, the most effective way to bring the disorder under control would be for the party to place itself at the head of the mass social movement which had materialized with the Revolution.

The events of the following days seemed to vindicate Imre Nagy's policy; his pledges to consolidate the situation were designed to extract further concessions from the Soviets. On October 29, Soviet military units began withdrawing from Budapest and the Soviet government's declaration of the following day included an explicit promise that it would lay new foundations for relations between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, foundations based on equality and non-interference in domestic affairs. In addition, the Soviet government promised to consider a decision to withdraw its troops.

At nearly the same time, however, signs of the Soviet Union's real intentions began multiplying at an alarming rate. From October 31 came reports that fresh Soviet troops were entering the country, occupying all important strategic locations. It was at this point, when it became clear that a Soviet invasion, with the obvious aim of overthrowing the legitimate Hungarian government was imminent, that the cabinet decided to make a heroic last-ditch effort at rescuing the Revolution. Accordingly, Nagy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and declared the country's intention to be neutral. At the same time, he sent an appeal to the Secretary General of the United Nations requesting that the four great powers help defend Hungary's neutrality and that this question be urgently placed on the agenda of the forthcoming General Assembly.

The Imre Nagy government had therefore turned to the Western great powers and the United Nations—always with the ideal of Austrian-style neutrality in mind—in a last-ditch effort to stave off the growing threat of a Soviet invasion. Nagy himself was quite aware of the extreme improbability of vigorous assistance from the Western great powers or from the UN; he was also familiar with Soviet imperial politics and recognized that within the existing international political context it was likewise highly improbable that the Soviet leadership, for whom the suppression of the Revolution was never really more than a logistical question, would relinquish one of its strategically important dominions just because the government there had declared its independence.

Thus, even as Nagy launched a further appeal for UN action on November 2, he continued to work desperately behind the scenes to try and work out some agreement with the Soviets. In the first days of November, Nagy summoned the ambassadors of the socialist countries, first of all Andropov, the Soviet ambassador, in order to try and convince them of the correctness of his policies. Nagy informed Andropov that he was willing to rescind his appeal to the UN in exchange for a Soviet pledge not to engage in further military intervention; Nagy also requested an immediate meeting with the highest-level Soviet leadership—a request which the Soviets promptly refused. Finally, in discussions held in Budapest with a Romanian party delegation on November 3, Nagy attempted to coordinate a plan whereby Gheorghiu-Dej would petition Khrushchev for a Soviet–Hungarian summit. On that very same day, however, the Soviet leadership was holding a meeting of a very different nature in Moscow with János Kádár; the purpose of this meeting was to coordinate the violent overthrow of the Hungarian revolutionary government.

The Soviet bloc and the Revolution

In contradiction to previous assumptions, on October 23 the Soviet leadership reluctantly agreed to comply with the request of party first secretary Ernő Gerő that Soviet troops assist in breaking up the mass demonstrations in Budapest. However, on the following day, they sent a crisis management delegation to Budapest consisting of Mikoyan, Suslov, the KGB chief Serov and deputy chief of staff Malinin. For several days after the outbreak of armed conflict, Khrushchev and the rest of the Soviet leadership continued to maintain the hope that the newly appointed prime minister, Imre Nagy, would effectively quell the disorder and that the Hungarian crisis could ultimately be resolved within the same framework of compromise and negotiation which had proved successful in Poland. In negotiations conducted with Nagy and the rest of the Hungarian leadership on October 26, Mikoyan and Suslov defined the limits of possible Soviet concessions in expressing a willingness to allow some people who had previously belonged to non-communist parties into the government (a multi-party system was not even considered) and a return of Soviet troops to their bases after the restoration of order—again, similar to what had occurred in Poland. They also warned the Hungarian leadership that further concessions might very well lead to the overthrow of the communist system, an eventuality which, the Soviet delegation quite clearly suggested, would evoke a vigorous response from Moscow. The Soviet leadership never entertained the slightest notion of allowing the restoration of a parliamentary system in Hungary, for fear that this would lead to the disintegration of its vitally important East European security zone.

There were also significant ideological factors motivating the Soviets to suppress the Hungarian Revolution. During this period Soviet attempts to enlarge the world communist empire centered on the Third World; the Soviet leadership could well imagine the damage that might be done to these efforts if Hungary were to be seen restoring multi-party democracy by an anti-Soviet uprising nearly ten years after communism had been instituted there.

The Soviets regarded the following elements to be of paramount importance to the maintenance of communism in the Eastern European satellite states: a competent and unified communist party leadership, a potent and resolute state security apparatus, a loyal and disciplined armed force and military leadership, and strict party control of all media. Any hint of disturbance to any of these institutions set off warning bells within the Soviet decision-making mechanism; the breakdown of all four of them at once, as happened in Hungary in 1956, left the Soviets with only one option, that of armed intervention.

However, it was in the short-term interests of the Soviet Union to exercise this radical option only if all possible peaceful means for resolving the crisis had already been exhausted. The Soviet desire to preserve bloc unity and the process of rapprochement with Yugoslavia, to improve the standing of communist parties in the West, to maintain propaganda efforts in the Third World, as well as to find a peaceful resolution to the Polish crisis, all weighed in against the option of armed intervention.

Tactical considerations also compelled the Soviets to make further concessions. On October 28, they assented to a cease-fire, and agreed to withdraw their military units from Budapest—without having first put down the groups of armed insurgents—and did not take official issue with the passage in the new government's communiqué on the initiation of negotiations over the eventual withdrawal of Soviet

troops from Hungary. The Soviet government pronouncement of October 30 contained further pledges to examine the possibility of troop withdrawals from Hungary.

The developments in the days following the government's acceptance of the Revolution's essential demands on October 28 convinced the Soviet delegation that the communist system was in jeopardy in Hungary. They concluded, correctly, that Imre Nagy, whom they already held to be opportunistic and irresolute, was unable, and worse still, unwilling, to restrain those forces which were threatening to break up the entire Soviet system.

This on-the-spot assessment of the situation led the Soviet leadership to the conclusion that the possibilities for a peaceful resolution of the crisis had been exhausted. Accordingly, on the second day of its session of October 30 and 31, the presidium of the Central Committee of the CPSU reached a decision for armed intervention and took the steps necessary to set Operation Whirlwind in motion.

On November 1 and 2 Khrushchev held talks with the leaders of the East European socialist countries and China (who just happened to be in Moscow), all of whom assured the Soviets of their continuing support. Though the Polish and Chinese leaders had earlier endorsed the revolutionary changes taking place in Hungary, more recent developments—above all the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and declaration of neutrality—inferred a repudiation of the entire post-Second World War European geopolitical structure. For the Poles this geopolitical structure constituted the foremost guarantee of their border with Germany, for the Chinese, Nagy's abolition of the single-party system was conclusive evidence that he was a traitor. In the course of negotiations which took place during the night of November 2 and 3 on the island of Brioni, the Soviets and Yugoslavs were able to agree on steps to be taken in response to the Hungarian Revolution. This the Soviet leadership found particularly reassuring, since earlier, on October 29, Tito had publicly expressed his solidarity with the Nagy government. Recent developments in Hungary had greatly disappointed Tito, who had hoped that the Hungarians would look to Yugoslavia for their new social, political, and economic model. Therefore, to the great relief of Khrushchev and Malenkov, the Yugoslav leadership not only agreed that intervention was necessary, but also promised to help eliminate Imre Nagy and his followers from political life.

Western reactions

Western governments—unlike their public opinion which had expressed solidarity with the Hungarian uprising from the beginning—were acutely aware of their limited room to manoeuver within the existing European status quo. They reacted with extreme caution from the very beginning and, in most instances, went so far as to explicitly and publicly endorse the principle of non-intervention. Behind the Western response to the Hungarian Revolution was the realization that, in the prevailing international political circumstances, any sort of Western military intervention in Hungary carried the implicit threat of war with the Soviet Union, quite possibly a thermonuclear war, which would likely lead to the obliteration of the very East European peoples which intervention was intended to liberate.

Especially on the part of the three great Western powers, there was the possibility of taking political steps somewhere between the two extremes of armed intervention and total passivity which might have encouraged the Soviet decision makers to find a more constructive resolution to the crisis.

The United States

The events in Poland and, particularly, in Hungary during October 1956 caught the American government by surprise despite it being well informed on the political changes in these countries. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had already publicly distanced the US from armed intervention during the Polish crisis, though this information never reached those most affected. In an October 21 appearance on the television current affairs programme *Face the Nation*, Dulles stated that the US would not send troops to Poland in the event of Soviet armed intervention. The American government was pleased with what it deemed to be positive developments in the Polish crisis during the following days, for these had come about without any kind of American involvement. Furthermore, contrary to all pessimistic predictions, the Soviets had not intervened militarily and had agreed to accept the new Polish leadership.

The Americans thus found the news of the uprising in Hungary all the more disturbing, especially since the American government had no prepared strategy for dealing with such an unlikely occurrence. The Eisenhower administration was confronted with the fact that, contrary to the massive propaganda it aimed at Eastern Europe, even the United States, the world's greatest military power, had only limited options regarding any sort of intervention within the Soviet sphere of influence. It was important for the United States to conceal this impotence in order to preserve its international prestige. For this reason, on October 24, Dulles suggested to President Eisenhower that the issue of Soviet intervention should be broached in the Security Council. (This happened on October 28, after the three great Western powers requested that the issue be placed on the Council's agenda).

On October 26, the United States' highest advisory body, the National Security Council, met for the first and last time during the Hungarian Revolution in order to evaluate events in Eastern Europe and to plan what kind of official message to communicate concerning US policy on the region. Amid the general confusion there was one intelligent proposal, made by Harold A. Stassen, the President's advisor on disarmament. Stassen suggested that it would be expedient to offer assurances to the Soviets that the United States would not seek to exploit the possible independence of the satellite countries in any way that could threaten the security of the Soviet Union. Although this suggestion was promptly rejected by the National Security Council, proponents of the plan succeeded in getting the President to endorse an expanded version of Stassen's original proposal the very next day. The United States, either through Tito or some other diplomatic channel, would attempt to convince the Soviets that a zone of strictly neutral, non-NATO countries, politically akin to Austria, would offer them just as much security as the existing buffer of satellite countries. The essential logic behind the proposal was that in the negotiations over the Austrian State Treaty, it was the Soviets who had insisted that Austria remain strictly neutral and not be allowed to join NATO. Of course, the same possibilities for compromise did not apply to the East European satellite countries as had applied to Austria, but within the strict confines which circumscribed the United States' room for maneuver, a plan offering the possibility of mutual concession was preferable to complete passivity. Ultimately Eisenhower instructed Dulles to insert the message to the Soviets into the presidential campaign speech Dulles was to deliver in Dallas on October 27. However, Dulles, who had opposed the proposal

from its very inception because it offered the Soviets exaggerated ideological concessions, watered it down—with the president's assent—dropping any reference to neutrality and to a prohibition on NATO membership. In the end, the Secretary of State's message to the Soviets consisted of the following celebrated sentance: "We do not consider these nations to be potential military allies."

This fundamentally modified version of Stassen's original proposal did not achieve its original aim of calming the Soviets, or, more precisely, achieved it to an exaggerated degree. Whereas the original idea had been to try and induce concessions from the Soviet Union through explicit recognition of its security interests, the revised version was of a distinctly defensive tenor, which the Soviets logically assumed to mean that the United States was not going to take any action whatsoever on behalf of the independence of Eastern Europe. The American leadership nonetheless went to great lengths to make absolutely sure that the message reached its intended recipients: on October 28, Henry Cabot Lodge, the US representative to the UN, quoted the passages from Dulles's speech which concerned the satellite countries during a Security Council session, on October 29 the American ambassador in Moscow received instructions to confidentially reiterate the germane points of the speech to the Soviet leadership, including Zhukov; and on October 31 Eisenhower himself reiterated the passage previously cited in the course of a televised address to the nation.

At the end of October, the advisory committee of the National Security Council completed a report analysing the recent events in Eastern Europe and outlining its recommendations for American policy toward the volatile political situation in the region. The report determined that the Soviets had only two options: either accede to Hungary's desire for independence and risk unleashing similar forces throughout the satellite countries, or to forcibly reinstate their hegemony over the country. The authors of the report left no doubt as to which option the Moscow leadership would choose in an emergency. Regarding possible American policy toward the crisis, the report basically expressed the view that prospects for concrete action were extremely limited; it did, however, contain one well-founded proposal for compromise with the Soviet Union according to which, if the Soviets withdrew their troops from Hungary, the Americans would, in exchange, make proportional reductions in the number of US troops stationed in Western Europe.

The agenda for the November 1 meeting of the National Security Council called for deliberation of this document; before the meeting got under way, President Eisenhower, at the urging of Dulles, decided to postpone discussion on Eastern Europe until a later date so that the Council could devote its entire time and energy to examining the Suez crisis, which had degenerated into armed conflict on October 29. The American leadership was not again inclined to occupy itself with the events in Hungary until the second Soviet intervention took place on November 4. Eisenhower and Dulles had decided that since the United States did not in fact have any effective means of exerting influence inside the Soviet sphere, US energies should be concentrated on resolving the Suez crisis where the task was one of laying down the law not on a rival superpower, but with the US's own military and political allies. In spite of the complications involved, this was a much easier and more feasible undertaking: within a few days, the resolute actions taken by the United States, particularly the economic arm twisting of Britain, had borne fruit.

Thus the sole international political forum apparently willing to give appropriate consideration to the Hungarian crisis was the United Nations. However, the conflict of interest which arose between the great Western powers when the two international crises broke out simultaneously began to play itself out in the UN as well, just a few days after the Hungarian question had been placed on its agenda.

Great Britain, France, and the Suez adventure

The governments of Britain and France, already preoccupied with their preparations for an attack on Egypt, were likewise caught off guard by the developments in Eastern Europe. Indeed, due to their overriding desire for success in the Middle East, the reaction of the British and French to the Soviet intervention in Hungary was even more cautious than the habitually restrained response of Western governments to events in Eastern Europe.

While Dulles's Dallas address is well-known, the fact that representatives of both the British and French governments delivered similar messages to the Soviet Union implying a recognition of Soviet security interests in Eastern Europe, has received far less notice. On October 26, French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, in a speech delivered to journalists, stressed that although the Western powers welcomed the developments which were taking place in Eastern Europe, it would be ill-advised to try to exploit them to the West's own military and political profit. Pineau also insisted that raising the issue of relations between the West and Eastern Europe was still dangerously premature and that France would not intervene in Poland or Hungary under any circumstances. The British were even more adamant about avoiding even an inadvertent provocation of the Soviets and about not giving them grounds for accusing the West of having in any way instigated the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution. According to a memorandum of October 27 from Deputy Under-Secretary of State Sir John Ward, top-secret sources had informed the British that the Soviets were preparing for Western intervention in Hungary. Accordingly, on November 1, the government declared in parliament that "It is not our slightest intention to try and exploit the events taking place in Eastern Europe in order to undermine the security of the Soviet Union".

The striking simultaneity of the Suez and Hungarian crises inevitably raises the question whether the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution had any bearing on the timing of the attack on Egypt, which was planned during secret British–French–Israeli negotiations held at Sèvres between October 22 and 24. Recently published monographs and primary source materials reveal that the date for the Israeli attack on Egypt (October 29) was set during the first day of the Sèvres talks. With this conditional timetable established, the foreign ministers of Britain and France immediately made it clear that they would have liked the Israeli attack to be fixed even earlier. The rationale for this was not the presumption that the Soviet Union would be preoccupied with the crisis in Hungary, as is commonly assumed, since the Hungarian Revolution only broke out on the following day. However, the Polish crisis, which had flared up a few days earlier, on October 19 , may have exercised some influence on the timing of the attack, a suggestion which appears in various Israeli sources. However, the most important reason for the haste of the British and French was undoubtedly that their expeditionary forces had been at a state of full readiness—a condition which could not be

maintained indefinitely—for quite some time, simply waiting for the political green light to launch an attack on Egypt.

The official protocol containing the results of the secret Sèvres negotiations was finally signed on October 24. In this protocol the day of the Israeli attack is definitely fixed for October 29; thus the fact of the outbreak of the Hungarian uprising did not cause even the slightest change to the existing strategy and, contrary to earlier suppositions, did not cause the date for military action in Suez to be brought forward. Available sources even raise doubts as to whether the subject of Hungary came up at all during the final day of negotiations on October 24, when news of the Budapest uprising could have reached Sèvres. However, according to Ben Gurions's diary, he learned of the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution and the alleged Soviet suppression thereof only after his return to Israel, sometime around midday October 25.

The Hungarian Question in the United Nations

The American administration, primarily for reasons of prestige, decided on October 25 that, in concert with its allies, it would initiate discussion in the UN on the subject of the Hungarian uprising. The British and French initially expressed reluctance when Dulles proposed on October 26 that the three countries jointly cause a meeting of the Security Council to be convened. With the Suez action already definitely decided upon, the British and French leaderships were worried that if Soviet intervention in Hungary were put on the agenda and discussed in the UN, it might serve as a precedent for a similar procedure concerning the Israeli-British-French attack on Egypt, which was to take place at the end of October. But since they had not informed the US of their plans, they were forced to accede to American pressure and, on October 27, the United States, Great Britain and France submitted a joint request that the Security Council be convened to examine the situation in Hungary.

From this date until November 3, the representatives of these three great powers continually met behind the scenes in order to work out a UN strategy which all could agree on; the comportment of the US, Britain, and France during the three Security Council sessions which dealt with the Hungarian question on October 28 and on November 2 and 3 was planned during these secret negotiations.

In the days preceding the Israeli attack on Egypt, the UN representatives of the three great Western powers agreed that it was imperative to voice emphatic public condemnation of the Soviet intervention and that, apart from this, they would employ a wait-and-see policy until the confused situation in Hungary became clearer. The consequence of this policy was that the three Western powers which had placed the Hungarian question on the agenda did not even introduce a draft resolution during the October 28 session of the Security Council. When the armed conflict in the Middle East widened with the engagement of Great Britain and France on October 31, the tenor of the negotiations among the great Western powers regarding Hungary changed completely. Eisenhower and Dulles, who had placed increasing importance on establishing good relations with the Arab world with the aim of expanding American influence in the Middle East, reacted angrily to the action taken by their European allies. Not only did they publicly condemn the Suez action, but they also instructed the American UN representative to submit a draft resolution calling for the immediate cessation of all military operations in the Middle East, a motion

which brought about a circumstance which had no precedent in the history of the UN: the representatives of the United States and the Soviet Union voting in concert against Great Britain and France.

As a result of the sudden deterioration in relations between the Western powers, their subsequent discussions regarding the Hungarian question were conducted in an increasingly icy atmosphere, one in which the negotiating partners were not really interested in condemning, much less impeding, Soviet intervention, but wanted to exploit the Hungarian crisis in the name of their own conflicting great power interests. Beginning at this time, the British and French undertook to get the Hungarian question moved from the Security Council to the emergency session of the General Assembly—convened to discuss the Suez crisis—where they hoped that simultaneously treating the two issues would lead to a mitigation of the censure they had been receiving. Transfer of the Hungarian question to the General Assembly would have been of incidental benefit to the forces of change for Hungary, since there is no veto in the General Assembly, which left at least the theoretical possibility that the UN would pass a resolution which would favourably influence events in Hungary. Since the sole objective of the American leadership under the existing circumstances was to resolve the Middle Eastern crisis, they did everything within their power to frustrate the strategy of the British and French. Until November 4, the Americans succeeded in preventing them from submitting a draft resolution on the Hungarian question in the Security Council and further blocked them from referring the question to the emergency session of the General Assembly via the 'uniting for peace' procedure.

After the second Soviet intervention, the American UN representative, Henry Cabot Lodge, unilaterally implemented the British-French strategy without asking for the cooperation of his European Security Council allies. (Indeed, he had broken off negotiations regarding Hungary the previous day as a punishment for British and French actions in Suez.) When the Security Council was subsequently convened upon the news of renewed Soviet intervention on November 4, the American representative initiated a measure which effectively circumvented the Soviet veto and referred the Hungarian question directly to the emergency session of the General Assembly. On the afternoon of that day, a large majority of this body voted to adopt a draft resolution, likewise submitted unilaterally by the US representative, which condemned the intervention of the Soviet Union, called for it to withdraw its troops from Hungary, and recognized the right of the Hungarian people to a government which would represent its national interests.

At the same time, this resolution—which the British and French supported despite its being submitted unilaterally by the United States—made no reference to the recognition of Hungary's neutrality, for which Imre Nagy had so emphatically appealed in his messages to the UN Secretary General on November 1 and 2. This may be due in part to the fact that there was much disagreement within the American leadership regarding whether Hungarian neutrality served the interests of the United States. The concept of Hungarian neutrality engendered a good deal of support in the State Department, where it had surfaced as a topic of discussion days before Nagy launched his appeals to the UN. President Eisenhower himself sympathized with the idea of establishing a zone of neutral states in Central and Eastern Europe, but he hoped to achieve this through negotiations with the Soviets within a general framework for reconstruction of East-

West relationships. However, it was not surprising that Dulles, who had sharp misgivings regarding the increasingly powerful non-aligned movement, and was therefore generally ill-disposed toward the idea of neutrality, came out against the idea with regard to Hungary. Dulles firmly believed that if, perchance, Hungary were to succeed in its struggle to free itself of Soviet domination, the United States should not rest satisfied with her neutrality when there existed the real possibility of incorporating Hungary into the Western sphere of influence. And although Dulles was hospitalized on November 3 and did not return to his office until mid-December, it was his line of thought which ultimately determined the conduct of the US vis-à-vis the Hungarian Revolution during the critical first days of November.

In the early hours of the morning of November 4, the United States nonetheless fervently condemned renewed Soviet intervention in Hungary—Eisenhower even sent a personal message of protest to Bulganin—and in this way succeeded in leading the world to believe that it had, from the very outset, played a constructive role in attempts to settle both the Suez and Hungarian crises.

The real clash of conflicting views in the UN, contrary to earlier interpretations, took place not between the Western powers and the Soviet Union during meetings of the Security Council, where what was said on both sides was primarily for public consumption, but behind the scenes, in the course of secret negotiations between the US, Great Britain, and France.

The result of the discord between the great Western powers over the Suez crisis was that the UN was unable to take firm steps toward the resolution of the Hungarian question at a time (from the first to the third of November) when circumstances in Hungary, such as Nagy's request for UN mediation, made such steps feasible.

However, one should not overestimate the potential influence of any UN resolution by the Emergency Session of the General Assembly condemning Soviet intervention, a measure which remained a distinct possibility right up until November 3. The Soviet Union, in view of its status as a world superpower and the reassuring pledges it had received from the United States, was not in the least disposed to let the moral authority of UN resolutions prevent it from intervening militarily, if necessary, to restore order in a country within its own sphere of influence.

The discord among the Western powers created by the Middle Eastern conflict no doubt made things easier for the Soviets. Nevertheless, it is fairly certain that even without the Suez crisis they would have pursued a similar policy, just as they made a similar decision regarding Czechoslovakia in 1968. Similarly, Western passivity was not caused by the Suez crisis, but by the limits to its range of options in Eastern Europe implicit in the prevailing international status quo and the notion of spheres of influence. The Suez crisis simply served as a handy excuse, especially for the United States, in order to explain why, after years of liberation propaganda, it was not capable of extending even the smallest amount of support to an East European nation which had risen in arms in an attempt to liberate itself from Soviet domination. ❧

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György Kelényi

Anna Zádor, Art Historian (1904–1995)

Art historian, professor emeritus Anna Zádor died shortly after her 91st birthday. Teaching and research into architectural history were the focus of her work. Toward the end of her career she added the study of the history of landscape gardening to her scholarly inquiries.

Professor Zádor came from an upper-middle-class family she fondly remembered in her old age. She believed it was this affectionate atmosphere and responsiveness to things beautiful that directed her to art history. Her decision to apply for university was not an obvious one in the Hungary of the 1920s, when there was a *numerus clausus* directed against Jews by law.

As luck would have it, she was able to enroll in the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest and commence her studies in art history. The Art History Department at the University was established in 1871, and thereafter it produced art history graduates, even if few in number. Conditions were favourable: the department had an excellent and well-stocked library, learned professors who had studied in several European countries, and a very small number of students to be taught. Outstanding work by museologists and the studies they published in professional journals is evidence for the high standards. So too is the number of eminent art historians (like Charles de Tolnay, Frederick Antal, Johannes Wilde, et al.) who had studied at the department and later emigrated. These high standards were also promoted by good relations with the Viennese and some Italian universities, by field and study trips abroad.

In the 1920s, two departments made up the Institute of Art History and Christian Archeology, both headed by prominent professors of international renown. Tibor Gerevich became known for his catalogue of the Czartoriski Gallery in Cracow; he was also the director of the National Committee of Monuments, and one of the leading cultural politicians of the age. The second was Antal Hekler, whose interest lay in classical sculpture and who played an important role in organizing and cataloguing the classical sculpture collection of the Museum of Fine Arts. Anna Zádor began her studies in Hekler's department and later attended his seminars, but she was also interested in the courses of the other department. In 1926 she wrote her dissertation on Renaissance and Baroque concepts of architecture. Later she was to

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put down her choice to her lack of experience, yet it has proven to be a singular piece of writing in Hungarian art history.

After receiving her doctorate, through Professor Hekler's support she was awarded a travel grant to study in Milan the contacts between Italian architecture and Hungarian classicism. This early enterprise was highly successful: she discovered the plans and documents left by Leopoldo Pollach. This Viennese architect had worked in Milan for thirty years from 1775 on and was highly esteemed throughout Lombardy, then part of the Habsburg Empire. His main work was the Villa Belgioioso, later known as the Villa Reale, in Milan. Anna Zádor's research rescued the architect from virtual oblivion, reintroducing him to the profession. The Pollach papers were of immense significance to the history of Hungarian architecture as well. Leopoldo was the half-brother of Mihály Pollack, an outstanding figure in Hungarian neo-Classical architecture. Pollack had resided for a time at his half-brother's home in Milan, learning the rudiments of the profession from him. For this reason and through their later relationship, the papers also contained material concerning Mihály Pollack.

Upon her return from Italy, under Professor János Kapossy's guidance, Dr Zádor became more involved with archival research. Kapossy worked in the National Archives and was one of the first in Hungary to base his approach on archival research. Zádor's archival work was almost immediately crowned with success: in the Grassalkovich family archives she found landscape designs which proved to be very important documents of Hungarian Baroque architecture and landscape gardening. The landscape plans and copies of such plans show that in 18th-century Hungary a close scrutiny of designs accompanied the closely correlated planning of parks. Their significance from the point of view of architectural history lies in the fact that two of the plans show the façade and ground plan of the Grassalkovich chateau at Gödöllő. Both were made in the 1780s and are not only the two oldest drawings of the chateau, but differ from later ones, thus proving what is not clearly stated in the sources: that in the original plan the building was smaller and had corner turrets.

In the 1930s, Anna Zádor's findings were published in the *Archeológiai Értesítő* (Archeological Gazette), the single professional journal of the time. She continued to have Professor Hekler's goodwill and attended his seminars, also acting as his assistant. Soon she was forced to recognize, however, that her Jewish origins meant that she could not hope to find a post at the university or at a museum. Accordingly, at the end of 1935 she accepted a job at the Franklin Publishing Company, whose editor-in-chief, the art historian András Péter, was a former colleague. She worked there as an editor without interruption—except when Budapest was under siege at the end of the Second World War—until 1950. In her old age she remembered this publishing post with affection, though it had little to do with art history. She did acquire, however, the basic skills of book publishing and printing, and she worked and lived in an intellectual atmosphere that was liberal and humane despite the increasingly grim historical moment. She met many important poets, writers, and figures in the world of the arts.

Although she had to do almost everything herself, in whatever spare time she had she worked in archives, travelled around the country, and was writing her book on Hungarian neo-Classicism. She and Jenő Rados had been invited to write a book as the result of winning a Budapest

competition back in 1933. The first and larger part of the volume *A klasszicizmus művészete Magyarországon* (The Architecture of Classicism in Hungary), published in 1943, is a historical summary written by her, the second part is a taxonomical analysis of buildings by Rados. Dr Zádor's work, based on extensive archival and bibliographical research, offers a history of Hungarian neo-Classical architecture covering every region in historical (that is pre-1920), Hungary and surveys in detail the career of every architect of the age. She showed how deeply rooted in Hungarian culture the neo-Classical style was and how widespread it had become in the first half of the 19th century. She explored the foreign connections of the style and, in addition to the German and Austrian, pointed out the (particularly Lombard), as well as French and English influences. The comprehensive material she collected, which had to precede the study of this artistically little recognized (and therefore unexplored) period, is one of the major merits of the volume, making it a standard work which has still not been surpassed. Another merit is the change in approach from the then accepted one-sided German orientation, which was a result of her extensive investigation of influences.

Zádor's interest in the age of neo-Classicism never diminished. In the fifties she was occupied with the ouevre of Mihály Pollack, one of the two eminent architects of Hungarian classicism, the other being József Hild. She made good use of the notes and photographs she had collected in archives in Milan, which she could no longer have been able to obtain due to war damage. Naturally, she had to search for further facts in Hungarian archives and collections of architectural plans. The result was an extensive monograph on Pollack (1960). In addition to research into details of his chief works (e.g., the Hungarian National Museum), she also set out to study the inspirations for more or less unknown or less recognized buildings in the countryside in order to place them in his oeuvre. In retrospect, she saw the volume as lacking a broader overview, a more comprehensive analysis of social, economic, and aesthetic questions, but readers sense no such shortcoming. The intellectual background described in the biography is all the more convincing, since it was Zádor who researched into the social background of Hungarian neo-Classicism and published her results in several studies.

Briefly, in 1950, Anna Zádor worked in the National Centre for Monuments and Museums, but it proved enough for a lifelong close relationship with monument protection, its institutions and related organizations. Her work on the art history subcommittee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and on the Hungarian board of ICOMOS confirmed her committment to the cause of monuments.

In 1951 she was invited by Professor Lajos Fülep, head of the Art History Department, to teach at Eötvös University, where she remained until her retirement in 1974. Even then she was unable to stop teaching and continued work part-time at the department as long as her health permitted. She lectured on topics of universal and Hungarian art from the Cinquecento to the age of neo-Classicism. She was also the first to lecture on modern American architecture. Her lectures were scholarly and lively. She believed in the importance of personal contact with her students: she was always ready to offer counselling, and, with her knowledge and experience, to advise them in their work, in writing theses and in their studies. She often explained that she was trying to raise the standard of teaching through regular counselling, through a voluntary tutorial activity.

Parallel with her research on Pollack, Professor Zádor was the editor and the author of one chapter of a two-volume history of Hungarian art. Originally, Anna Zádor, Lajos Fülep, and Dezső Dercsényi planned the work as a university textbook (*A Magyarországi művészet története* [History of Hungarian Art, 2 vols]) but success exceeded all expectations: in the decades to follow fourteen editions with minor modifications were published. Further editions were called off by the authors in view of the accumulation of new research since the first edition.

Several facts explain the success. A balance of content, the absence of pedantry, of dry academicism met with a growing need for a reference book covering a vast area of new research. The interest in monuments and in archeology increased after the war, and in the course of reconstruction unknown remnants, hidden behind later alterations, were being discovered constantly. Readers were eager for modern summaries and the single-volume shorter and up-dated paperback edition, written by only Dercsényi and Zádor, was also a success in the 80s.

In the 60s and 70s Anna Zádor had manifold interests. One topic she devoted several studies to was Palladian architecture in Hungary. Interpretation of one of Palladio's letters found earlier gave the necessary incentive. The architect addressed the letter to a Hungarian aristocrat—we don't know who, because the page bearing the address was damaged. Anna Zádor's first study on this topic dealt with the interpretation of the letter: her hipothesis was that Andrea Palladio's work mentioned in the letter was the outer gate of the castle at Sárvár. Further studies dealt with Hungarian architecture in the second half of the 19th century and noted Palladian influence in the Eclecticism characterizing it. Her observations threw light on something that had not been previously recognized; no researcher had thought that Palladian features present in English, German, and French architecture, was also present in Hungary. We see elements that, directly or indirectly, show this influence, a familiar feature primarily in the Renaissance inspired buildings of Miklós Ybl's (who designed the Budapest Opera) Romantic period. Several town houses in Bródy Sándor utca in Budapest reflect this same relationship.

Toward the end of her career, Professor Zádor returned to the topic she had written one of her earliest studies on, landscape gardening. Once again she found a theme—the history of English gardens in Hungary—that had not been comprehensively studied and methodically researched. She had the opportunity to enlarge the scope of her knowledge at Dumbarton Oaks in the United States, the centre for research into landscape gardening, by studying the enormous amount of literature and engravings available there. Using data, travel writing, and some drawings of the 200 English gardens that had existed in Hungary, Anna Zádor produced a comprehensive survey of Hungarian landscape gardening between 1770 and 1830 against its economic, and cultural background. She was able to show, for example, that this type of garden appeared in Hungary relatively early, not long after the first German examples. She provided a detailed description of one of the most magnificent gardens in Hungary, at Hotkóc, based on a painting—itself a rare genre—by János Rombauer (1803). The painting is divided into 23 fields, and depicts the garden section by section reproducing every edifice and sculpture. (Zádor gave a detailed account in 1985 of the garden in English in the 100th issue of *The New Hungarian Quarterly*. She supported the journal from its re-emergence in 1960 and was a member of its editorial board.)

In conclusion, two books should be mentioned that gave Anna Zádor great pleasure in the last twenty years of her life. The first is a collection of studies published in 1974 to honour her 70th birthday. They were written by her favourite students as an expression of their respect and affection. The second, a collection of her own earlier studies, was published in 1988. Rereading this again made me see the many areas in which the author achieved lasting results and the various ways in which she had inspired young scholars in their work. To mark her 90th birthday, *Ars Hungarica* (Vol 1, 1994) was published as a Festschrift, with a preface by Ernst H. Gombrich.

It is not enough to judge the significance of Anna Zádor's work as an art historian merely on the basis of studies she wrote or edited. She engaged in an enormous amount of work as an organizer, promoting research in architectural history in various academic committees and publishing projects. She co-edited the four-volume definitive art encyclopaedia (1965–68), edited a dictionary of architecture, inspired and supported the publication of series, *Építészeti hagyományok* (Architectural Traditions). In addition to many decades of teaching, she acted as a "counsellor" to several generations of art historians; she remained in contact with them, showed genuine interest in their work, and helped with advice, comments, and vigorous criticism. She smoothed the path not only for beginners, but also for "successful" researchers; she introduced them to their foreign counterparts, obtained scholarships for them to ensure their success. Few people were able to enjoy the success of others as she was; she praised them at every professional forum without referring to her own accomplishments.

With Anna Zádor's death, Hungarian scholarship lost not only an excellent art historian, an outstanding organizer, but someone who promoted the internal cohesion of a profession, inspired research work, gave well-meant advice in promoting research, and someone who was loved by all. ❧

Levente Szepsy Szücs

Fragment of a crowned head from the sarcophagus of Queen Gertrudis. Around 1230. Hungarian National Gallery.

János Makkay

Pannonia Regia

Pannonia Regia. Art and Architecture in Transdanubia 1000–1541. Catalogue of the exhibition in the National Gallery, October 1994–March 1995. Ed. by Árpád Mikó and Imre Takács. Budapest, 1994. 626 pp.

Historians like to call Asia Minor a *carrefour* of peoples. If a single term can cover a vast territory at all, then the Great Hungarian Plain and Pannonia was certainly a *cul de sac* in the Great Migrations. Here tribes pushing westward from boundless Eurasia ground to a halt. That made Pannonia the true bastion of European civilization, even if so far only the Romans, the emperors Augustus, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, have been aware of this. First as the Pannonia of Augustus and, some turbulent centuries later, as the Carolingian Eastern Marches (Ostmark), it served to block the eastern barbarians. It stopped the Mongols in 1241 and the Turks after 1526, when their western advance reached the gates of Vienna just beyond Pannonia's western border.

The Roman emperor Nerva (96–98) adopted Marcus Ulpius Trajan, the governor of Germania Superior, and made him his regens. Trajan, in turn, adopted Hadrian, a distant relation who had served as governor of Pannonia Inferior from 107. His palace on a Danube island, today called Shipyard Island in Budapest, has not been excavated yet, and exquisite mosaics were destroyed in the stepped-up construction of the yard in 1951–52.

When Hungarians say "Pannonia" they mean Transdanubia, south and west of the Danube. In Roman times it covered all the territory between the Alps, the river Save and the Danube. Ever since ancient times it has been a distinct cultural unit. It became part of the Roman Empire relatively late even though it was the closest to Italy of all the provinces later threatened. Attacks by Germanic, Hun and Turkish tribes, which caused the fall of the Western Roman Empire, came from this direction.

As early as the time of Julius Caesar, when the Dacians threatened Macedonia and Noricum, and even the port of Aquileia, plans were made to expand towards the Danube. Only Augustus (31 B.C.– A.D. 14) carried them out. His idea was to occupy, fortify and set up defences along the Elbe and Danube line, or at least the Rhine and Danube line, to create an easily defensible frontier against the Germanic tribes. A river as border facilitated logistics, including the speedy restationing of army units. In his will (*Res gestae Divi Augusti*) Augustus stated, "I have defeated the Pannonian tribes and advanced the borders of Illyricum all

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the way to the banks of the Danube river." (One of the discoverers of the text, known as *Monumentum Ancyranum,* in Angora, modern Ankara, in Anatolia was Cardinal Antal Verancsics, Archbishop of Esztergom, who lived in Anatolia from 1553 to 1557.) Between 11 and 8 B.C. the Roman legions reached the Danube, and Augustus advised his heirs to maintain the river frontiers to the north and east, including that in Pannonia. With this the province of Pannonia was established.

After a brief period of peace the Dacians again grew strong enough to change the Empire's policy toward Pannonia. Between A.D. 10 and 60 the Romans invited the Sarmatians, Iranian-speakers from the steppes to the north of the Black Sea, to settle on the Great Plain and serve as a buffer between Pannonia and the Kingdom of Dacia. At the same time Pannonia was being civilized, that is Romanized; the building of towns began and so did that of the frontier fortifications making up the Danubian *limes*. In 85 Dacian raids led to the Danubian wars, forcing Rome to regroup its European forces. Most of the legions from the Limes Germanicus on the Rhine were restationed along the Pannonian Danube, and they remained there until the end of the Roman Empire. Pannonia continued to be a Roman military stronghold. A mighty force of 4 legions (24,000 soldiers) was stationed in Vindobona (modern-day Vienna), Carnuntum, Brigetio (Ószőny) and Aquincum (Budapest), on the presumption that soon the migration of the eastern peoples from the steppes would advance toward the Empire via Pannonia and the lower Danube.

Trajan destroyed the Dacians in two bloody wars (101/2 and 105/6) and annexed most of present-day Transylvania to the Empire under the name of Dacia. Trajan disregarded Augustus's will. He wished to move the limits of the Empire into the Carpathians, then build a line of fortifications all the way to the Black Sea, thus cutting off once and for all the invaders' passage to the Balkans, and from there to the Danube valley and along the Sava and Drava rivers through Transdanubia into Italy. By occupying Dacia his first move had been successful. Next the plan called for the subjugation of the Sarmatians and the Germanic Marcomanns and Quads north of the Danube. But first Trajan marched on Mesopotamia, fought and defeated the Parthians. His death in 117 brought his plan to an abrupt end, and changed the future of Pannonia.

Trajan's successor Hadrian discontinued the policy of expansion. With the security established by the conquests of Trajan, he chose a more peaceful course. He began to construct a series of stone fortifications as part of the *limes*. Trajan had intended to make Aquincum the core of the entire Carpathian basin but it now remained only a centre of defence in a small, though militarily significant, province. The Marcomanns and Quads to the north continued to be restless, and the Sarmatians to the east threatened to break in at any time.

Half a century later Marcus Aurelius (161–180) sought to continue Trajan's policy. Between 172 and 180 he won a series of victories against the Sarmatians, Marcomanns and Quads with the aim of extending the Empire's frontier to the Carpathians. His sudden death brought an end to the expansion and his son and heir, Commodus (180–192), like Hadrian, showed no desire to conquer the barbarians in the Carpathian basin.

Apart from these wars, however, the well defended province prospered, especially after the governor of Upper Pannonia, Septimius Severus, became caesar in 193. The province, however, could not maintain the huge garrison and had to receive support from other provinces. Latifundia inhib-

ited urban development and the economy was unbalanced. According to the first-century Greek geographer Strabo, the Celtic inhabitants of the Carpathian basin prior to Augustus had exported only slaves, skins and cattle to the markets of northern Italy, mainly to Aquileia. The presence of a large army prevented subsequent economic development, and exports remained limited. Uncompetitive latifundia continued and hindered the growth of industry. Pannonia supplied the circuses with wild beasts, and exported herbs, hunting dogs and other such curiosities to other provinces, but because of the large quantities of food consumed by the army, the grain grown by the Sarmatians in the Great Plain was needed here. It was traded not for local products but industrial goods mass-produced in the western provinces, such as clay and bronze vessels, glassware, and the like. Not until the 4th century did Pannonia become a grain exporter, all the while retaining its position as a leading slave trader. Its commercial image, with few export products and only curiosities to offer, remained the same through the Middle Ages and even in modern times. A customs seal found in the western Hungarian city of Szombathely near the Austrian border testifies to the area's isolation from the main trading routes and the prevailing policy of protective tariffs on the part of the West—something that is still true today. A duty of 1–2 per cent was common in the western and Balkan provinces, but the customs seal shows a 12.5 per cent duty, the eighths, for Pannonian goods taken in the direction of Rome. Italy and the provinces on the Rhine could do without the products and goods of this eastern province.

In spite of Pannonia's successful Romanization and its role as a major defender of the Empire, it was never able to match the level of the western provinces. Latin never became the exclusive language and the kind of vulgar Latin that would have paved the way for a separate Romance language did not develop here, as it did in other provinces from Dalmatia through France and Spain to Portugal. Successive conquests by Vandals, Goths, Huns, Langobards, early Avars and the Onogurs drove out or destroyed the Latin-speaking inhabitants, and with them towns and industry, as well as Christianity. Bishop Wulfila, who produced the first-known Germanic Bible translation (its earliest known remains, several fragments of writing in Wulfila's script, incised in a lead plate, were found in Pannonia, in present Hács-Béndekpuszta near Fonyód, from a grave dated 460–480) fled from Transdanubia around 340 to escape a Gothic warlord, persecutor of Christians, a *foederatus* of the Romans. After the onslaught of the Huns around 420, no evidence remains of Christian bishops or Jewish synagogues, like the one in Intercisa (today's Dunaújváros) in Pannonia with its earlier inscription, which mentions a certain Cosmius, a musician of that synagogue and a customs officer (*"Cosmius praepositus stationis spondilla synagogae ludeorum"*). Thus no Latin-speaking peoples survived and civilization declined. A few economic achievements probably endured, however. Some produce like fruit, especially the vine, were still grown. The main roads and settlement patterns remained in place, as did the estate system, a few monasteries, agricultural techniques and the like. In the Transdanubian wine-country around Szekszárd the Roman-type, sickle-shaped knife, the *falx vinitoria*, is still used for pruning vines.

While Roman stone walls of buildings survived until the 18th century, and in a few cities like Sopron and Pécs became part of medieval houses, only Savaria (present-day Szombathely) retained its Latin name until the Middle Ages. That, too, is an indication of the interruption in the continuity of settlement sometime between 453–895.

When Árpád, their highest warlord, led the Hungarian tribes to conquer the Carpathian basin between 895 and 900, all they could use of what the Romans left behind were dilapidated stone ruins of buildings and amphitheatres. The tribal chief Kurszán chose the military amphitheatre in present-day Óbuda to set up his tent. Árpád and his warriors crossed the Danube and entered Aquincum, the city of King Attila. "There they spied the royal palaces, some crumbled to the ground and others standing, and they greatly admired all the stone structures," wrote the anonymous Latin chronicler around 1200. A later chronicle from the 14th century speaks of nothing but ruins in 10th-century Transylvania. During a hunt, prince Gyula, a descendant of the Onogurian clan to which Attila had belonged, stumbled upon the remains of a large city built by the Romans. It was either Apulum, or the former Dacian royal seat of Sarmizegetusa that Trajan had occupied and destroyed in 106.

The first four hundred years of *Pannonia Romana* started with Caesar Augustus and ended with Attila the Hun. For a brief period after Charlemagne's wars in 803 Pannonia lived again until 895 as the Carolingian Ostmark. A few ruins of churches and cemeteries south of Lake Balaton, and especially the huge foundation walls of a circular Frankish fortress found beneath and near the baroque cathedral in Szombathely, testify to the greatness of this period.

When the Magyars had completed their conquest of the Carpathian Basin in 900, their leader ruled over three large territories. One was Pannonia Romana, the most developed because of its geographic location and Roman and Carolingian heritage, but without natural resources. The second was Transylvania, also with Roman remains in ruins, but with the richest gold deposits and mines in Europe, alluvial gold, salt mines, and timber. The third was the Great Plain, probably a densely inhabited area but one that had never known civilization, except perhaps for tawdry goods imported from Byzantium or Rome. It never had any goods that could be turned into money and only a few competitive products, like cattle and horses, which, however—like now—had no export markets. Grain production was extensive and low-yield. Karl Kerényi appropriately summed up the prevailing conditions in the early Hungarian state, "The Magyar tribes, with their language related to eastern, as well as north European tribes, and a culture to match, broke through the northern limits set by nature and history to antique culture, through the limits of the cultivation of the vine and the *limes*. What has determined once and for all the Hungarians' place in the world, is that they have built their national existence straddling the *limes*. One foot remained outside it, while the other stood firm on the antique soil of Pannonia and Dacia."

For quite a while the Magyar Conquest only widened the ancient economic and cultural chasm between this region and the civilized world: the late-Carolingian West and Italy in the south of Europe, Byzantium and already Christian Bulgaria. Around 950 however, the centres of the Magyar chiefdom, initially established along the upper Tisza, were moved close to Aquincum in Buda, and to Székesfehérvár on the Roman military road from Buda to the south, and finally to Esztergom. It was the very area from which Marcus Aurelius had once observed the Quad lands; as he noted in his *Meditations*, "written in the land of the Quads, on the banks of the Granona". Péter Váczy has pointed out that only the Hungarian House of Árpád was able to carry out Trajan's and Marcus Aurelius's scheme: the unification of the Carpathian Basin under one rule. Just as the Gyula clan ruled Transylvania from the former Roman town of

Apulum in Dacia, the Árpáds installed themselves in the Roman province of Pannonia. Transdanubia-Pannonia continued to retain its political and cultural superiority; even during the Renaissance the name Pannonia designated the whole Hungarian kingdom, that is the entire Carpathian Basin.

The exhibition and catalogue presents the history of this, the western part of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, of Pannonia Regia, where between the year 1000 and the final Turkish occupation of Buda in 1541, Western civilization was able to establish itself for a second time. Pannonia's was the most markedly Roman region within the kingdom, with much of the Roman heritage surviving, if only latently (as proven by the old Christian relics unearthed in Pécs, for example). Transylvania, the territory that was Dacia, is now part of Romania, and Upper Hungary, rich in medieval relics, is today Slovakia. Conversely, the Great Plain, which until the Mongolian invasions in 1241–42 was gradually catching up with Transdanubia, suffered the worst destruction at the hands of the Turks. Compared to Transdanubia hardly any relics survive in this region, especially where architecture is concerned. With few exceptions all the items on display were found within the present borders of Hungary or are in Hungarian museums.

The catalogue argues that Christianity spread only after the coronation of King Stephen at Christmas 1000, that is, exactly 200 years after Charlemagne's, which is why only a handful of standing monuments and objects from the 10th century are included. The standing monuments portrayed are almost exclusively ruins, mostly of churches, while the objects are architectural fragments and small finds, including illuminated books.

Naturally we only know what has survived and only exceptionally do we know of

Levente Szepsy Szücs

A relief from Somogyvár showing a figure extracting a thorn, and a lion. Around 1170–1190. Kaposvár, Rippl-Rónai Museum.

what has perished. The western portal, the *Porta speciosa*, of Saint Adalbert's Cathedral in Esztergom was demolished in 1764. In 1822 Cardinal Sándor Rudnay meditated for months on whether the Cathedral where the infant Vajk, the later King Stephen I, was baptized should also be demolished. In the end he did demolish it, to build in its place the Esztergom Basilica, the largest church in the Carpathian Basin (1822–1886). The Romanesque Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Székesfehérvár was demolished in our own times; the once magnificent Romanesque cathedrals of Transdanubia were destroyed by the Mongols, the Turks or restored out of recognition by architects of the Counter-Reformation, and later the neo-Gothic. The Romanesque cathedral of Pécs met the same fate. The Great Plain fared no better, for the Gothic church in the fortress of Szeged,

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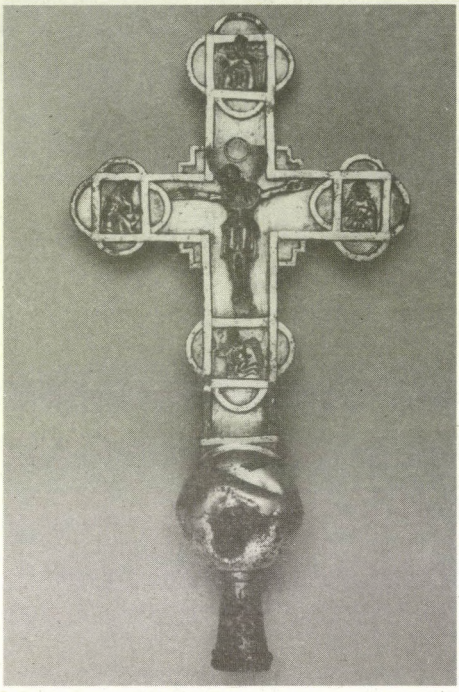


Processional cross from Csájág, first half of the 13th century. Hungarian National Museum.

erected by Caroberto of Anjou, survived the ravages of the Turkish age only to be demolished after the 1879 flood, its bricks and stones used as cheap building material in the reconstruction of the city. The fortress stood where there had been a 2nd century Roman military stronghold guarding the mail road to Dacia. It can be presumed that Attila the Hun chose it as a camp; perhaps his grave is in nearby Röszke. Thus the antique heritage and its medieval continuation in Pannonia Barbarica, Dacia Hungarica and Pannonia Regia survives in legends told about the ruins, or at most in the revival which one article in the catalogue calls the rebirth of Pannonia during the Hungarian Renaissance. The catalogue naturally cannot relate the losses: that some of the frescoes in Filippo Scolari's sepulchral chapel in Székesfehérvár were by Masolino da Panicale, who between 1424–1427 worked in that city, in Veszprém, and Temesvár. The great Renaissance king Matthias Corvinus owned several paintings by Filippino Lippi and had his portrait painted by Andrea Mantegna. The workshop of Verocchio made a marble fountain. Between 1483–1485 Lodovico Sforza commissioned a Madonna from Leonardo da Vinci for Matthias. We know it was completed, but it has been lost since.

The catalogue does mention on the basis of manuscripts in the Bodleian Library in Oxford that on July 1, 1489 a ship docked in Buda, bringing Roman stones from Transylvania at King Matthias's command. The Florentine Bartolomeo Fonzio, who witnessed the event, copied the inscriptions on the stones. This all happened a few months before Matthias's death on April 6 1490, when his power was at its zenith. It marks the peak of five hundred years of progress in Pannonia Regia, but also the start of Central European art history and archeology: this is the first archeological report in the region. Matthias wanted to be the founder of a museum. For this purpose he had earlier urged the collection of Roman objects in Szombathely, which were subsequently taken to his castle in Buda. One article in the catalogue by Árpád Mikó points out that ancient Pannonia, as more and more of its past was revealed, was present in Transdanubia as a source of inspiration (p. 37). In the late 13th century the chronicler Simon of Kéza had only been able to point to the Roman heritage by locating battles fought by Attila or the Avars on the sites of antique, that is, Roman ruins.

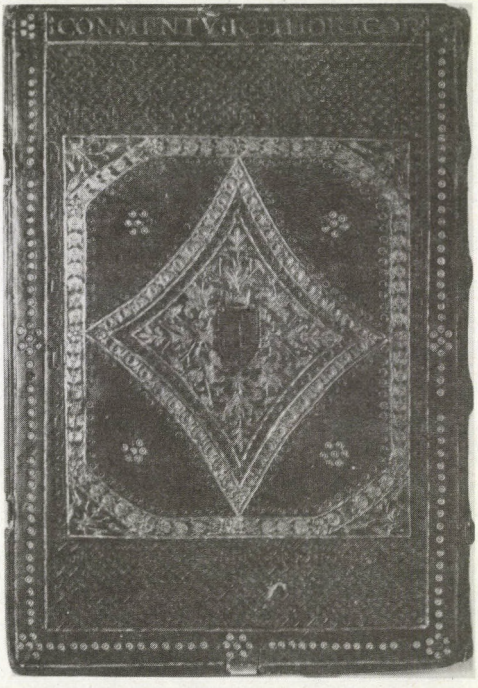
Unfortunately the flash of revival was at the last moment. What occured shortly afterwards was the second destruction of Pannonia, this time by the Turks. Even the stones which Italian and other historians had seen and drawn in the late 15th, early 16th centuries disappeared. Decades of ex-

cavations in the Palace of Visegrád are bringing to light a wealth of fragments, which reassembled might some day fuse into a complete picture, just like the restored Gothic and Renaissance fountains already on display.

The three opening essays of the catalogue by Pál Engel, Imre Takács and Árpád Mikó deal with the subjects I have described, each from its own scholarly perspective. They are followed by the actual catalogue's ten chapters, most of them with a multiple authorship. The most extensive chapter deals with Romanesque architectural and decorative stones, first from what were once the cathedrals of Székesfehérvár, Esztergom and Pécs, and secondly from a number of other locations (Feldebrő, Veszprém, Tihany, Dömös, Szekszárd, Pilisszentkereszt, Visegrád, Óbuda, Zalavár, Pécsvárad, Győr, Pannonhalma, Somogyvár, and Kalocsa). The reconstructed cathedral portals from Székesfehérvár, Pécs and Esztergom's *Porta Speciosa* are dealt with in the first chapter, the second (by Zsuzsa Lovag) discusses Romanesque bronze artefacts. Most of those exquisite pieces are stray finds with many Latin and processional crosses among them. One originally belonged to a set of finds from the royal graves in the cathedral of Székesfehérvár, perhaps from that of King Coloman (1095–1116). A few of these objects are today in the National Museum in Budapest, while others were misappropriated or have disappeared. Gold belt ornaments were made into a bracelet for a mayor's wife, and gold-laced textiles were melted down immediately after they were found in 1839. A patriarchal cross which was once part of the royal insignia, had already been donated to the cathedral of Salzburg back in the 15th century by János Beckensloer, after he was driven from his position as Archbishop of Esztergom by King Matthias. All this is only a line in the sad tale of these finds.

Levente Szepsy Szücs

A Faenza majolica jug from Kőszeg, showing the profile of a young man, 1480–1490. Hungarian National Museum.



Levente Szepsy Szücs

Binding of Victorinus: Commentarium in Ciceronis librum de inventione, *at one time in the Corvina Library. National Széchényi Library.*

The third chapter is on wall paintings, only a few of which can still be seen. The best medieval narrative paintings have as their theme the legend of Saint Ladislas. Forty-eight such paintings survive, though only five are located within the present borders of Hungary.

Chapter 4 reviews Gothic architecture and sculpture. The Gothic reached Hungary at the end of the 12th century through the work of artist-craftsmen from the Ile de France. The royal palace in Esztergom built between 1170–1180 is the first still visible local evidence of the style, but there are others: in Pannonhalma, or the no longer standing churches of the monasteries of Pilis and of Somogyvár. The sepulchral monument of Queen Gertrud, also at the Pilis monastery, is an especially fine example, matched only by sculptures made after 1419 and unearthed in Buda Castle in 1974. They survived the castle's destruction by being deliberately buried, probably before the whole series was completed, and prior to King Sigismund's death in 1437. They are portraits, just like the royal heads from Notre Dame in Paris, which met a similar fate.

The ensuing chapter deals with Gothic gold and bronze work and other small artifacts, such as stove tiles, seals, and seal impressions on written records. A 15th-century drinking horn by a German craftsman is of rare beauty.

The subject of Chapter 7 is the late Gothic and Renaissance palace of Visegrád, a landmark of Pannonia Regia and of Hungarian culture overall. The palace, located below the restored fortress on the high rock, was where King Casimir III of Poland, John of Bohemia, and the Hungarian king Caroberto of Anjou met in 1335. The 1990 summit of the Visegrád Three was a distant echo of that event. Although the palace was a royal seat from 1323 to 1346, it reached the height of its glory at the time of King Matthias Corvinus when it was expanded to 350 rooms. Like Matthias's Buda palace, it was also destroyed. Still, the fragments shown in the exhibition and catalogue testify to the fineness of the architecture and craftsmanship, comparable to anything in the Europe of the time. The superb red marble reliefs and sculptures, the lavish Italianate ornamentation from Buda palace, erected at the end of Matthias' rule, are especially noteworthy. (My personal experience is of the excavations I headed in 1958–59, the last major archeological digs in Buda Castle, where I had the only still available profile drawing made of the architectural sections of the palace of Sigismund and Matthias.) The funerary chapel, entirely of red marble, of Cardinal Tamás Bakócz in Esztergom is one of the finest examples of the Florentine early-Cinquecento. Built in 1506–1507, early even for Italy, it mercyfully still stands. That it is a masterpiece is something of which those who demolished Saint Adalbert's Cathedral were already aware; it was not torn down but incorporated in the new basilica minor.

Chapter 8 deals with Renaissance goldsmith and majolica work. An exhibition in Budapest in 1983 first displayed in this country the exquisite majolica dishes decorated with the coats of arms of Matthias and his wife Beatrice, the former now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the latter in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. They were made in Faenza and commissioned by Matthias Corvinus but were never delivered because of his death. Buda also had a majolica workshop from the 1470s to the early 16th century which was established by Petrus Andreas, a master craftsman from Faenza. The bulk of the fragments of floor tiles and dishes found in Buda Castle were made there.

Chapter 9 discusses the codices, incunabulae, and illuminations found or made in

Hungary, focusing on Matthias's great library, the *Bibliotheca Corviniana seu Augusta*, and its fate. The Corvinian collection probably comprised around one thousand volumes. After the king's death, another 150 codices, which he had ordered but which were not completed, remained in Florence. Just over 200 of the Corvinian codices survive, and only the plainer ones are still in Hungary. The finest volumes are in various West European collections; the Cassianus Codex is in Paris as is a Ptolemy with large maps, a Livy is in the Biblioteca Capitolare in Verona, a Theophylactus and a Lucretius are in Vienna, the Didymus Chalcenterus Corvina in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and a Roman Missal is in the Bibliotheque Royal in Brussels. Buda had a printing press, the first in Hungary, established by András Hess in 1473 but Matthias was not satisfied with the quality of its work and preferred to order from Italy. A bookbinding and illuminator shop also flourished here, but was closed after Matthias's death in 1490. The chapter points to the strange but true fact that the wonderful library, matched only by those in the Vatican and of Lorenzo di Medici in Florence, was partially saved just because it was dispersed after 1490 and thus did not fall prey to the Turkish invaders in 1526.

Levente Szepsy Sztücs

A Pietà from Keszthely, around 1500. Hungarian National Gallery.

Church treasures, or *ecclesia exornata*, are the subject of Chapter 10. Panel paintings, wooden statues, altars, incense burners and braziers, chalices, monstrances, vestments, *mitrae aurifrigatae et preciosae* and similar fine pieces are described.

In 1490 Hungary was one of the great regional powers. Then came the Turkish occupation from 1526 to 1688, and with it the second devastation of Pannonia. Buda and the country were wrested from the Turks in 1686–1688, followed by a slow and irregular development that lasted 250 years. This reached its peak one hundred years ago, with the millenary celebrations in 1896. In the 20th century King Stephen's Pannonia, which once covered the entire Carpathian Basin, was again carved up, and only Pannonia Regia was not dismembered. Hungary—what was once Pannonia and part of Barbaricum—for the fourth time faces the task of catching up with developed Europe. The quality of the exhibition and the catalogue (complete with German summary, and an index of names), with its crisp photography is a modest token of this immense task. ❧

Ivan Sanders

Elusive Author

Péter Esterházy: *The Book of Hrabal.* Translated by Judith Sollosy. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois. 1994, 168 pp.

There are basically two ways to treat translations of famously difficult but important, even celebrated books. Describe the phenomenon rather than the book itself; allude nonchalantly to the hurdles to understanding; lace your review generously with quotable quotes, and mark out a very lofty place for it in the annals of literature. *Or*: inveigh against its obscurities, expose its pretensions, mock its cult status, and declare forthrightly that the Emperor has no clothes. English translations of Péter Esterházy's work have received both of these treatments: respectfully laudatory albeit brief and rather unilluminating reviews as well as detailed diatribes. The recently published American edition of Esterházy's *The Book of Hrabal* got a sympathetic reading in *The New York Times Book Review*, though all one could gather about the novel is that it's a delightful mishmash with serious overtones. (Tibor Fischer's piece in the *Times* of London a year earlier was even more general. Fischer is full of praise, of course, repeating every critical cliché about Esterházy—he is "playful," "deeply allusive", etc.—and at the end does come up with the inevitable ranking—"This is the frontline of Hungarian literature"—as well as the obligatory caveat: "but... you have to play close attention.") And then there is John Simon's memorable assault on Esterházy's previous novel, *Helping Verbs of the Heart*, published in *The New Republic* back in 1991, in which the influential New York critic and curmudgeon lashes out against author, novel, translator, as well as the vagaries of post-modern fiction.

It so happens that Austrian and German critics, who are rather more familiar with Esterházy's work (six of his books have been published by Austria's Residenz Verlag since 1985), have found *The Book of Hrabal* more troublesome, more tentative and fragmented than his previous fiction. However, Judith Sollosy's English version of the work offers convincing proof—to this reader, at any rate—that this was the right Esterházy book to translate into English. Of all his unconventional forays ("introductions") into literature, *The Book of Hrabal* seems the most satisfyingly accessible. Which doesn't mean, of course, that the work does not present unique challenges to the American or British reader. Let's begin with the title. Clearly, the

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novel is meant to be an homage to the Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal. But aside from an oblique reference to an episode in Hrabal's *Postřižiny* (Haircutting), and a hilariously irreverent conversation between him and God, there is very little of Hrabal in the novel. (Esterházy's American publisher notes helpfully on the dustjacket that it has also published *Closely Watched Trains*, Bohumil Hrabal's most famous work, but any American reader hoping to learn more about Hrabal from Esterházy's book is bound to be disappointed.) On a subtler level, of course, praise for qualities associated with Hrabal the unflappable Central European master permeates every page of the book. And on a deeper level still, Esterházy intimates his spiritual kinship with his Czech colleague by replicating Hrabal's curious and poignant identification with women. (The Hungarian writer enjoys quoting the famous Flaubertian dictum: "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi*," and this coincides with Hrabal's preference—he makes the phrase his motto in *Postřižiny*.) Unfortunately, to appreciate these correspondences, the subtler *rapport de fait* between the two authors, one must not only be a reader from Eastern Europe but an Esterházy buff as well.

The figure of Hrabal, then, is no more than flimsy connecting tissue that nevertheless unites various strands in the minimal plot: the novel's writer-hero is in fact working on a book devoted to Hrabal, his wife Anna does confide her innermost fears and frustrations to an imagined Hrabal, and God Himself uses the Czech writer as a kind of intermediary. But Esterházy's polyphonic fiction contains so many other voices and motifs that Hrabal remains even for the initiated a suggestive but undelineated emblem. The reader also has to contend with two hapless angels disguised as secret police agents, who have been directed to prevent Anna from aborting her fourth child. Her and her husband's favorite jazz musicians likewise put in an appearance, on the side of the angels of course. And running through the entire book are references to a country in transition (we are in the Hungary of the late eighties), as well as reminiscences of past historical traumas.

One wonders which segment of Esterházy's fiction presents the most daunting obstacle to the non-Hungarian reader? Obviously, the world of Charlie Parker and Miles Davis and Count Basie, even when placed in a whimsical Central European setting, is not that alien. Neither are angels assuming human form and longing to fulfill human desires. (It was around the time Esterházy wrote *The Book of Hrabal* that Wim Wenders's film, *Wings of Desire*, became well-known on both sides of the Atlantic. Esterházy's celestial duo: Blaise and Gabriel, a.k.a. Cho-Cho, bear a striking resemblance to Wenders's down-to-earth angels.) But the steady stream of allusions to Hungarian literature, politics, history, to the verbal and material clutter of an age, must remain a perplexing mystery. Just what is communicated to the unsuspecting American reader when he is informed that the Lada is "made in the Soviet Union on the basis of an old Fiat license?" Or when he is told of all the exciting goodies—perlon stockings, mohair knits, plastic raincoats—that East Europeans could buy in "Chesko" in the 60s. What could he possibly make of a fleeting reference to Petőfi's Russian wife, or to the "talking" graves of 1989? Footnotes would be needed to remind the reader of the historical reburials of that year, or to point out that Sándor Petőfi was a hot topic in Budapest in '88 and '89, since his bones were allegedly found in Siberia, lending credence to the old theory that he didn't die on the battefield but lived out his life with a Russian wife. But can a novel afford to have footnotes? It's also true,

of course, that the jazz references may perplex many Hungarian readers. What could such locations as the Williamsburg Bridge or the Congress Street pier in Brooklyn possibly mean to *them*? The point is that no one "gets" every single allusion in an Esterházy text, except Esterházy himself. His books are like ancient texts in a way, enigmatic, inexhaustible, while remaining defiantly quotidian, filled with trivia and ephemera.

(I have recently taught *The Book of Hrabal* in a course on contemporary East European literature at an American university. At first I was skeptical about student response to a novel this quirky, and had strong reservations about my own ability to convey its thematic riches, or demonstrate overall coherence. There was no need to worry; the novel went over quite well. A piece of post-modern fiction, I decided, has met its post-modern readers. My students, so used to "sound bites," so adept at scanning, perusing, "channel-surfing," worried far less about overall coherence and continuity than about relating to individual sections of the novel. The whole is less than the sum of its parts. To them this is a natural proposition.)

Actually, what makes all of Esterházy's books appealing in spite of their allusive and digressive character is that they are intensely personal. The private sphere is explored with such relentless candor, ordinary experiences are described in such telling detail, that on this level at least reader satisfaction can be guaranteed. All of Esterházy's fiction is ultimately centered around the family, the Esterházys, the immediate family above all, a still youngish couple with growing children—people who are clever, brash, sensitive, vulnerable. Their habits and hangups are those of the urban intellectual elite, though for all their irreverent sophistication, they are drawn to values and beliefs not always deemed fashionable by politicos and philistines of the moment. We also meet uncles and aunts and cousins, eccentric and often pathetic Hungarian aristocrats, who are nevertheless ennobled by the plain fact that they were victimized by a political order that had once considered them public enemies. What is said to be baffling in Esterházy's writing—the parade of abstruse concepts, arcane references, recherché puns—is invariably related to the humblest and absurdest piece of lived reality, which effectively domesticates and debunks the headier material. The irony never runs out, but it doesn't turn profane. God in *The Book of Hrabal* is someone who "saw everything simultaneously, the sea of space, the current of time, the branches of a rose bush, the Black Forest and the Black Sea, Jan Hus and a fatal typo in a grade B novel, the battle of Thermopylae, the flames of Jan Palach and the birth of a little boy called Marcel, then the same little boy's foot-fungus... he saw Anna's mother as young girl, he saw Bohumil Hrabal's mother as a young woman, he saw the writer's father at the age of eighteen in a Hungarian dress uniform...he saw the writer, he saw Anna and the sentence that except for him no one saw, which contained the words writer and Anna, and he saw himself."

Literary translation is a risky undertaking under any circumstances, but when it comes to a writer like Esterházy, who delights in appropriating other writers' words, whose books are replete with textual borrowings of all kinds, translation becomes even more problematic. It has been argued, of course, that all writers build on their predecessors' works, and that Esterházy happens to be one who confronts head-on what Harold Bloom has called the "anxiety of influence." "The writer," we are told in *The Book of Hrabal*, "was the kind who, given a choice between life and literature,

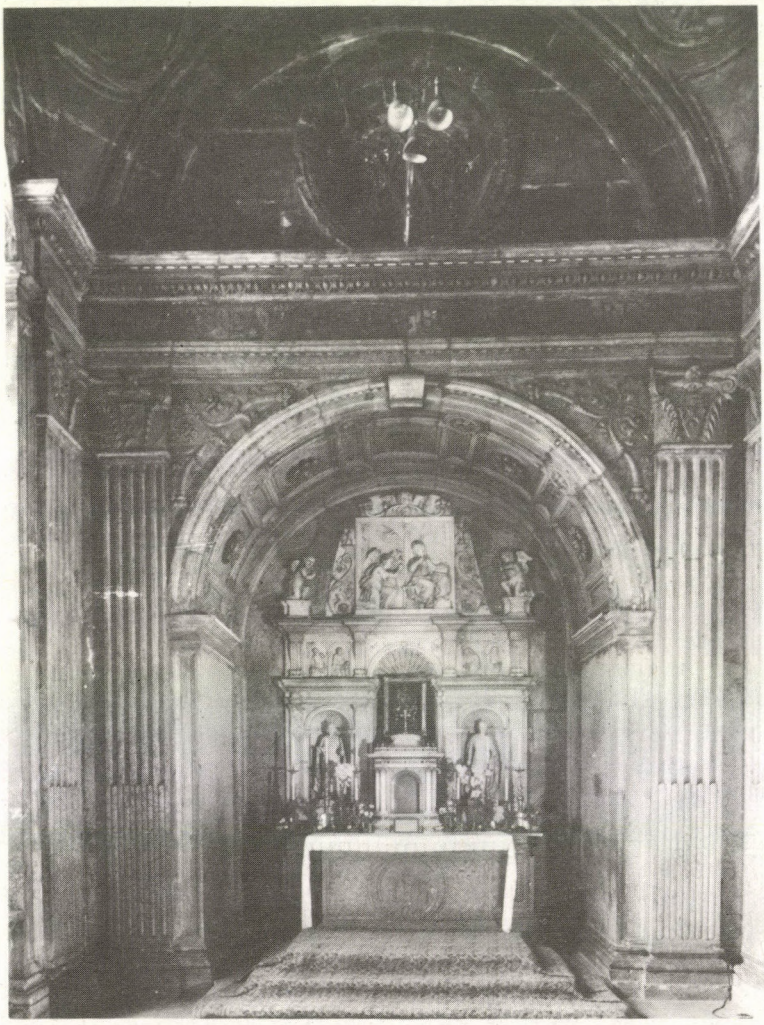
would choose literature at the drop of a hat, because he thought, he firmly believed, that literature was his life."

But if it's true that borrowed words, even household phrases, familiar quotations are changed (enhanced, trivialized, corrupted) by their new context, then the transfer of such a resonant text into another language may result in a work that is entirely different, not the equivalent of the original. This, to me, is the greatest danger of translating Esterházy. Judith Sollosy seems to be aware of the danger but is undaunted by it. She has produced a translation of Esterházy's book that works. Her language—a breezy, idiomatic American vernacular—doesn't try to match Esterházy's particular kind of verbal brilliance, yet its clarity of phrase and consistency of tone produces its own special effects in any number of intricate passages—in the long characterization of the divine, for example, or in the stunning last paragraph of the book.

All the same, a reviewer who is a translator himself cannot comment on another translation without quibbling a little. Rather than dwelling on minor examples of awkward, literal translations ("measure up and down" for *végigmér*, "bend into it" for *belehajol*) or more obvious slips (she writes Hradčany Palace instead of Hradčany Castle), or quaintly, and inappropriately, old-fashioned phrases ("deb's delight," "towhead"), I would point to a rather more noticeable blemish—the occasional insensitivity to certain cultural differences. A single example should suffice. Thanks to the Central European cultural and linguistic legacy, popular Yiddishisms have crept into the Hungarian vocabulary. It is quite natural therefore that even a blueblood like Esterházy should be conversant with many of these words, and should feel comfortable about using them. But while Yiddishisms certainly have their place in colloquial American English, too, the expressions that took root in the two cultures are not necessarily identical. The particular words and phrases used so blithely by Esterházy and taken over by Sollosy (*azes ponem, chochmetz*) are simply not familiar enough to American readers. But we are still talking about blots and blemishes. On the whole Judith Sollosy is in firm control of her difficult material and deals with it decisively, masterfully.

Whenever a new work by an East European writer is published in England or America, it invites comparisons with other books by writers from the same region. Esterházy's fiction, with its teasing title, inevitably brings Czech writers to mind, although the most popular East European novelist in the English-speaking world is not Bohumil Hrabal but Milan Kundera. It's interesting to note that Péter Esterházy's novelistic sleights of hand are in many ways closer to Kundera's experimental and cerebral fiction than to Hrabal's, who has always considered himself a plain old story-teller. Kundera's careful classification of the ingredients of his own fiction—"ironic essay, novelistic narrative, autobiographical fragment, historical fact, flight of fancy"—could be used in the content analysis of any Esterházy novel. Yet Kundera's art seems to leave Esterházy cold. His name is conspicuously missing from Esterházy's famous lists of authors who regularly provide grist for his creative mill—lists that contain plenty of minor literary figures. Perhaps the reason for this is that Kundera, for all his deftness and inventiveness, is too explicit for Esterházy—he provides the keys to his own puzzles. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, for example, he speaks of the Czech pop singer Karel Gott and how in the early 1970s Gustav Husák begged him to return after the singer had defected to Germany. Karel Gott's singing represents debased, mindless music, and he is related to the

orchestrated forgetting of Czechoslovakia's communist regime. All this is quite clearly explained by the author. Karel Gott's name pops up in *The Book of Hrabal*, too, but Esterházy's description is infinitely more enigmatic and laconic. "The Songbird of Prague"—that is all he will say about him. To repeat: whereas Kundera is magisterial and didactic, Esterházy is sly and elusive. It's not always easy to like a writer with these latter qualities, but ultimately it's more fun. ❧



Levente Szepsy Szücs

The Bakócz chapel in Esztergom. 1507–1508.

Nicholas T. Parsons

Bluffer's Guide to Hungary

Hungary: Essential Facts, Figures and Pictures. Edited by Éva Molnár. Translated by Pál Herskovits. MTI Media Data Bank, 1995. 320 pp. Illustrated in colour and black and white. ISBN 963 7560 30 0. Orders to: MTI, P.O.Box 3, Budapest 1426, Hungary. Europe $16, elsewhere $22 or equivalent.

The late and unlamented Robert Maxwell made his first fortune by purveying indispensable information for specialist audiences. With hindsight, the idea of Maxwell as a conduit for knowledge might incline one to a fundamentalist view of the happenings in the Garden of Eden; and who does not remember the affecting scene in 1989, as the bear-like publisher presented a beaming Erich Honecker with his latest production, *Forty Glorious Years of the German Democratic Republic?* Nevertheless, it was Maxwell who published the English edition of *Information Hungary* in 1968, Volume 2 in the series "*Countries of the World*" (General Editor: Robert Maxwell M.P., M.C.; series motto: "And Nation Shall Speak Peace unto Nation"). At the time, there was nothing else in English that attempted to cover every aspect of the country, and so this huge and characteristically costly volume found its way onto the shelves of many a library.

Of course, *Information Hungary* was, to put it delicately, a child of its time. Produced under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, it astutely mingled contributions of honest scholarship with deliberate misinformation. Connoisseurs of the latter might like to compare the section entitled "Development of the People's Hungary" in (Mis-) *Information Hungary* with passages covering the post-war period in the history section of the book here under review. One is struck not simply by the categorical reversal in the later work of statements made in the earlier one; more dramatic is the complete absence of many salient facts in *Information Hungary*; and this despite its interminable passages of turgid analysis, only enlivened by sporadic outbursts of ritual abuse designed to demonstrate the author's political correctness.

Communist "information" is now an easy target for mockery, although we forget at our peril that this was not always the case; by the same token, the challenge facing producers of factual analyses or compendia in today's free market of information is all the greater. The writer has to select from a vast pool of data, and has a genuine responsibility both to his readers and to himself. In the Preface to *Hungary: Essential Facts*, the Director of MTI Media Data Bank speaks of the editor's and contributors' intention to publish a volume "based on fac-

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tual data and to the least possible extent engaged in polemics about Hungary". It is a thoroughly admirable aim, and relatively easy to realize when writing about topography, sports, public institutions and the like; less easy, perhaps, when writing about environment, culture and history. For this reason the skill with which the authors have applied themselves to the book's general aim deserves to be saluted: most of their articles manage to avoid the po-faced stodginess of that dreaded genre, the Foreign Ministry handout; with one glaring exception, they also steer clear of the sugary blandness of the tourist brochure.

As every schoolboy knows, no information can be entirely "objective", objectivity being a laudable aim rather than an ontological certainty. Financial sponsorship (in this case by the Trade Promotion Fund, the Hungarian Tourist Board and the Prime Minister's Office) is obviously preferable to propaganda by an authoritarian state, whose chief interest is in suppressing, rather than supplying, information. Nevertheless, all financial sponsors expect a return on their money, however indirect, and thus the sponsored products are, however indirectly, trying to sell us something. In this case, the sponsors and compilers of *Hungary: Essential Facts* are in the business of marketing Hungary by telling us all we ever wanted to know about it, and perhaps a little more. But the weapons deployed in this valuable exercise are the ascertainable fact, the key statistic and the dispassionate analysis.

To realize their aims the contributors have accumulated a vast amount of the relevant facts and figures, thus creating a reliable source of reference for journalists, scholars and businessmen. If it proves possible to update the work, even at four-yearly (i.e. electoral) intervals, I see no reason why it should not become the bible for non-Hungarian speakers with a professional interest in Hungary.

Despite its general excellence, it is perhaps inevitable that a work like this, compiled by many different hands, is bound to exhibit occasional unevenness of quality and style. While the editor (Éva Molnár) has clearly performed her Herculean task with the utmost skill, she may occasionally have been stuck with some less than dazzling material (for example the very poor article on "Tourism") which could not very well have been left out, or perhaps even amended, without possible offence to a sponsor. Such lapses are rare, however; of the eleven chapters, the first ("The Country and Its People") and the fifth ("Society") seem to me outstanding, while some of the others ("Structure of the State, Education and Science, Religion"), although inevitably rather dry, are highly satisfactory as overall summaries and factual sources. For the general reader, (and surely there will be some), "The Country and Its People", together with the "History", would provide excellent foundations of knowledge about Hungary. The first chapter covers climate, hydrography, topography, soil cover, flora and fauna, together with sections on the origins of the Hungarians, population, demographic trends, ethnic minorities and a particularly well written piece on language. As it happens, the author of this (Tamás Vladár) is an MTI journalist, whereas other contributors tend to be specialists.

One of the most distinguished of the latter is Béla Kádár, the former Minister of International Economic Relations, whose piece is extraordinarily thorough—indeed suffers at times from statistical overkill. To the layman, struggling to absorb the significance of a tidal wave of economic data, there also appear to be occasional contradictions, or at least paradoxes, in the text. Thus we are told that the appreciation of the forint by 25 per cent between 1989 and 1993, while it tempered inflation and made imports cheaper, also "reduced the prof-

itability and weakened the competitiveness on foreign markets" of Hungarian agricultural and food industry products. That being so, it is puzzling to learn in the next sentence that agricultural exports rose from US $340 million in 1989, to $650 million in 1992 and topped $700 million in 1993. Despite this apparent confusion and some rather opaque passages in the translation, the article succeeds in supplying an understandable and detailed analysis of Hungary's roller-coaster ride to a fully fledged market economy. All the essential data are presented and discussed, whether it be the amount of foreign investment in Hungary (more than 50 per cent of the total in former Comecon countries), the horrendous debt burden costing 10 per cent of GDP to service, or the budget deficit (7 per cent of GDP in 1992).

Two general points seem to emerge: the first is that Hungary has paid dearly in terms of transitional and social costs for its decision to honour its debts, particularly compared to Poland (which reneged on its debts) or the Czech Republic (whose debt burden was light). This is a policy that pays off in terms of international credit-worthiness, as long as the social fabric is not stretched beyond breaking point by pursuing it. Secondly, there seems to be quite a lot of evidence that the Hungarian economy touched bottom in 1993 (like some western economies), and that a post-recession surge in world economic activity, if it emerges, could allow Hungary to trade out of its difficulties over time. That may be no consolation to those living below the poverty line, (about 23 per cent of the population according to the article on "Society"), but macroeconomic indicators always run well ahead of what in England is called the "feel good factor", and what in Hungary should perhaps be called the "feel very slightly better factor".

It is indeed the section on "Society" that offers the most depressing reading in the book. The problems often seem overwhelming, especially in the area of social security and pensions. All western economies are now in a state of near-panic over financing the pensions of a longer living population, when the numbers of economically active are shrinking as a proportion of the whole. It seems that Hungary has the worst of every possible world; as the author (Rudolf Andorka) bluntly states: "Pensions are too low, are offered to too many and begin too early". In only three years (1989–1992), the number of pensioners increased by 30 per cent and now constitutes one quarter of the population. Nor is this situation ameliorated by the fact that the death rate has exceeded the birth rate since 1981, a phenomenon that induces apocalyptic gloom in some Hungarian patriots. The gloom is unlikely to be dispelled by the news that the Hungarian suicide rate is today the highest statistically observed rate in the world, although it has declined slightly since 1988. High unemployment, low life expectancy and a health system struggling with budgetary restrictions are further reasons for pessimism, and nobody expects much improvement in the short term.

To turn from Rudolf Andorka's sober and sobering piece to the article on Tourism is to be transported from the real world into the glossy never-never land of travel advertisements, where anything and everything that might disturb the idyllic picture has been airbrushed out. Up to this point, the book has been measured, informative and authoritative; but here it abruptly changes gear and the reader finds himself being pelted with the worst bromides and clichés of Travel Agents' adspeak. The Danube at Ráckeve is "a veritable Eldorado", we hear of Margit Kovács' "enchanting oeuvre", Sopron is "a veritable treasure trove" of monuments, and by now you will not be surprised to hear that it has also preserved its "fairy-tale atmosphere";

in Veszprém "the very stones speak" (so be careful when you tread on them) and the Gemenc Forest (how could it be otherwise?) is a "Garden of Eden". One appreciates that the author prefers not to mention the thousands of dead eels that floated to the surface of Lake Balaton not so long ago, but to describe the lake as "romantic and refreshing", with its "picturesque, exhilarating and bustling atmosphere" is largely meaningless, when not (as in the case of far too many Balaton resorts) downright untruthful. So anxious is the author not to disturb the one-dimensional view on offer, that Mohács becomes no more than a place "bursting with merriment" at Carnival time. There is no word about the most important and moving burial ground in Hungary, a place of almost mystical significance. But then, burial grounds would scarcely fit the image of Southern Hungary we have been given in the introduction, and which includes the rash claim that "the mood of residents in this part of [the country] reflects the long hours of sunshine". This last observation reminds me of an English guide to Yugoslavia published some years ago, in which the author gravely remarked that the southern Slavs were a "morally and sexually healthy" people. Such fatuities are certainly hostages to fortune; but worse than that, they take up valuable space which could be used to supply real insights and information.

Despite the shortcomings of the piece on Tourism, it is nice that one can be unequivocally positive, not only about the majority of the text, but also about the really excellent production values of the book. It is well designed, clearly printed and presented in hard-wearing plastic covers. The quality of the colour illustration is quite exceptional, successfully capturing the atmosphere ("fairy-tale" or not) of city, village and landscape. István Faragó's sombre picture of the Parliament in the gloaming is one of the best I have ever seen, and he has also contributed many of the other marvellous colour shots in the book. Every picture is credited individually on the bottom left-hand side, a great improvement (for both photographer and reader) on the blur of names and page numbers that usually constitute the picture credits. The publishers also deserve a few hosannas for supplying an index. I hope the latter does not prove to be an aberration, soon to be corrected by irate financial controllers and production managers, for this alone makes the book stand out from so many information and scholarly books published locally.

Does this book succeed in "selling" Hungary? I would say emphatically "yes". Ironically, it is least effective at doing so where the sales pitch is most overt. This thought prompts a cautionary tale about a Budapest professor of my acquaintance, who was hosting a conference of visiting American scholars. Somewhat carried away in his presentation of the world metropolis, Budapest, he grandly informed them that Nagymező utca was the "Broadway of Pest". In the evening, the enthusiastic Americans hastened thither for a whiff of the vibrant cultural atmosphere. Finding only a couple of rather run-down looking establishments, neither of which reminded them very much of Broadway, they assumed that they had heard the address incorrectly and returned despondently to their hotels. The moral of this story is that Hungary unhyped is better than Hungary hyped; it is fascinating enough in itself to a visitor with an inquiring mind. Such a visitor is also likely to be a potential reader of this excellent book, but is surely not the sort of person who will endure having his or her intelligence insulted with mindless prattle about "bygone times", "Eldorados" and "extraordinary fish". ❧

"There Was Perfect Understanding Between Us"

Zoltán Kocsis on Sviatoslav Richter

This being Sviatoslav Richter's 80th birthday, I would like to ask you what you remember of your joint music making. Was it a recording of yours, or a concert or recital that he first heard? What did he hear that made him decide that he wanted to play chamber music with you?

I think the first recording of mine that Richter heard was of Bartók's Piano Concerto No. 2, which I made with György Lehel and the Radio Orchestra for the Hungaroton Complete Bartók Edition. I was told he played this for many people, in Moscow and elsewhere. Then, although we had not met, he invited me to the 1975 Tours Festival. In this small town in the heart of France the concerts are held in a granary, but because of Richter, the festival is now fairly widely known. He actually invited me as a guest, not as a participant, just to attend the concerts. I did not even take tails—my most formal piece of clothing was a white roll-neck pullover. It so happened that Pollini had a motoring accident and I had to step in for him.

So in the end you gave a solo recital?

Yes, in that white roll-neck pullover. This was when Richter first heard me play in public. I had heard him two days previously playing a wonderful *Hammerklavier* Sonata—he lost his way in the fourth movement, and so he repeated the finale—overwhelmingly.

It is common knowledge that he is his own severest critic. Was he just as severe with you? What sort of working relationship did you have with him?

I am just as strict with myself and with others, to no small extent because of the influence of Richter, whom I first heard on a concert platform—if my memory serves me right—in 1969 or 1970. So in 1977, after my stepping-in at Tours, he called me back for a four-hand performance. Richter found me a good partner since I prepared my part properly and no technical problems propped up in rehearsals. The differences were rather of a musical nature, concerning apprehension and interpretation.

In certain details—tempo indications, phrasing, dynamics—did you have differences in which you finally succeeded in convincing him of your point?

Yes, of course that happened. I am of a more scholarly cast of mind, I treat what the composer has put down on paper as more sacred than Richter does. He tries to decipher the messages written between and behind the notes at least as much as I

do, perhaps even more than I do. So that he—following Furtwängler—prefers to read by looking behind the notes, while I try to learn everything from the score as it is written. The confrontation resulting from the clash of these two views was not particularly sharp: I can safely say that the understanding between us was perfect in Tours (and earlier too, while we were preparing, when I had accompanied him for three weeks on his Swiss tour, and during this time we were rehearsing.) On some minor issues—questions of phrasing and the length of the various notes—there were indeed points that had to be discussed. Richter never plays from an *Urtext* score because, and this is connected to what I have just said, he does not consider the question of authenticity to be that interesting. On the other hand, I feel that it is not for nothing that a composer writes something down. In the end we reached a kind of homogeneity, both in sound and style, which is fairly rare in four-hand piano playing—and even when it is achieved, it is precisely the very essence, the true bringing to life of the music, that most often is lost.

Richter's touch, his sound is not as pregnant as that of some others, for instance Gould's, who can immediately be recognized. His is a more abstract ideal.

Richter's playing is really non-material. Let me say that for me this is one of the great merits of his technique, which in other ways is not without the influence of the Russian school. It's absolutely undeniable that schools do exist—Hungarian, Russian, German, French—and, of course, this differentiation is valid for the approach to an instrument, and not always in a fortunate way. In the Russian school, I feel, there is a fair amount of the kind of professionalism which is not always successful, which for instance seeks to extract the most from the instrument with the least amount of energy. Somehow, Richter himself would have been one of these people—had his talent not taken him, from the very beginning, much further along. Neuhaus, his teacher, writes somewhere that Richter does not actually practise, rather he "keeps playing" with the works—right up to the point when they sound perfect. Here naturally there can be huge surprises: somewhere else, Neuhaus writes that Richter was once able to learn three piano concertos in a single week and play them at a concert. These were Rachmaninov's in F sharp minor, Glazunov's and Rimsky-Korsakov's. Richter himself says that he likes to take things easy but once he is caught by a piece, he plays it endlessly. You should not look for any great secrets behind Richter's way of practising, it's simply based on his love of music.

As far as his piano playing as such is concerned: *pace* Gould or Pollini, Richter in all probability knows more about playing the piano than others do. Richter works very thoroughly on technical problems, but the moment he has solved one, it is immediately turned into music. Let me search among my memories: Schumann's *Traumes Wirren* is a very difficult work, it needs an awful lot of practice and it sets serious technical challenges. In Richter's case, the final result is one in which I don't hear or feel the various stages of the road that led to its realization technically.

When listening to a Richter recital or recording, I sometimes feel (the Wohltemperiertes Klavier *is a case in point) that his performance wishes to radiate not so much the world, the gestures and atmosphere of a given stylistic ideal, rather the inner logic of the work.*

This is a more complex question, and it's not really possible to give an answer in a

nutshell. Naturally it's partly related to the fact that Richter did not travel outside Russia for a very long time. There, a kind of general taste reigned, and a general way of approaching a work. And in Russia, too, stylistic ideals had their influence, and these ideals do not necessarily coincide with the Central European tradition which we consider to be the right one. Of course this brings the question of how far a performer can go, in what areas he can safely add to the work from his own resources without causing a break in style, and where he must strictly follow the composer's prescriptions. In the final analysis I think Richter listens to his intuition. I had long talks with him precisely about how to play Bach, and about Gould...

What is Richter's opinion of Gould?

He said he considered Gould to be a wonderful artist, but what he offered was still too little. The clue perhaps lies in the fact that to understand Bach one must reach down deeper than the music itself. But to return to Richter, unlike Gould, he is not (or not only) in love with the notes, but with music as such.

Do you consider Richter to be a 19th century or a 20th century artist type?

The 20th century, absolutely. He shows no signs of the licence which is so typical of the 19th century, but, which, as a whole range of highly gifted composers had proved, can be curbed. Let's just take Liszt, a more typical example of a licence taking artist you cannot imagine, yet he systematized what he could. Richter's 20th century quality can be derived from that "mopping-up operation" which has swept away 19th century licence once and for all. I could mention many such moppers up from the past, for example Josef Hofmann, of whom Stravinsky wrote with great respect as early as the thirties—and who, in a way, can be taken as the predecessor of the Russian piano school that Richter originates from. Or take Edwin Fischer, Arthur Schnabel or Bartók—they deliberately avoided the Romantic repertoire: the superficially brilliant pieces which make a wonderful impact when heard from the podium, but have not much to do with the more profound contents of music. Or there is Rachmaninov; as a composer he perhaps belongs to the 19th century, but as a performer he is still one of the great 20th century purifiers and represents the principle of reducing to the minimum possible any infiltration of elements which do not belong to the work or the style. This is tantamount to honesty in a Tolstoyan sense: art can be this or that, it can be of any kind but, before all, it must be sincere. Richter meets this demand to the maximum.

The crucial word for the basic experience that connects Richter to music seems not to be joy, domination or release, but service and suffering. Listening to Richter, I have often felt that his attitude is basically tragic.

Well, he is certainly not an Apollonian type... I don't know whether that sentence in itself is not enough to sum him up. There is a great deal of artistic ambition in Richter, which urges him never to rest on his laurels. In this sense he is never happy. No sooner has he produced something out of himself, that he starts to worry about the next problem and how to solve it: he is planning programmes, selecting works to place side by side, and he wants to have an instructive influence on audiences too. This is not necessarily the basic attitude of a sufferer: the simple fact is that he has an engine inside him that urges him along.

I had in mind some specifics of how he works, for instance the imposition of daily practice that he sets out for himself almost like a clerk, and if he is unable to meet this, he imposes even more on himself—the whole thing has a singular, almost religious, sometimes expiatory character.

Yes, that's true. But then what a good feeling it is to sit down at a concert knowing that you have done all the necessary homework and perhaps it was exactly those ten minutes, added to the practice, which were so useful! Or take the "bad" practices when you feel simply awful—but the next day when you again sit down to the instrument and the playing goes well, you think, "wasn't it good that I held on yesterday and did not get up from the piano". In this sense Richter and Gould—now that we have linked the two names—have perfectly different make-ups. When playing was not going well for Gould, he tended to leave off because he thought that going on at times like that would do more harm than good. Richter is different—and so I should add am I. I believe too that bad practices are also necessary because even in them there is something good. At least you get to know what is bad and which direction not to pursue—but first you must take that bad direction all the way to the point that you come up against a wall. I think Richter's practising is very close to this. I did not use to think so, but now I do believe that the quantitative difference between a lot of and too little work is reassuring, even for a truly gifted person. If I work more I will obviously feel more confident.

Richter's path has been irregularly "retarded": over twenty when he entered the Moscow Conservatory, which he attended for eight years, thirty-eight when he won his first competition, the Leipzig Bach. His international career also started quite late. Could this singular drive which has so slowly gathered momentum have a message for the present age, when twenty-year-old musicians, simply because of their agents, can look back on careers of several years, and then burn out at the same rate. Is it possible that Richter's trajectory links with the slow development of his carreer?

Certainly, though I would also mention that Richter's debut was delayed by political conditions as well. I have heard that Richter was no blue-eyed boy politically in the Soviet Union, his great talent did not matter, and initially he was not given the same chances that were granted, for instance, to Gilels, another student of Neuhaus, much sooner. So there were some outside reasons for the delay as well. But it is also true that because of his late start, Richter had an arsenal at his disposal at the very beginning which others could not have possessed. Of Gilels, I cannot imagine what Richter himself once told me: that he could have performed the whole third scene of Debussy's *Pelléas*, and in a manner that all the significant parts could be heard. This is obviously connected with Richter's work as an opera coach—but I would like to see an opera coach who can do that in the same way! We keep finding newer and newer elements in Richter's art—elements that are closely linked to each other and reinforce each other. The way he plays Prokofiev, for example, obviously follows from his personal relationship with Prokofiev—yet, the crucial thing is not this, but the fact that he knows practically all of Prokofiev's works. And this can only be achieved by the kind of steady work, which is more and more difficult to come by in our times. ❧

Kristóf Csengery

Alan Walker

Liszt and his Pupils

Pianist, composer, conductor, teacher, author, administrator, cofounder of the Romantic Movement in music...

Franz Liszt was one of those protean figures who did so much for music that he poses a perennial challenge to criticism. The pianist obscures the composer, the composer the conductor, the conductor the author, and so on. Is it possible to have so many gifts that they turn into liabilities, so many talents which clamour for attention that they cancel one another out? The multi-gifted artist ought to be a cause for general rejoicing. Too often, however, we place him in Limbo, unable to cope with his versatility.

Let me begin with a single assertion of fact: Liszt was the greatest piano teacher of his generation. He began to teach during his mid adolescence, in the 1820s, and he continued right up to the last month of his life, in July 1886. More than 400 students are known to have passed through his hands, and a number of them became eminent.[1] Liszt's Weimar classes, held during the 'seventies and 'eighties had a decisive influence on the history of piano playing. He virtually created the "masterclass", a concept that still flourishes today. He believed that young masters would find one another artistically stimulating, and that the competitive climate would raise artistic standards. His students included Moriz Rosenthal, Siloti, Emil Sauer, Tausig, von Bülow and Friedheim, some of whom lived well into the 1940s. Their gramophone records give us a fascinating glimpse into a golden age of piano playing, now vanished forever.

What was Liszt like as a teacher? There is a wealth of testimony on the subject, much of it from the pupils themselves. Liszt was not interested in playing the pedagogue. He had no 'method', no 'system', no technical advice of any kind to offer his students. Not for him an analytical pursuit into the processes of piano playing. Frankly, the subject bored him. "Do I care how quickly you can play octaves?" he once thundered at a pupil renowned for his dexterity in this field. The

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Alan Walker
has just finished the third volume of his ongoing life of Franz Liszt. It will be published by Alfred A. Knopf (New York) in early 1996.

1 ■ Comprehensive lists have been drawn up by Viktor Papp, August Göllerich, and Carl Lachmund but they are not complete.

last thing the supreme master of the keyboard was concerned with was the physical problems associated with the instrument. As they had long since ceased to exist for him, he no longer considered them. Technical drudgery was a matter for each individual to cope with in his own way. As Liszt put it, he expected his pupils to wash their dirty linen at home. He often used an aphorism which still gives us food for thought: "Technique should be created from spirit, not from mechanics."[2]

Of course, by observing Liszt himself play—watching the lie of his hands on the keyboard, seeing how certain passages were fingered, studying his pedal-effects—his pupils received the best possible guidance, and they learned far more than they might have done from a dry, academic description of these events.

All this stood in marked contrast to Liszt's contemporaries, some of whom were obsessed with technical gimmickry. Kalkbrenner, for example, used a hand-rail to make the wrists conform to the correct lateral motions of playing. Kullak, who used to frown on all surplus movement, insisted that his pupils play with a coin balanced on the back of the hand. (All this did, as one pupil wrily observed, was to give people plenty of practice in picking up fallen coins off the floor.) The most notorious of these mechanical aids was Logier's "Chiroplast", an amazing invention of rods and rings through which the luckless pupil was obliged to insert his thumbs and fingers, all freedom restricted, like a manacled prisoner.[3] Needless to add, not one of these methods produced a pianist. Liszt produced pianists, however, and their technique was considerable, despite his non-technical approach.

If you ask how anyone can acquire technique without being taught technique, I would find that difficult to answer. I can tell you only that it happens. We are all familiar with brilliant teachers who produce bumbling pupils, and bumbling teachers who produce brilliant pupils. In my more desperate moments I am led to conclude that there is no causal connection between teaching and learning whatever. I am convinced, however, that a link of affection and empathy between teacher and pupil is important, for without it the pupil will never accept the master as his model, and begin mysteriously to absorb whatever it is he feels that model has to offer. But for the rest, I begin to see what Schopenhauer meant when he declared: "If teaching were of any avail, how could Nero be Seneca's pupil?"

Most of Liszt's teaching during his Weimar years, in the 1850s, was done in the Altenburg, the old house on the hill, overlooking the River Ilm and the city of Goethe and Schiller, where he lived for twelve years. The Altenburg, which was bought for Liszt's use by Maria Pavlovna (the reigning Grand Duchess of Weimar), contained more than 40 rooms, and became a shrine to Liszt's memory even during his tenure there, housing all the treasures he had accumulated during his years of travel. The gifts from kings and potentates were all exhibited for the visitor to admire. Here could be seen the jewel-encrusted Hungarian sword-of-honour, the silver breakfast service presented to him by the Philharmonic Society in London, the medals from Moscow, Madrid and Berlin, and the solid silver music desk inscribed with the names of more than a hundred eminent musicians. Beethoven's

2 ■ Lina Ramann: *Liszt-Pädagogium*, Series I, p. 6.

3 ■ A very good description of the "Chiroplast" may be found in Arthur Loesser's *Men, Women and Pianos*, pp. 297–301, New York 1954. One of the early models (1819) is illustrated in the article on Logier in *The New Grove*, vol. 11, p. 132. (London 1980).

old Broadwood piano also stood there, together with his priceless deathmask, which had been presented to Liszt by an admirer ten years earlier.[4]

Visitors to the Altenburg during the 1850s included Wagner, Berlioz, Raff, Cornelius, Brahms, Joachim, George Eliot and Hans Christian Andersen. By the mid-1850s, the historic old house had become a Mecca of modern music to which the faithful trekked across Europe to pay their respects to Liszt—who was already acknowledged as the leader of the avant-garde in Germany.

Among the pupils who studied with Liszt at the Altenburg were Carl Tausig, Hans von Bülow, Karl Klindworth, Hans von Bronsart, Robert Pflughaupt, Ingeborg Starck, Dionys Pruckner, Felix Draeseke, and the American pianist William Mason, who afterwards wrote an informative Memoir covering his years with Liszt.[5] Tausig and Bülow stand out as major names in the history of the piano. They were often called by the Greek name 'the Dioscuri', the sons of Zeus who sprang fully armed from their father with magical gifts.

It was well-known that Liszt disliked infant prodigies ("Artists who *are* to be!" he called them scathingly) but Tausig's father appears not to have heard the news when he brought the 12-year-old Carl from Poland to Weimar in order to play for Liszt. Liszt at first refused to hear the *Wunderkind*, and Tausig senior was forced to concoct a simple ruse. While Liszt was drinking wine with a group of friends, young Tausig was smuggled into the Altenburg and led to a piano in an adjoining room. At a pre-arranged signal he began to play Chopin's A flat major Polonaise with such brilliance that after a few bars Liszt looked round and cried "I'll take him!"[6] Thus began one of the closest relationships Liszt ever enjoyed with a pupil. Tausig moved into the Altenburg and lived there for two years as a member of the family. Liszt was astonished at the way in which his talent flourished, and used to say of him that Tausig was his true heir. Tausig was something of a prankster; he was frequently left to his own devices, and his escapades often taxed Liszt's patience. Once, Tausig's father bought him a new grand piano which was delivered to the Altenburg from Leipzig. Tausig proceeded to saw off the corners of the keys in order to make them more difficult to strike, and thus improve his technique, leaving the father to settle a large repair bill before the instrument had even been paid for. On another occasion Tausig, who always seemed to be short of pocket-money, sold the manuscript of Liszt's *Faust* Symphony to a scrap-paper merchant, and Liszt had to go in search of the man and buy back the score of this masterpiece.[7]

"Carlchen," Liszt used to say, "you'll either become a great blockhead or a great master!"[8] There was never any real doubt about which it would be. For a brief, ten-year period he enjoyed a shining career and became the model against which all

4 ■ For a comprehensive history of the Altenburg, and an accurate description of its interior at the time of Liszt's tenure, see Jutta Hecker's *Die Altenburg: Geschichte eines Hauses*, Berlin 1983. Hecker also clarifies the circumstances surrounding the purchase of the house by Maria Pavlovna, in 1850 (p. 101).

5 ■ Mason, William: *Memories of a Musical Life*, pp. 86–182, New York, 1901.

6 ■ Fay, Amy: *Music Study in Germany*, p. 251, New York, 1880.

7 ■ *Ibid.* pp. 278–79.

8 ■ *Ibid.* p. 250.

other pianists of his generation were judged. He died of typhoid fever in 1871, aged twenty-nine. It is difficult to form an impression of his playing, since he lived before the age of recording, but his keyboard transcriptions, which are still a challenge to play, reveal his consummate knowledge of the keyboard.

Bülow arrived at the Altenburg in 1851, and like Tausig enjoyed the run of the place. He soon became Liszt's trusted colleague, and his career took on all-embracing proportions. He not only became a wonderful pianist, but also developed into a composer and conductor—activities in which he was helped by Liszt.[9] Bülow had a phenomenal memory and he was among the first to dispense with his scores on the podium. Indeed, when he was appointed conductor of the Meiningen Court Orchestra in 1880 he insisted that the entire orchestra play from memory as well! Bülow had a sharp tongue and a mercurial temperament, and his colleagues learned to fear his banter. He could not abide professional incompetence, and whenever Liszt (in later years) asked him to take over his masterclasses in Weimar, the students went about in fear and trembling—and with good reason, for it was his habit to "sweep the stables clean", as he put it, by sending the less gifted ones packing. After hearing one young girl plough through Liszt's difficult study *Mazeppa* (which depicts a Cossack chieftain bound naked to a wild horse, streaking across the Ukrainian Steppes, as a punishment) Bülow told her that her only qualification for playing the work was that she had the soul of a horse! To another he said that she should be swept out of the class "not with a broom but with a broomstick!" Bülow gave the first performance of Liszt's B minor Sonata (Berlin, 1857), and he frequently conducted his master's symphonic poems. A fine tribute to Liszt was the dedication of his edition of the Beethoven Sonatas "To Franz Liszt, as the fruits of his teaching."

The next few years were times of storm and stress for Liszt, and we must gloss over them rapidly. We recall that after years of intrigue against him, Liszt was forced to resign his position at Weimar; that he closed down the Altenburg; that two of his children (Daniel and Blandine, by his youthful liaison with Marie d'Agoult) died in harrowing circumstances; that his long-postponed marriage to Princess Sayn-Wittgenstein was thwarted at the eleventh hour by the Vatican; that he took holy orders in 1865; and that he then endured a series of mental depressions which at times filled his old age with darkness. Worst of all, he saw his music rejected, eclipsed by that of Wagner, Schumann, and Chopin, whose own careers he had done so much to foster. It must have seemed to him that everything he had striven for had turned to ashes. Life left its mark on his physiognomy. He was once spotted by Gregorovius, who described him in his *Roman Journal* as "tall, thin, with long grey hair... he is burnt out ...only the outer walls remain, from whence a little ghost-like flame hisses forth."[10]

And yet there was a bright spot in all this darkness, and as the years rolled by it

9 ■ Liszt always called Bülow his favourite pupil, and claimed that his mantle had fallen on the young man's shoulders. After Bülow became his son-in-law (through marriage to Cosima Liszt, in 1857) the connection became even more intimate and Liszt did much good by stealth for his protegé—particularly in the matter of securing conducting engagements for him.

10 ■ Gregorovius, Ferdinand: *The Roman Journals*, 1852–1874, edited by Friedrich Althaus and translated from the second German edition by Mrs Gustavus W. Hamilton, p. 201. London 1907.

grew into shining proportions and cast a glow over all Liszt's activities. In 1869 the Grand Duke of Weimar invited Liszt back to Weimar, placed a new home at his disposal (the so-called Hofgärtnerei), and encouraged him to turn Weimar once more into the centre of his activities. Pupils now flocked to him from the four quarters, and for the last 25 years of his life Liszt's fame rested mainly on his Weimar masterclasses, which attracted some of the greatest talents of the age.[11]

One of Liszt's best pupils was Moriz Rosenthal. He arrived in Weimar in 1878, when he was about 17 years old, and studied with Liszt until the master's death about eight years later. Rosenthal's repertoire was vast—he played the whole of Chopin from memory, for example—and his delivery was marked by technical brilliance, fire and poetry. His dazzling rendering of Chopin's Waltz in A flat major (op. 42) still sounds fresh and vital today, although more than fifty years have passed since he made the recording.[12]

Rosenthal abandoned the piano for a time in order to study philosophy at the University of Vienna. A man of great culture and learning, he was much more than a keyboard technician. The prospect of crouching over a piano for three or four hours a day, keeping his fingers up to concert pitch, would have represented a waste of time to him.

But back to Liszt's classes. What made them so exceptional was their emphasis on interpretation. Liszt would take apart a Beethoven sonata, phrase by phrase, in order to get his pupils to comprehend the music behind the music. In so doing, he established traditions of performance which survive to the present time. His masterclasses were quite informal, and held in a relaxed atmosphere in the music-room of the Hofgärtnerei. They usually took place in the afternoons, and sometimes as many as a dozen students took part, with a score of observers sitting in the background. The custom was for one student to play, Liszt and the others looking on, after which Liszt would make a few observations and perhaps even play through the work himself. These were moments to treasure, and the atmosphere could become electric when Liszt, displeased with the way a performance was going, would push the student off the stool in an attempt to revive the flagging music. The whole keyboard would thunder and lighten, and the trembling student would get a glimpse into a mighty conception of the work which, until then, lay locked up behind the notes of the music. Liszt was an inspirational force. Simply to be in the same room as him, as more than one student testified, turned one temporarily into a better pianist.

11 ■ This new generation of pupils included Arthur Friedheim, Alexander Siloti, Eugen d'Albert, Alfred Reisenauer, Sophie Menter, Moriz Rosenthal, Emil Sauer, Frederic Lamond, István Thomán, and Giovanni Sgambati. Practically every pianist of note who enjoyed an international career before World War I, with the notable exceptions of Busoni and Paderewski, had been a pupil of Liszt. We are not wrong to call him "the father of modern piano playing."

12 ■ Originally recorded on the old Victor label (no. 14299), in 1942, this performance should not be confused with Rosenthal's Ampico Piano Roll of 1926. The Ampico rolls constitute one of the greatest frauds in the history of piano playing. Unlike gramophone records, piano rolls can be played back at any speed without a corresponding change of pitch. Ampico was notorious in indicating a playback speed far in excess of the one used to make the recording—in order to create the illusion of greater "virtuosity". Wrong notes could likewise easily be corrected on the roll, whereas on the old 78 r.p.m. discs they lay where they fell.

Another outstanding pupil was the Scottish pianist Frederic Lamond, who, like Rosenthal, went to Liszt while he was still a 'teenager. In 1945, when Lamond was 78 years old, he was persuaded to go into the BBC studios in Glasgow and record his reminiscences of Liszt. Although sixty years had elapsed since he had last seen and heard his teacher, his memories of that vanished epoch remained as clear as ever.

> We who were studying with Liszt, met together every second day at the Hofgärtnerei. Sometimes there were only a few of us. He could be very strict, even severe in his remarks. The mere mechanical attainments of pianoforte technique meant very little to him. Speed, pure and simple, of which so much is made by many pianists of the present day, he held in contempt. I remember a pianist who was performing Chopin's Polonaise in A flat, and playing it with great gusto. When he came to the celebrated octave passage in the left hand, Liszt interrupted him by saying: "I don't want to listen to how fast you can play octaves. What I wish to hear is the canter of the horses of the Polish cavalry before they gather force and destroy the enemy."
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> These few words were characteristic of Liszt. The poetical vision always rose before his mental eye, whether it was a Beethoven Sonata, a Chopin Nocturne, or a work of his own.[13]

Did Liszt have any general principles of interpretation? The answer to this question is not unlike that given by the Irish judge who once declared that as a general principle he had *no* general principles. Still, two of Liszt's more thought-provoking ideas can be mentioned here, since they are indicative of the way in which he taught and played. For example, Liszt talked ironically about the "Pontius Pilate offence" in art. By this, he meant that he had no time for those artists who ritually washed their hands in public of the music they played, who claimed "classical objectivity", who detached themselves from their art. He argued that the "cult of personality" was less harmful to music than the "cult of anonymity". He knew that Diderot's celebrated paradox about actors (that in their art they can only be true by being false) cannot possibly be applied to musicians, who can only be true *by being true*. He saw his first duty as a teacher, then, to encourage his pupils to discover themselves. It is almost as if he believed the cynical aphorism: "There are no great teachers, only great pupils." How well he succeeded is borne out by the enormous diversity of playing he encouraged among them. Only the bad teacher is interested in producing copies of himself.

The other idea is equally stimulating. In 1875, the Royal Academy of Music was opened in Budapest and Liszt was appointed its first President. This gave him the chance to draw up its curriculum. He insisted that all piano students study composition, that all composition students study the piano. This injunction seems harsh. What conservatory today would tolerate it? Liszt, however, thought that the separation of performance from composition was detrimental to both, that music was indivisible. Until his death, in 1886, all

13 ■ BBC Sound Archives, 16801 MY 4. Recorded on 6 March 1945. This radio script was later incorporated into *The Memoirs of Frederic Lamond*, Glasgow 1949. The above passage is reproduced on p. 68. In the course of his radio presentation, Lamond played a number of Liszt's works, including *Feux-follets* and the D flat major Concert Study (*Un Sospiro*). Unlike Rosenthal, Lamond regarded himself as a composer first and a pianist second, and he tended to neglect his technique. But one is never in doubt that a musician is presiding at the keyboard.

his students at the Budapest Academy had to graduate in improvisation. It is a fact that most of Liszt's students who later dominated the field of performance also *composed*. The link is so consistent that we can postulate a causal connection between their interest in *creation* and their excellence in *re*-creation. Certainly, it could be said of Liszt himself that he played with the insight of a composer and composed with the outlook of a performer.

Another pianist who was a young man of twenty or so when he sought out Liszt in Weimar was Emil Sauer. Sauer left a vivid account of his studentship under Liszt—which occupied the years 1884 and 85—and he, too, testified to the fact that Liszt emphasized interpretation, not technique. It used to be customary for all the students to gather in the music-room of the Hofgärtnerei a few minutes before Liszt himself entered, having first deposited the music they wished to play in a great pile on top of the piano. Liszt would then enter, everyone would stand up respectfully, and he would leaf through the music that had been left for his scrutiny. When he found something that he wanted to hear that day, he would hold it up and ask: "Who plays this?" The luckless owner was then expected to come forward, seat himself at the piano, and play before an audience of his peers. It was a nerve-wracking experience, admits Sauer, but it was one of the finest possible training-grounds. If a young artist could survive such a baptism of fire (this audience contained some of the best-known names in piano-playing) nothing he was likely to encounter in the years ahead need bother him. Sauer tells us that having played a Rhapsody of Liszt somewhat shakily, he was mortified when Arthur Friedheim followed him to the piano and delivered a stunning performance of Liszt's fantasie on *Lucrezia Borgia*. Sauer resolved to improve his technique or perish in the attempt.[14] Once more we see the master-class principle at work: one young master stimulating another: peer rivalry, physical competition if you like, under the watchful eye and in the stimulating presence of a benign guru. Sauer's records, like those of Lamond, suggest that he was an uneven pianist. His playing bears the marks of its period and unfolds somewhat more freely than might today be tolerable. But all records are time-capsules. Who knows what they will be saying in a hundred years' time about some of the steel-fingered, chromium-plated virtuosi who presently occupy the world stage?

Liszt charged nothing for his lessons. All were welcome to attend and Weimar was crowded out with students during the months that Liszt was in residence. The sound of practising filled the air. Eventually the city council was forced to pass a bye-law forbidding practising with open windows. Offenders were fined three marks, and given an official receipt. The thought that he had become a public nuisance in his old age probably gave Liszt deep satisfaction.

Liszt was a solace to his students; they were certainly a solace to him. He saw in them his posterity. At a time when the world had started to shun his music, he knew that he could safely entrust his legacy to the gifted young. ❧

14 ■ Sauer, Emil: *Meine Welt*, pp. 162–78. Stuttgart 1901.

Erzsébet Bori

Mao et al.

Szilveszter Siklósi: *Az igazi Mao* (Mao, the Real Man) • Zsuzsa Böszörményi: *Vörös Colibri* (Red Colibri) • Péter Gothár: *A részleg* (The Section) • József Pacskovszky: *Esti Kornél csodálatos utazása* (The Wondrous Voyage of Kornél Esti)

This year's annual festival of Hungarian films was held in February, introducing films that have since been released and shown in the cinemas. The big surprise of this year was a short feature film in the guise of a documentary, *Mao, the Real Man*.

Szilveszter Siklósi (b. 1944), who has made his name as a documentary film-maker, used a screenplay based on an idea of András Szekér. One of those so-called experts who flourish on all TV channels presents his historical researches and sets out a challenging hypothesis which, in more than one respect, revolutionalizes our knowledge of world history. Real and faked archive recordings and "genuine" eye-witnesses are brought along to produce the "irrefutable" evidence that there were actually two Mao Tse-tungs. The wise master had a twin brother who, when needed, acted as his double, so that while one of them headed the Long March, the other arranged the supply of arms for the fatherland as a mafia boss in Chicago. And that is not all: the background to the spectacular break between China and the Soviet Union is also revealed. A simple case of *cherchez la femme*. Mao and Nikita—Khrushchev at the time was also an important figure in organized crime in the New World—fell in love with the same lady, thus sowing the seed of discord between the two "American friends" and their empires for life.

Mao, the Real Man is a fake of the first order. However, its narrative line is so well worked out that it takes a while for you to realize you are being led by the nose (the actual point of the film depends on your knowledge of history), but once the penny drops you can only gratefully laugh at Mao's more gruelling and crasser "true" story, with its caricature of how television disseminates information in "fact-finding" documentaries. (The success of *Mao, the Real Man* can perhaps best be gauged by the fact that it has stirred a minor diplomatic scandal.)

Red Colibri, drawing on the deep waters of the present, also has mixed links with fact. Zsuzsa Böszörményi, whose first film this is, won a student Oscar way back in 1992 for her documentary *Once Upon a Time*. Both her parents, Géza Böszörményi and Lívia Gyarmathy are noted film-makers, who have written and directed splendid comedies, hard-hitting dramas and disturbing documentaries.

Erzsébet Bori
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The young Böszörményi set herself a hard task by seeking to make something that has been long missed and awaited in Hungarian film-making—a straightforward commercial success. Although this has only half come, the fault is not entirely hers. A good popular film calls for a well-turned story, interesting and attractive characters—played by the appropriate stars—excellent production values and, above all, money. The last, of course, is what Hungary has least of. Film-making has become increasingly expensive and these days it is virtually impossible without foreign support. This support, however, has its price. Producers have very definite ideas about what audiences like and that is what they want to see on the screen. *Red Colibri* was made with Italian money, and in return a hand was taken in everything from the script to editing, from casting to the music. Watching the film I felt that it was impaired by compromises inevitably involved. There is more to the Hungary of today, the individuals peopling it are more human, and one feels Italian and other audiences would find it easier to identify with the story if the promisingly talented Böszörményi, already well versed in her craft, had been given greater freedom.

Red Colibri is built around a divorcee bringing up a daughter and earning her living as a taxi driver. She works mainly at night because that pays better. She meets a young Ukrainian in dramatic circumstances—during an attempted robbery of a filling station—and falls head over heels in love with him. There is nothing surprising here, since Andrei is more than good-looking, he is dangerously handsome, a ballet dancer to boot, living in Hungary without residence or working papers. Not for him a brilliant solo career, he scrapes a living "on the black" and sleeps rough in a railway station. If lifted, his destination would be the reception camp at Kerepestarcsa, from where the road almost inevitably leads to expulsion and not to the desired West. However, our Andrei is fortunate. Anna stands by him, as does a Mr Abadze, an influential figure in the Budapest underworld, once a Red Army quartermaster colonel stationed in Hungary. Abadze's talents and old connections are put to good use as the owner of a disreputable night-club called the Red Colibri and as a gang boss. He gives Andrei work and obtains papers for him, and he even has great plans for him. Anna moves heaven and earth to see to it that her lover does not waste his talents in a sleazy night-club show but gets himself into the Opera. She is not aware that she is going to lose Andrei, for Abadze correctly points out that she is out of place in the underworld and in the world of artists, and that the coldly designing Andrei, who sells both his looks and his talents, is not right for her.

Indeed, Abadze is right about everything in the film. *Red Colibri*'s version seems to suggest that the Soviet occupation of Hungary has come to an end only in name, the key figures have stayed on in mufti, managing by pulling invisible strings. Trains arriving from the former Soviet Union pour out fresh drafts of official criminals, black-marketeers, prostitutes and hitmen to dominate the new market economy, trade in girls and drugs, and kill—all with impunity. Hungary today may not be an earthly paradise and Budapest can be as dangerous as any of the world's great cities, but that contention is grossly exaggerated. In actual fact, women taxi drivers have all but disappeared and those who still remain would not dream of working at night. Anna's job seems to have been selected as a compensatory character trait, since the actress playing her obviously has not the faintest idea of where she is, has no experience

nor any idea of this particular world. She may stiffly act out a hard and courageous woman, but her deep passion and her agony of despair are simply not believable. This heroine unbalances the whole film, which deserves a better fate.

The Section also has a woman at its centre and its director, Péter Gothár, has managed to find the appropriate character for it. Gothár, born in 1947, is of the middle generation of Hungarian film-makers and has made a name as a stage director as well. He turned to the excellent Kaposvár theatre company to cast Mari Nagy in the lead. Nagy as an actress strikes no poses, uses no dramatic flourishes. In other words, she works in what is in the most difficult mode for an actor to achieve, that of not acting. This is the Gizella Weisz she gives us, a woman neither beautiful nor young, who lives through no great emotions or events, and does not fight against her fate.

The film comes from Ádám Bodor's splendid short story (which appeared in *NHQ* 101, under the title "The Out-Station"), and Mari Nagy has unerringly matched the very essence of Bodor—a puritan uncontrivedness, a tone that confines to conveyance, pushing the narrator into the background. One critic has used the term ballad novelette for this kind of short story, blurring the borderline between reality and irreality, its archetype, its closest relation being Kafka's narrative. Bodor indicates neither the location, nor time, although the references make it clear that the setting is somewhere in Eastern Europe in the 1950s. By inference, the time is the year of Stalin's death, and bringing to bear the knowledge that the author was born in 1942 in Transylvania and, up to the time he settled in Hungary in 1982, had thus found himself living under a twin burden (of being Hungarian in Ceausescu's Romania), a fairly exact picture of the locale and the conditions of those who figure in his writing can be formed. Since Bodor is a short-story writer par excellence, he is not really accorded the appreciation he deserves in Hungarian literature, which even if implicity, shows greater respect for larger forms. It was not until a long-story, "Sinistra District", appeared in 1992 that Bodor at long last gained notoriety and the proper recognition his work merits. (A volume of selected stories by Bodor, *The Euphrates at Babylon*, was published by Polygon in England in 1991.) Bodor has created a world all his own in consistently brilliant volumes of short stories, each of a highly individual and uniform tone. Any single piece creates its own universe "in an atmospheric and material rather than an idiomatic sense," the critic mentioned writes, "because it succeeds with the simple, bare maintenance of narration and delivery ... to render one of the main features of the East Central European region, namely that there have been, and still are, successful attempts to liquidate the perception of history. The ballad novelette in this sense is the literary form for an archaic and brutal lack of freedom."

The Section is not the first literary work Gothár has adapted. He made two important films out of screenplays by contemporary writers (Géza Bereményi's *Time Stands Still*, 1981, and Péter Esterházy's *Time*, 1985), which present wry pictures of the Hungary of the period after 1956 and the 1980s, respectively. Making a film out of *The Section* had to wait for ten years, because Bodor's work was not considered "timely" in the Hungary of the 'eighties. In socialist newspeak, "not timely" meant too poignant by far and too cutting. But times had changed by 1994 and Gothár may have felt he had to reshape the original story so as to carry across its universal message and to reclaim something of its lost currency.

The central figure, Gizella Weisz (expressly a foreign name) has graduated from Lomonosov University in Moscow (but Paris in the film version) and works in a design office. She is appointed section leader in recognition of her good work and an innovative project, and is dispatched right away to her post. She travels for three days and three nights, by jeep, train, bus, rail-car and a horse-drawn cart before she arrives in a god-forsaken, deep valley in the back of the beyond, above the timber-line and enclosed by huge mountains. It is here that she has to share an unheated hovel with another outcast and with weasels.

Gizella Weisz sets out in the belief that she is only to spend a couple of days at her new post. By the end of her journey, not only does she lose this belief but, serially, all her personal belongings; she arrives at her destination deprived of everything, and now already knows that her "commission" is to last for years, perhaps for a lifetime. In its intention, the film tries to undo the story's ties with space and time, but only partially succeeds in doing so. The concrete images, the language, the discourse, the physical world and the environment inevitably imply period and locale. Another trap set for any director is the "cinematic quality" of Bodor's writing. A text is made cinematic by demotic dialogue, perceptive description, a world portrayed with a strong visual force, and a mode of non-disclosing, broken narration which allows the reader's fancy free rein. A film, on the other hand, is forced to display things: the director indulges in reverie while the viewer simply looks on. Gothár has undertaken the impossible, but he has salvaged for the screen whatever could be realized out of this impossible through the close adaptation that he has opted for. *The Section* is a fine, highly effective film, giving us a negative utopia and an authentic report on a once-existent (existing) and a possible (future) world.

The festival, which awarded Gothár's film its first prize, had another outstanding film, *The Wondrous Voyage of Kornél Esti*. This is a first film by József Pacskovszky, who also turned to a Hungarian literary source, stories by Dezső Kosztolányi, a brilliant writer of the inter-war period. Kosztolányi (1885–1936) was a master in practically all literary forms—a congenial poet, novelist, short-story writer and translator, whose journalism and reviews have also stood the test of time. Unlike Gothár, Pacskovszky aimed not so much at a faithful adaptation, exploiting not so much the given work as the writer himself as the protagonist and the subject for his film. The script starts out from the Kornél Esti stories of the 1930s (two autobiographical cycles of stories with the same title), which are supplemented here and there from Kosztolányi's oeuvre, from poems, other stories, diaries and letters. Kornél Esti is of course Kosztolányi's alter ego: no lesser self, more an immoderate, bold, student-like Doppelgänger existing alongside the writer, who has already made his name and settled down to middle-class values and conventions. Pacskovszky uses twin protagonists in the film, pitting the famous poet preparing for his last reading against his own youthful self in the person of Kornél, setting out abroad after his matriculation exam. The framework is a rail journey: the same train carries the fifty year old man to death, and the eighteen year old towards life and towards the sea. Their worlds are linked by drama, imagination and memory; memory and desire are so mixed that it cannot be known whether what we are seeing is the young man daydreaming about what it will feel like to be a successful writer or the older man looking back on his unclouded youth. Visually,

the film conjures up the benign comfort of middle-class life (we now know how brittle that was), the Europe of the last years of peace—fine clothes and drinks, elegant places, a pleasant environment, beautiful landscapes and beautiful objects, tactful people and brilliant women.

The film has caught the scintillation of Kosztolányi's charismatic personality and his work, the playful, ironical tone, high-flying ideas, his ease as a creator of fable and the magic power he used to enchant his readers (viewers), luring them into a world that has been lost and will never return. ❧

Sir—the CLOSE-UP article: "Not to Praise, but to Bury" by György Szücs (*HQ* 135), provides a glimpse behind the scenes to the non-Hungarian reader, as it explains the removal of some "national monuments" from public display into a sort of dinosaur cemetery.

The article does contain, however, one segment which seems to perpetuate a Soviet lie, parroted by communist Hungarian propaganda for far too long already. This obvious, unintentional error must be corrected.

György Szücs wrote inter alia: "...the statues of the two Soviet officers *shot during the siege* of Budapest, *while trying to convey* a truce offer..."(Italics are mine for emphasis).

Captains Steinmetz and Ostiapenko *were not shot*! Budapest guides and guide books do state the "fascists murdered" and/or "assassinated" them. Hence the falsification was apparently not detected by the author of the writing. The lie lived already for far too long.

Captain Steinmetz died as he was driven in his Russian jeep to come across the Hungarian lines, when the driver drove over a land mine on the road and that mine exploded, fragments killing the captain.

Ostiapenko died after he delivered the truce letter to the commander and was on his way back to his side. The Soviets, albeit they must have known that he had not yet returned back behind his lines, vehemently took the road under mortar fire. A mortar exploded in the returning officer's proximity and he fell, his companions continued on and they returned.

The US Army coined a phrase for such casualty events during the Iraqi war, they called the victims as having died due to: friendly fire.

Please let your English speaking readers know the truth. Thank you.

John C. Veszely
Nollamara
Western Australia

On October 26, the US' highest advisory body, the National Security Council, met for the first and last time during the Hungarian Revolution in order to evaluate events in Eastern Europe and to plan what kind of official message to communicate concerning US policy on the region. Amid the general confusion, there was one intelligent proposal, made by Harold A. Stassen, the President's advisor on disarmament. Stassen suggested that it would be expedient to offer assurances to the Soviets that the US would not seek to exploit the possible independence of the satellite countries in any way that could threaten the security of the Soviet Union. Although this suggestion was promptly rejected by the National Security Council, proponents of the plan succeeded in getting the President to endorse an expanded version of Stassen's original proposal the next day. According to the plan, the US, either through Tito or some other diplomatic channel, would attempt to convince the Soviets that a zone of strictly neutral, non-NATO countries, politically akin to Austria, would offer them just as much security as the existing buffer of satellite countries.

From: *"The 1956 Revolution and World Politics,"* by Csaba Békés, p. 109.

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