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Growth vs. Equilibrium

"To Unwork Agony"

Poetry of Ágnes Nemes Nagy

*Transition and Privatization
in Publishing*

*Transylvania
imagining within a Nation State*

*There Is No Such Thing
as Eastern Europe*

The Voluntary Sphere

*Great Britain
and Horthy's Hungary*

Artók and the Third Reich

*Kurtág in Rehearsal and
Performance*



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Medals, 1933–38
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Györgyi Kocsis

Growth vs. Equilibrium: Interim Reports

Those of you here in Eastern Europe understandably envy the average annual eight per cent economic growth of southeast Asian nations. What you overlook, however, is that in those countries only six to seven per cent of GNP is redistributed as social spending in contrast with fifty per cent here, the average tax rate is one-third that of Eastern Europe," the Harvard Economist Jeffrey Sachs recently told an audience in Budapest. While he was naturally careful not to direct his observations to any specific Hungarian group, these interest groups and lobbies which insist on a continuing paternalist role for the State would do well to don antennae so as to receive his message loud and clear.

On the basis of his something-for-something logic, however, Sachs provided food for thought to those technocrats who are susceptible of giving priority to the "dictatorship of reform" over social consensus. The "little tigers" of Asia, not to mention China, are not exactly paragons of democracy; ultimately they may be showing us that democratic political institutions are not a condition of economic growth. After all, noted Sachs, the value of democracy does not lie in its ability to add or take away one or two per cent of economic growth. The Hungarian government, futilely turning the Rubik's cube of growth and equilibrium and social stability, does not, of course, have much room for manoeuvre. If the government follows through on its decision to trim real wages next year by two per cent rather than the originally planned four, as announced at a recent session of the Interest Coordination Council, economic growth, projected at barely more than zero for 1996, might yet turn negative.

Both the internal opposition within the main coalition party, the Socialist Party (MSZP), and interest groups talking to the government would probably demonstrate a greater propensity to negotiate if the experience of the past eight

months could show with certainty that the economic stabilization programme started in March actually works. In other words, that it not only brings lasting order to the various elements that comprise macroeconomic equi-

Györgyi Kocsis

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an economic weekly.*

librium, but will before long also lead to a rise in the standard of living that is perceptible to the broad reaches of society. However, the time so far elapsed is insufficient for indisputable evidence to have emerged; furthermore, many economists have raised doubts as to the feasibility of this economic policy, others question its inner logic and others still, the applicability of the measures chosen. The key dilemma thus facing the government is choosing the point in time up to which the Bokros programme must be sustained at all costs, with only such amelioratory steps taken that do not detract from its effectiveness; that is, the government must decide just how much adjustment can be allowed without taking the whole of economic policy in a different direction.

Recent weeks have seen the publication of a series of reports by independent research bodies, Kopint-Datorg, GKI, and the economic analysis division of Budapest Bank, which more or less concur that the anticipated improvement in equilibrium will indeed be the consequence of the "Bokros-Surányi" economic programme (named after the two men credited with its conception, Finance Minister Lajos Bokros and György Surányi, President of the National Bank of Hungary). The catch is, however, that this programme has gone about achieving its goals by way of rather harsh measures, and neither this year's growth—slower than last year's—nor the limited growth promised for 1996 can yet be attributed to the programme. Again on the down side, there is hardly any structural transformation to be seen yet which might strengthen economic equilibrium. Indeed, the introduction of crawling peg devaluation seems to have been the sole aspect of this year's policy which won undivided acceptance domestically and abroad; it injected predictability into the system—and predictability has been in chronically short supply in Hungarian economic policy. At the same time, however, analysts uniformly point to an Achilles' heel in economic policy, caused by this very devaluation policy: a necessary condition for crawling peg devaluation is that tight reins be kept on inflation, which, with an economy less and less under government control, can only be planned with a significant degree of uncertainty.

"In mid-1995 the economy veered away from the deterioration in equilibrium, what with a devaluation in March and the introduction of the supplementary customs duty in that same month; furthermore, the consumption tax measures proved effective," GKI reports. This research and analysis company outlines the process as follows: the government's measures prompted upwardly spiralling inflation, which in turn tempered domestic demand; thus imports declined while exports became more profitable, meaning that the foreign trade deficit is likely to be lower by the end of 1995 than last year. The decline in the deficit is, however, far from being in proportion with the drastic slump in imports; the rate of increase for exports, various forecasts tend to conclude, will have fallen by nearly half since last year. "A supplementary import intensivity has built up in the Hungarian economy since 1992 to the tune of some \$3 billion," observes Kopint,

offering a possible explanation. An in-depth analysis of the country's imports leads Kopint to conclude that the "structural import surplus" cannot be attributed solely to consumption, nor to investments alone, nor for that matter exclusively to exports, but rather to the aggregate effect of economic activities both newly emerged and hang-overs from the past; consequently, approaching these factors independently of each other will allow neither management of the problem nor any reduction.

In line with the tight relationship between the deficit in the current balance of payments and the foreign trade deficit, the former can be expected to drop more or less in harmony with the latter, although the current BOP deficit—thanks to economic growth—is, when expressed as a proportion of the GDP, considerably lower than last year's. The payments deficit will not be covered, however, by the projected \$1.5 billion working capital inflow in the course of 1995; what remains will only add to the nation's stock of debt. (By just how much also depends on changes in cross currency rates.) All the economists have pointed to a new phenomenon, which may be interpreted in various ways: a rapidly growing proportion of the nation's stock of foreign debt—already one fourth of the total—is attributable neither to the government nor to the National Bank of Hungary, but to hard currency loans taken up by the corporate sector and by commercial banks. "The foreign indebtedness of the Hungarian corporate sector financed the 1995 economic growth," assert analysts at Budapest Bank, adding, "This restructuring hinders economic policy-makers when managing debt." They go on to say, "Ever-increasing corporate indebtedness promotes the effective functioning of the economy so long as loans finance production, which in turn assures repayment. Indications are that, having utilized the low cost of hard currency credit compared with forint credit, and further, the high returns on forint investments compared with hard currency investments, a portion of hard currency credit went not toward financing production but to financial investments made in forints." In other words, although a portion of foreign credit was indeed not taken up by the state, the banks and firms which did take up foreign credit did so with an eye toward speculation, using it to purchase government securities; thus the money was, after all, absorbed by the state.

Hungarian economists are generally not in complete agreement as to just how strong the relationship is between the current balance of payments and the position of budget equilibrium; still, along with the former, the latter is also expected to have improved considerably in 1995—more or less as planned in the supplementary budget. This is happening even though the bulk of the social spending cuts originally built into the Bokros package were rejected by the Constitutional Court, to the applause of numerous interest groups; the other scale on the balance was pressed down, and firmly at that, by the extra revenues brought in by the supplementary customs duty—which can in no way be termed a liberal economic measure—and which played a key role in spurring 1995 infla-

tion, even though it drew relatively little public opposition. "As regards the position and financing of state expenditure, the concern over hard currency privatization revenues is entirely unwarranted," Kopint economists note. They explain, "It is not the function of these hard currency revenues to finance state expenditure and possible supplementary imports, but rather to expand the country's hard currency reserves and reduce the net national debt."

From the latter point of view, however, it does indeed matter quite a lot just how close to the projected Ft150 billion in revenue the government closes the year with; alongside the import slump, the other conspicuous macroeconomic development of 1995 has been a structural change in the budget deficit. The deficit arises entirely from internal debt-servicing—from payment of interest and repayment of loans—while the primary balance, once debt-servicing is removed, is in surplus. Kopint analysts are convinced the government has overshot the mark in their projection of the primary surplus for this year and especially for 1996. "If we assume that the issuing of money has not been a factor in budget financing—as was more or less the case in 1993 and 1994—then even a two per cent primary surplus would be sufficient to stem the increase of the national debt/GDP ratio," they assert. They go even further at Kopint, where they conclude, "If economic growth already underway is indeed blocked by the economic policy drive to achieve a sizable primary surplus at any cost, both the primary surplus and GDP as calculated in real terms will be less than projected by economic policy-makers; in this event the debt/GDP ratio would not diminish, but on the contrary, grow."

The price to pay for the improvement in macroeconomic indicators is three-fold, contends Kopint: steeply rising inflation, drastically falling real wages, and finally, a slower rate of economic growth than last year. This is not even considering the extent to which the total 28.3 per cent nominal devaluation of the forint in 1995 (factoring domestic and international inflation into the calculation means a devaluation in real terms of 3–4 per cent) is responsible for the rise in prices. "There are no reliable calculations as to the percentage of inflation brought about by a 1 per cent nominal devaluation," observes Kopint. Analysts there assume, however, that the "inflationary effect of devaluation is smaller than its nominal value." Still, the economists add, "With the inflow of foreign capital and external borrowing almost entirely liberalized, the monetary authorities cannot in fact control the amount of money in circulation."

Kopint analysts contend that the 1995 wage hikes, rather than generating inflationary pressure, actually checked inflation. "The drain on revenues remained modest even in the absence of comprehensive price-wage agreement," GKI commented here, "because public sector earnings grew at a markedly slower rate than last year, since wage increases in state enterprises remained behind the private sector average, due to the strengthened position of owners." Although real wages dropped in 1995 by 11 per cent after last year's 7 per cent growth, per

PROJECTIONS ON THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ECONOMY

(as percentage of previous year)

Forecast for 1995

	1994	Kopint	BB	GKI	Government*
GDP	2.9	1-2	2	0-1	0-2
Private Consumption	1.3	-(1-2)		-(3.5-4)	-3
Public Consumption	-20.4	-(5-6)			-(7-8)
Investment	11.5	6-7	5-7	4	7
Industrial Production	3.5	6	6-7	5-6	
Exports	13.3	8.0		6-7	6-9
Imports	10.5	1.0		-2	-1-1
Balance Sheet Deficit in Sales Turnover	3.8		3-3.5	3	3.1
Consumer Price Index	18.8	29-30	28-29	28	28
Unemployment Rate	10.4	10		10.5	12.5-12.9
Current BOP Deficit	3.9	3.0	3-3.3	2.8-3	2.9
Current Balance of Payments as percentage of GDP	-9.6	-6.0			-6.6
State Budget (Balance)** as percentage of GDP	-8.0	-6.5		-(6.5-7)	-6.9
Primary Balance as percentage of GDP	-1.3	+2.0			1.9
Budget Deficit (Ft billions)**	237	300	290-300	280	341

Forecast for 1996

	Kopint	BB	GKI	Government*
GDP	2-3	1-2	0-1	1-2
Private Consumption	-1-0		-2	-4
Public Consumption	-2.0			-10
Investment	7-8	5-7	5-7	11
Industrial Production		3-5	4	
Exports	8-10		6	7-8
Imports	2-4		0-1	1
Balance Sheet Deficit in Sales Turnover		2.5-2	2.5	2.5
Consumer Price Index	21-24	22-25	20-23	19-21
Unemployment Rate	10.0		11	
Current BOP Deficit	2.5	2.6-3.1	2.2-2.5	2
Current Balance of Payments as percentage of GDP	-4.5			-4.5
State Budget (Balance)** as percentage of GDP	-4.0		-5	-3.9
Primary Balance as percentage of GDP	-4.4			4.2
Budget Deficit (Ft billions)**		280-32	200	224

* The Hungarian Government's Medium-term Economic Strategy

** GFS, without privatization revenues

capita total real earnings—comprised of both wages and other forms of income—will have fallen only by 5 per cent compared with the 4 per cent growth in 1994. Consumption by the public will drop even less, the projected figure being 3.5-4 per cent in contrast to last year's 0.7 per cent rise, means that consumers are trying to maintain or approximate their previous consumption level at the expense of their savings. "The number of those given to regular saving is gradually declining, but a narrow, "rich" section of society is ever-more conspicuous, whose savings are likewise striking," observes GKI. Indeed, the GKI report concludes that the decline in savings by the public—for now, at least—is not directly responsible for the lower rate of investment as compared to 1994; instead, this may be traced to the curtailing of investments by the state and by municipal authorities. GKI points out that the major investors in the Hungarian economy continue to be the multinationals, which draw on foreign sources and are expanding capacity at a rapid rate, especially in the motor and car components industry, in pharmaceuticals, and in telecommunications.

Given the degree to which consumption has fallen through 1995, neither the rise in exports nor in investments had sufficient pulling power to sustain the rate of GDP growth seen in 1994, say the statistics. Then again, statistics should be taken with a grain of salt. In May 1995 the Central Statistics Office (KSH) estimated last year's growth at 2 per cent, but in August adjusted the figure to 2.9 per cent. The major factor in this year's modest growth has been the engineering industry, which has seen exports rise by 150 per cent over 1994. "This would most certainly never have occurred in the absence of foreign working capital, especially that provided by leading international car manufacturers," concludes Kopint, emphasizing that the growth in industrial production can be attributed mainly to firms in majority private ownership. Although GKI points out that growth in industrial production and exports was helped along by still low energy prices, its analysts do not stop there; they also note that the export stimulus effect of sudden devaluation toward the start of the year is now petering out, and they do not predict much staying power for the improving price competitiveness Hungarian exporters have seen on foreign markets in the wake of this year's unavoidable wage freezes. Kopint expresses this in a slightly different way: "While exports may rise in the short term with the contraction of domestic markets, this manner of growth in exports cannot be maintained in the long term."

Analysts at Budapest Bank likewise concur that this year's "upswing is the result of short-term, singular, one-off measures and effects (the supplementary customs duty, for example) rather than permanent changes in the fundamental workings of the economy." At the same time, they note that "a transformation has begun with respect to the state's involvement in the economy, which may lead in the long term to a considerable curbing of state overspending." GKI more or less concurs: "The Hungarian economy has veered off an unsustainable road, true, but it has yet to pull onto the road of sustainable economic growth, whose

GDP AND INFLATION IN FOUR EAST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (PER CENT)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995*
Czech Republic	0	-14	-6	-1	3	4
Hungary	-4	-12	-3	-1	2	3
Poland	-12	-8	3	4	5	6
Slovakia	0	-15	-7	-4	5	5

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995*
Czech Republic	52	13	16	10	10
Hungary	32	22	21	21	28
Poland	60	44	38	30	23
Slovakia	58	9	25	12	10

*projected

Source: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

key short-term condition is the curbing of inflation and the comprehensive realization of state budget reform." On the issue of budget reform, GKI points out, "Conceptual disputes are still in the first stage... The principles to be followed in restructuring the major areas of allocation should be set before the public at the beginning of 1996 in the interest of actually getting the restructuring process underway by 1997." This opinion is generally shared by the economist László Lengyel, who heads Pénzügykutató Rt. (Financial Research Co.). As he pointed out at a recent business forum, "The mountains have given birth to a mouse," by noting that the state treasury system to take shape as of January 1, 1996 will bring about only relatively modest savings, while as yet there exists no draft legislation to lay the foundations for a future system of financing higher education, health care, and social security. "Next year's budget was therefore drafted on the basis of the old system," said Lengyel, "meaning that as regards reform, 1996 has to all intents and purposes been lost."

Analysts generally concur that the government has tied its own hands with respect to inflation by announcing a 1.2 per cent monthly devaluation for the first half of 1996. If inflation takes off, the consequent devaluation of the forint would dishearten not only importers, but exporters as well. "The task now at hand," according to Kopint, "is to convince the players to adjust their inflationary expectations and thus contracts (including those on wage issues) to the government's projected 20 per cent inflation for 1996 rather than to the approxi-

mately 30 per cent figure this year." Kopint further observes that the drop in central bank interest rates and the decline which has begun to set in with respect to market interest rates, is certainly promising, though by no means sufficient. Beyond this the government can pursue two avenues, in Kopint's view: "It may exercise self-restraint with respect to prices within its competence and take firm measures to assure a price-wage agreement amongst the "social partners"—that is, the trade union, management, and government sides of the Interest Coordination Council. "Such an agreement, so long as the various players have faith that it will be upheld, could legitimize the government's efforts to curb inflation," reads the Kopint report, "and the same goes for the pre-announced degree of crawling peg devaluation; and if the devaluation attains legitimacy, this could in turn also help stem inflation." GKI is more cautious on this point, underlining that the only sort of price-wage agreement which would make sense is one that can in fact be adhered to, and thus keep inflationary expectations in check—preferably one that looks several years ahead, establishing principles to be followed in drafting future agreements. "Insisting on limits to inflation which are unrealizable from the start will only result in eventual price-wage adjustments," warns GKI.

According to András Vértés, chairman and managing director at GKI, indications are that the 2 per cent cut in real wages for 1996 proposed by the government last week, down from the original 4 per cent, is the maximum concession that can be made without fatally curtailing the resources requisite to modernization. Economists generally concur, however, that the key benefit of a workable price-wage agreement would be an improvement in public confidence, which has dropped to rock-bottom levels in the past six months; this is especially important given that the public, to say the least, is a key input factor. Indeed, perhaps this could nudge the general tone of public pessimism in a brighter direction, for surveys have shown that since 1993 Hungarian consumers, always putting off the "deadline" for a happier future, invariably believe their standard of living will not improve for another seven to eight years. ■

Ottó Orbán

Ágnes Nemes Nagy in the Sky

N.N.Á. az égben

Translated by Bruce Berlind

The space.

The flow, the flurry.

The wings.

*And down below the scribble of some map maker,
the Rosetta stone's hieroglyphic landscape.*

*A rusty fence-wire slackens and tautens in the wind.
Tools and trash flung around on the ground:
blasting cap, heart-shaped shovel, Swedish chisel,
one boot. A shapeless shadow cast by a creaking door
on the bare stone. And as brick midst the crumbling mortar,
to see the pubic gash of the basalt hill
as redly convulsing it labours forth
a smoking monstrosity,
the drop of red-hot lava.*

*Can this be that house? She walked, lost in thought,
not up there nor down here, not
walked really, waddled rather,
and remembered every detail.
For instance, how much she'd feared childbirth.
She'd paced her room back and forth,
until finally she'd decided: NO!
Said it out loud: NO!
And now this infinity
—a smoking wreck, unpopulated, empty.*

She stumbled on.

*Someone had seized her by the waist.
The New Year's Eve crowd, and of course dancing.
She was sober as a stone statue,
and yet for the blasphemy of it she too was dancing,
arms raised to the sky, all alone.
Take a look at this, God! Her partner
glanced off her as a pebble off iron.
This is the way it always was, she was always
the more wretched, the more powerful.*

She came to the foot of a knoll.

*It was made of words, but frozen
in a single gigantic block of silence.*

*She found a pickaxe among the tools.
The iron clashed struck sparks on
some of the harder quartz crystals. Good,
she could come to terms with that again.*

*Even while she lived she'd made the choice of pain
to carve from the dark of nothing what she could in vain,
lines of verse alone can soar to heaven,
if it's this that blazes up there, not just the sky,
the unburstable bubble.*

Mátyás Domokos

"To Unwork Agony"

On the Poetry of Ágnes Nemes Nagy

*And there is something I yet must do,
something to unwork agony. Must form a god
to sit on high and, seeing, he shall see.**

Agnes Nemes Nagy's life and poetry was constantly shaped and beset by various agonies; under the cultural policy of the dictatorship in the fifties she was not permitted to publish, she underwent a personal crisis, and so forth. She wrote these lines in the sordid solemnity of her constant agony some time around the turn of the fifties and sixties. After the devastation of the Second World War and the siege of Budapest, after the euphoria of the "three-year literature"—between 1945 and 1948, the relatively free period just before the communist takeover, when a new generation of writers centred on the periodical *Újhold* (New Moon), made its appearance—after the glorious autumn of 1956 and the collapse of Stalinism, Nemes Nagy here identifies, in soul and mind, with the Pharaoh Akhenaton, the Sun of her poetry and awareness. She thus chose as an imago for herself "the first European intellectual", who had lived in the 14th century BC, the clever and ugly husband of the beautiful queen Neferteti, who elevated thought to a higher degree of abstraction and who set off "that landslide of a startling new idea—monotheism" in the history of mankind. She may have hoped that this new god alone, the Sun God of reason, with his "granite heart", could testify that "what I sought was just the truth".**

This means that our task could match that of the god—to seek truth in a poetry that finds expression in over one hundred poems written across four decades. To find in poems born amid all that agony the true communication which, for her, is artistic morality, and whose precise expression, in her view, is the moral

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* "From the Notebook of Akhenaton". In: *Between. Selected Poems of Ágnes Nemes Nagy*. Translated by Hugh Maxton. Corvina, Budapest—Dedalus, Dublin, 1988.

**Idem.

and aesthetic imperative of a writer's existence. In mapping this out we have to heed two fundamental warnings she signals to us in her essays. The first refers to the limitations of analysis, stating summarily that "all poems are in-explicable". For this she saw the principal reason as the agonizing attempt by 20th-century poetry to "elevate into the poem hitherto unknown or unvoiced contents of the mind", providing that the poem tries to fulfil the main calling of 20th-century poetry, to project our, or rather, the poet's, general perception of life.

From the very beginning Ágnes Nemes Nagy sought this as the ultimate truth. "My homeland is existence—yet metre sways in it / as star systems in nocturnal wells" (prose translation), proclaims the title poem of her first volume, *Kettős világban* ("In a Double World") in 1946. "Daily, I grapple with existence" (prose translation), she repeats in "Twilight" in the early 50s. An aspect we have in common with her perception of existence is, however, inexplicability, for its reason lies in its self-being. It is one of the given, ultimate and unfathomable mysteries, for the naming of which there are no adequate, precise words in the language. Yet the fundamental duty of poetry is to lay siege to the ineffable, to try to articulate what cannot be said. This agonizing tension yields a characteristic paradox of contemporary poetry, "the obscurity of the modern poem results from the conscious attempt at achieving clarity of expression." In a piece in her collection of essays *64 hattyú* (64 Swans, 1975), Nemes Nagy speaks of "our two-layered sentiments", saying that "the first layer carries the known and acknowledged emotions which have names, such as joy, fright, love, astonishment... they are the citizens of our hearts. The second layer is the no man's land of the nameless... One duty of a poet is to secure civic rights for even more of the Nameless." In "Trees", the poem which opens her collected poems *A Föld emlékei* (Memories of the Earth, 1986), she warns the reader and, I feel, herself in particular, that "What must be learned is that streak, / where the crystal is already steaming, / and the tree swims into mist, / like a body in the memory drifting",*** it is a warning of that no man's land of the Nameless, the streak of the transition, of the mystery of "between" in which, in the creative moment of poetic grace, unexpressable, unnamable experience can be given a name and can assume a form, at least partially, through words. What was previously felt to be the ineffable appears, conquering the resistance put up by those elemental metaphors rooted in ancient experience—the commonplace and the kitsch. In short, this is the ontological and aesthetic justification for the apparent tautology in an essay (somewhat and ironically after Monsieur Jourdain, she is referring to her own experience of Rilke): a poem "is non-prose not because it has 'form' but because its communication is inexpressible except in those very words." It follows from this

*** "Trees". In: *Ágnes Nemes Nagy: Selected Poems*. Translated by Bruce Berling. Iowa Translation Services. The University of Iowa, 1980.

that the hypotheses and suppositions made about her poetry can never quite reach its innermost essence.

The other essential warning she gives us is of the makeup of the poetic ego. She says, in connection with the poet Jenő Dsida: "Mad is the poet who gives up what is worth most—himself—and wastes his uniqueness, of whatever kind, on fashion, attractiveness or pressure." This uniqueness exists in a poet before his or her writing visibly starts. It must be approached along mysterious inner ways and uncovered in the course of a metamorphosis, that of a poetic talent's perception of itself. What distinguishes a poet from anyone else is his "truth", the formula of his poetic existence, if you like, which he uses, at first instinctively, then consciously. The successful realization of this poetic truth is interconnected with the truth of poetic expression, of form. It is dependent on the way he enfranchises in his poem the content that is retrieved from deep, "nameless emotions". These two truths are, in fact, twin facets of the one and only truth. What is called poetic originality depends, as Nemes Nagy expounds, on how the poet is able to struggle with his predecessors for his own "revolution for sincerity", against poetic tradition as a whole, "searching for new words to match new reality, the content of the mind felt to be relevant in the given age" (From the essay, "Negative Statues"). The body of experience perceived as new, that bound Nemes Nagy, of a middle class family from the marches of Transylvania, to members of her generation born and raised elsewhere, was "war, danger of life, the experience of human ideals trampled upon, that we had undergone so early when we were just at the beginning of our career as writers... with the kind of experience behind us that can at best be isolated, not forgotten, and the expression of which was in some way meted out to us as our task... We came together, young and not so young, from the most different places possible. But every place was a bad place. From cellars, POW camps, concentration camps, life's endangered moments." In the autobiographical essay "View with Chestnut Trees", she describes the kind of experience her generation, especially those around *Újhold*, had of the sordid reality in which she personally, for the first time, endured the agonizing experience of "historical anxiety", due to the apocalyptic events in the outside world, along with the elevating sense of poetic expression being able to surmount menace. "1944 was in fact the first year when I was able to write a poem... that monstrous year when I was born as a poet," she writes in "The War Came to an End."

What else other than art is able to grow above life, can render, if not meaning, at least compensation and justification for life? After the war and the siege of Budapest, another night of history closed upon us—Stalinism, the darkness of being silenced and of telling silence. Her poem "Fear" tells us, "I take a list of all the kinds of horror awaiting you and me, already staring us in the face. // I register and count them daily / waking up from dreams that make one groan / I am

preparing for a yet more appalling age" (prose translation); at a time she awoke every day to "the heart bubbling in dread". The supplication "To My Craft" arises from her persistent faith in the one and only certitude: "My craft, bewitching one, / you make me believe my life matters. / Between morality and terror, at the same time / in broad daylight and pitch blackness." (Translated by Bruce Berling).

Ágnes Nemes Nagy has reason to refer to the poet's calling as a "craft". She ignores expressions that bind it to the traditional, though true, perception of a "sacred trance". Géza Ottlik, the most influential of the post-war novelists, describes a writer as "a skilled worker labouring in the existence trade". Nemes Nagy's usage reflects the modesty and self-respect of an expert in the field of existence—in her case, its outer skin, with its "disposable delight" ("The Garden of Eden"), "lively filth on the rock" ("Statues"). This idea is also supranational and is shared by foreign writers of Nemes Nagy's generation. Zbigniew Herbert, for instance, in a short story, "Dutch Apocryphals", describes the poet as "one who transforms the apparent into eternal", a "craftsman working with the material of daydreams". He contrasts him with those who probe a reality that is objective, measurable and expressible in formulae, such as scientists who approach the world in a different way because "art does not solve a single puzzle of nature." To this constantly voiced objection Zbigniew Herbert replies, through the persona of a painter, that "the task of art is not to solve puzzles but to make you aware of them... The means available to us have been primitive and unchanged for centuries. If I understand my task correctly, it is to bring man into harmony with the reality around him."

A substantial feature of Nemes Nagy's originality and uniqueness as a poet is the way she performs this heightening of awareness, of poetic expression—grappling with both the unknown inside and outside. This provides the high tension in a poetic diction that stretches between two poles; in "View with Chestnut Trees," she says "one is adhering to the concrete, the other the penchant for the abstract." Elsewhere she writes about this dual character: "If I consider my love of objects, I ought to have been a cabinet maker; and if I consider my need for abstraction, a mathematician." She says much the same when she opens "Twilight" with "I love matter."

Thanks to this perception and sensitivity to objects and matter, she was able to incorporate them palpably even in her philosophical poems. At the same time, she raised matter to a visionary plane, illuminating it with added meaning and sacral flame. A critic has said that one of her major poetic virtues is that her "knowledge of reality is mobilized at the right moment." This always fends off the sterilizing effect of what is called "philosophical poetry". No train of thought exists in her poetry without a train of emotions; the lightening of passion strikes in the inner abstract space of her poems. The train of emotions is, however, always "contained by a classic sense of proportion in the French style", as the poet István Vas said about her first volume in 1947.

In her poetry Ágnes Nemes Nagy elevated matter from the visible to the visionary. But the converse is equally true. In her poetry are shown, in blinding light, matter and objects, be it "one fat poppy" ("The Garden of Eden", tr. Hugh Maxton), "an incomparable swishing / sheared-off foresail" ("Storm", tr. Bruce Berlind), horses that "paw the ground, then stop" ("The Horses and the Angels", tr. Berlind), "poplar leaves heave up to a whine" ("The Horseman", tr. Berlind), "Dark iron-filings of grass" ("Pinetree", tr. Berlind), "heaps of melonrinds, / with ancient half-hearted scars, / tattooed green heads scored by skewers" ("The Night of Akhenaton", tr. Hugh Maxton), or "a splinter of iron inside a skull" ("Statues", tr. Maxton). In each poem the image of a section of the world appears like a piece of "the infinite cut in slices". She conceives images (not similes) as the horses in harness which "I pulled and took back, / with the double pleasure in my arms of galloping and bridling" ("On Images", prose translation). In her poetry, the sensory appears in the vision with immediacy and directness. In classical poetry, vision is embedded in the visible through metaphor; in modern poetry, which in a converse manner aims to create an inner state of mind, a perception of existence visible, the spectacle is embedded in vision. The critic Balázs Lengyel correctly identifies the sensuality of Nemes Nagy's poetry as "of a degree of vision, not of visibility".

The basic experience of Nemes Nagy's generation is conveyed by the poetic associations of an object or image on which her visionary sensuality focuses. A good example is the compulsively recurring memory of the nightmare of the Second World War. "A shirt is running on the meadow," she writes in "Storm", and by saying that it "escaped" from the clothesline "in an equatorial storm", (tr. Berlind), she elevates the poetic vision and an earthly sight into the cosmic arch of abstraction. A philosophy for this technique is given in a late poem, "The Proportions of the Street", "...the streetcar banks into the turn like a seasoned runner or like the earth at the curve of its elliptical orbit, where the simile is not simile, merely the other face of the same law". (tr. Berlind). The vision of the shirt that has escaped, scarred by the war, is imagined as "a wounded soldier's bodiless choreography". Then imagination multiplies the image: "They're off and racing. The linens. / Below the lightning's muzzle-blast / an army's worth of ultimate motions... / the very last linens of a mass grave / flare up for show". If it were not for the structure and handling of the metaphor, one might think this vision was created in the enflamed imagination of a 19th-century romantic poet. The vision of "Storm" is built up not of similes (no longer used after the first period of her poetry) but, as Reverdy desired, of the contact of two, more or less distant realities; they exist together by necessity and forever in her perception of existence determined by history, without any logic or justification for the sight. (This is similar to another member of her generation, János Pilinszky, in whose poetry the eternal metaphor for the state of the world is the concentration camp). After poems written, as she put it, "in the bottom of the fifties", "Storm",

and poems such as "Between", "Statues" and "Hot Water Spring", signal her mature period. She herself considered this as the most important phase, in which her uniqueness manifested itself most successfully.

Her relationship to the avant-garde—an undeniable inspiration but, more importantly, a difference—is best shown by the basic situation in the poem "Night Oak", a situation which is clearly absurd. That type of neo-avantgarde poetry ignores our instinctive rationality. One night an oak tears up its roots and sets out after a passer-by. The poem can, however, be interpreted in its totality only if we take this surrealist dream at face value, as we would any robust absurdity of Existence or Nature. We should not search for the symbolic in it, a deliberately ironic technique on the part of a contemporary poet, essentially in the style of the poetry of the fin-de-siècle. The night oak, silent and setting out, appears as though visualized by Rilke; it touches a chord in the most basic experience, in an irreversibly tragic aspect of human existence—the fear that assails man, who is divorced from the totality of Existence and Nature and is unable to re-integrate himself in that primal whole, where we were all at one and where there was no distinction between organic and inorganic living form, for this was paradisaical, cosmic homogeneity itself. The passer-by in the poem confronts this existence radiating the light of fullness when, on hearing noise, he turns on the "road" on which, however, there is no "return", yet does not stare into a Heideggerian nothing. This "news in oak-form", locked in the poem, existentially sad, is about the coming to life of trees that are presumed dead, built as they are into civilization, into the stone forests of cities; it is a cosmic vision of the sweeping revolt on the part of nature, vanquished by civilization.

"Just standing, and that's all, / Just a sight, just a vision, / just leg, just wing—the road, the sky, / remoteness dwells between—" ("The Horses and the Angels", tr. Berliand)—This was a major turning-point in Nemes Nagy's poetry, preceded by a tragic break, a break not caused by any disturbance in her own inner development but by a fresh historical disaster. The suspension of artistic autonomy imposed by the dictatorship affected all those who were unwilling and unable to enter the *cul-de-sac* of the vulgar agitprop poetry in the 1950s. "After '48 I was unable to write anything for two years. I could not utter a word," Nemes Nagy recalls. The period of "writing for the desk drawer" began with this desperation and depression induced silence. "What shall I do? I don't know. / I clasp my hands. / I sit on the bed in silence. / Where have I plunged myself?" (prose translation), was what she wrote in 1952 on this state of suspended spiritual animation and its stupefying effect.

In the mid-60s she diagnosed this state of weightlessness, creative force forcibly interrupted, with merciless self-irony in a single extended verse sentence: "The one who has been rowing while the storm / Approaches near, who strains with every limb / Against the trusty footboard's rigid form / And finds a sudden absence from the rim / Of the broken oar, weightless hand, and / Falling

propulsion, falling / With the loosened, dropping shaft and / Whose whole body sags — / He knows what I know." ("Simile", tr. Maxton).

Even if in secret, as though buried alive, yet following her predestined path, she did creatively encounter what the European neo-avantgarde was attempting—the new (latest) "assays" (Apollinaire's word) of "Adventure and Order", in which the adventure of the turn of the century found its place in tradition. Yet the most important part of what Nemes Nagy bore off from this secret adventure to aid "true communication", the expression of her poetic truth, was not the exterior of novelty in poetic diction and the breakup of verse forms. It was the lyric experience of the sudden pleasure and dramatic agony of thought appearing in poetry—the rare examples of which, in Hungarian poetry, are the poems of Mihály Babits and Sándor Weöres. The lyric experience of the pleasure of thought lies precisely in the double nature of the philosophical climax in capturing "precise truth"—it is both conceptual abstraction and organic, living passion.

The frames of several interpretations can be fitted onto the important poem "Between", with its ontological and transcendent suggestiveness. They would, however, drain poetry itself from the poem, "those packages of emotion beyond concepts and outside language" (Nemes Nagy's words), for which it was written and which can only be communicated in verse. A hidden structural principle of the poem is the story of Genesis itself. Behind the lines "...air on which the bird / and the science of birds bear themselves" (tr. Maxton) the metaphysical dilemma in scholasticism of nominalism vs. realism looms up, with the ideal vs. the actual, or the Platonic vs. Aristotelian answers to the relationship of the existing particular and the entelecheia in the background. The poem says that the pulsation of existence always takes place between two terminal points, and this constant motion from the empirically elusive elemental particles to confined infinity—the pulsation of a cosmos that creates and destroys worlds—permeates existence in every detail, plane and section. The state of "between", therefore, touches and bears down on all our reality at its very centre and it is the basis of our perception of existence. As long as we live, and perhaps beyond, we are "on our way" in this change between the two states; philosophers from Heraclitus to Heidegger have variously tried to describe this progress. The endeavour can only arrive at achievements as partial and incomplete as the differential equations and graphs written in the chalk of hypotheses in mathematical language on the blackboard of existence, and it is as deficient as Planck's constant in following the path of energy emission. Whatever we know in our vitals and through our existence—for we constantly experience it because we live in it—we can only speak about it with the original incertitude of "imagined intellect" (Nemes Nagy's words). As Balázs Lengyel says in an essay on this poem, "through the system of images she created here, she wants not only to make us experience

the truth we perceive with our mind but also to suggest the emotional determination of material living." To this should be added that, with the strength of poetic evidence, she wishes to suggest doubt, the decline of the 20th century's thought and world view: as Lengyel puts it, "our jeopardy that is present in the weightless, the wondrous non-palpable, in the ethereal matter carrying our desires and transcendent notions, which we always exile to the periphery of our mind."

"How can one carry on living at the same time as experiencing annihilation?" Nemes Nagy once said in a radio talk, explaining how she intended to condense this 20th-century perception of existence in her cycle of Akhenaton poems. "Myth for me is but a sounding box for today's tunes. It is an old skin filled with new wine..." We know what danger of annihilation, what historical experience of destruction she refers to. "You precise truth! / Be my people and homeland!", is how the early two-line poem "Homeland" expresses the solemn aspiration of all spiritual men, of cultivated Europeans, who form Akhenaton's army. Yet she was soon to see that citizenship in the country of Truth offers no protection from the storms of the bloody and muddy history of the earth-bound country, for her or for anyone, least of all for a moral person, on whose intellect Hungarian literature was deeply imprinted and who believed that it was her religion that she was "a participant in a conspiracy, that of high standards against low, the conspiracy of decency against indecency." As she herself revealed, Nemes Nagy found her spiritual and moral identity in the ethos of Hungarian literature, and her spiritual father in the monarch of this genuine country, Mihály Babits, poet, novelist, essayist, critic, translator and editor (1883–1941), in whose hand, as she said, "I put my middy-bloused oath of faith in a secret spiritual casemate". A poet of the objective, of moralistic and philosophical inclination, he was a 20th-century reincarnation of Nemes Nagy's vision of Akhenaton for most of her generation. With the clairvoyance of the lonely prophet of the Lighthouse, he held that the dilemma of the Scribe in our day was primarily a moral one. The moral lapses of the half century behind us justify this view. Babits taught Nemes Nagy not just the poetic craft but also poetic morality, showing that at critical moments it is a poet's duty to be political for moral reasons and to make moral decisions that bear on the poet's fate. That is why Nemes Nagy defended with all her strength the inner freedom of creative spiritual life, as one who had learnt from her master even "the etiquette of half-death" and knows, "with mirage-haunted sobriety" that "Even if convulsing in fear, / my life does not turn upon this—/ I will not be your underling even if I die." ("Notes on Fear", prose translation). Babits wrote that "there is silence that resounds afar", and Nemes Nagy's silence was of this kind. She gave the most, the greatest price for it—poems unborn, for which there is no recompense. But she was aware and she accepted the fact that, as a member of an oppressed and suffering community, a poet might at any time confront this mortal risk on the path of the "Hungarian way" in literature,

in poetry. In the preface to an English edition of her selected poems published in 1980, in which she speaks of her position as a poet and as a Hungarian poet, she emphasizes the special importance poetry had assumed in Hungary. Branded by the ideologues of servile literature as a poet in an ivory tower, indifferent to social and national issues, she stated that "...in Hungary this sociological importance has been historically determined, and perhaps not only in Hungary but also among other peoples who have had a difficult history, whose national consciousness and national existence were as often threatened as ours. Since the threshold of modern times, Hungarian literature has been the literature of peril. Historical, social and political role: the poet as commander, agrarian policy maker, dead hero, minister, prison inmate—for centuries, this has been regarded as natural in Hungarian literature. Thus, being a poet has its personal dangers, not to speak of the disadvantage that this all too conspicuous role could bring with it for poetry, changing the actual starting point, poetic quality, into a role itself, or sacrificing the former for the latter." (Preface to *Selected Poems*, The University of Iowa, 1980).

The latter was especially a conviction that informed and guided her throughout her life. "A most primitive blunder in literary thinking is to mistake intention for artistic execution," she says in one essay. "Blunder number two, on the other hand, is to mistake execution for intention. In other words, to write what our stylus enables us to, irrespective of what we want to express. The second mistake is commonly committed by the virtuosi who feel they can deliver anything."

Her style, her acumen combined with inspiration, the truth of her poetic uniqueness and her moral purity protected her from such temptations, from sacrificing the truth of her poetry to aesthetic fashions or political compulsion. They also protected her from falling into the trap of role-playing, a wide variety of which is on offer in Hungarian literature, past and contemporary.

Ágnes Nemes Nagy
Posthumous Poems 1979–1991

"On God" in Two Versions

On God
The Gravest of our
Deficiency Diseases

Istenről
Hiánybetegségeink legnagyobbika

Admit it, my Lord, this just won't do. It just won't do to create like this. To put such an eggshell Earth in a void, such eggshell life on the Earth, and into that—like an inconceivable punishment—consciousness. That's too little, that's too much. That's misgauging the scale, my Lord.

Why do You demand that we squeeze a universe into our children's toy skulls that can be clasped in two palms? Or are You doing to us what You did to the oak—squeezing the whole tree into an acorn?

I'd never treat my dog like You treat me.

Your existence is not a scientific but a moral absurdity. To presume Your existence as the creator of such a world is blasphemy.

If only You hadn't baited the trap with so many temptations. If only You hadn't made clouds, gratitude, a golden head for the autumn acacia. If only we didn't know the thin, greenish, sweet-sweet taste of existence. Your sweet lime-twigs are monstrous, my Lord!

Do You know what it's like when the blood-sugar level sinks? Do You know what it's like when the little white patch of leukoplakia thickens? Do You know what fear is? Bodily pain? Ignominy? Do You know with what wattage of light the murderer glitters?

Have You swum in a river? Have You eaten a lemon-apple? Have You grasped calipers, bricks, scraps of paper? Have You got fingernails? To carve on live trees with them, scribble on scaly plane trees, while up there, on and on the afternoon goes on? Have You got an up-there? Have You got an above-You?

I haven't said a word.

Translated by Bruce Berlind

Concerning God The Gravest of our Deficiency-Induced Diseases

Istenről

Hiánybetegségeink legnagyobbika

Admit it, Lord, this just won't do. This mode of creation simply will not do. To deposit this eggshell of a world in the solar system, this eggshell of life on earth, and then, to top it all—mysterious punishment—consciousness. This is both too little and too much. This is to lose all sense of proportion, Lord.

Why expect us to cram an entire universe into toy skulls two human hands can compass? Or will you do with us as you do with acorns into which you have crammed entire oaks?

I wouldn't use a dog as You use me.

Your existence is not a scientific but a moral absurdity. To postulate your existence as creator of such a world is an act of blasphemy.

You might at least have refrained from baiting the trap with so many temptations. No one forced you to make clouds or gratitude or to crown the autumnal acacia with a head of gold. Not to have known the slender, greenish, sweeter-than-sweet taste of being. That sweet limed twig of yours, Lord—horrible!

Do you know what it's like to feel your blood-sugar sinking? Do you know what that faint small patch of leukoplakia is like when it's growing? Do you know what fear is? Or bodily pain? Ignominy? Can you tell the wattage a murderer emanates?

Have you swum in a river? Eaten a crab-apple? Have you handled calipers, bricks, small slips of paper? Do you have fingernails? To scratch the living trees with, to carve nonsense on peeling plane trees with, while above you the afternoon stretches ahead, on and on into the distance! Do you have an up there? Is there anything above you?

I haven't said a word.

Translated by George Szirtes

Strange Afternoon...

Oly furcsa ez a délután

*Strange afternoon, I doubt now whether
I'd felt so dull before or ever
known a distress so dislocated.
I was a child, uncomplicated
by adult terrors. Now I fear
engaging that child's look of cheer.
Have I improved? I might have done.
But it's another scent I'm on,
I'm different. Of that not-me sense
This poem is the evidence.*

I'm Sixty-Four Now...

Most hatvannégy éves vagyok

*Sixty-four now. Summer. No use acting
as if this were what I was quite expecting.
Still there's a thaw, a soft appeasement
a gentle waking up and easement,
this summer of my sixty fourth commencing.*

In a Garden

A kertben

*It's the garden, always the garden
one should remember. Or rather
to delete the as-if from the as-if-now,
the as-if-it-existed.*

*As a matter of fact a person might believe
the past would fade away. But no,
it vanishes, then reappears,
reappears having completed its orbit,
just like the seasons which sometimes
condense into seed and sometimes extend
down the unmarked highways of space-time,
re-growing according to statistical norms,
by unwritten contractual laws.*

*It's there that they walk in the garden which is
newly in blossom, by diffused light, down boulevards,
under well behaved titanic trees,
among serried ranks of the lower orders,
among pansies with striated faces
cute tiger faces really but still
immature, still in their infancy.
A coil of cable resting on a boulder
the past or future of some installation.*

*It's there that they walk, those who return walk there,
walk round in circles, during the whole monotonous
journey turning their backs on us,
though sometimes they might turn round to face us,
their faces luminous
as clearings in dense woods,
as current in wet cables,
now blazing, now fading
away on the spiral cables
of time—then returning the way they came,
away, returning, coming:
again, again, again.*

I Have Seen This

Én láttam ezt

*This I have seen (This I have never seen)
Here I have been (Here I have never been)
Perhaps in some other life
I simply stumbled on the scene.*

*Perhaps in some other life
(Some other dying, possibly)
Veiled, I once had come this way,
Or strayed here quite unconsciously.*

*Perhaps I never went away,
Have always been here, earth enfolded,
And stand here lost, without direction
In this bloodless resurrection.*

Would you Believe it...

Nahát! Hogy száll itt a lét néhanap

*Would you believe it! How the sense of being
can sometimes take wing,
like a boat round whose dark body
the summer sails insist on billowing.*

*Only a few gusts of wind
shake it unexpectedly as it leans over,
then the sail straightens, and conspiring
with the surface of the water soaks through
time and again, without tiring.*

The Empty Sky...

Az üres ég

*The empty sky. The empty sky.
I can't tell what might satisfy.
No more perhaps than a few bars
Across the window to stop my eye.*

The Leaving

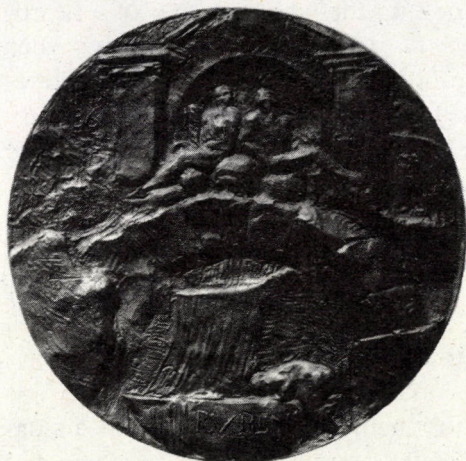
A távozó

*When she looked back her face had disappeared.
When she looked back.
The masks that she inhabited
dissolved in earth; green, blue and black
in smeary piles of brow and head
the very last time she looked back.*

*As soon as she had turned away
her two wings
began to glow beneath the ray,
the purest silver, two wings, two lungs
which slowly opened as if to fly
an inch or so, then closed again
as she breathed out.*

*I saw it all,
I saw then they belonged to me,
not others, sadly, but to me
between my shoulder blades she flew
like something light had shivered through,
no mask to obscure her backward view.*

All translations by George Szirtes



Rubens, 1936

László Darvasi

Mr Stammer in São Paulo

Short story

A few days after they moved in the young couple had their baby. There was some celebrating, not more than such an old building can still tolerate, and perhaps not only tolerate, but secretly even enjoy, it has been so long since legitimate transgression of any kind last happened here. All the same, the morning after, the old man inspected the row of letterboxes, looking for their name.

They were called Tóth.

The old man stared moodily at the strip of paper pasted on the flimsy tin box, Tóth, Tóth, we really could have done with a better sounding name.

In the end he shrugged his shoulders.

One can't help being called Tóth, after all.

Then they shuffled along to the shop together, as they did every day. They did not have far to walk to the grocery that took up the whole corner of a nearby block. They went arm in arm always, as they used to do on family outings when they spent the day rambling on the Island or strolling beneath the plane-trees of the Park. But in the last few years they had taken to going everywhere together, clinging to each other so neither could come to harm when the other was not there. It was together or not at all. But only to the chemist's, the doctor's, or the grocer's. A quarter kilo of bread, a litre of milk, some sliced cold meat, that was what they bought, that was all they could afford, and it usually lasted them two days. They ate like the birds of Saint Francis of Assisi. They pecked at their food, chewed every mouthful ponderously, softened it, reduced it

to pulp. They ate for the taste, for illusion's sake. A morsel of bread was to them a slice. Their meals-on-wheels were brought to them in a dinner-pail by a hefty woman whose name they did not know. This slatternly female had become the most important person in their lives. She

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had introduced herself the first time she came, had rattled off her name, but they had not caught it then and had never asked her since.

"Girlie," they would say to the stoutly built blonde woman in her thirties. The soup was always lukewarm by the time she got to them, but the vegetables were hot. Vegetables take longer to cool, especially if there is meat to go with them, roast for the most part, rib-roast, yes, meat takes longer to cool than gravy.

In their experience at least.

Sometimes the old woman would complain about the absence of pickles.

"And where's our apples? There used to be a dessert too, girlie. Iced tea-cakes or chocolate cake, even."

"Catering's centralized these days, Ma," said the blonde, shrugging her shoulders.

Sometimes even the old man found himself wanting to protest about a maggoty apple.

In their old age their shrivelled faces had become very similar.

Their noses had grown alike and they stared, blinking rapidly and often, with the same lustreless, watery, puckered eyes; their ear-lobes drooped, their hands were mottled and shaky, their brows deeply furrowed, and they walked with the same halting, tottery steps, as if co-ordinating their ominously growing weaknesses; they sniffled and gurgled and hawked in the same way and if the old woman had a pain somewhere, the old man at once developed shooting pains in his back or shoulders. They lived on each other's words. They never spoke of their dreams, they had woken for years to the same images meaningless, or a thousand times dreamt.

In the beginning they often heard the baby crying.

"The little Tóth," the old man would say to himself.

"The little Tóth," the old woman once said over a plate of lukewarm peas. The baby cried a lot and loudly, and his choking sobs, like a disquietening piece of news, went the rounds of the house, bubbling up from the chinks in the wall and from hidden corners, coursing along the old pipes, carried by the beetles scuttling up chirping from the cracks in the floor, and if the Dormicum pill had not taken effect, the old man sometimes heard the cries continue till dawn. No one raised any objection, not one of the tenants, of course they did not either, everyone knew it was hardest on the Tóths. The poor Tóths. And they, the two old people, lay on their damp bed at a distance from each other, for it was some years since they had last cuddled up together, and listened to the crying.

"He's crying," the old woman would say.

"He's crying," the old man said.

A few weeks later they were just setting out to go shopping together, as usual, when the young man almost ran into them at the point where the piercing bright light streaming in from the courtyard slashes the murky gloom of the stairway. Tóth cast a quick glance at them and, muttering some sort of greeting, brushed against the old woman in passing.

She knew she ought not to, but the old woman called after him anyway.

"We haven't heard the baby much lately."

Tóth turned back.

"You haven't?"

He looked offended somehow.

"There's nothing wrong, is there?" asked the old woman.

There was a scar from an old dogbite under Tóth's eye. His thin, pale face gleamed in the gloom of the stairway, the smooth cheeks rarely needing a shave. He leaned forward slightly, as though drawn forward by his hairless chin. It all seemed quite unreal. Had he really spoken the words they believed him to have said, or had they been lip-reading and misunderstood something, or had they perhaps simply imagined the whole thing, both of them at the same instant—well, it wouldn't be so very surprising if even their hallucinations were the same after all these years.

"What did you say?" the old woman asked just to make sure, fumbling with the ends of her kerchief and shaking her tiny bird-like head. Tóth took a quick step upwards. He kicked the chalky parapet with the toe of his pointed shoe. Then trampled upon the bit of plaster that had fallen off the wall.

"You heard right," he said.

"What did you say?" asked the old man in turn.

"The baby died," repeated Tóth slowly, practically syllable by syllable, and this time they heard him clearly. Tóth stared at them, his face expressionless, at the two twitching, trembling birds' heads, then turned away for a moment and stared at the patches of saltpetre rot on the wall.

"Oh dear," said the old woman, and, like in a trashy film, clutched her husband's shoulders with both hands.

It took all the old man's strength to hold her up.

"What do you mean, sir?!" he asked, poking at his glasses and repeated.

"What do you mean?"

Tóth shrugged his shoulders.

"The baby died," he said for the third time.

He took another step upwards. Now he was standing right above them. He stared down at them as if he were looking into a deep dark well. He put his hands in his pockets, sniffed, and this made him seem even younger. He made a face.

"Dear God," the old woman shook her head.

Tóth suddenly took a step down and stared into their faces from close up. And, like a small boy, broke into a smile.

"I was only joking," he shrugged.

And set off at a run up the stairs.

The old man made an angry gesture as if to strike the young man, and almost fell down the stairs, dragging the old woman with him.

They did not go into the grocery. There was a squalid-looking playground two blocks from the shop; they sat there awhile silently, stiff-necked, on a bench

badly in need of a coat of paint beside a sand-pit dotted with dog-turds. Before they left the old woman stood up, stepped behind the old man and brushed the dandruff off his shoulders. It was growing dusk by the time they got home. For a long time the old man pottered about the study crammed with books. With drooping lips he gazed at his shelves, at the huge oak writing desk covered with a fine film of dust.

"Magda, make me some coffee please," he suddenly said.

The old woman stared at him.

"Coffee, at this hour?"

"And bring me a shot of cognac before you go."

The old woman looked at her husband again, then shuffled over to the cabinet, running her eye musingly over the dusty, unopened bottles. A few bottles of vintage Tokay, Villányi Cabernet, a bottle of honeysweet liqueur from Lisbon and an open bottle of apricot brandy from Kecskemét.

"There is no cognac, Ferenc...We finished the bottle last summer."

The old man meditated, rubbing his chin.

"Then bring me some apricot brandy! There's got to be some of that left."

The old woman first took one glass out of the cabinet, stood pondering, then took another small glass from among the rest. She picked a Viennese handkerchief from the chiffonier, with a pattern of tulips and the Stephanskirche embroidered upon it and used it to wipe the glasses. She wiped them several times. Then she filled them carefully.

"Your health, Magda!"

"Your health, Ferenc!"

The old woman stuck her tongue into the glass and as soon as it touched the liquid and she could feel the taste, ran her tongue over her gums.

The drink burned her mouth and that was good.

"Serve the coffee in the Zsolnai service," croaked the old man.

The old woman went out into the kitchen, past being surprised now. The old man stood for a long time before the rickety bookshelf that touched the ceiling, reached up for a leather-bound Marcus Aurelius, leafed through it. He stared fixedly at an underlined sentence but did not read it, just stared ahead, unseeing. He dropped the book. Reached up at random for another. *The Forms of the Hungarian Soul*. Reached up for another. *A Journal of the Plague Year*. Then he came upon a Zrínyi.

A Miklós Zrínyi.

The old man frowned.

Then suddenly cried:

"São Paulo!"

The old woman stuck her head around the door that was open a crack.

"What did you say, Ferenc?"

"Have you any idea, Magda, what they are doing right now in São Paulo?"

The old woman took a step inside, shrugged her shoulders.

"How does São Paulo come into all this?" she asked hesitantly.

She stared at the wizened bird's head, at this little, dishevelled man. As though she had suddenly realized that the person she was looking at, whose lined face had again become hardened by the severity that used to terrify so many pupils, was in reality another man altogether.

"How could you know!" the old man grumbled.

"They are taking a siesta!" he shouted, rummaging in the overstuffed drawer of the writing desk. In a moment he found the directory with the international dialling codes and licking his forefinger, began to turn the pages. His tremulous lips moved as he read the numbers. And he was already dialling. The old woman made no move to go, just stood astonished, an incredulous half-smile turning up the corners of her mouth. The line was dead, the old man shook his head irritably. He dialled again, unsure of the exact number of digits needed. Then suddenly the phone began to ring at the other end. The old man pressed down the cradle and smiled.

"Taking a siesta," he said.

He dialled again and once more the phone began to ring.

Rang once, and once again.

Then someone spoke at the other end.

"Hallo?"

It was a woman's voice, cross, breathless. Gasping for breath, choking almost. Like someone coming up from underwater at the last moment.

"Is that São Paulo?" asked the old man.

"What...what the hell do you want?!"

The old man stared absentmindedly at his wife.

"What... do you... want?" panted the woman again.

"I'd like to speak to Mr Stammer," said the old man quickly.

"What Mr Stammer are you talking about?"

"My name is Gerlóczy and I'd like to speak to Mr Stammer."

The woman's voice lashed back, breathless still and sharp with irritation.

"Is this... some kind of a joke? It's ...siesta time."

"This is Ferenc Gerlóczy speaking from Hungary, and I would like to speak to Mr Stammer...It's rather important."

In the kitchen the percolator began to bubble fiercely, but the old woman made no move to go. She just stared in amazement at her husband, who was speaking with São Paulo, wildly gesticulating with every sentence.

For her part, the panting woman in São Paulo was becoming more alert by the minute.

"There's no one by the name of Stammer living here...Stop that," she suddenly said, aside.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Are you really...stop it...are you really calling from Hungary?"

"From Europe," the old man nodded.

A bad-tempered male voice jabbered at the woman.

But the woman retorted:

"They're calling from Hungary...Europe...Stupid."

The old man heard a rough curse from the background but the woman had begun speaking to him again.

"Are you sure you're not...calling from Rio?" she asked. "How can I be sure you're not speaking from Rio?"

"I am speaking from Budapest."

"And how come you speak Portuguese?"

"I am a teacher."

"A Portuguese teacher?"

"I learnt it."

"How did you learn?"

"From books."

"And who is Mr Stammer?" The woman's voice had become quite animated, her breathing was almost back to normal and her irritation had been absorbed by incredulous wonder.

The old man concentrated.

"Mr Stammer...is my friend."

There was silence at the end of the line in São Paulo.

"Is Mr Stammer... Hungarian?" the woman asked suddenly.

"Naturally," said the old man.

"You know," said the woman, "I've never spoken to a Hungarian before."

"Well, there aren't too many of us," bantered the old man.

"You're quite old, aren't you?" asked the woman.

"I just...want to speak to Mr Stammer," said the old man.

"I'm very sorry," the woman explained, "'we've been living here for ten years, and this has been our telephone number for ten years."

"I see," said the old man.

"I really am very sorry," said the woman.

They were silent again.

"Are you still there?" asked the old man.

"There's no one by the name of Stammer living here," the woman sighed.

"Well, if there isn't, then there isn't. I shall look into the matter," said the old man, playing for time.

"Goodbye," said the woman.

"Goodbye."

The line went dead. The old man listened to the dial tone for a little while longer, then slowly replaced the receiver. The old woman, who was still standing in the doorway, heaved a deep sigh.

"Who were you talking to, Ferenc?"

"A Brazilian woman," said the old man absentmindedly.

"A Brazilian woman," mused the old woman. "And what would you be wanting, Ferenc, from a Brazilian woman?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders, smiling.

"And who is this Stammer?"

The old man's eyes were suspiciously bright, as if he were the worse for drink. He did not reply, just shrugged his shoulders again. Then he sniffed the air. At once the old woman turned and in a few minutes brought in the coffee. As her husband had demanded, she served it in the Zsolnai service, on a silver tray with birds engraved upon it. The porcelain sparkled as if it were Sunday afternoon. The old woman poured a drop of coffee for herself as well. She watched the other sipping from his cup.

First brandy, then a Brazilian woman, now coffee.

Six months ago he had been rushed to St John's hospital in an ambulance.

"What would Dr Hevesy say if he saw you now?"

"Dr Hevesy can go to hell," rasped the old man.

"But Ferenc!...Really!"

The old woman pretended to be really offended.

This sudden, exorbitant intemperance was truly insupportable. Swearing too, he is surely not himself. She hadn't seen him like this for years. She cast a contemptuous glance over her shoulder and went over into the next room, leaving her husband, who was sipping his coffee noisily, to his own devices. He walked up and down in the room, muttering to himself, and every now and then broke into a wide smile.

All at once he heard the music.

The horns striking up playfully.

"Stravinsky," said the old man and pondered.

"The card game," he said after a while, "And ballet."

Then he shuffled into the other room to join the old woman.

And there his wife was, sitting at her dressing table, wagging her little bird's head and playing patience in the pale, diffused light of the small table lamp with the glass shade. Her grey hair fell loosely upon her shoulders, as on a cheap copperplate print. Yet she looked just like she had in the old days. The old man stood beside her. His wife glanced up and smiled at him. The old man cleared his throat, and, like one wanting to make peace, remarked;

"On the other hand, Magda, the piece is about a poker game."

But it was as if she had not heard him.

"The king of spades goes here in the middle," she began to explain. "Then the seven of diamonds will come here on this six, the queen of spades goes here in the middle, on the king... are you paying attention, Ferenc?"

"Yes," the old man mumbled confusedly.

"Are you really paying attention?" his wife looked up at him like a stern little girl.

"I really am paying attention," the old man muttered with bad grace.

"Good. Now we'll rid ourselves of the queen of hearts, you see, which will free the jack of spades, so we can put him here in the middle... Are you really paying attention, Ferenc?"

"Yes."

"We'll put the seven of hearts on the eight, and set the king of clubs in the middle... Now we'll put the four of diamonds on the five of hearts, so as to free the ten of spades.... So. Does that look right to you, Ferenc?"

"It does," said Ferenc, wagging his head.

The old woman heaved a deep sigh. And looked up at him, giving him a despairing, withering look.

"You're not paying attention, Ferike."

"I am," the old man protested uncertainly.

"Can one put a diamond on a heart?" the old woman asked, shaking her head theatrically.

"One can't?" asked the old man sourly.

"How could one?!" said the old woman irritably.

She sighed in resignation.

"Watch, Ferike. The five of hearts goes back on the ten of spades, and we put the two of hearts here in the middle."

Then the old woman stared at the cards for a long time.

"What do we do now?" asked the old man.

"I don't know," said the old woman, dispiritedly shrugging her shoulders. "That's the end of the game." She pointed at the position of the cards. "We deal again. This position is finished, there are no more moves to make."

The old man watched his wife shuffling the cards. She shuffled them quickly, her fingers quite nimble. Then the old man switched off the record player, the needle had reached the last groove. And as he turned he looked straight into the expectant eyes of the old woman. The old man could not have described exactly the expression that flitted across the thin lined face. A tranquil, distant little smile, or perhaps the unfamiliar flush of a mischievous, provoking fever.

Then the old woman spoke.

"Are we done with joking, Ferenc?"

The old man smiled.

It was a bad smile.

Old, as if it did not belong to anybody.

"We are done with joking, Magda," he said then.

And watched the other laying out the cards for a new game.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

Transition and Privatization in Publishing

The way it all began was that back in 1990 the new government was very reluctant to consider privatization at all where culture was concerned.

First they spoke of slow and gradual transition, then they warned of the dangerous clutches of predatory foreign capital, and the idea even cropped up of establishing some kind of central authority or directorate (to replace the Chief Directorate of Publishing that had just been abolished) which would then be the custodian of cultural values, ensuring that publishing firms (still state-owned then) and book distributors would not be infected by the same greed that had infected the newly established private companies which were growing in number day by day.

The state-owned houses, still in the majority, cast envious glances at the new publishers, which, apart from wearing the new halo of "entrepreneurship", were free

to engage in those little tricks—like making money—that they were barred from by regulation. They were more envious of the "foundation" publishers beginning to crop up here and there, which received money to keep their newly won spiritual freedom alive when their own old master was becoming increasingly close-fisted about handing out meagre subsidies while still not allowing them to take care of themselves.

From 1989 to 1991 there was an unprecedented boom in the book trade, due to the new freedom from censorship and to the windfall resulting from an unexpected tax exemption; the latter, to everyone's surprise, actually made publishing books a lucrative proposition, even if only for a short time.

This was noticed by everyone, with the exception of the state-owned houses, where going about blindfolded was made mandatory. It did not take long for armies of hungry and clever though penniless free spirits and quite a number of fortune hunters with little capital but much enterprising spirit to turn up in the book trade (this was the time when it was practically the only business where with little money you could turn a profit if you were lucky, where there was some kind of market already in operation). Publishers and book

István Bart

heads Corvina Press, a Budapest publishing house, formerly specializing in Hungarian books in foreign languages. Besides many translations from English and American fiction, his books include a biography of Crown Prince Rudolf of Habsburg and a volume of non-fiction.

distributors mushroomed, skilful (and less skilful) professionals were leaving companies they had worked in for years in droves so that, free of the state's yoke at last, they could found some (any!) private company and make as much money as quickly as possible. The surest way to achieve that was to privatize the state-owned company from inside, to use the standard euphemism.

The streets were flooded with book-stalls, and some people did indeed manage to make a lot of money. Most of these have long left the book trade and are making even more money elsewhere. Today, those of the "new guys" that are left are sitting on the benches of the same school as the "old guys", all learning how difficult it is to create capitalism without capital.

It seemed immoral as well as a crime to talk about the privatization of the state-owned publishers, a ragtag army that was all that remained of the once proud cultural forces attached to the Ministry. If they too were forced to quit, the fortress of culture, it was thought, would remain ultimately defenceless.

Four years went by. Investors came and went, foreigners and Hungarians, negotiating, bargaining with the Ministry and the State Property Agency until, at long last, the authorities reconciled themselves to the fact that the struggle was doomed to failure: this road could only lead to the final destruction of serious Hungarian writing. But by then it was too late.

The majority of the bookshops could no longer be saved. The sunnier side of the market had already been occupied by the mercilessly calculating. Some capital might still have helped the Hungarian publishing trade—but that capital had long disappeared into the bottomless pockets of the State Property Agency in the revenue from the

sale of the privatized shops. All that was left was debt. The foreign investors lost interest. Who needed a company whose markets had disappeared? Easier to found a new one, unburdened by the past and by tradition, by cumbersome "socialist" obligations. With one or two exceptions, they all went home. Even today it is hard to decide whether this is something to be cried or rejoiced over.

Developments since then have taught us some lessons that the foreigners probably knew all the time. One, for instance, is how small this market really is, which meant that you had to seize a huge share of it if you wanted to make profits; that in turn needed an enormous investment. The chaotic character and fragmentation of this narrow market (making what was expensive anyway even more expensive) and lack of capital even further limited the scope already narrow because of the uniqueness of the language. The need to make things pay is a command more ruthless and unchallengeable than any censor's judgement.

What Hungarian intellectuals (including the elite, making cultural policy), however, demanded was not a protected market and investable capital (they hardly had an inkling what market and capital really meant) but a secure life and cash which could be spent on making books. Just as it used to be under socialism.

Of course, no genuine security and support were to be had, and the amount of cash was only as much as what would, piecemeal, trickle away in the desert to be absorbed by the dry sands. At the same time, the forces of the market inevitably went into action, unnoticed at first, then with increasingly frightening strength, to finish off the increasingly powerless and defenceless Hungarian publishing trade.

Soaring costs, declining demand

In 1994, the total value of the books produced in Hungary, calculated at retail prices, was some Ft7 or 8 billion.

To reproduce the same Ft7 or 8 billion worth of books would require (at the same printing and paper prices and with other costs unchanged) about Ft1.7 to 2 billion worth of new investment, which is actually likely to emerge from the sales of the new books (and some 50 per cent from selling stocks produced last year). Things would be all right, in fact, if producing books cost the same this year as last year. Production costs, however, have for some years been increasing by at least 25 per cent a year (this year the growth is expected to be 30 per cent); this does not take into account the rise in publishing overheads (relatively smaller than the growth in printing and paper costs) and the relentless pressure of distributors for larger and larger discounts. It is now certain, however, that retail prices (even though, by 1994 they had risen to two and a half times their 1992 level) will be unable to keep up with this increase, given the drop in buying power. Nor have I even mentioned inflation, the effects of which are now inseparably interwoven with the rise in costs.

Yet the depressed book prices that are a legacy of socialism have so far only kept pace with the increase in production costs. Indeed, last year saw a major turnaround: against the relentless growth in costs, a relative decline in prices began. Publishers seemed to recognize that buyers were simply unable to bear further price increases; they either reduced the (intellectual or material) quality of books or eliminated certain types of title from their lists. Most of these were books of high intellectual value (produced in small print runs, and consequently priced out of the market).

Here, it might be said, the adjustment of book production to the real dimensions and absorption capacity of the market began. The direct cause is that because of the market limits on price rises or an increase in sales, the money that needs to be invested in order to reproduce last year's output is impossible to raise within the industry. Since there are no miracles, and there is no influx of new cash into the Hungarian publishing industry, this year there will be once again fewer books published—many fewer—in Hungary than the year before. This has been going on for years now.

Furthermore, the increase in the cost of reproduction is not simply a consequence of inflation (alongside the crawling-peg devaluation of the forint coupled with extra customs charges) but, at least for printing, a result of international price rates.

Just about everything in the Hungarian printing industry is imported except labour: machinery and basic materials, as well as much of the paper—the better the quality, the more of it. (The most up-to-date paper mill was closed down by its new Austrian owner more than a year ago on the pretext of various labour and property disputes. It is now rumoured that he intends to set up the machines in China.)

Consequently, operating costs are inevitably higher than those of Western competitors, if only because of the customs duties and the 8 per cent customs surcharge levied on all imported goods coupled with the continuous fall in the value of the forint. Wages and salaries, however, are still a great deal lower here than in the competing countries and this explains why Hungarian books are still cheaper than those published in the West, by 30 to 40 per cent on average. A 200-page book, roughly equivalent to the British £5 paperback, costs about Ft6–700 in Hungary, (the price of a modest three-

The Black Side

Straightforward piracy (when intellectual property is produced and sold without the knowledge of its copyright owner), apart from a few isolated cases, has so far been unknown in Hungarian publishing, unlike in the case of video or audio cassettes, where only two years ago illegal reproduction was on an industrial scale. Since then, bootlegging has become a criminal offence in Hungary, too, and, of course, complainants (mostly foreigners) have more effective means to defend their rights. Today there are more or less settled conditions in this market, too, although thus far, no-one has been convicted.

Strange cases of faking, however, do happen. For instance, several books have been published under the name of Ken Follett, an extremely popular author in Hungary, which were actually written by someone else. In another instance, the same book, already a hit once, was republished under a different title by another publisher who naturally forgot to inform the copyright owner. The latest affair of this kind was when the copyrighted form, design and editorial principles of a highly popular series was simply swiped by someone who produced a poor-quality work in the same protected mantle.

Books of this kind are usually put out by non-existent publishing companies without giving the name of the printers where they were produced, information which is legally required. They are mostly sold by similarly illegal street-vendors and they are strikingly cheap since they are naturally unburdened by VAT and other taxes. So far no move has been made against these illegal book distributors, either by the police or by the tax authorities.

course meal at a cheaper Budapest restaurant), which, at the present rate of exchange, amounts to approximately £3.50.

In Hungary there are no price bands as in the Western book markets; the price scale is contiguous. Instead, there are certain "threshold values" marked out by what people find "affordable". Today a paperback priced over Ft6-700 is regarded as expensive, which means that it can be

brought out in a relatively small number of copies only. Another price rise of at least 25 per cent is predicted for this year because of soaring paper prices. This is bound to lead to a tragic decline in demand in Hungary, especially as it comes at a time of dropping living standards.

The increase in paper costs exhausts the rise potential in book prices, which means that the income of all those active

Selling Books

Before the change, there were three major retail distributors in Hungary, which also owned every bookshop and book kiosk—600 sales outlets altogether. One company operated only in Budapest, another in provincial towns, and the third in villages. The latter also supplied libraries.

They were swept away in the very first wave of privatization. Most of their shops were auctioned off by the Property Agency, and the money obtained—the assets and common capital of the Hungarian book trade—was also pocketed by the Agency. Today, hardly more than 200 bookshops are left, about half of which are owned by the shrunken successors of the former big firms. True, these are the biggest and finest shops in the country. The other half is owned by private booksellers of varying size.

Nearly 400 of the old bookselling outlets are now selling something else. Hardly any new bookshops have opened in recent years.

Only one of the shrunken successors of the old big retailers has been privatized so far. The privatization of two others is imminent: the trade is holding its breath, watching anxiously whether their bookshops will continue to be bookshops or not. There will be no shortage of prospective buyers, since these two firms own all that is left of the old state-owned network. The Property Agency is, in principle, looking for investors from within the trade. The trouble is that the entire trade taken together does not have enough money to buy even one of them.

Since the disappearance of the old firms, there are practically no book wholesalers. Nobody has the kind of capital needed, least of all the new entrepreneurs.

in the production of books is declining. Publishers can earn, at best, 5 per cent on their investment on a publication; obviously, at such a profit margin they daren't even think of bank loans and have to rotate their own capital as fast as possible. Consequently, economies can only be effected in the other column of costs—quality and people. To put it briefly and

crudely, even in the best case, increasingly fewer and poorer-quality books are going to be produced by fewer and fewer staff and authors, who will be more and more underpaid.

Based on last year's figures, the missing cash must be, in my estimate, somewhere in the neighbourhood of half a billion forints, close to a third of the money

There are middlemen instead, small-time businessmen acting as distributors, who move books between the publishers and the shops. They have no stocks of their own, only a couple of small vans, modest storage facilities and a few agents, usually the same person who drives the car. They know little if anything about the article they are selling. On the other hand, nearly all carry at least a gas gun, since they carry much cash, and must be wary of the competition. The ability to get the new products to the shops fast is of crucial importance in retaining market share, so some of the tougher of these "businessmen" have sometimes actually damaged each others' cars. It only goes to show that the labour force of the Hungarian book trade has become rejuvenated.

Street book vendors made their first appearance in Hungary on the eve of the changeover, and much of what they sold then was illegal, too. The big difference is that those books were illegal because of their political contents or character. There were few signs indicating the decline of power of the old regime more striking than the fact it no longer had the will to act against them. At that time there was still something heroic about street book selling, and to buy books in the streets gave you a thrill of sorts. That period, however, was brief.

Today, street bookstalls are controlled by a few entrepreneurs who got rich very quickly, and high business ethics is not exactly what they are known for. The competition between them is fierce, for there is big money involved: according to some estimates, about a third of the total of book sales in Hungary is through street vendors, amounting to at least Ft2 billion annually. That figure does not even include illegal and "black" books (hidden from the tax office).

to be invested in principle. In other words, if the declining trend of the last couple of years continues, this is the minimum decline in the investable ratio of income from last year's book sales. Although full data are not yet available, nothing is in sight that may halt the decline in print runs and total sales. Consequently, some Ft2 billion less goods (calculated at current—retail prices)

are going to be produced by Hungarian publishers. An even graver consequence, however, is that this decline is also equivalent to a continuous loss of capital: investment is continuously devalued by inflation if prices cannot keep up with it. This they definitely cannot do any longer.

The decline in the value of output began in 1993, the year VAT was intro-

duced. Buyers spent almost exactly Ft1 billion less—the equivalent of the then 10 per cent VAT—on books than the year before. The same cash was badly needed by the book industry to maintain its level at least at nominal prices. VAT seems to have been the last straw. Up to then, from 1989 to 1992, people spent exactly Ft10 billion on books year after year, even though the same amount of money was worth 10 million copies less every year, due to the effect of inflation.

The decline in the total number of copies sold, or rather produced, has been going on since 1989. Since then, total output has been falling by an annual 10 million copies; along with that, the average print run of titles published is declining by about 2,000 copies every year.

It is interesting, though not exactly surprising, that the only area to show growth is the print run of foreign fiction: its average rose to 19,000 by last year—the triumph of trash. The average print run for fiction titles by Hungarian authors had dropped to 4,700 by last year, a figure below the technological minimum. In other words, such a book is impossible to be published at a "normal" price.

The conclusion is that there must be an upward leap in prices since publishers have reached the limit of their ability to economize on costs (and on salaries and royalties). A radical price rise means a further decline in demand. Quality book production is being sucked in for ever by the vortex of ever narrowing reproduction.

In reality, of course, it does not happen that way. What can be observed is that the market is being increasingly torn apart. There are (if in a declining number) books that remain profitable despite the decline in print runs across the board, involving all books regardless of type or quality. On the other hand, there are (yes, there still

are!) what the trade calls "special market segment books", the number of which does not appear to be falling, although their average print run is hitting frightening lows, to the point of near invisibility. (This is, of course, a blanket term covering everything from handbooks of abdominal surgery to books of verse.) That they still exist is not necessarily due to their value or to the demand for them but the generous support of some foundation or other.

The sudden leap in the number of titles in 1993 (from 7,629 to 8,458) and the decline, disproportionate to that figure, in the average print run lead one to suspect that both the loss in the number of copies and the rise in the number of titles had taken place in the above mentioned, less popular category of books. Obviously this was a result of the support coming from foundations.

Let us not be too happy about that. It means increasing dependency, the state of being at the mercy of other forces.

Quality publishing and sponsors

No book of any value can be published without support in Hungary today. However, a book worth anything appears to find it relatively easy to attract support in Hungary. Statistics indicate that the number of literary and scientific books remains unchanged. Their average print run, on the other hand, is declining fast but this does not result in a proportionate rise of the prices.

The biggest dispenser of money here is the Hungarian Book Foundation, which is largely funded by the state. It will control more than Ft100 million this year.

The Soros Foundation continues as the next large supporter, with Ft60 million this year. Announced changes in policy, however, mean that this amount will be considerably reduced next year.

The third largest is the National Cultural Fund, whose income comes from the mandatory contributions by companies and institutions involved in the arts; these are set at 1 per cent of their turnover. A rather peculiar law enacted two years ago rules that by paying 1 per cent of the price of books, movie and theatre tickets, rented videos, library membership fees, museum entrance fees, etc., the arts should support themselves. Out of this income, paid as a tax, the Fund is going to spend 25 million directly into book support this year.

There are in addition several funds financed ultimately by the state, in research and in academia, a part of which goes into supporting books.

Another unknown figure is the amount spent on supporting the publishing of books by banks and other businesses. That amount is reported to have declined considerably in the last year.

The total for support from all these sources must be somewhere around Ft260–280 million. Of this figure, a rough estimate would be that at least 500 titles are going to be financed by sponsors—mostly through open contests.

The retail value of books in the fund-supported category amounts to 13 to 15 per cent of last year's output. That is an enormous figure. It indicates how important books are for the elite of the Hungarian intelligentsia and also how great an influence those circles have in the places where the cash squeezed out of the financial bureaucracy is being divided up.

What this considerable support suffices for and where it is turned to use, however, is highly questionable.

The average print run has shrunk to the point where books published can no longer be sold in a normal manner, in accordance with the usual terms of the book trade. In other words, these books do not even find

their way to the buyer if only because their publishers are, in many cases, amateurs operating without a professional publishing organization (and therefore cheaply), who do not even have access to the distribution channels of the book trade.

Thus these books are being distributed at best in the same way as the samizdat books of old used to be. Indeed, most are actually produced in the same way, too. Computers and desktop publishing, available to everyone, create the illusion that it is professional publishing (and, of course, also distribution) that is unaffordably expensive involving "unnecessary" costs; ignoring them appears to be a triumph over the "system", a genuine alternative.

Profit-oriented publishers can hardly be expected to act against their own interests for any long period of time; a publisher is certain to attempt to maximize available income even if, let us say, for the sake of his image, he is willing to take on the occasional money-losing book.

Are the 10 to 15 (20?) larger and smaller publishers constituting (for how long?) the main force of the Hungarian publishing industry, quasi-old as well as quasi-new, capable of doing so?

The majority of publishers active in the continuously shrinking market of high-quality books, operating, in principle, as business ventures, are probably all money losers, and have been in the red for a long time. They have been kept alive only because their owners (in most cases identical with their staff) are prisoners of their own companies: they cannot (perhaps do not even want to) find another job, and even if they put their company up for sale, there would be no takers, not at a realistic price. There is no other choice than to continue to operate the publishing house or the bookshop. Operation here means gradually declining reproduction, the eating up of capital at an accelerating rate.

In the worst-case scenario, before total exhaustion and total loss of capital, these publishers will change their field of operation out of sheer self-defence. What will remain will be small companies which will publish books regarded as important by benevolent sponsors.

That, however, will no longer resemble anything like professional, business-type book production. It will be a cottage industry.

So far so good. But can there be books without publishers?

Of course there can.

There will be books in Hungary even then, because books in this country still have a rather high prestige, and sponsors are therefore relatively easy to find. What gets published, however, will not be what their publishers wish to bring out to satisfy genuine interest. Nor, of course, will those books be published or distributed and compete with each other; they will only get printed. It is there that the newly won autonomy of intellectual life will come to an end.

Publishers will cease to look for books worth publishing. Instead, they will look for works for whose publication sponsors can be found.

The need for restructuring

The mass-producers of the Hungarian publishing industry will not remain unaffected by the general narrowing of the market either: there will be fierce competition via mergers, hostile bids and buyouts leading to an intensifying concentration of capital. The big fish, seizing ever larger chunks of the market, will increasingly want to publish nothing but foolproof titles, which will be (at best) "international best-sellers". For Hungarian writers, the skies, far from bright already today, will turn pitch dark.

In other words, the conditions of a full-blown market economy will become predominant. It will be more or less like the German publishing industry—or more exactly, half of it. Or a more provincial variant of even that half.

Incidentally, in 1988, the Hungarian publishing trade was, in the respect of all its more important indices, almost exactly a tenth of the (then) West German publishing trade. This was largely proportionate with the difference in population. German publishing was first-rate (as it is today) and has traditionally served as a model for Hungarian publishing. Of course, the inner proportions had always been different because of the different dimensions and absorbing capacity of the various special market segments, not to mention the capital strength of the German book industry and the resulting performance which could be measured even by the intellectual value it was producing. Still the comparison was not entirely absurd. However, in a country like Hungary, this was possible only in the shelter provided by the economic greenhouse of socialism. We did not know that the much yearned-for freedom from censorship will naturally entail the demolition of the greenhouse as well.

Ominously, quality publishing is on the retreat in the West, too. The growth of capital concentration, the proliferation of "books" that compete with video clips, containing hardly any text at all, price wars and the increasing number of bankruptcies among booksellers signify long-term trends which no one will be able to avoid facing. However, they will affect different countries in different ways.

There is a danger that because of the sudden opening of the floodgates by the political and economic changeover, processes will be accomplished with extreme speed—within a year or two in

Hungary—processes which took decades in Western book markets and under settled conditions. Here, a similar story will be played out amid the scenes of the collapse of book distribution—and a lot else—the sum of which will also be a decline in the role of the written word. It is ironic that it was the intellectuals pressing for a market economy who practically opened the way to the liquidation of their own power. Who would have believed that the spiritual culture embodied in writing, printing and reading would be so very expensive and so dependent on technology? It will have to be protected, while the new technology will never be able to take on its most fundamental role, just as the cinema has never been able to take on the same role as the theatre.

In the stagnant, still waters of socialism, many things were preserved—including


the power of the word. Now we can sit back and wonder.

But can a country exist without publishing?

Is it really inevitable to accept these economic realities—and are they really the realities?

Perhaps not.

Book publishing cannot be substituted by randomly distributed occasional publications issued out of context. Nor can it be replaced by a couple of computers; nor can its absence be made up for by teaching the educated classes English as is being done in Nigeria. Hungarian science (and scholarship and architecture, medicine and art, poetry and fiction) can only be cultivated in the Hungarian language. That requires a skilled and professional Hungarian publishing trade functioning on an industrial scale and, last but not least, decent bookshops.

To find a way to do this is the great challenge of the coming years. 



Titian, 1937

Transylvania: Managing within a Nation-State

An Interview with Béla Markó

Béla Markó was elected President of RMDSz, the Democratic Federation of the Hungarians of Romania, in 1993, and re-elected in 1995. He was born in Kézdivásárhely (Țirgu Secuiesc) in the Székely Country of Transylvania, in 1951, and made his name as a poet and as editor of *Látó*, a journal published in Marosvásárhely (Țirgu Mureș) where he still lives. The interview was first published in the 23 September issue of the Budapest daily *Népszabadság*.

Things are on the move in Romania, is the impression you get travelling in Transylvania. I was here in the spring and the roads seemed to be in a pretty bad state, there was barely any traffic, very few Western-made cars could be seen with local plates. Now, there are roadworks all over the place and a surprising number of Western cars with Romanian plates.

Yes, there have been spectacular changes. There are roads being built and improved in many places, petrol stations mushrooming everywhere. There is much more opportunity to broadcast, both radio and television, and the larger towns are on cellular telephones. But as everywhere in Eastern Europe, the situation is very uneven. Foreign capital—Italian, Turkish or Arab, for instance—is clearly showing an interest. Computerization is spreading, but

there are basic transport problems over large parts of the country. All the same, life is much less drab, things are moving, things are bubbling.

After the 1989 Revolution, many thought that Hungarians in Romania, especially in Transylvania, would be starting from a favourable position in the move to capitalism.

There was an idea hereabouts that the sort of differences between Western and the local—let's call them Byzantine—traditions did give a headstart to the Hungarians. Now, with five years behind us, it is clear that the Hungarian community in Romania was no more able to take advantage of the situation than anyone else. Quite the contrary, we proved to be more stuck in a rut and less flexible than our Romanian compatriots. I cannot be sure why: was it because a very fluid unregulated situation better suited Romanians, or was it that what happened here has not really been a switch to a market economy—it just has still not happened. In the absence of that switch, you have to bear in mind that the pseudo-privatization carried out by those who also held the political reins earlier, in the nature of things, handicapped the Hungarian community. Just as before 1989, it found itself a long way from the levers of power.

You can probably cite an example or two.

Privatization commissars, or delegates, were placed at the head of state enterprises designated for privatization. They were appointed by the State Privatization Fund. Take Maros, our own county: here almost 40 per cent of the population are ethnic Hungarians, and yet out of two hundred and six of these delegates no more than four or five were Hungarians. I think that the figure is enough to show how Hungarians can be forced out of some of the processes taking place in the economy.

Why was the RMDSz unable to counterbalance this discrimination in privatization?

We have stood united as an organization for six years now. The importance of that cannot be overestimated. But what we have done as regards the economy is certainly not up to the mark. That's a justifiable criticism. Although naturally, we have our excuse—the objectives of the Hungarian community in Romania are primarily cultural. Our most obvious grievances concern language and culture. Let me note—and the irony is intentional—that our organization is largely headed by writers and intellectuals of that ilk.

Clearly Hungarians here can draw up a positive side to the balance sheet as well since the 1989 Revolution?

There is truly a great deal that speaks for dynamism. A list of all the funds and associations created by the Hungarians of Transylvania, and what they have achieved, would be a surprise to many people. I can confidently say that it is here that the most essential changes have occurred.

Learning from experience, have ideas been formulated which might help Hungarians in future privatization?

What is called privatization by coupon is about to take wing. In simple terms, this means that every adult citizen will be allotted a share of the wealth of the nation in the form of privatization coupons. Within a given time these can be exchanged for shares in enterprises specially selected for this purpose. In something like this, that the average person finds difficult to understand, any of us might feel at a loss. I think there are real opportunities here for the RMDSz to be of help to Hungarians. Will privatization by coupon prove to be a genuine option leading to a market economy? That will only become clear when the balance sheets and prospectuses of the enterprises designated for privatization are studied. In any event, we will do our best to help those who wish to exchange their coupons for share certificates. What we want to do is to discover what form of association is necessary, or indeed possible, at which enterprises. Naturally we do not propose to act as brokers or as an investment fund. If we wished to put some sort of RMDSz strategy into play instead of individual enterprise, we would find ourselves acting against what we actually want—a free and democratic society.

Despite the difficulties democracy is having in taking root in Eastern Europe, there are undeniable signs of progress in the development of a civic society. What role did the RMDSz have in this?

From one point of view, the RMDSz is not a political organization but a communal structure which both serves and mobilizes its members. Let me take the Hungarian language press as just one example. Although it finds it difficult to stay on its feet, it is still viable. There are a number of local dailies, magazines devoted to art and literature, trade and leisure activities, and observers are impressed by their stan-

dards. They may have their difficulties, but they rely on their own resources. They are not supported by the state but by the efforts of communities of various sizes. They have had their problems for one reason or another, very often their survival is precarious, but they have stood the test.

What you're saying suggests that, pace unbelievable difficulties, you appreciate the scope that democracy in Romania now provides. Yet the accusation has frequently been made by official sources in Romania—and even more often by others—that your complaints stand in the way of Romania's desire to be part of Europe.

It is true we never hesitate to express demands where they are justified, or to raise our voice in complaint whenever our rights are abused. We too are giving much thought to the nature of a possible future integration. A shared Europe which recreates certain well-known problems is not really attractive to us. What we fear is that it will not be the West that will shape the East in its likeness but vice-versa. We are anxious that the West does not forget this. We are hoping for a Europe where a western legal system can ensure that the norms of coexistence are observed everywhere.

The way the Irish and the Basque questions are being resolved, seems to prove that European integration has managed to cope with ancient, poisonous conflicts.

I am afraid these examples also show that even advanced democracies can only recognize the importance of the national question, and the need for compromise, at the price of much sacrifice, time, patience, and willingness to learn. In other words, democracy on its own is no guarantee that a minority question, with all the sediment

of the ages attached to it, can be resolved within the short term.

You have had the opportunity to enter into discussions with politicians in the West. What have they to say about future prospects?

Sometimes they express themselves pretty crudely. They say, for instance, that a society can only be expected to make sacrifices if it is appropriately compensated. In Romania we live in a society which traditionally identifies the state and the nation, the people and the country. Indeed, the government itself can mean all these things. Unfortunately, this interpretation for a nation state is not just part of the constitution, but it is part of the way people think collectively. As regards the politicians you mention, the question is whether this society can be expected to abandon such an approach to a nation state; a society which, in historical terms, has only recently formed a nation state. In other words, can Romanians be expected to abandon what is still a nascent nation state in exchange for sharing the benefits of European integration.

Is this too great a sacrifice?

That is not the question, but whether there will be politicians, let's call them statesmen if you like, who are capable of taking the long view instead of merely weighing up the balance of current interests.

Do they exist?

The future will tell.

That does not sound over-optimistic, understandably enough. Perhaps you're thinking of the recent Education Act, to which Hungarians in Transylvania responded with protests and demonstrations.

This piece of legislation, in all its aspects, was very far from what we would have liked to see. What we had in mind was a decentralized system, with many options and considerable institutional autonomy, including a totally independent Hungarian-language system of instruction which fits into the education system of Romania in a manner guaranteed by the constitution. That the Act provides for additional restrictions within a highly centralized system, restrictions that are a step backwards, even in terms of the recent situation, implies much more than a mere non-acceptance of our ideas. A telling example is that all vocational training in a language other than Romanian is prohibited. Hungarian as the language of instruction in such schools has been legal so far. Up to now, all pupils in Hungarian-language secondary schools have been able to sit for their university entrance examinations in Hungarian. That will stop next year.

Why?

The answer is easy. Nationalist incitement, the provocation of a confrontation is rooted in this situation. This is a tried and proven method of setting the Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority against each other. The objectives differ from time to time. Right now the aim may well be the creation of a pseudo-unity, putting a brake on the pluralization of Romanian society; a desire to divert attention from major social problems, say those of privatization, or the widening of the chasm that divides society; a manoeuvre on the part of those who, pace democracy, have no desire to relinquish power to anyone. It is, however, also true that there are people in Romania whose influence on politics should not be ignored, whose idea of the future is of a country which will somehow be rid of a community different

in language and culture. Whatever they might say in public, these people look on multilingualism or multiculturalism as a burden, indeed as a threat to Romania. Their desire to assimilate others follows logically. And these things do not concern only Hungarians, not by a long shot.

How do you view Hungary's policy towards Romania?

In essence, the present Hungarian government's policy towards the Hungarians of Romania does not differ from that of previous governments. What is perhaps most obvious is that the present government is much keener on dialogue with Romanian politicians. It is trying to speed up negotiations in relation to the Basic Treaty Convention. There is some difference in rhetoric, true. However, Hungaro-Romanian relations are essentially what they were earlier. For things to change, the Romanians would have to change their attitude and that has not happened.

As regards relations between the RMDSz and the Hungarian government, I should stress in the first place that we maintain regular and fruitful contacts with the Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad in Budapest. We are on good terms with individual members of the government. As I see things, the Hungarian government unavoidably faces the horns of a dilemma. Hungary is moving rapidly towards Europe, and it is therefore in the country's interest to settle things with all her neighbours as quickly as possible. The need to represent the interests of Hungarians outside Hungary, including those of Romania—and to do so in a manner that nobody could describe as half-hearted—is in diametric opposition to this. It is extremely difficult to pursue such a policy in a situation where the other party, perhaps for domestic reasons, has conflicting

interests—in a situation where Romanian politicians are not sufficiently motivated to make the huge sacrifices for the sake of this European integration; all the more since, the way I see things, Western Europe would sooner see the speedy conclusion of a Basic Treaty, and through that all problems swept under the carpet, than having them genuinely solved.

What are your hopes as to the future of the Hungarian community in Romania?

Primarily I place my hopes in the two million Hungarians who live here. Perhaps not the majority of them, but a fairly large segment live in a region where they are in an overwhelming majority. If I set out from a certain point in Transylvania in a given direction I can travel for two hundred kilometres and hear Hungarian spoken around me. That is powerfully encouraging.

You're saying quite clearly that the Romanians hold the key to the situation. Recently, on the 14th of September, following the publication by President Iliescu of the draft of a document outlining a plan of reconciliation between Romania and Hungary, along with Romanian party leaders, you took part in discussions with the President. What import do you see in that meeting?

We discussed President Iliescu's initiative. The Foreign Ministry had prepared a package of three documents. One is a political declaration, the other the draft of an agreement on cooperation between neighbours, and the third a code of behaviour related to national minorities in both countries. The latter denies more than it

asserts, so I am afraid there are formal reasons as well why we cannot accept it. It is not a code of behaviour that we are in need of, but a Basic Treaty convention. It's not that we maintain that this declaration was made for purely tactical reasons. The leadership of the RMDSz is convinced, bearing in mind all that I have said, that it is indeed in the strategic interest of Romania to be present in Europe as a country which cooperates with Hungary as closely as possible. However, I must admit, that I was unpleasantly surprised by two of the parties which took part in the discussions, the Liberal Party of '93 and the Civic Alliance Party. Both are opposition parties but what primarily mattered to them were the chances of such negotiations, given that the government coalition was implacably anti-Hungarian. In other words, even these two parties, which are ready to engage in discussions with us, have not seriously considered what kind of relations between Romanians and Hungarians they want.

At the most recent RMDSz congress, you came under severe criticism but were re-elected President with a large majority.

What matters is not that I was reelected but that we did in fact manage to achieve a consensus. Even though the RMDSz is clearly undergoing pluralization, it includes platforms which differ. A certain kind of cohesion was able to assert itself all the same. You can say that, on certain defined issues, the Hungarians of Romania are capable of united action. I should say it is that which makes the existence of the RMDSz meaningful. ☛

Interviewed by László Hovanyecz.

There Is No Such Thing as Eastern Europe

An Interview with Paul Lendvai

Paul Lendvai was Vienna correspondent of *The Financial Times* from 1960 to 1982, as well as contributing regularly to Swiss, German and Austrian papers. He is currently a senior executive of ORF, the Austrian state radio and TV company, where he also presents a monthly political discussion programme on television, *European Studio*. Since 1973, he has been editor of *Europäische Rundschau* and, since 1990, Chairman of the *Európai Szemle* Foundation.

He is a member of the executive board of the Austrian Foreign Policy Association, as well as member of the International PEN, IPI and the Central European working team of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

Among his many books, the following have also appeared in English: *Eagles in Cobwebs. Nationalism and Communism in the Balkans*, 1969; *Anti-Semitism without Jews. Communist Eastern Europe*, 1971; *Bureaucracy of Truth. How Communist Governments Manage the News*, 1981; *Hungary: The Art of Survival*, 1988. His most recent book was *Between Hope and Disenchantment. Reflections on the Change in Eastern Europe*, 1994, published in German and Hungarian.

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Am I talking to Paul Lendvai or Lendvai Pál?

Paul Lendvai, of course.

Why?

Because I don't want to confuse anyone reading this interview. I am based in Vienna and I keep an eye on events in Hungary as an outside observer, and not as a knowledgeable insider. Henry Kissinger calls himself Henry, not Heinz. And Brzezinski's name has been anglicized, too.

I don't think these two names cropped up quite by chance. Just as Kissinger and Brzezinski are highly regarded in their own

specific fields, you, too, are widely recognized in the East and West as a leading authority on Eastern Europe.

There is a big difference between us, though. Kissinger and Brzezinski are also skilled power brokers. Both were associated with administrations and held positions in government. I'm only a little man who comments on things.

What was the environment in which you started?

Well, I was born in Budapest in the year of the Great Depression. My father's family was from what is to-day Slovakia, and

Hungarian Jewish. He was a lawyer but not a very well-to-do one. On the other hand, he was extremely proud of having been an officer of the Austro-Hungarian k. und k. Army. My mother was Transylvanian. Our family was completely assimilated, with relatives the length and breadth of the old kingdom of Hungary, from Pozsony—Bratislava—to the Székely region in Transylvania. They felt a certain nostalgia for the Austro-Hungarian Empire...

How was the family affected by the war?

Like most Jewish middle-class families. Even though the Nazi laws only decreed that men between 16 and 65 should be sent to forced labour, I was caught at the age of fifteen. I escaped from a death march toward Austria at Pécel. I hid out with Swiss documents—I was never sure whether they were genuine or forged—but I did not live in constant fear. During the day I took off the Star of David and went to cinemas to flirt with girls.

Your family, as can be expected, was bourgeois and liberal. Yet you joined the Social Democrats. Why?

The whole family joined the Social Democratic Party. Once I was invited to the Social Democratic Youth Movement to give a lecture, and that was how my career in the movement began. I became Education Secretary for the IXth district of Budapest. At the beginning of 1948, I was the political secretary at the Law School. By that time I was fully involved in politics, and quite deliberately so. I was not one of the secret "two-card-holders" whose real sympathies were with the Communists, but I had become one of the rare birds who were then called "left-wing socialists".

You wanted to be a writer and you started to work as a journalist. Where?

Early on, I wrote ridiculous pieces on international politics for various Social Democratic youth papers, then, after the merger of the two parties, the Social Democrats and the Communists, I was moved from *Kossuth Népe* to *Szabad Nép*, the Communist Party daily.

Was that a voluntary and welcome move?

I felt honoured. But in the spring of '49, I was fired for a political error I committed by flirting with a secretary who had made a mistake in describing somebody's position. As punishment, I was sent—instead of Siberia—to MTI, the National News Agency. My boss there was György Ádám; later on, he was imprisoned in the Rajk trial. At that time, I was still enthusiastic. I wrote terrible pieces.

Were you really a member of the ÁVH, the State Security Force?

I was a conscript who was simply drafted into the internal security force. Our training was very harsh. In 1952 I was jailed.

Why?

That information was never shared with me. I was in the Fő utca prison, and was then sent off to the Kistarcsa internment camp. I was released in '53. I went back to MTI where no one even dared to talk to me, and a few days later I was dismissed on the grounds of incompetence. I was rehabilitated in the summer of '56. I got a job on the staff of the new evening paper *Esti Budapest*.

What did you do in the revolution?

I sat it out in a cellar, our apartment was close to the Kilián Barracks, which were under heavy siege most of the time. My wife, a British actress, used to say that I am the only '56 exile who has never boasted of destroying Russian tanks single-handedly, risking his life. After November 4 1956, with some colleagues I founded the independent evening paper *Esti Hírlap*.

You left Hungary in January 1957. You travelled to Poland, and never returned. Why?

The wave of arrests began, but what really frightened me was the way the Chinese delegation led by Chou-Enlai spoke on the "Hungarian question" at an international conference. On top of that, I made friends with the correspondent of *The New York Times*, to whom I complained about the immense damage done by all the propaganda against the moderate stand of Imre Nagy that Radio Free Europe had put out under US pressure during the first days of the Revolution. To that, this prominent American journalist admitted that he thought Eisenhower an idiot. I was shaken and confused by all that. I rapidly organized one more protest action against the arrest of Hungarian writers and journalists, then, via Bratislava, I travelled straight to Vienna. I never wanted to live a lie again.

Did you get a job right away?

Yes, I did. But I used a variety of pseudonyms in different papers because my parents had stayed on in Budapest. During those years I was known as Paul Landy in America, and Árpád Bécs and György Holló in Austria and Switzerland. No one really knew who the person behind those names was, no one except Hungarian counterintelligence, that is. My big breakthrough

came in 1960 when I started to work for *The Financial Times*. It became my citadel, and my second wife helped me a great deal in building it.

How did you become an East Europe specialist?

We settled in Vienna. I learned about Austria and later on about Eastern Europe from that vantage point. I was publishing continuously in two languages—English and German—which was a real professional challenge. For many years I did not write a single line in Hungarian, only once did I write an article for Radio Free Europe in Munich, criticizing its activity in '56. I got twenty dollars, and that was that. Nevertheless, I was regarded for a long time as being on the staff of Radio Free Europe. Which was nothing to be ashamed of—it simply wasn't true. I acquired Austrian citizenship in '59, and was released from Hungarian citizenship in '67.

I took quite a risk there, because in between I had been constantly travelling in the region, and could have been arrested any time since I had been blacklisted by the Hungarians.

How did the famous or infamous "Lendvai File" come into being?

This is quite well known today, for one reason because I published my experiences after I had laid hands on the operative files on me from the various countries. The evidence of these confirms my own experience over several journeys that I was under surveillance everywhere I went during the Sixties and Seventies. It was only in Romania that they did it openly. In the other countries they rather created situations which could have provided a pretext for arresting or deporting me. I'll give you an example. The time is February 8, 1973.

The scene the Balkans Hotel in Sofia. That was where I had been provided with a room as a guest of the Bulgarian Foreign Ministry, having accompanied Rudolf Kirchschläger, then the Austrian Foreign Minister, to Sofia. At eight o'clock in the morning two plain clothes security men appeared in my hotel room. "Come with us," they said, and took my passport, which had been lying on the desk. I was not yet dressed and I had to act fast. To the surprise of the policemen, I picked up the phone, and asked for the Foreign Ministry headquarters. A long dispute began between the secret policemen and the Bulgarian bureaucrats, which ended with the Bulgarian protocol chief coming for me, and sending off my unexpected visitors with the excuse that there had been "some misunderstanding". Of course, there would have been an unprecedented scandal even then, if the whole affair had come to light, and it had become known that an official member of the Foreign Minister's entourage was about to be arrested. They had meant to cover the thing up with Kirchschläger by telling him that I was only to be expelled, not arrested, because I had been on the blacklist for a long time. And in any case, they had to consider the sensibilities of "the Hungarian comrades". Incidentally, I happen to know from my Stasi file that András Benkei, Hungary's Interior Minister at the time, wrote to Erich Mielke, his East German counterpart, that the Hungarians knew I made frequent visits to the GDR, and would appreciate it if they did not let me in again. The text of the original telegram is published in my new book. In the meantime I have received 161 pages of additional material from another former communist country. These will come in handy when I write my memoirs.

Did you get the Hungarian documents, too?

Well, I asked for them, but haven't got them yet. A high-ranking official assured me they contained nothing of any interest at all. Which, of course, I don't believe. But I think a lot of time will have to pass before these documents become accessible. If they became public, they would embarrass quite a few people in Hungary as well as in Austria.

Why were you put on the blacklist in Hungary?

I have no idea. Why I was put there was just as incomprehensible as when I was taken off, for which there was no particular reason either.

How did you find out that you were persona non grata at home?

I asked for a visa, and was refused. That was in 1966. I had been to Budapest before, in 1964. It was considered then as a gesture on the part of Kádár and company, an indication that consolidation had started in Hungary. Then, without any explanation, I was put on the blacklist, and stayed there until 1970. During the same period I could not go to Poland or Czechoslovakia either. But I could to Yugoslavia.

Had you written anything that may have provoked such hostility?

I wrote nothing that would have given grounds for that. I wrote before in the same way as after. But my goal, which I never made a secret of, was to "loosen up" the regime.

In your latest book Between Hope and Disenchantment. Reflections on the Change in Eastern Europe, you refer to the fact that the security services of the Eastern Bloc acted "in concert" in order to prevent your

getting direct information, and the whole operation was directed from Moscow.

That's right.

Yet you were allowed into Moscow in the company of Bruno Kreisky.

First they officially declared that my membership in the official delegation was a provocation but, when Kreisky made it clear that he would not put up with being dictated to by the Russians, they decided to swallow it. In any case at that time I was still not really dangerous to the Kremlin. I became their Public Enemy No. 1 when I was appointed to the ORF. Television is the most effective medium, and even they were aware of that. They were especially sensitive about my representing an offensive Eastern policy. In 1983, under the title "Lies on Screen", *Izvestia* launched a vicious attack on the ORF series *Ostreport*, and on me personally. They accused me of ideological subversion and called me a paid agent of the CIA. Federal Chancellor Kreisky, Alois Mock, the President of the People's Party, and the Austrian journalists' union protested, not just ORF. Kreisky's formal statement reads: "For constitutional reasons, we cannot allow the activities of Austrian journalists to be controlled or censored for any reason." *Izvestia's* second article, without mentioning the name of Bruno Kreisky, rejected the charge of putting a strain on Austro-Soviet relations, and used quotes from the communist *Volkstimme* to support their allegations. I learned the real reasons behind that unusually concentrated campaign only much later. As it turned out, it had been Gustav Husak who had got even with me. The "offence" had been committed when, prior to his first official visit to Vienna, I was permitted to interview him on television. Before the semi-off-

ficial interview on bilateral relations, the contents of which were quite irrelevant, we exchanged a couple of words in German. I asked him if it was true that Prague would soon be the scene of a summit meeting of the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries. Husak said yes but mentioned no date. I asked offhand, whether Brezhnev, who was already ill much of the time by then, would be there, too. Husak replied, "Yes, of course, Comrade Brezhnev will be there". Next morning I learned that when the interview was being conducted, Brezhnev was already dead, but this had been kept secret by the Kremlin even from the leaders of bloc countries. Unable to resist the temptation, I made a reference to this fact in my report from Prague. I met Husak later at a formal luncheon given in his honour in Vienna but his behaviour was very unfriendly. And a year later he put me on the blacklist. Although my visit had been prepared by the Czechoslovak embassy I had to return from Prague on the same plane on which I had arrived. Husak was a vain man, and that was his revenge for having been made "the laughing-stock of the whole world". After that, he regarded me as a "hostile expert", and did his best to have my fall from grace declared throughout the entire bloc. It was only in 1984 that the ice broke with Moscow: ORF broadcast the visit of Federal Chancellor Sinowatz live. But the absurdity of the whole situation was shown by the fact that they never gave any explanation for the ban on my entry. My visa was granted at the last minute, and before that, I had a long conversation with Ambassador Efremov, who was probably worried about his own future, too.

In Hungary, you could work as a journalist without restrictions from the seventies, couldn't you?

That's right. A panel discussion programme entitled "The Art of Survival", was a huge success. Only later did I learn that the show was a kind of milestone in the struggle between the regime's hardliners and those who followed the more liberal Aczél line.

At the time I was warned by several people—benevolently or otherwise—that I had better be careful with Lendvai, because he is a "double agent", working for both sides. That's a legend that appears to be surviving stubbornly. What is your comment on that?

Very interesting. This is the first time I have heard of it. Why didn't you tell me earlier? Of course it is absolutely groundless. No one in Hungary ever asked me for a favour. Naturally, if you deal in information, you are very much aware—and that is the basis of all of American-style journalism—that in order to get information, you must give information, too. Whenever I came here, I always met many people, tried to get information from as many sides as I could, then put the pieces from different sources together to obtain a full picture.

So is that all there is to the Lendvai legend?

Look, I travelled a lot in the region. I made frequent trips to Yugoslavia, for example, so I was able to foretell well in advance what would happen when Tito died. When I took the side of the Croats on some issue, I got an award from them, and the Serbs said ugly things about me. Then vice versa. In the former communist countries the activities of independent journalists were always suspect. They were treated as potential spies. That followed from the historical antecedents, the closed nature of the communist movement, but also from the conventions of conspiracy.

You have referred several times to your friendship with Bruno Kreisky. How did this come about?

I met Kreisky first in 1960 as correspondent of *The Financial Times*. He was aware that I could be of use to him and he was always sympathetic to journalists, due partly to his character, his open mind, but also to the fact that he had been a journalist himself. But the development of our friendship was also affected by the fact that he recognized pretty early on that I wasn't one of those who try to repaint their past, to curry favour by making themselves seen as extreme right wingers.

I have read the lengthy conversation on modern Social Democracy you had with him. In that discussion you seemed more than just the person asking questions.

I have never denied that I am a left liberal. Kreisky appreciated that. But I was attracted to him myself. I regarded him as one of the greatest politicians of this century, a man who had created something enduring with his new Eastern policy. We talked a lot. We also quarrelled quite a lot. I wrote his first biography in 1972. I think I'm not overly immodest when I say that Kreisky's image in the world, but especially in Austria and Eastern Europe, was, at least in a small part, the result of my work. Incidentally, there was also a lesser known, confidential side to our relationship. In 1968 he sent me to Canada to stand in for him at the famous Bilderberg Conference, a forum for the world's most influential businessmen, bankers and politicians, where I made the acquaintance of people like McNamara, Rockefeller and Rothschild. On that first occasion I was representing Kreisky, but next year I was invited in my own right.

Are you a member of the Austrian Social Democratic Party?

The only thing I'm a member of is American Express.

Did your relationship with Kreisky never prompt you to join?

No, and I never felt even the faintest pressure in that direction. Kreisky's genuine human and political greatness lay precisely in the fact that he surrounded himself with people of different views. At any rate I can't picture myself as a member of any party. The way I see it, most people in the West today join one party or another to further their career, to get better paid or to increase their influence in business through politics. When they advocate various ideologies, you'd better take a close look and see on behalf of which business interest group they are acting. The kind of purity in politics, when you simply want to do something for people, is practically extinct today. Kreisky may have been the last of the Mohicans... Incidentally, I never asked anything from him, nor he from me. More exactly, he once suggested that I should start a weekly. I thought it over, then rejected the offer because I felt that if I accepted, I wouldn't be able to form an opinion as independently as before.

But your close relationship to the party leader and chancellor must have had a part in your appointment to a senior executive position at ORF.

Well, I already had a professional reputation by then. It was recognized that I was one of the leading experts on Eastern Europe. Of course, my relationship to Kreisky was no disadvantage. But it wasn't he who got me the job.

As far as I know, it was due to you that the image of the new K. u. K., i.e. "Kreisky und Kádár" developed, a formulation which so greatly influenced Hungary's image in the early eighties.

Yes, this may be partly true. Leaving aside deep ideological differences, there was something in common between the two.

How did that memorable interview with Kádár come about?

Kreisky interceded on my behalf. But I'd better tell you the whole story. In September 1978 I visited the Chancellor for a long-expected background conversation on the East European situation. The discussion was suddenly cut short, which irritated me. Kreisky, who was uniquely sensitive to the changes of mood of the people he was talking to, suddenly turned to me with the question, "Tell me, what is your relationship with the Hungarians these days?" I answered, "My relations with them are normal, and with some people they are definitely good. I've been off the blacklist for years, I can travel there whenever I feel like it; they watch me, especially since that two-part television documentary which you saw yourself." Kreisky interrupted me: "Well, all right then. Next week I'll be making a working visit to Budapest. Come along as my guest, then we'll have ample opportunity to discuss our subject." The protocol chiefs on both sides of the Iron Curtain were distressed but neither his own staff nor the Hungarians dared to tell the Chancellor that I, as a person, was still a "sensitive issue". True, in Budapest the organizers separated me from the Kreiskys, and when I asked why I couldn't go with them, they replied: "There is not enough room on the government train taking him to Debrecen." But to the great annoyance

of the Hungarian organizers, Kreisky would not forget about me, and invited me for breakfast at the guest house where he was staying. We continued the conversation interrupted in Vienna while walking in the woods, with an army of secret policemen and protocol chiefs at our heels. That walk together had the effect of a revelation. But since Austria was accorded an important role in Kádár's brand of cautious reform communism, a journalist from that country, even if he was "difficult", merited special treatment. That was how it came about that in the autumn of 1981, during one of Kreisky's official visits, Kádár was ready to give an interview to an expatriate Hungarian on cameras for ORF.

What was your impression of Kádár then?

It was a pleasant surprise to me that Kádár did not ask for the questions to be submitted in writing in advance, even though this was the accepted custom, even in the West, at the time. It was like a casual conversation. Kádár, who was sixty-nine then, seemed a little embarrassed and stiff when he walked into the ornate room of Parliament where the cameras had been set up, but he soon relaxed. After the usual words about bilateral relations, I began to ask questions about his passion for chess. He told me that he had played regularly even at the age of thirteen, then added, "Chess teaches you to accept losing, then later to endure winning." To my immediate question as to what if there was a stalemate, he answered with a smile, "Then a new game must begin..." Incidentally, I made one more, shorter interview with him when he had a meeting with Federal President Rudolf Kirchschläger in the Burgenland. So the legend that I was his "favourite Western journalist" is not true at all. Nevertheless, I was recently attacked for this by people

who had acted as informers for the regime.

In the past couple of years you shocked many by speaking in a tolerant manner about the semi-market, semi-bourgeois conditions of the Kádár regime, even though you used to be highly critical of the former Socialist countries. What made you "understand" us then?

Well, I thought the most important thing was that these regimes should loosen up, and I judged my own activities accordingly. Hungary was different from the rest of the bloc. Those people who, in recent years, wanted to start history anew forgot how much this country had profited from the fact that there was an Aczél here, not a Bilák. The difference what the "homo Kádáricus" meant could be measured in decades. At any rate, it must always be considered that the Kádár regime lasted longer than the Horthy regime had. And just like the Horthy regime, it developed a new political class. The parallels between the two regimes are really startling: some features regarding the attitude, thinking and value order of the new political classes often coincide. I was not awed by the former government, nor am I by the present one. In both there were figures who came to Vienna to take part in my show, and made enthusiastic speeches about the Hungarian reforms. None of them said anything about wanting to pull down this whole regime. The small steps made possible by the reforms had a large part in the fact that people did have some sense of freedom here. It is also true, though, that for the same reason, the changes here are not as radical as in the Czech Republic.

You used to have a similarly tolerant opinion of Poland. What was it that changed your view?

My friendship with the Poles goes back to a long time, and I have never had the same deeply human relationship with any of the bloc's politicians as I had with Mieczyslaw Rakowski. We have always spoken with each other with the same frankness, whether he was the editor-in-chief of *Polityka*, Jaruzelski's Prime Minister, then Party Chairman, or now that he is the editor of a small leftwing paper. He gave me his last important interview when the one-party state had only minutes to live. I found him with difficulty in the Party building, normally defended like a fortress, which—such is the punishment of history—houses the Stock Exchange today. Rakowski, who had always been one of the moderate reformers, then on the brink of their fall in Moscow, told me that not long before he had had a meeting in Moscow with the leaders of the bloc who were at the edge of falling from power. Gorbachev comforted them with the sentence, "Whatever happens, comrades, Socialism will win in the end!" To which Rakowski, according to his own account, replied, "Maybe, but we'll never live to see it." I only mention this because I argued a lot with Rakowski about Solidarity. The way I saw it, Walesa was making history. Today I regard Walesa as the most powerful destabilizing factor where the internal situation of Poland is concerned. And General Jaruzelski? In the eyes of many Poles, the man with the dark glasses who, in 1981, introduced the state of emergency, is no longer a traitor but the saviour of his country, because he probably prevented Soviet armed intervention. I interviewed him for TV in 1985, in a rather peculiar atmosphere. Before the interview Jaruzelski made reference to the Polish-Hungarian friendship, and actually toasted it in Hungarian. I nearly warned him that I was from Austrian Television when he began to talk about good relations with

Austria with the same cordiality. That conversation was particularly interesting because my book *Anti-Semitism without Jews*, which mainly investigated the witch-hunt of Autumn 1968, had been banned in Poland for years. After the interview we chatted for another hour. This educated soldier, from a family of the lesser nobility, was not one to listen only to the voice of sycophants. The complexity of his role is well shown by the fact that in recent years Adam Michnik, the father figure of dissidents in Poland, appeared in public together with the discredited Jaruzelski. I remember, after the interview I tried to get through to the night duty desk of ORF from his anteroom. I reached for a green telephone, and at the very last moment Jaruzelski's aide prevented me from unwittingly putting the armed forces on full alert. That sort of sloppiness is very Polish.

And Yugoslavia?

Yugoslavia was the great love of my life, and also my bitterest disappointment. I kept going there again and again, I learned Serbo-Croat, and made many friends and even more enemies. The latter especially, because of looking into the Albanian problem. I gave warnings well in advance about what might happen but I never believed that there would be such horrible bloodshed. To me, the greatest achievement of the Tito regime was that it tried to establish a confederacy, and did so in a much freer and more enlightened atmosphere than the other communist countries had.

What is the root of your disappointment? The outbreak of nationalism or the impotence of Europe?

Both. Yugoslavia shocked me to the point where I recognized the truth of Sir Karl Popper's view that there is no real

progress in the history of mankind. When you look at all that is happening in Yugoslavia today, and see how large the role of individual and national freedom is, then you must also consider the price that had to be paid for all this in human lives. And the behaviour of the West is further evidence for the selfishness and inward-looking character of the world.

How and why did the West allow things to go this far?

That's a huge topic, and I have written enough on it to fill a large book. I will only quote the headlines now: Everybody would have liked to keep the special status of Yugoslavia but the West was always a step behind. American policy was terribly short-sighted and stupid. They failed to recognize the importance of this region, and after the Gulf War, the only thing they cared about was the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia was written off.

Can this be seen as a moral failure for democracy?

Everything that has happened in the world since the thirties can be seen as the moral failure of democracy from Nazism to Chechnya. Because of the information revolution, these events have broken into our bedrooms, and still, politicians will only take notice of bloodshed if it has a direct bearing on their election chances. In this sense, the last few years were the years of a great loss of illusions for me.

Does that concern not only Yugoslavia?

No, it concerns the whole region.

How closely did you feel or anticipate the change of system in the Eastern bloc?

In my best dreams I hoped for changes but I never thought that they might take place without large-scale bloodshed, massive strikes and a flood of refugees. I did anticipate, though, that the GDR would simply rot away and fall apart. The unexpected has always had a major role in politics and history. Frankly, what I hoped for was not rapid change but gradual rapprochement. I thought that these regimes would be forced to give up for economic reasons. I am pretty familiar with the entire literature on Gorbachev. I wrote on the phenomenon myself. All in all, I think we had enormous luck.

Which was the point when the whole process toppled over and became irreversible?

When Gorbachev gave up. The watershed was the German question. I had never thought that this would happen in such a way. Today's debates inside Russia are a good indication of what had been going on. Gorbachev is accused of having given up two empires, the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union. To absorb such a shock will take several generations, and that will cause many problems to the world.

You were very enthusiastic in 1990, after the Hungarian elections, but you had reservations, too. Why?

I anticipated two threats. For one thing, I saw that Prime Minister József Antall and his men were amateurs on the economy. I felt that the expert class had been "be-headed". The other thing was that it appeared to me that where they were trying to go back to was not 1945 but the 1930s or the end of the last century.

Turning back to the past and intensifying nationalism was hardly specific to Hungary.

Of course not. But Hungary was well ahead of the other countries in building a market economy. Antall was a true Hungarian gentleman who managed the country's outside image pretty well. But his tactical genius concealed the real substance of what was going on. Hungary lost its market advantage. It lost more than three or four years. Another thing I didn't like was the "media war" getting really vicious. I may have been wrong when I kept silent for so long, and refrained from speaking out in public, even though I could see the dangers clearly. The third thing was nationalism. I found it distressing that a small Central European nation should seek rhetorical instead of real solutions. Hungarian internal politics must not be built on the backs of Hungarians living abroad. And it's wrong to create false expectations. In this sense, I prefer the path the Socialist-Liberal coalition is trying to tread. I favour the so-called basic agreements with the neighbouring countries. Not that I believe these would solve anything. But by pursuing these, Hungary would show the world that it is fighting for minority rights and not for the restoration of the pre-Trianon borders. They could also learn much from Austrian policies, for instance the way the South Tyrolean question is being handled there. Nor should the Romanians or the Slovaks be treated condescendingly. Progress can only be by small steps.

What did you expect from last year's Socialist-Liberal election success?

I was genuinely surprised by such a shift in proportions. I think the Socialist Party would be better off if its victory had been less sweeping. They have made many mistakes already. The biggest challenge is the race against time. Every government must make its most decisive moves in the year

following its electoral success if it wants the positive results of these to be felt by the fourth year. You know what real leadership is? To have the people feel, both subjectively and objectively, that things have become better for them during the four years of governance. The present Hungarian government was given an unprecedented historical chance. Metaphorically speaking—and simplicistically—this is a government uniting the former prison directors with the former inmates. It's a miracle. It would have been better if they had acted faster but it is perhaps still not too late. But the party leaders must be aware that this is not the kind of job that will earn them popularity. You must not lose your nerve along with your image. And public opinion must not be underestimated. People know exactly who's really doing something and who's only making promises.

Can the Social-Liberal coalition get back the advantages lost in consequence of the policies of the previous years? In general, in your view, will a Socialist-dominated government be able to carry through a modernizing economic policy which is certain to entail a series of grave social conflicts?

That is indeed the biggest question that has to be asked about Hungary today. But you must disregard ideological labels. They have much less importance today than four years ago. The Hungarians ought to learn from the Czechs and the Slovenians. The tax system has to be re-organized, because it is absurd that 30 per cent of the GDP should be produced by the untaxed hidden economy. If they can find some measures to deal with that, they will improve morale in the whole of the country. And I would not overdramatize the impoverishment of the country either. It is

precisely the example of Austria which shows that the best way to fight poverty is by improving the economy.

What did you think of the idea many had, one that is alive even today, that the East European changes might be financed by the West?

That's an illusion. The attitude of the West is a mixture of arrogance and ignorance.

To go back to the title of your book, where is Hungary headed?

There is no such thing as Eastern Europe. Every country is different. The direction Bulgaria is headed is—I hope—different from where Hungary is going.

And where is the world headed?

The greatest threat is chaos. There are no large confrontations but many local wars. They all want to protect themselves by retreating into their snail shell. That is no solu-

tion. One thing recent years have taught us is how little we know about the world. About where the world is really headed. When we have not even digested the Great War. See Yugoslavia.

So you don't share the widely held view that the "destination is Europe."

No, I don't. And I don't like slogans and stereotypes anyway. I think the best thing that can be said is what Voltaire said in *Candide*, "let us cultivate our gardens". In other words, let us try to be a bit more tolerant of each other, and to shape (economic) policy in a way that people's life improves a little. And let us keep the alternatives in mind: Yugoslavia, the Caucasus. That is the basic question. A prominent Serbian politician told me once: "You can't walk barefoot and wear a top hat at the same time." Unfortunately, he was right. ■

Interviewed by Katalin Bossányi



Daumier, 1933

János Dobszay

Crutches for the State

The Voluntary Sphere

A study presented to the conference in Copenhagen last Spring by a National Commission (consisting of representatives of six ministries, the government office responsible for minority affairs, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Central Statistical Office [KSH] singled out the spectacular expansion of the civic sphere as a salient feature of developments in Hungary in recent years.

Indeed, one fifth of all Hungarians are members of some voluntary organization or another, and a tenth of them are registered members of two or more. The role of this sector in meeting social needs is on the increase, the added value produced by voluntary organizations assisting households—that is, not state nor banking or business interests—reaching half a per cent of GDP in 1994. These contributed 0.7 per cent to the full output of the economy.

In Hungary, voluntary organizations have a history going back only two hundred years, but even this relatively short span has had its relapses. In the first half

of the 19th century, the imperial Habsburg authorities cast a suspicious eye on the foundation of the first civic groups—clubs or cultural, scholarly, scientific, and professional associations; it was only after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 that associations really began to flourish. In 1862, only 319 civic organizations operating in the form of associations were registered in Hungary; by 1878, there were nearly 2,000, and more than 14,000 in 1932, despite the fact that the territory and the population of the country had shrunk after the 1920 Treaty of Trianon.

Events following the Second World War halted the momentum drastically. In 1949, the establishment of foundations was made dependent on ministerial approval; in 1959, the very institution was abolished and the notion was expunged from Hungarian legislation. Most association and voluntary organizations were closed down by the authorities or driven into a position where their members had no choice other than to dissolve their organizations. (The number of associations, for example, dropped below 9,000 in 1970; in 1982, a mere 6,500 were registered.)

Along with the dissolutions, a kind of inner restructuring took place: in the forty years preceding the changeover to democracy and a market economy, more than 90 per cent of associations were concerned with sports or leisure-time activities—the

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number of voluntary fire fighters was also astonishingly high—while health care, social, cultural or religious organizations were reduced to a few per cent of the total.

Changes began, even if slowly, in the second half of the 1980s. In 1987, the foundation as a corporate identity was restored, and a law on the freedom of association was enacted in 1989.

In the wake of the changes in the political and legal environment, there was an epidemic of organization-founding. In 1989, the number of foundations registered by the courts was 400, in 1992, 9,803. Over the same period, the number of associations rose from 8,936 to 21,528.

Although the rate of growth has slowed down (in 1992 the number of foundations grew by 3,500 and that of associations by 3,200, in 1993, those figures were 2,181 and 1,271, respectively), the process is far from over. In September 1995, more than 15,000 foundations and some 23,000 associations, interest-protecting bodies and other civic organizations were listed in the register of the Supreme Court. Today, for every thousand Hungarians there are 1.15 foundations and 2.22 organizations, all founded under the Association Act.

Most voluntary organizations operate in their own immediate vicinity, within a town or village and, in the case of foundations, frequently attached to some other institution. The proportion of organizations that are active nation-wide is only some 15 per cent.

Nearly half of all organizations are multi-purpose, their charters specifying several kinds of aims and activities. In the case of foundations, a combination of cultural and educational objectives is most frequent, while associations tend to link sports and leisure activities. The experience of recent years, however, shows that the declaration of several objectives often

has a practical purpose, as it provides grounds to seek financial support for a variety of reasons.

Some sixty per cent of the foundations are active in education, culture and welfare. Their overall make-up, however, still bears the marks of the past: those linked to sports or some other leisure-time activity are still in the majority (around 50 per cent).

Most foundations, a quarter of the total, were established for educational purposes. This legal form is favoured by those founding or maintaining private schools; foundations are also frequently established by municipal (or state) institutions of education as a channel for investments—thus, building gymnasiums or purchasing teaching aids—and for the support of various other local initiatives. A total of 18 per cent of foundations were created to serve cultural aims, and 16 per cent as a form of safety net against the impoverishment.

The Fund for the Support of the Poor (SZETA) began to operate (still underground) in the years before the change-over. However, this charity, the first to openly address the poverty issue, was practically bankrupt by the end of 1994, and had to close down even its single office in the capital. Nevertheless, voluntary organizations for community care—for instance, assisting the unemployed or providing care for the homeless—continue to be founded. Most of the country's sixty or so soup kitchens are operated by such organizations (12 are run by the Red Cross, which also receives financial support from the government).

A significant number of voluntary services for the sick and the poor were established by churches or religious groups. Charitable work funded to the extent of several hundred million forints is being undertaken by the Charity Service of the Hungarian Knights of Malta which, on the

initiative of the late Csilla von Boeselager operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Church. Forty thousand volunteers are active in 139 local groups; according to their own statistics, the financial value of their work runs to Ft 300 million annually. The Protestant and Orthodox communities co-ordinated their charity missions in 1991, establishing their Ecumenical Charity Service. It has little money, and is mainly engaged in the distribution of food and clothing largely donated by foreign organizations.

Membership of the majority of the associations is typically 20 to 49 people. Social welfare organizations make up only 4 per cent of all associations, yet almost a fifth of the country's population, some 2 million people, are registered in them. The main reason is that this group includes the insurance and mutual fund associations of various companies; many expect these social organizations not just to provide aid but also to protect their interests.

The National Association of Large Families has more members, some 70,000, than any of the political parties in Parliament and, backed by such massive support, has managed to get several restrictive measures proposed by the government rejected or amended. (The last instance was its success in seeing to it that families with three or more children should continue to receive family allowance without a means test).

The transition has also increased the number of organizations representing the interests of employees: 18 per cent of the voluntary sphere belong to this category.

These interest protecting organizations (as they are categorized) also have a sizeable membership: nearly half of them have over 150 registered dues-paying members. Most operate within one workplace; only around 10 per cent of them are national organizations.

A growing number of voluntary workers assist the national health service, which is in dire straits. George Soros alone, who has spent some \$50 million in Hungary since 1984 through his foundation (support to 6,500 individuals and about 3,500 institutions and voluntary organizations), targets \$10 million in aid to the national health system over the next four years. Every fourth Hungarian foundation is active in health care, most with general objectives—prevention, supporting a healthy lifestyle—in their charter. The foundations concerned with concrete activities are led by those providing paediatric aid and by those created to compensate for the shortcomings in the health care system; this they do, for instance, by raising funds for equipment for a medical institution.

The geographical distribution of voluntary organizations in Hungary is uneven, with the usual high degree of concentration in Budapest: over a quarter are based there. The outer metropolitan area, County Pest, comes second. The number of foundations per thousand inhabitants in the capital is 2.2, double the national average. The distribution of other voluntary organizations roughly corresponds to the demographic distribution. This may be explained by the fact that while the establishment of a foundation requires reserve funds by law, associations may be formed for a much more modest financial outlay.

The ratio of the membership of voluntary organizations to the inhabitants in a given town or village is highest in the county seats (28.2 per cent). There is relatively less community activity in villages: 14 per cent of the rural population belongs to some organization or another.

The unevenness of the geographical distribution seems even more unfavourable when cessation of activities is also taken into account. Voluntary organizations centred in villages are the most ex-

Patient Self-help

In Hungary there is now at least one legally registered foundation, association or club covering every chronic illness or health impairment. The creation of voluntary organizations started in the 1980s under the patronage of the trade unions, the Patriotic People's Front and the Red Cross; it has since turned into a genuine movement. The blind have had a union of their own for decades, but in recent years, the handicapped, cancer patients, those suffering from cardiac and circulation complaints, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, kidney disease and other ailments have also formed associations, which have united later in national federations. Dozens of organizations of this kind are active throughout the country today.

These associations help patients to develop life-styles better suited to their illnesses, they make up for gaps in the treatment offered, and try to provide counselling from the moment of diagnosis. Due to consistent lobbying by the foundation Against Cancer, for Man and Tomorrow, the Hungarian Anti-Cancer League and the National Federation of Cancer Patients or the Hungarian ILCO Federation (an organization for those who have undergone colostomy), a growing number of state of the art rehabilitation aids are being provided by the National Health Service. The National Union of Kidney Patients has succeeded not only in organizing free transport by ambulance for patients after dialysis and cut-rate holidays for them, but has also seen to it that the anaemia consequential to renal insufficiency is treated not by frequent transfusions but by a more modern and safer drug therapy and that victims now receive costly, imported medicines free of charge. The activists in these organizations (themselves convalescing sufferers) contact their fellow-patients while in hospital, providing moral support and showing them the skills needed to use medical instruments. Patients are more likely to share their problems with fellow-sufferers than with doctors or nurses, and are readier to ask—and receive answers to—questions regarded as delicate, such as sexual problems after surgery.

An increasing number of hospital wards now have patients' self-help clubs co-operating with them in the treatment of chronic illnesses: thus, for instance, all paediatric cancer wards, most dialysis stations and the 23 colostomy out-patients' departments of the country, to mention only the most widespread. These organizations stand up for all their fellow sufferers regardless of whether they are members or not. Membership fees are usually nominal, and the associations subsist on continuously diminishing government support and on donations by sponsors, frequently drug manufacturing companies. The largest organizations issue news bulletins of their own (e.g. *Vesevilág* [Kidney World]), and target prevention by publishing information material and, if possible, by organizing screenings. They also support the training of nurses specializing in the treatment of the "adopted" disease. The functions they organize are intended to provide leisure activities for those afflicted, to promote adjustment to society and to cultivate a general

public awareness. Well-known artists often perform at these functions, which are attended by patients and their friends and families. Most of these organizations have joined relevant international organizations which have been operating successfully in Western Europe and the United States for some time, thus profiting from their experience and from international support when needed. The need indeed arises from time to time: CEAPIR, the international association of kidney patients, for instance, raised its voice recently against the Chinese practice of removing convicts' kidneys for transplantation.

Lobbying also has to be insistent on the level of health and welfare policy. Most of the time it is taken on by the Chain Federation, which has 25 member organizations. They fight for long-delayed legislation on patients' rights and for subsidies by the Health Service for drugs the chronically ill cannot do without, and call attention to the blank spots in Hungarian legislation. A case in point is the fact that automatic benefits linked with disability pensions (public health care) are available for those of working age only, which means that persons who are afflicted the day after their retirement can only receive free medicines if this is made possible by the local authorities.

Attempts by patients to help themselves are not welcomed wholeheartedly by doctors, who are concerned that patients, already in shock or anxiety, might be swamped by horror stories and inexpert advice from laymen, which would do more harm than good. Most doctors, however, think differently. They believe that these organizations actually help increase the efficiency of their own work. Collaboration between patients and healers is strongest in the organization of colostomy patients, which has a separate section for doctors and specialist nurses.

During the present nightmare of continuing spending cuts and reduced benefits, these voluntary organizations may be the only rays of hope. People want to survive deteriorating conditions, pulling themselves out, if need be, by their own chinstrap from the quagmire.

Judit Bokor

posed to the threat of dissolution. Of these 3.6 per cent disappeared over the last few years; in the capital, the figure was only 1 per cent.

The ephemeral character of voluntary organizations founded since the changeover indicates that some kind of supply and demand "market" is taking shape. In 1989, according to the registers, no foundation was wound up, and even in 1990, there was only one; last year 94 were struck off the records, and up to mid-

September of this year the figure had already reached 70.

The probable reasons for more foundations folding in villages are lack of information, inadequate fund-raising skills and a shortage of funds.

Many of the voluntary organizations that were established at the time of the changeover were virtually beheaded in the ensuing few years. Their directors were enticed into the political parties or into government offices after each of the two

general elections. Nevertheless, politicians are prominent in the voluntary sector. In the parliamentary elections of 1994, for instance, 55.9 per cent of Hungarian Democratic Forum candidates also served on the board of trustees of a foundation; for the Socialists, that figure was 45.9 per cent, for the Free Democrats, 44.6 per cent, and for the Christian Democrats, 44.7 per cent. The proportion of those registered as members of voluntary organizations was even higher (64–77 per cent of candidates).

These last five or so years have seen several political scandals over financial support extended in questionable circumstances—for instance, through funds made available by secret decree—by the government to voluntary organizations felt to be sympathetic or run by individuals close to it. An investigation made by the State Audit Office last year established that, more than Ft24 billion was transferred from the government sector to various foundations. An estimate has not even been attempted on how many billion forints may have been passed, under political pressure, from state-owned firms to organizations of this kind. For instance, the largest energy-supplying firm, the Hungarian Electricity Company, has alone spent Ft900 million in recent years in support of foundations.

On 1 January 1994, Parliament created a special, intermediate group for voluntary organizations so that they may be both “state” and “civic” in character, but transparent in their operation. This type of “public foundation”, under current law, may be brought into being when it is assigned a public task, for example, the local organization of education. (In contrast to the foundations pure and simple, it does more than serve the public interest, it has to actually take over a task from the state.)

While public foundations receive a considerable income from government funds,

the average voluntary organization, which is dependent on private contributions, receives only a few million forints. Membership fees generally do not play a major role anywhere; revenues from business activities or investments are crucial only for the larger voluntary organizations. The annual income of a third of them is less than Ft50,000, a further third (those with an annual income of over Ft500,000) account for 97 per cent of the total income of the sphere.

Several surveys have been made of the willingness on the part of the public to give money voluntarily. They have unambiguously shown that some two thirds of the adult population make some kind of voluntary donation to help people who are not relatives or personal friends. The last year, 1993, when this type of survey was carried out, results showed that voluntary organizations received Ft 8 billion in support from the public, 0.3 per cent of gross personal income. The value of actual work donated by volunteer work was even higher, at Ft 14 billion.

Inclination for charity is closely related to social and demographic position. Those most willing to give are urban males between the ages of 30 and 60 with families and incomes from several sources. The willingness to give for charitable purposes increases with education.

People contribute, on average, 1.1 per cent of their annual income to the support of voluntary organizations. Five per cent of the more than 5 million contributors donate less than Ft100 for such purposes, while 6.4 per cent donate between Ft10,000 and Ft 50,000. The majority, 52 per cent of all contributors, provide with money donations between Ft100 and Ft1,000.

Voluntary organizations do not have to rely on private contributions only. Parliament allocates a certain amount in the annual state budget to their support. How-

ever, the money to be distributed has not risen, despite inflation, even though the number of organizations seeking funds is growing year by year. In 1990, Parliament provided Ft500 million, Ft400 million in 1991, Ft420 million in 1992, Ft388 million in 1993 and Ft400 million in both of the last two years. It should also be noted that in applications, in expectation of a cut in the support asked for, people normally ask for several times the amount which the size of their organization and their tasks would justify. Thus, this year, a total of Ft3 billion was applied for, while 400 million was actually distributed.

The situation is only made worse by the fact that the parliamentary representatives on whom funding decisions rest, frequently know nothing about the organizations applying for them. It has happened more than once recently that support was extended to organizations existing only on paper, with no real activity behind them.

It is highly characteristic of the prevailing chaos that while political organizations were declared no longer eligible for support, the youth organizations of the parties represented in parliament once again received money from "civic funds" this year.

The inadequacy of legal regulation, however, makes itself felt not only in the respect of financial support. Appropriate legislation on voluntary organizations still does not exist; no more than a very few paragraphs are found in the Civil Code pertaining to the formation and winding up of foundations. The Supreme Court is doing its best to make up for the gaps in statute law by creating precedents in case law. Nevertheless, one of the disagreeable experiences has been that the legal form of foundations or other voluntary organizations has been used as a cover for various business ventures which have been able to secure major tax benefits for themselves.

Payments received by several founda-

tions went in fact to various public utility development projects or as fees for other services—for instance, for the installation of cable television. On other occasions, the obligatory contribution for street or pavement construction was made to appear as a donation to a foundation; there was even a case where the cost of tennis club dues was entered deductible for income tax purposes. Another example was when a firm transferred several million forints to a foundation, attaching a list with the names of individuals to be supported. This money was passed on to the individuals concerned as social benefits. The firm deducted the payment from its taxes, and those on the list received the benefits tax-free.

Little is known about the economic activity of voluntary organizations today with the latest information three years old. What does seem to be clear is that Hungarian voluntary organizations have achieved a negative record, unique by international standards: they spend some 80 per cent of their income on covering their own expenses. These organizations cannot thus be characterized by an accumulation of capital, in contrast to the practice in more developed countries where capital returns constitute the actual basis for their economic operation.

Labour costs in Hungarian voluntary organizations are rather low by international standards; most investigators explain this through the fact that most organizations employ personnel on a very limited scale only, or employees are usually remunerated by a token salary.

Another negative sign is that the material assets of voluntary organizations are strikingly low and little goes on investment. The conclusion is that no major improvement can be expected in the infrastructure of voluntary organizations in the near future, and this, in turn, may have an adverse effect on the efficiency of their operation. ■

Helping Self-Help

András Bíró, Winner of the Alternative Nobel Prize
of the Right Livelihood Award Foundation in Stockholm, on Roma Self-Help

The Alternative Nobel Prize, a Swedish award, is presented for achievements in non-governmental organizations "built up from below". In 1995 András Bíró, founder of the Autonomía Foundation in Hungary, shared it with three others. This is not the first time that the prize, which carries a considerable amount of money along with enormous prestige, has gone to a Hungarian activist: the winner in 1988 was János Vargha, the organizer of the Danube Circle, an environmental pressure group protesting against the Gabčíkovo-Nagyymaros-Dam. Bíró's Autonomía Foundation, launched five years ago and relying mainly on contributions from American private foundations, has increased its budget ten-fold, and, in addition to other projects, has spawned some two hundred that support Gypsy voluntary organizations.

András Bíró: We have supported local initiatives in three main areas. The most important of these, where some 70 per cent of the donations go, is support for projects of Gypsy civic organizations. In the field of environment protection, we are aiding projects concerned with "sustainable growth". That means support for production projects involving the use of alternative technologies which, rather than continuing to damage their environment,

function in a rational, sensible and beneficial manner. Our third concern is supporting training programmes for people active in voluntary organizations for them to learn what are the ways of locating funds, of drawing up projects in a professional manner, establishing democratic rules, etc. "Civic society" has become a kind of chewing-gum word today, everybody uses it, but it is our task to give meaning to this cliché. A multi-party system alone is not enough. In Panama, too, there are several parties, but that does not make the country democratic.

Perhaps the prestige of this prize will turn out to be its most important element.

I see it that way too. Another major role of the prize may be in helping to throw light on the position of Gypsies in Hungary. The question is not whether you like them or not. This is a very serious social issue far beyond any emotional approach. The government, the political parties, the voluntary organizations and the whole of society all have to face up to it. Keeping out five per cent of the population, more than half a million Gypsies, will be an obstacle not only to economic progress but also to democratic change*. This is too heavy a burden. Bosnia, fortunately, Hungary will

* See the two Close-up articles on Gypsies in Hungary in HQ 138.

never be, but there can still be ethnic tensions.

You once said that the Gypsy issue was a time-bomb.

That's right. But this view is shared by other people. When a certain social group loses hope, there are no rules of the game any more; anything goes, anything can be done. We know how great the bitterness is. It is not true that they don't want to work, that's not what we have observed. What is true, however, is that they are jobless and drifting. In a situation like that, extreme things are bound to happen.

The approach must be from several angles. The very first—and that is why we are especially active here—is simply to provide them with food, to allow the majority to lead a normal life biologically. I don't know how well it is known that the life expectancy of Gypsies in Hungary is ten years less than the average. That fact speaks for itself. Living conditions are obviously closely linked with whether these people are able to earn money at all. We must help them to make some money. That means more than having a formal workplace, it also means that we lend money to village families or groups to buy a couple of pigs for themselves, to lease some land, to grow corn. Let the family make some kind of living from the piglets, killing the sow only at Christmas, not before. Unfortunately, it often happens that they are so hungry that they kill her earlier to get some income, some security, at least where food is concerned.

The second issue, which is enormously important, is the problem of education, of schooling. It is awfully difficult for a Gypsy child, who has much greater freedom at home than the children of the majority have, to sit down on a school bench and stay quiet there for fifty minutes at a

stretch. The simplest thing for the teacher is to declare that the child is subnormal. Then the kid is put into a special class, and the whole process starts afresh. We have to give training to teachers whose job is to deal with these children on a special basis, and even give some financial support to them, if necessary.

What can be done to mitigate intolerance and prejudice?

That is a difficult question, and I'm not sure if I know the answer. I think both tolerance and intolerance work on the basis of the prejudices that are established in an individual. To give a personal example. For years I lived and worked in various Third World countries. I simply ran into the fact that the people living there were different. I had to ask myself whether I was really right in everything. Was my taste the right taste? Of course, ten million Hungarians cannot be sent to Africa and Asia to experience what it means to be different. However, Africa and Asia are already here, the Gypsies are here, foreign students are here, the world is coming to us. They are all different. They have different customs, different rhythms, different smells. That must be understood. All you can hope for is that this is a topic that will be discussed at school, that children will hear about who the Gypsies are, where they come from, what they did and what they did not do. People experience the presence of the Gypsies in Hungary but they don't know who they are. They don't know why they are the way they are. Perhaps if people learned about their customs, it would increase their respect for them. Perhaps.

How can politics help?

We ourselves want to formulate a Gypsy policy that could become the policy of the

Five Years in Action

THE HUNGARIAN FOUNDATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE
(Autonómia Alapítvány)*

Main Areas of Support:

- environment (sustainable development)
- alleviation of poverty, minority rights and economic betterment of the Roma
- support for non-profit programmes as such.

Combining these three apparently unrelated fields makes sense due to the appalling state of the environment, the growing discrimination against and marginalization of the Roma, the unemployment-fuelled dramatic growth of pauperization among the non-Roma poor as well, and finally, the embryonic state of self-help and grassroots non-political organizations after 40 years of dictatorship in Hungary. Focus on the "underdogs" thus contributes to the overall process of democratization.

The Poverty and Ethnicity Programme

spearheads our activities. The Roma make up approximately 5 per cent of the population, but more than 50 per cent of the unemployed. In addition to a life expectancy 14 years below that of the majority population, in which the reappearance of tuberculosis and a worsening housing situation play a part, this community is more and more exposed to violence and discrimination.

As opposed to traditional support for social *cum* educational policy or cultural/folk programmes and projects, HFSR is unique in funding income-generating projects, motivated by the joint occurrence of two factors: a) dramatically growing unemployment has hit the dominantly unskilled Roma work force the hardest and b) applications from Roma grassroots organizations are for support of mainly agricultural production projects.

Skepticism associated with HFSR funding policy is based on the conventional wisdom that Gypsies were not typically tillers of the soil. However, the male unemployed have had to leave towns and return to rural families. As job opportunities in villages are even more limited, there has been no alternative to cultivating the land, at least producing food for the family.

Recipients being exclusively grassroots organizations, HFSR grants have two other characteristics: a) only registered organizations with an elected leadership can apply (to further democratic practices this is considered indispensable) and b) assistance comes in a combination of grants and interest-free loans (the latter introduces a planning factor *cum* contractual relationship which is meant to encourage the acquisition of managerial skills as well as creating a horizontal relationship between the contractual parties). Repayment of loans has become an evaluation factor in the assessment of success or failure of a project.

HFSR's monitoring system is unique among donors in Hungary. A team of young activists—both Roma and non-Roma, women and men—have been trained by the Foundation to establish a new type of relationship, one based on mutual trust. Trust is a particularly important factor for a community which, for centuries, has not been trusted and has been despised. Dialogue and not giving orders is the rule. Asking questions and not offering answers is the way to make leaders aware of their lack of

* From the Foundation's 1995 annual report

knowledge of a given field, of the necessity to acquire or, if possible to pay for, indispensable information. The monitor is the first to visit an organization after the receipt of an application and is helpful in the formulation of the project and its budget. After the agreement of the board, monitors follow up execution. Yearly evaluation workshops, with some of the project leaders, the monitors, the staff and some board members, allow adjustments to be made.

Special projects:

The Roma Entrepreneurs Training Project

financed by the Mellon Foundation for the past 18 months in which more than 100 leaders will undergo intensive training in order to acquire managerial skills, so desperately needed in this community in both business and non-profit organizations, and **The Euroma** brainstorming session held in Budapest in March 1995 funded by the Open Society Institute. This meeting brought together three types of participants: community leaders; recipient foundations from the surrounding countries (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria); and donors like the Mott Foundation, the Soros Roma Foundation, the European Commission and the Freudenberg Stiftung. The idea of the meeting was conceived by the latter in order to discuss the possibilities of developing programmes to alleviate poverty among the Roma, looking on the HF-SR model as a possible approach feasible for the region. The lively discussions concluded in two points: a) to maintain periodical informal brainstorming meetings and b) HFSR will be the host of delegations of Roma leaders from Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia who, for a week will study on-site some of the projects of the foundation. The European Commission expressed interest in financing a regional project as well.

The Tolerance Prize, distributed every year on December 10, International Human Rights Day (in 1993 by the President of the Republic) to journalists and to the best media products, which help close the gap between the ethnic minorities' point of view and that of the majority.

The Legal Defense Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities was established by HFSR in 1993 to meet a glaring gap in this field. Its urgent establishment was dictated by the growing number of atrocities of which Romas of all ages and both sexes were the preferred victims and the absence of legal aid to help them in their plight. The Bureau is totally independent. HFSR contributed an exceptional \$15,000 (the ceiling for one project being set at \$10,000) as a one-off grant. The foundation has helped in fundraising for the Bureau, and USAID Budapest, as well as the European Community have contributed to its operation. More than 40 cases have been handled by the Bureau's lawyers since its inception in the spring of 1994.

Funding

Feasibility studies and initial activities were financed by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) in 1990, soon joined by the Ford Foundation and the Freudenberg Stiftung in the first period of its activity, then other overseas private Foundations followed: the German Marshall Fund of the US, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, and Anonymous Donors from the US. Hungarian donors have joined in only recently, among them the Hungarian Soros Foundation and the Open Society Institute, Budapest. Several donors: RBF, Ford, Mott pledged support for 2-3 consecutive years, which has allowed continuity in planning and stability of employment to the staff. At the initiative of HFSR, Coopers & Lybrand, the international auditors, has checked the bookkeeping every year since 1990.

government. We have ample data, ample material; we cannot say that we don't know what the situation is. A "complex" all-embracing programme should be concerned with schooling, employment opportunities, problems of identity, culture and language, social and health issues. The authorities, the political parties and the government can no longer neglect these problems.

Are the Gypsies open to efforts to help them, and if so, how much advantage can they take of it? Indeed, do they want any help?

First of all, I don't really like the word "help", help creates a situation of dependence. If I help you, then you are dependent on me in one way or another. If I have lent you money, then I am the boss. We prefer to use terms like "solidarity" or "co-operation". Everything depends on how people are addressed and spoken to. We never give advice to the Gypsies. We want to avoid being the all-knowing *gazhos* (Magyars) who explain the meaning of life to them. We ask questions, provocative questions at that. "And how do you imagine that? And when the water-melons are ripe, who are you going to sell them to, and for how much? And how can you be sure of that?" We want to persuade them to accept the rules of the game, whether the game is that of a market economy or that of the majority society. That's our method. Respect, trust, empty words like that. Trust, which means that we give, say, hundreds of thousands forints to local Gypsy organizations.

What do they do with those hundreds of thousands?

We've learned a lot too in the past five years. Our projects are better prepared

and now the money is spent for what we meant it to be used for. And they don't just spend it: 65–70 per cent of the grants are interest-free loans. They have to be repaid according to the contract. Being contracting parties further underlines equality. They have signed something and under-taken an obligation and we have signed something, and we too, have obligations.

Are the contracts honoured?

The ratio of repaid loans is now 30 per cent. We are far from satisfied, but getting our money back is increasingly characteristic of our projects. Some projects fail, though. Then we investigate why they didn't succeed—because of a lack of skills, because of drought or because somebody stole the money? If someone stole it, then we take him to court. There is no reason not to sue, since we have a signed contract. We are not more lenient because he is a Gypsy. I show my respect by looking on him as a citizen just like me, and if he fails to keep to the rules, he gets exactly the same treatment that I get if I don't keep to the rules.

How many projects are on hand?

We have financed two hundred projects, and right now ninety are under way. Our philosophy is to provide what we call the fuse money needed for something to start. By not handing over the whole amount as a grant, we want the Gypsy communities to learn to plan. One of the main problems of people living on the fringes of society is that they subsist from day to day. God will take care of tomorrow. That's obviously no way to cope with problems. Every year we invite a few project leaders—ten to fifteen—to sit down and talk things over for a day or two, to see what they have

achieved and where they failed and why. We analyse things.

Have you any indication that news of the existence of this foundation and this support is spreading among the Gypsies? Do they come to you saying "we want to grow watermelons too, we need two hundred thousand forints"?

That's exactly what happens. Our big problem is that we have not enough money to meet even 40-50 per cent of the requests and applications. There is simply no money. We may receive an application on a greasy piece of paper and we accept it all the same. We have no fixed formula applications should meet, but if we recognize that a local community has the strength to take the initiative, we go down there and start a dialogue. Is this the right thing to do? Is there a market for watermelons? This year, for example, the watermelon situation was catastrophic. They couldn't sell them.

Is it due to prejudice that support from people in Hungary is so small?

They don't give because they don't think the problem is important enough for them.

How does it happen that the Gypsies in Hungary are supported by American organizations?

That is indeed strange. Not only strange. Shameful. The majority here simply ignore this subject. They don't want to know about it. They consider it uncomfortable, they have plenty of problems anyway, so why should they think of those people, too? It has not yet entered the mind of a single Hungarian businessman to come to us. And that news about us is spreading.

It would be logical for you to get money from well-to-do Gypsies in Hungary.

That's a sore point. I would be only too pleased if that were true. Unfortunately, I have to admit that wealthy Gypsies do not show much solidarity with their own poor.

Why is this so?

When we talk about Gypsies, we are not talking about a monolith. There is social stratification among them, just as there are differences in language and tradition, and a sufficiently strong sense of identity embracing all the Gypsy groups in Hungary has not developed as yet. I might say they have a negative sense of ethnic identity. A well-to-do Gypsy came to me once, telling me that he wanted to put on a charity concert for the benefit of Ethiopian children. I looked him straight in the eye, and asked why he did not put it on for Gypsy children in Mátészalka. In his eyes it was more respectable to help the Ethiopians than his own people. This is a delicate problem, but unfortunately it's a real one.

How did you become so committed to the Gypsy cause?

I start from the fact that this is not a question of love or hatred. Personally, I don't especially like Gypsies. Neither do I hate them. They are a fact of Hungarian life. What I dislike is when somebody has to suffer for what he is. I will gladly do something about that. I had a lot of experience myself of what belonging to a minority means because I felt a foreigner everywhere. The Gypsies are the largest ethnic minority in Hungary, and the poorest, the one most discriminated against. They have no international support whatsoever. All

the other minorities are in some ways connected to other states. Noone backs the Gypsies.

How does Hungary compare to the neighbouring countries in terms of government and social action?

We are streets ahead of the countries surrounding us. Unfortunately. Because what we're doing is far from enough. However, there is a world of difference between them and here. On the level of words, of declarations, there is something, but very little is really happening. Legislation on minorities is uniquely positive in this country. The fact that today there is a woman who is half-Gypsy at the head of the cabinet office for ethnic and minority affairs would have appeared impossible five years ago. I have just come back from a meeting in Warsaw where the Gypsy issue was discussed. Romania and Slovakia were fiercely criticized by the American representative for their treatment of minorities. He mentioned Hungary as a positive example. He was pleased that there was an ombudsman for minorities here but said there was no Gypsy in the government bureaucracy. It is, of course, very bad, too, that high-level officials are drawn from a very narrow group. The number of Gypsy lawyers is very small. Efforts have to be made to help as many as possible to get to university, so that they can take up functions and positions as white collar workers or civil servants.

What is the position regarding the planned Gypsy public fund?

As far as I know, they are hard at work on it in the relevant government office. There is hope that the Ministry of Finance will allocate finances—too small an amount, in my opinion—for the purpose. The word is

that it will be a hundred million forints, which I find ridiculous enough, since it would mean thirty thousand forints per capita. As a beginning, however, it should be regarded as highly positive since in our neighbouring countries, where there are also sizeable Gypsy populations, there is no such thing at all. Not even in their dreams.

The basic idea is, as I understand it, that the foundation is a kind of miracle weapon. This would be a marked step towards an institutional solution.

History will provide a solution. If the financial base of this foundation grows significantly, if it operates well, that is, not just distributing money but using the appropriate methods too, then it will make a major contribution toward opening up roads on which the Gypsies will be able to improve their position. There is no such thing as a miracle weapon, and money is not enough. Even if there were to be a hundred times as much money, you can't solve everything just through money. The kind of relationship that exists between donor and recipient is extremely important. All through history, the Gypsies were either given or took things, but they very rarely gave; so why should they not give something this time which we would receive from them? All I can do is to represent a way of thinking on how to use funds in ways appropriate to the objectives and through the right methods. If this foundation operates in such a spirit, and not as a government bureaucracy, then it can really achieve a breakthrough. Solution? There is no solution.

You are fairly aggressive and straightforward in going after what you want. Has your style ever come into conflict with that of other Hungarian organizations with similar objectives?

It may be somewhat unusual. I am ready to admit that. But transparency, clear expression, openly declared objectives and methods are of outstanding importance here. In a society where every major decision was made in secret for forty years, people are unaccustomed to this openness.

And how do Gypsies feel about this?

I talk to them in the same way as I am talking to you. I make no distinction between ragged-trousered Gypsies and yourself. In fact, my business isn't with them, it's with a case, and in that there are two parties. And they sense that. I think people can sense when some kind of psychological communication is established. It need not culminate in or be only expressed in words. I have been in the same situation not only with Gypsies, but also with Africans and Latin-American farmers, who all accepted me. They may not have liked me all that much, but they could see there was no beating about the bush, and I real-

ly meant what I said. Either they agree or they don't. In which case we argue.

Do you listen to Gypsy music at home?

Sometimes.

Do you like it?

No, I don't like Gypsy music of the café type. It has no appeal for me. What I like is authentic Gypsy folk music. Once I arrived late for a session with a Gypsy group somewhere in Northern Hungary. It was cold, the car had broken down, and by the time we got there, there were some thirty people standing there, there was a milk pail, and they were dancing. They were not just standing shivering in the cold but began to dance. There is a fantastically strong *savoir vivre* in them, and love, and naturally often hatred, too, and, well, I love that! ☛

Gábor Kereszty and György Simó

Miklós Szinai

Great Britain and Horthy's Hungary

The Memoirs of György Barcza

György Barcza was the last head of mission to represent post-Great War Hungary in Great Britain. He stayed *en poste* in London from June 1938 to April 1941. One of the most eminent members of the Hungarian diplomatic corps, Barcza decided in 1945 not to return from Switzerland to Soviet-occupied Hungary. His memoirs, written in exile in 1946–47, could not be published in communist Hungary and first appeared in Budapest in 1994. I reviewed the two-volume work at length in the Spring 1995 issue of *The Hungarian Quarterly* (No. 137) under the heading "Hungary on the Threshold of War".

In the biographical notes published in the book, András D. Bán describes Barcza as a democrat and patriot. "He was through and through the representative of a noble conservative liberalism whose conception of the ideal existence and behaviour of man was in harmony with European cultural values. He rejected the extremes of left and right alike, and treasured above all culture, talents, ability, gentlemanly conduct and fair play. Understandably enough, he opposed radicalism both in 1918–19 (during the revolutions in Hungary) and the 30s."

These excerpts from György Barcza's memoirs recount events in the first year of the Second World War, from January to July 1940, when Hungary was not yet a belligerent; they also tell the story of the

U.K. breaking off diplomatic relations with Hungary and the declaration of war by both Great Britain and the U.S. After the breaking off of diplomatic relations, although Barcza was encouraged by the British government to stay on in London as an especial *persona grata*, he decided to return to his homeland. In another excerpt, he describes the new and important assignment he received in January 1943 from Hungary's conservative elite and the Kállay government. His missions to the Vatican, and later to Switzerland, were important links in the country's policy aimed at re-establishing contacts with the Western world and preparing the way for Hungary's extricating herself from German bonds and from the war. It was not Barcza's fault that the attempt failed (March–July 1943). The excerpts also provide an insight into the intentions of Prime Ministers Pál Teleki and Miklós Kállay and the most confidential instructions Barcza received from them, and offer an account of Barcza's talks with prominent statesmen, such as Foreign Secretaries Lord Halifax and Eden as well as Winston Churchill (in early July 1939).

However fine his qualities were, Barcza's scope was limited. Hungarian–U.K. relations before and during the Second World War were affected mainly, though not exclusively, by five factors: (1) the 1920 Trianon Treaty at the end of the

Great War; (2) the French policy of securing hegemony on the Continent, and its primary instrument, an alliance called the Little Entente, in which Yugoslavia, Romania and Czechoslovakia cooperated militarily and politically, mainly against Hungary; (3) after Hitler came into power in 1933, Germany's policy of dismantling the peace system of Versailles and the eastward expansion of the Nazi empire; (4) and truly only in fourth place, Great Britain's policy vis-à-vis Hungary, which had to bear in mind not only the above three factors but also Great Britain's position within the Empire; and (5) last, but by no means least, the political system and the domestic policies of Hungary.

Under the terms of Trianon, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and more than half of its population. Before 1918, non-Hungarians made up 46 per cent of the country's population. After Trianon, three million ethnic Hungarians found themselves citizens of neighbouring countries such as Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The repression of national minorities by the Hungarian authorities was replaced by the repression of millions of Hungarians in the newly emerged states. Old injustices were followed by new ones. After the Great War, Hungary was subjected to peace terms which were much more unjust and severe than those meted out on Germany, the main enemy of the Entente powers. It was not surprising that the foreign policy of all Hungarian governments after 1919 was governed by the desire of territorial revision.

Predictably enough, such revisionist policies by Hungarian governments prompted resistance on the part of the

victorious Great Powers and the Little Entente. Within the given political conditions, after Hitler assumed power, Hungary's political leadership and its aim of revising Trianon saw an unexpected new ally in a Germany which was endeavouring to break up the Versailles peace treaties. They paid little heed to the fact that the support for Hungarian revisionist goals offered by Hitler's Germany was simply an instrument in the service of its own expansionist goals. Hungarian conservative politicians thought they would be able to preserve independence in foreign and domestic affairs, despite the fact that they welcomed the partial realization of their revisionist aims by the grace of the Germans. They believed they could resist growing Nazi influence in Hungary which was being abetted by the Hungarian far right. However, due to the nature of the conservative political system, anti-Nazi democratic Hungarian political forces could not assert themselves to the necessary degree. Hungarian governments, despite their own wishes, made large concessions domestically to the pro-German extreme right, yielding also to pressures from the army command and the civil service. They introduced anti-Jewish measures and anti-democratic legislation, before eventually drifting into war on the side of the Third Reich.

In his memoirs Barcza describes clearly what the U.K.'s policy towards Hungary was in circumstances like these and where its limits were. "After these two momentous conversations with Lord Halifax and later Mr Eden," he writes, "I had the impression that as long as Teleki¹ remained prime minister and stood firm by his com-

1 ■ Count Pál Teleki (1879–1941), geographer; Foreign Minister (6 June–12 August 1919) in the rival government formed in Szeged during the Hungarian Soviet Republic (21 March–1 August 1919); Prime Minister from 19 July 1920 to 3 April 1921, and again from 16 February 1939 until his suicide on 3 April 1941. (See also note 11 on p. 90)

mitted patriotic and self-confident policies, the relationship between Britain and Hungary was not in trouble. [...] The British, who for the past two decades had hardly paid any attention to issues on the Continent and none to Hungary, now, after the Second World War had broken out, were suddenly compelled to concern themselves with Europe, including Central Europe. Owing to twenty years' neglect, however, they found themselves everywhere face to face with the Germans [...] With the war, then, British interest in us awoke from its indolence of twenty years; however, German influence had gained so much strength by then and, owing to the Vienna Award², had struck such deep roots that unless the British achieved a quick victory they could hardly hope to catch up. That was not in sight; all of us in London knew that it would take years until the

British and the American military forces could be built up and equipped properly, and it would take some more time until they caught up with that of Germany in manpower and resources, before they could eventually win. Neither myself nor my friends in Hungarian politics who thought along the same lines entertained any doubts about a final Anglo-Saxon victory. But we knew that this would not materialize for another four or five years."

The tragedy that befell Hungary was aggravated by the fact that the Allied landing and the opening of the Second Front took place in Normandy, not in the Balkans, as many Hungarian politicians had thought and hoped. A long way from any sizable Anglo-Saxon armed forces, Hungary became the Soviet-German frontline in 1944. ■

2 ■ There were two Vienna awards, one, following Munich in 1938, granted southern Slovakia to Hungary, the second, on August 30 1940, transferred Northern Transylvania from Romania to Hungary.

György Barcza

My Memories as a Diplomat 1911–1945

Excerpts

London, 1938–1941

Talks with Lord Halifax. First visit to Mr Eden

(Vol. 1, Part 5, Chapter 15)

A few days after my return¹ I received detailed instructions from Teleki via courier. After having studied and committed them into a shorter memorandum, I went to see the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax.

The gist of Teleki's political instructions was as follows. I was to assure the British government that

- (1) Hungary harboured no intentions of attacking anybody;
- (2) Hungary was determined to defend—with arms, if need be—its sovereignty and national honour against any foreign attack;
- (3) Hungary would under no circumstances ever engage in any joint action with the Soviets.

These assurances called for an explanation. The first point was clear, and was taken note of by Lord Halifax with great satisfaction, for in spite of the fact that officially we were a "non-belligerent state", this promise, to a degree, amounted to a declaration of neutrality. The second point referred to any attack, including the event of the Germans employing force against us. I was, under Teleki's orders, to put this to the Foreign Office in this light. This also met with satisfaction, even though Halifax pointed out that he was afraid the Germans, instead of engaging in an open act of violence against us, would more likely draw us under their control through gradually increasing pressure and threats. The third point meant that should the then valid German–Soviet non-aggression pact lead to active military collaboration between Germany and the Soviet Union against the United Kingdom, we would never participate in conjunction with the Soviets, for we could never, under any circumstances or as part of any alliance, pursue a cause *commune* with the Soviets.

1 ■ After staying in Budapest in December 1939, Barcza returned to London after 15 January 1940.

Lord Halifax received my communications and explanations with visible satisfaction. He stated that he knew and understood our difficulties, and with regard to these the British government did not wish to consider as relevant those aggravating aspects they would otherwise be compelled to constate from the excessively pro-German, and consequently anti-British, tone of our official statements and press. The United Kingdom then would, out of consideration for our especially grave predicament, take a position of patience and exoneration. But this was not to be taken to extremes, Halifax added. By joining the Axis², Hungary had stepped on a path, or a downward slope rather, on which it was difficult to hold back. Joining the Triple Alliance on our part involved the undertaking of political, economic and other commitments that enabled the Germans to demand just about anything from us. Therefore he was sceptical as to the viability of our policy. He trusted Teleki, the man and politician, and knew that he meant to keep his word—but would he be able to? Would he be able to defend, as he promised, our sovereignty in arms if need be, against anybody? Even against the Germans?

I told Halifax I was convinced that once Teleki held out anything in prospect he would adhere to it with all his might. As long as he was Prime Minister he would seek the enforcement of the above assurances. I added in all sincerity that this was only to be as long as Teleki was in charge, which I hoped would be for a long time. I could sense from Halifax's communications that O'Malley, the British envoy in Budapest, must have struck a more sceptical tone in his reports about our attitude. Not that he mistrusted Teleki's sincere goodwill, but he was apprehensively watching us sliding down the slippery slope of German friendship and yielding to growing German demands, which at the time were still political and economic in nature. O'Malley clearly saw in Budapest that a sizable part of our officer corps, civil servants and society was definitely pro-German, whether out of conviction or because, through clever propaganda, the Germans had managed to win them over (while the British were standing by idly and did nothing to counterbalance this). Teleki was *bonissima fide*, but what was going to happen once he resigned? Teleki himself found it difficult to stem the current; what if he were replaced as head of the government by someone weaker who was bamboozled by the Germans? Within myself I could not help sharing Halifax's apprehensions, yet on the outside I assured him that Teleki's position was the most stable possible and Horthy³ was a sincere Anglophile, just as were the better part of our upper classes.

2 ■ Barcza is mistaken here as regards the date of the signing of the Tripartite Treaty. It was formed by Japan, Germany and Italy on 27 September 1940, with Hungary joining on 20 November of the same year. Barcza's talk with Lord Halifax can be dated to January 1940.

3 ■ Miklós Horthy (1868–1957), Rear-Admiral in the Austro-Hungarian Navy, was head of state as Regent of Hungary from 1 March 1920 to 15 October 1944.

Lord Halifax was a typical distinguished English peer, an amalgam of a pious conservative who respected tradition and the unctious idealism of an Anglican priest. He intimated to us the sympathy conservative Englishmen felt for a similarly historic constitutional state. Anglo-Hungarian friendship in sport also played a part in this, as with so many members of English society. Halifax had come from India to head the Foreign Office; he had had no knowledge or experience in diplomacy. He had a blind trust in the League of Nations as an institution capable of making the world happy and of resolving all international disputes. Halifax was remote from practical life and the exigencies of politics; he was the English gentleman who would play it fair, an idealist devoid of any posturing and arrogance. Similarly to Chamberlain and public opinion in Great Britain, he too loathed the thought of war and believed in appeasement and in an agreement with the Germans. When all efforts at maintaining peace proved futile, he confronted the future with a firmness permeated with resignation.

He was succeeded at the Foreign Office by Mr Eden. This was the second time the latter had come to the position, despite the fact that his previous performance in foreign affairs could hardly be called fortunate or successful. In consequence of the failure of the international sanctions against Italy because of the war in Abyssinia⁴, a plan which had been decided upon in Geneva, and of which he was a principal originator, he was to no small degree compromised. Owing, however, to the peculiarities of public life in England, Eden did not disappear from the political arena, much though he deserved to. In another country a cack-handed politician, such as Mr Eden, would have left public life, but England is a country dissimilar from all others in every respect. As long as they enjoy the confidence of a party or a political leader, some politicians there keep coming back again and again. Besides, though Mr Eden was definitely a man of mediocre intelligence, he was excellent in one single respect—his performance as manager of the office he had been entrusted with was impeccable, reliable and disciplined. Politics in England is handled in both domestic and foreign relations by the government and the head of government together with Parliament, that is, public opinion. The holder of a portfolio is merely the first office-holder in his department, who is less a policy-maker than the executor of the instructions of the government, which in turn were brought in harmony with Parliament and thereby the entire nation. No politics can be practised against public opinion. It is the government's task to convince public opinion of the correctness of their policies, and should they fail to do so they have to draw the logical consequences and either step down or alter their plans. This is what the democratic and constitutional form of government in the United Kingdom en-

4 ■ Italy's invasion of Abyssinia started in October 1935 and ended with the occupation of Abyssinia in March 1936.

tails. The secretaries of the various departments are merely the executive agents of the whole government. If they do not see eye to eye with the government as a whole, they withdraw rather than go their own way or intrigue against the government or its leader. Mr Eden was the most reliable executive agent of the government as a whole in foreign politics; this is why he enjoyed their trust and became the head of the Foreign Office for the second time. Otherwise foreign policy was directed not from there, but from the Prime Minister's study at 10 Downing Street. As regards Mr Eden's own views on foreign policy, he certainly stood for the spirit of Versailles. In his view, the Entente had not made good use of their great victory in 1918 and had lacked either the capacity or the will to exert constant pressure to keep the defeated Germans at bay. Eden had always been clearly opposed to appeasement of the Chamberlain and Halifax sort, for he held there was no way to a peaceful agreement with the Germans, especially Hitler. Subsequent events proved him right and condemned Chamberlain who failed to secure peace, even though he had flown to see Hitler several times, thereby humiliating himself and his country. That is why Eden returned to head the Foreign Office at a time when the policy of appeasement had finally been bankrupted. Chamberlain was to retire later, and was eventually succeeded by Churchill who managed to shake the country out of its half-asleep lethargy and mobilize all the strength of the entire British Empire in the service of the war against Germany. Mr Eden was a perfect complement to Churchill. Everything in the sphere of major foreign politics was decided upon and handled by Churchill himself, and was actually carried out by the reliable and skilled Eden. Churchill was the brain, Eden the hand.

Hungary and its policies had never enjoyed Mr Eden's sympathies. He bore no ill-will towards us, nor, however, was he our patron. As he told me in plain words at a later date, Hungary, though never in a direct conflict of interest with the British Empire (a conflict which could hardly occur), had always sided with Great Britain's enemy, Germany. This was so in the war of 1914-18, and was likely to be the case in the Second World War. As regards the international interests of the British Empire, Hungary was merely a small cog in the European wheel. Yet this small cog had always worked for Germany, that is, against Britain, and this was what counted. Though many in England recognized and even understood the reasons, this did not alter that fact.

In the winter of 1940 my effort was to inform and explain Teleki's political position to official circles and public opinion and to make them understand at the same time all the difficulties he encountered in realizing his policies. I sought out opportunities to exchange views with several leading politicians. I met Mr Attlee, Sir John Simon, Mr Morrison, a number of MPs, peers, journalists and even high-ranking soldiers. All listened to me politely, even with sympathy, yet I could see in their faces that though they believed my words they had doubts about Hungary's will and courage to withstand the increasing demands

being made by the Germans. With the help of Sir William Goode⁵, Lady Listowel⁶, Gordon-Lennox, the diplomatic correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph* and Capt. Kennedy, his counterpart at *The Times*, I placed or inspired articles in the press on Teleki's policies, in which I made the point that although Hungary was in an especially grave situation, the government, the upper class and more educated patriotic circles intended to maintain neutrality at all costs; and though we could not pursue an openly anti-German line, we were not going to go beyond the limits set by the constitutional sovereignty of the nation. The Hungarian Prime Minister definitely had a good press in London at the time—and an excellent one on his death, a press which poor Teleki had paid for with his life.

The most radical anti-German position in the Foreign Office was that of Sir Robert Vansittart, who in my time served as adviser first to Halifax, then to Eden, a post which was specially created for him. His authority was not defined; his room was below the Foreign Secretary's, and envoys had nothing to do with him officially. I paid him a few visits, at which times he politely heard me out and agreed with much of what I had said, but I knew that because of his extreme hatred of the Germans I could not count on his support, so I saw no use in seeing him frequently. His wife had previously been married to Sir Colville Barclay, the minister in Budapest. The couple had enjoyed great popularity in Budapest and were definitely friendly towards Hungary, and to Horthy personally. After Barclay's death, when his wife became Lady Vansittart, this friendship came to an end on her part.

Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, who was also the Foreign Secretary's deputy, even though he was of the reserved and cautious diplomat type, behaved most considerately towards me from the very start. Later, when he came to know my political views, since I had more frequent contacts with him, he warmed even more. I visited him and the desk officer Mr Strang the most frequently, while I saw less and less of Sir Orme Sargent, a supporter of Vansittart's intransigence, who had very little understanding for Hungary's situation. Mr Butler, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary was very understanding and attentive, but he was not involved in issues concerning Hungary and Central Europe, so I saw him less often. I generally paid a weekly visit to Mr Cadogan. Sometimes I went to see him without any special instructions or occasion, simply to exchange views and keep him briefed on our situation. At times like that, I gave him all the information in my possession that

5 ■ Sir William Goode was a member of the British peace commission in Hungary after the Great War; from 1921 he was a financial adviser assigned by the League of Nations first to the Austrian government, then to the Hungarian government, and was subsequently a commissioner of the Hungarian government in Britain.

6 ■ Judith Listowel, née Márfy-Mantuano, journalist; married Lord Listowel in 1933. During the Second World War she worked for the Department of Information in England.

I thought could be of interest to the British government. Observing that to serve the cause of peace and understanding among the nations of Europe was in our mutual interest and in such questions I was always pleased to be at his disposal, I passed on to him many items of information that were of interest and useful to his government. In time, contacts between Mr Cadogan and myself became frequent and ever more friendly; this I was cultivating out of the express intention to obtain benefit for matters Hungarian.

Soon after being named Foreign Secretary, Mr Eden summoned me to him. Eden, whom I had known from Geneva, greeted me as an old acquaintance and said he would like to talk to me about Hungary's situation quite openly. He had been informed, he said, of the political guarantees which Prime Minister Teleki had provided and which gave him satisfaction. Yet he could not leave it unsaid that the way the situation as a whole was developing in Hungary filled him with apprehension. Our entire policy was, to his knowledge, more and more turning to the service of the German cause. Our hapless geographical situation could still be cited in a justification of sorts for our quitting the League of Nations⁷ and joining the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis and for the entirely pro-German tone of our press. However, he had been informed that the pro-German position in Hungary was going from strength to strength, that the German demands that we were complying with, mainly in the economic field, were more and more intense, and he feared that such complaisance could eventually lead to a complete surrender of our national sovereignty. He trusted in Teleki's good intentions and even in his determination not to go beyond a certain point, but would he indeed, Eden asked me, be able to stop there?

In reply, I told Mr Eden that I too would speak frankly and I thanked him for giving me the opportunity to do so. His trust in Teleki the politician and the man was entirely well-placed. As long as Teleki retained control over Hungarian politics, the country would never abandon national sovereignty and blindly serve the German cause. I told him how, in the autumn of 1939, Teleki had denied the Germans the right of transit towards Poland⁸, despite Germany's offer to Hungary of the region of oil fields in Poland in return. Of course, I could not know what would happen once Teleki was no longer prime minister. Since I wanted to play it fair with him, I had to admit that the apprehension he had brought up struck me even more. If the war were to last long and the Germans were to have great diplomatic and military successes, it would be difficult to convince the Hungarian public that the Germans would still be defeated in the

7 ■ Hungary left the League of Nations on 11 April 1939.

8 ■ On two occasions in September 1939, the Teleki government refused Germany's demand for free passage for German forces through northern Hungary. Germany's plan to attack Poland from the south and cut off the retreat of the Polish army was thus foiled by this resistance to German demands.

war. As for me, I was convinced that Great Britain and the United States, once they could exert their force of manpower and military capacity, which was many times more than that of Germany, eventually would be invincible. Unfortunately, however, the Hungarians, dazzled by German propaganda and by the initial German successes, were much less aware of this. British propaganda in Hungary was either inefficient or nonexistent, while German propaganda worked perfectly. Great Britain was far away and Germany close, it was no wonder that wide sections of our nation believed in the invincibility of the Germans. In addition, they put down the return of Northern Hungary⁹ to the goodwill of the Germans, while they were aware that Great Britain for twenty years had never shown any concern for us. This I was telling him in sincerity, for I wanted him to have a clear picture of the situation and the mood in Hungary, and of the factors that contributed to and drove them. Teleki and many of the leading figures in Hungary believed, as I did in London, in Great Britain's eventual victory, but as he would know best, no government could work without the support of or against public opinion, and public opinion played a great role in Hungary as well. I would do my utmost and use any means available to prevent Hungary from eventually drifting into the camp of Great Britain's enemies. Teleki was doing likewise in Budapest. But we needed understanding and patience, for our plight was especially grave. It should be noted that there was constant and increasingly violent German pressure on us in every field; he should also note that the territorial revision, for twenty years longed for, had been carried out partly through German support, for which the Hungarian man in the street was obviously grateful to Germany and Italy and wished to see them victorious, otherwise all that we had regained would again be lost. Mr Eden followed my words with attention; when I called his attention to the fact that the Hungarian public believed that in the event of an Anglo-French victory, the country would have another unjust peace dictated to it like that of Trianon, he eagerly protested. He said he was fully aware that the Trianon treaty was a bad peace treaty, it was unsound, and he asked me to inform Budapest that once victory was secured, Great Britain would in no way want or approve of another Trianon. As long as we did not enter the war we could expect to be rewarded; however, if we did, we could no longer count on any consideration on the part of the victors. I replied that I was convinced of that; however, I thought it would be useful if either he or another British politician in a position of authority would openly declare what he had just told me, so that the Hungarian public as a whole could learn of it. German propaganda in Hungary was still stirring up the Hungarians by claiming that in the event of an Anglo-French victory we would be dealt another and even more unjust Trianon, consequently a Germany victory was in Hungary's in-

9 ■ See Note 2 to Miklós Szinai's article, p. 80.

terests. This Nazi propaganda had never been counterbalanced in Budapest by the British, although it would be vital to do so. It would greatly help all those who were fighting to maintain our independence, for German propaganda would have the ground cut from under it. This Mr Eden understood and held out the prospect of a British statement to that effect. He concluded with warm appreciative words on my work and called upon me to seek him out whenever I felt was necessary, for he would always be pleased to see me.

After these two momentous conversations with Lord Halifax and later Mr Eden, I had the impression that as long as Teleki remained prime minister and stood firm by his committed patriotic and confident policies, the relationship between Great Britain and Hungary was not in trouble. But if he was to be followed by a political leader who would uninhibitedly serve the Germans, we would inevitably be drifting into the war on the side of the Germans. The British, who for the past two decades had hardly paid any attention to any issues on the Continent and none to Hungary, now that the Second World War had broken out, were suddenly compelled to concern themselves with Europe, including Central Europe. Owing to twenty years' neglect, however, they found themselves everywhere face to face with the Germans, who had had a headstart and who cleverly exploited the national aspirations of the various peoples, such as territorial revision in our own case. By embracing these, they secured such political advantages for themselves that to the Hungarian public, far-off Great Britain, with its incredible strength in manpower, resources and finance, had only a very blurred outline as a future political factor. We who had known this strength and had seen that, for all the striking initial military successes of the Germans, the war would be won by the Anglo-Saxon powers, vainly warned and alerted the political factors at home. All they saw was the present, and believed that before the Anglo-Saxons could exert their power the Germans would have won, so they had to go along with them. Hungary was obviously a minuscule factor in British and American political interests all over the world. The oil wells in Persia, the Burma road, or any of the small states along the Panama Canal were of greater importance and interest to London and Washington than the whole of Hungary, those directly affected British and American political and economic interests. For the Anglo-Saxons, Hungary was significant from one aspect alone, that its armed forces of about 800,000 and economic resources should not be fully at the service of the Germans, thereby increasing Germany's military potential. This was a straightforward Anglo-Saxon interest, so anything that could serve to halt or slow down or upset such developments was to be supported. Politics is not about emotions, it is about self-interest. With the war, then, British interest in us awoke from its indolence of twenty years; however, German influence had gained so much strength by then and, owing to the Vienna Award, had struck such deep roots that unless the British achieved a quick victory they could hardly hope to catch up. That was not in sight; all of us in London knew that it would

take years until the British and the American military forces could be built up and equipped properly, and it would take some more time until they caught up with Germany in manpower and resources, before they could eventually win. Neither myself nor my friends in Hungarian politics who thought along the same lines entertained any doubts about a final Anglo-Saxon victory. But we knew that this would not materialize for another four or five years. Until it did, Hungary could not afford to manoeuvre between the two warring sides and the moment would come when Germany would force it to choose. Time was working for the Anglo-Saxons, not for the Germans and for us least of all. [...]

Germany turns against Yugoslavia. Teleki's death. Britain breaks diplomatic ties with Hungary

(Chapter 20)

On 3 April Horthy appointed Bárdossy prime minister¹⁰ and on the same day sent the following letter to Hitler:

Prime Minister Count Teleki shot himself last night. A paragon of extreme decency, purity and commitment, he was a talented and cultured politician and scholar who, under great stress of work and the heavy burden of events, found no other way out.

He left a letter for me, in which he said he had felt his conscience burdened, as on the previous night the Council of Ministers, under my chairmanship and with the Chief of Staff present, did not put up sufficient resistance to exploiting the current situation vis-à-vis Yugoslavia, despite the treaty of friendship signed recently and thereby we have become veritable grave-robbers. He felt that the greatest danger threatening us comes from the Russians and the Romanians. He was aware that in order to be able to withstand the threat, the Hungarian nation had to exercise the utmost economy in manpower and military materiel, especially considering the grave situation of supplies due to natural disasters.

At this session I myself was of the opinion that, with regard to the recent friendship treaty, we should seek to keep up appearances. Eventually we came to a common view that Croatia, after invasion by German forces, would probably secede from the Yugoslav state, and thus the contracting party, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, would cease to exist as such.

Count Teleki has become a victim of a conflict of conscience which is felt by our whole nation.

Your Excellency will no doubt understand that this tragic event, unique in modern history, has shocked the whole nation, including myself.

10 ■ László Bárdossy (1890–1946), Foreign Minister from 4 February 1941 to 7 March 1942; Prime Minister from Teleki's death on 3 April to 7 March 1942. He was executed in 1946 as a war criminal.

In accordance with my letter of 28 March, we have taken the necessary military measures. Yet driven by the conflict of conscience we find ourselves in, the depth of which nothing reveals better than the Prime Minister's suicide, we request that the German military command should possibly set tasks for our troops that would remain at all times compatible with our conscience.

I do not have to repeat that I remain, as ever, Your Excellency's faithful supporter.¹¹

I do not know who drafted this cunning, apologetic letter, so devoid of the solemnity becoming to a head of state. Probably it was not Horthy himself, it could have been Bárdossy or some soldier, perhaps Chief of Staff Werth, the evil spirit in the military clique around the Regent and a blind servant of the Germans. In any case, the urgent telegram I sent from London on 4 April, warning the government anew in a most emphatic and serious tone not to make the fatal step of attacking Yugoslavia, was to no avail.

In the days following Teleki's death, myself and my colleagues were aware of what was about to happen in London. The official announcement in the White Paper, that Hungary had become an enemy occupied country, having been invaded by German military forces, appeared as early as 6 April. Hungarian assets were frozen the same day, and on 7 April Mr Cadogan summoned me to see him. I well knew why. Sir Alexander gave me to understand that as the situation they had signalled to me long before had come about, i.e., Hungary had not only allowed German military forces free passage to march against an ally of Britain's but had also joined in the military action, the British government, to their regret, were breaking diplomatic ties with Hungary. To my question whether a declaration of war would also ensue, Cadogan replied that he could not say that as yet. As to Bárdossy's interpretation of the whys and the wherefores of the attack against Yugoslavia, I merely made a mention

11 ■ In his memoirs, Barcza deals with the Yugoslav crisis, its consequences for Hungary, and Pál Teleki's death by suicide in great detail. In an East-Central Europe rapidly drawn under German influence after 1938, the Teleki government, intent on preserving Hungarian sovereignty, made an agreement of permanent friendship with Yugoslavia, still then relatively independent, on 12 December 1940. However, on 25 March 1941 Yugoslavia too joined the Tripartite Treaty (see Note 2). Three days later, on 28 March 1941 the Yugoslav military overthrew the country's subservient government. Hitler immediately decided to wipe away Yugoslavia. On the day following the military takeover in Belgrade, Hitler sought for permission from Horthy, via the Hungarian envoy in Berlin, for German troops to march against Yugoslavia through Hungarian territory, and suggested that the Hungarian army join the action on Germany's side. In recompense, he offered to return to Hungary its former regions of the Bácska and the Bánát, ceded to Yugoslavia after the Great War. While Horthy and the military leadership were immediately willing to support this act of German aggression, Prime Minister Teleki strongly resisted. After he had learnt on 2 April that Horthy had gone back on his word, issued mobilization orders and was set to attack Yugoslavia along with the Germans, Teleki shot himself in the small hours of 3 April.

of them, upon which Cadogan asked me if I identified with the prime minister's position. I said that as a minister I felt it was my duty to inform him of it and that, far from identifying with it, I deeply regretted and condemned the act and I asked him to take cognizance that from that moment onwards I did not consider myself to be the diplomatic representative of the Bárdossy government and would in the remaining time confine myself to attending questions of the departure of my mission, for as of now I would regard my political assignment as having come to an end.

Cadogan noted this statement of my personal position and when the question of my departure came up, he said to me spontaneously that should I decide to stay on in London they saw no obstacle, since they knew and trusted me. More than seeing any inconvenience in this, they would in fact be pleased if I stayed on. Thanking him for this gratifying proposition, I replied that I had not even had time to think of my personal plans and asked him to allow me to respond at a later time. The Secretary of State went on to say that until the details of my and my mission's departure were settled, we were to stay on where we were undisturbed. The only request he had to make was that my military attaché, Lieutenant-Colonel Utassy, moved in from the village [where he lived] to a hotel in London, as he was the only member of our mission they wished to keep under observation. The whole mission then, with the single and hardly objectionable exception of the pro-Nazi Utassy, could stay on in Sunningdale and come and go to London. Our departure was not urgent, Cadogan said, we could take our time preparing and the Foreign Office would offer any help we might need. He took leave of me in his customary cordial fashion and escorted me to the door. By the time I got down to the entrance of the Foreign Office the evening papers were out in the streets. Jenkins, my driver, handed me *The Evening Standard* without a word. The front page bore the large headline: "Great Britain Breaks with Hungary". He then remarked, "I'm afraid, Your Excellency, we both lost our jobs just now."

The break was made then, and all that was left was attending to issues concerning our departure. After dinner I gathered for consultation around me my 'sons', as I called my secretaries, (Counsellor Balásy had by then left for America). Zsilinszky and Almásy told me they intended to stay on in England. We talked for a long time, weighing the pros and cons. On my way out I had had time enough to think about my own situation and made up my mind to return home. I had the feeling that I had to, for that is where I belonged, where all my loved ones were, and I saw no opening for any useful political activity on my own in England before the war ended. Once home, I intended to make closer contacts with self-respecting and patriotic circles—all who disapproved of the Bárdossy government giving in to the Germans. I would then see where and what I could do in the interest of the country. At the time I still entertained some hope of Hungarian politicians of authenticity, István Bethlen¹² and others, com-

ing out to England to form a free Hungarian government. In that case I would have naturally stayed to be of service to them. Later at home, Bethlen told me how this plan had indeed come up when Horthy summoned Teleki and him and the three of them spoke in quite concrete terms of such a plan. The Regent was to protest against the Germans marching against Yugoslavia through Hungary, to appoint Bethlen prime minister, who would then form a government, giving the foreign minister's portfolio to me, the government in turn would be sent, together with a number of domestic policy advisers, to London, while Horthy was to remain home and resign, if need be, or have himself arrested by the Germans. This plan had come to nothing, of course. Horthy was swayed by his military advisers, gave up the plan and fell in with his soldiers, for he had neither the courage nor the mettle to do what the future and the honour of our country called for. Had at the time Bethlen and a couple of Hungarian politicians of integrity and credibility come to London, we could have formed a Hungarian government, a national body recognized and supported by Great Britain, to take what was to ensue in hand.

Some days later, Eden summoned me to him. Our talk was divided in two parts entirely different in tone and content. He began by saying that what Hungary and the Hungarian government had done would be to the eternal shame of the country. "Once a country is no longer the master of its own will," the Foreign Secretary said in a raised voice, "and renounces its sovereignty of its own accord, at least it should not enter into a friendship treaty only to break it and stab the friend in the back. This is something that we shall remember when it comes to making the peace treaty. We trusted Regent Horthy and also Teleki. With his death Teleki proved, more than anything, that he was a patriot and a gentleman. Tell your people back home that what your government has just done is infamous. We showed great patience and understanding towards Hungary, for we were aware of the especially grave situation she was in. However, by taking the side of the barbarian Germans you have openly become an enemy of Great Britain's and, I may say, of the whole civilized and freedom-loving world. You will see what this entails after we have won." I told him in reply that he knew my political position and attitude, and I had always done my utmost to prevent what had just happened from happening. All this I myself deeply condemned and disapproved of. Upon my return I would report his com-

12 ■ Count István Bethlen (1874–1947), Prime Minister from 14 April 1921 to 24 August 1931. The most respected Hungarian conservative politician of his time, as leader of the governing party after his premiership he was able to foil Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös's moves towards a fascist dictatorship during the latter's term of office (1 October 1932–6 October 1936). From 1936 on Bethlen, at the head of the traditional Hungarian conservative elite exercised considerable influence on Regent Horthy, yet he was not always able to counterbalance the extreme right and the pro-German forces in the army command.

munication to the Hungarian government; however, as I did not identify with what they had done I should, with his permission, not respond in merit. Thereupon changing his tone, Mr Eden said he knew I was not to be held responsible for what had taken place in Hungary and that I had always been intent on maintaining good relations between Hungary and Great Britain. I was not to blame. On my thanking Mr Eden for the consideration and goodwill all British official bodies had shown, he told me that should I wish not to return home, I would be welcome to stay in England where I could render myself very useful as an adviser to the Foreign Office. I told him in reply that while I greatly appreciated his generous offer I had learned "my country right and wrong" from the British themselves. I would therefore go home, however hard it would be to take leave of England, a country I had come to love and honour and in whose victory I had put my hope and trust. Mr Eden took my hand in a friendly manner and said he understood and appreciated my point. On leaving I told him I had only one request to make based on the trust they had placed in me, to accord me the chance and the opportunity to contact them again when and wherever the interests of my homeland called me to do so. This Mr Eden promised readily. And he and the government met that pledge; when in April 1943 I travelled to Switzerland in order to take up contacts, the British government liaised with me through a member of the British mission in Berne assigned to the task and later through the minister in Berne himself, Mr Norton.

What Mr Eden had told me about Bárdossy's policies, i.e. the attack against Yugoslavia, I put down verbatim in a telegram and sent it to Budapest. With Teleki dead, my report, communicating the British government's standpoint to Bárdossy in stern openness, arrived *post festa* of course, for by then Horthy had declared war upon Yugoslavia and issued his ill-starred order. The die had been cast. [...]

Budapest, May 1941–March 1943
Hungary and the USA. Hungary declares war on America.
US Envoy Mr Pell's behaviour and departure.
Britain declares war on Hungary

(Vol. 2, Part 6, Chapter 3)

Under German pressure, the Hungarian government informed the Polish minister in Budapest as early as 1940 that owing to the occupation of Poland his mission had become meaningless and therefore he was no longer recognized as a minister. For the same reasons, the Hungarian government withdrew extraterritorial rights from the Dutch, Belgian and later the Greek and Yugoslav mis-

sions. Under German agreement and patronage, France formed a government in Vichy, with old Marshall Pétain recognized as the head of state whose authority extended to the unoccupied parts of the country. This government's minister, Count Dampierre, was recognized by the Hungarian government. Our international relations were more or less adjusted to those of the Germans, with the single exception that we were as yet not at war with the British, and our diplomatic contacts with the USA were still normal.

Soon after my return to Budapest, I contacted the US minister, Herbert Pell. As a high-ranking official in New York State, Mr Pell had previously served in the United States and enjoyed President Roosevelt's confidence. He had come to Budapest from Lisbon. When I first met him he told me in confidence that he was officially well informed about what I had done in London and knew that I was *persona grata* with the British government. Having achieved social popularity quickly, Mr Pell regularly took his meals at the National Casino¹³ where I frequently met him. We also came across socially in society. He definitely wished us well and saw our predicament clearly. He was aware that the higher circles of the Hungarian intelligentsia were not at all pro-German; that they were watching the constant growth of German influence with anxiety and considered humiliating the way the Bárdossy government was increasingly exposing the country to the Germans both politically and economically. The minister had Mr Travers, who had been in Budapest for four years by then, and Mr Schott, a naval officer turned diplomat, work under him. Both these Americans were the favourites of Pest society; they enjoyed wide popularity and were our sincere friends. These circles wished to demonstrate aversion to the Germans who had been greatly annoyed by this preference for the Americans. Herr Erdmannsdorf, the German envoy, was an inflexible and boring representative of his race. With the exception of a few well-known pro-German individuals, he was on visiting terms with Hungarian officialdom, no one else, while everyone was on visiting terms with the Pells.

Minister Pell was obviously intent on maintaining and fostering Hungarian-American relations. Like everyone else, he too was well aware that as long as the US was not actively involved in the war on Great Britain's side, the Germans would not dare to break off relations with America, since Germany had quite a few interests in the US. But we also knew that as soon as circumstances altered, as was to be expected, and America stood openly by the British Empire, it would break off relations with Germany, and the Germans would insist that we did so with the US. At the end of August Mr Pell told me he had obtained President Roosevelt's consent and authorization to convey a friendly greeting from the

13 ■ The National Casino was an exclusive political club whose membership was predominantly drawn from the Anglophile Hungarian aristocracy. On 19 March 1944, the German occupying forces closed it and sent several of its members to German concentration camps.

President to the Regent, Horthy, on the occasion of Hungary's national day¹⁴. Indeed, the envoy travelled to Gödöllő to deliver the President's message to Horthy. The Regent was visibly pleased, for he still entertained the illusion that he personally was liked by the Anglo-Saxon powers. During his visit to Gödöllő, the US envoy asked Horthy if he would lunch at his house with a close circle of guests. The Regent accepted the invitation with pleasure, and the date was fixed. Pell invited a number of people whom he knew to be friends of the Regent's. On the morning of the appointed day, Horthy unexpectedly cancelled the visit, saying he regretted being unable to attend. He did not even bother to make up an excuse for the sudden cancellation, such as illness or an all too busy schedule, and went horse-racing that very afternoon. The envoy later learned that Bárdossy had frightened off Horthy, saying that the Germans would take it amiss if he attended a lunch given by the US envoy, and the military clique around the Regent might also have found the matter cause for concern. Not that it mattered politically, the incident as a whole was still highly illustrative of the degree of awe officialdom in Hungary, the government and Horthy himself included, held the Germans in. It was all the more grotesque that Horthy still fancied himself to be highly popular with the British and the Americans, and thought that this popularity was a form of political reinsurance and that Britain and the US would show understanding and goodwill towards Hungary because of him. He personally was still entertaining such naive and utterly groundless illusions at a time like that! There had been a period earlier when the Regent did indeed enjoy a degree of sympathy and popularity in higher British and American circles, which could in part be explained by the interest and attraction anything nautical commanded *ab ovo*, especially in Great Britain. By now, however, hardly anything at all remained of that popularity, for in the meantime the Hungarian armed forces had attacked Yugoslavia and in his order Horthy had needlessly criticized the Western powers, the British realized that there was no human trait in the Regent, otherwise outwardly highly attractive and sympathetic, that could earn him esteem. I have related this incident, perhaps insignificant in itself, in perhaps too great detail, because it was so typical of the feeling of dread, of Horthy's weakness and of the general political mood then prevailing in the country.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, when the US actively entered the war, on 11 December Bárdossy summoned Mr Pell. Next day the minister gave me a detailed account of what had taken place between them. The prime minister told the envoy that Hungary was breaking off diplomatic relations with America. A couple of hours later Bárdossy again summoned the minister and informed him in carefully measured words that Hungary

14 ■ The 20th of August, the Feast Day of St Stephen, is Hungary's national day; it commemorates the founder of the Hungarian kingdom, Saint Stephen (1000–1038).

considered itself to be at war with the USA. It was the German envoy, Erdmannsdorf, who, in between the two visits, told Bárdossy that it was not enough for Hungary to sever diplomatic ties with the US; the Führer's personal wish was for the country to declare war on the US. The minister, on taking notice of Bárdossy's communication, told him that he attributed this decision of the Hungarian government, which entailed severe consequences, to the difficult position the country found itself in, and was convinced that the Hungarian nation, which had no direct conflict of interest with the US, would continue to esteem the USA, where so many Hungarians had made a home. Upon this, Bárdossy in a raised and sharp voice stated that the envoy's surmise did not hold water, for the Hungarian government had come to this decision entirely on their own, without any outside pressure whatsoever, and that the Hungarian government and nation were at one in that. After this comment by the prime minister, as awkward as it was provocative, there was naturally nothing left for the minister to do except leave without a word. As Mr Pell told me, he had sought to get Bárdossy to tell him something this last time that would have indicated the declaration of war on America was based on political necessity, rather than on any conflict between the two nations. Pell was a genuine well-wisher of ours here as well, and hoped that by being able to offer his President an official explanation in this vein, our decision would receive a more clement appraisal in Washington. However, after Bárdossy's response he had no real chance to do so. Through his attitude, Bárdossy proved himself an inept and inferior diplomat, one who totally identified with the Germans, blindly serving German interests rather than Hungarian ones.

The departure of the American mission from Budapest turned out to be a political demonstration. Mr and Mrs Pell were being paid farewell visits by droves of their friends, and their rooms in Danube House were filled with flowers. The Germans looked askance upon this, and at their request the government called on the minister to remove himself, until his final departure, to the Palatinus Hotel on Margaret Island, which at that time of the year was totally abandoned. Mr Pell politely complied, only to be swarmed over by their acquaintances there as well. The Hungarian detective posted in front of the envoy's suite kept an eye on the visitors and noted their names. I witnessed this on the two occasions when I visited Mr Pell. Before he left, I had handed over to him a brief but clearly worded memorandum for him to take to the State Department in Washington. In the memorandum I described the plight Hungary was in, the constant and severe pressure the Germans had exercised on us, the respect for freedom and constitutionality shown by the nation; I concluded by saying that if the victorious Anglo-Saxon powers were to make a lasting peace in the Danube basin, they would have to distinguish between the Hungarian nation and its incompetent leaders. In other words, they were not to punish the Hungarian nation for the bigotry of the latter, they should instead be called to raise it from a state of hu-

miliation and liberate it. Mr and Mrs Pell and the other American diplomats made their departure from the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest, and the special train was filled with flowers of farewell brought by their acquaintances. The two Hungarian officials who escorted them as far as Lisbon told me, upon their return, that the envoy and his colleagues had remembered Hungary in the warmest and friendliest terms possible, making the distinction between a patriotic and proud people and a pro-German government. With Mr Pell's departure, the last thread to tie us to the Anglo-Saxon world was cut. We now became an Axis state completely, and the Germans could note with satisfaction how obediently Horthy and Bárdossy executed their orders.

The declaration of war on the part of the British Empire came on the 5th of December 1941, six months after the breaking off of diplomatic relations, i.e., almost simultaneously with the declaration of war between Hungary and the US. The British declaration of war made hardly any change to the situation. The Hungarian government did not curtail the free movement of British subjects and American citizens, nor did it intern them. They were, however, expected to report to the police authorities at regular intervals. During the Great War the Hungarian government had exercised the utmost good faith in its treatment of enemy aliens in the country, which was subsequently highly appreciated by both the individuals concerned and by their countries. Very rightly, the government took the same position now, and the Germans appear not to have interfered, for this was the situation until 19 March 1944. The Hungarian government showed equal consideration and benevolence to other foreign citizens whose country was in a hostile relationship with us or Germany. This was especially true for the Poles. Poland and Hungary had for centuries been tied by a genuine friendship and a mutually shared past. The number of Polish citizens residing in Hungary had dramatically increased after the defeat and occupation of Poland by Germany and surpassed fifty thousand, among whom were quite a few prominent public figures. The Poles in Hungary not only had the freedom of the country, they were also provided with homes. At Balatonboglár, a Polish secondary school was established with Hungarian support, and individual Hungarians voluntarily handled the affairs of the Polish refugees. With the covert support of the Hungarian government, officers and soldiers of the Polish army who had taken sanctuary in Hungary were able to reach Allied-controlled territories through Yugoslavia in order to join the Polish corps being organized there. The humane attitude shown in our treatment of citizens of countries which were either hostile or not in the same camp as we were was one of those deplorably few good political points our governments had earned. However, when Sztójay¹⁵ became head of

15 ■ Döme Sztójay (1883–1946), Hungarian minister in Berlin (10 December 1935–22 March 1944), led the Hungarian puppet government after the Germans had occupied the country. Executed in 1946 as a war criminal.

government on 19 March 1944, he changed course here too. Servilely seeking the favour of the Germans in all possible ways, he had the Britons, Americans, Italians, Poles, French, etc., who were living in Hungary, arrested and interned; some who had previously had official standing were tortured in the basest ways. This base procedure Sztójay initiated against defenseless foreigners who had sought shelter in Hungary is, along with the massive persecution of Jews¹⁶, one of the most shameful sins the Hungarian regime of the time committed.

A real state of war between Hungary and the US ensued in 1942. At the beginning of 1942¹⁷, President Roosevelt sent a memorandum through the US envoy in Berne to the governments of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Referring to the fact that these countries had been compelled to declare war against the US under pressure and at the instigation by other states at war with the US, and that this act was in opposition to the will of the majority of the peoples of these countries, the US Congress issued no proper declaration of war against them and the President issued no proclamation on this matter. The President then went on to state in the memorandum that unless these states made a prompt statement in explicit terms to the effect that they would offer no military aid to the Axis powers, he would recommend to Congress that a state of war with them be declared. In conclusion, the President recalled the deep friendship the American people felt for the peoples of Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria, which impelled him to take the above step. In other words, this memorandum of the President of the United States again offered a chance for us to avoid a state of war with the US.

When Roosevelt's memorandum arrived in Dísz tér¹⁸, it aroused great excitement. Both Ghyczy and Szentmiklósy¹⁹ consulted me on the response. I suggested that we reply with the utmost possible candor to the President's gesture, which attested to unparalleled patience and benevolence towards us. We should state in our reply that the declaration of war against the US had solely resulted

16 ■ The government of Miklós Kállay (1887–1967), in office from 9 March 1942 to 19 March 1944, resisted German demands for the confinement to ghettos and deportation of the 800,000 Hungarian Jews from the summer of 1942. It was only after the German occupation of Hungary on 19 March 1944 that the occupiers could deport, from 15 May 1944 on, aided also by the far right bureaucracy and the gendarmerie, some 600,000 Jews, the majority of whom perished.

17 ■ A state of war between Hungary and the United States existed from 5 June 1942.

18 ■ Dísz tér, in the Castle District of Buda, was the site of the Sándor Mansion, the Prime Minister's Office.

19 ■ The Hungarian diplomat Jenő Ghyczy was head of the Political Department in the Foreign Ministry from 30 December 1940, Permanent Deputy to the Foreign Minister (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) from 20 May 1942, and Foreign Minister from 24 July 1943 until the German occupation on 19 March 1944. Szentmiklósy followed Ghyczy at the head of the Political Department in the Foreign Ministry from 20 May 1942, and again as Permanent Deputy of the Foreign Minister from July 1943 until the German occupation. He was executed by the Germans.

from German pressure, and that both the government and the nation of Hungary felt the greatest esteem and sympathy for the government and people of the United States, and we could not be held responsible for the current situation, one that had arisen under threats and through both political and economic terror on the part of the Germans. We ought to make it clear for the President that we would immediately withdraw our troops from Russia, and we should also refer to the fact that bringing these troops home, surrounded by German forces, fell outside our power and was practically impossible without German help. Similar advice was given by Kánya²⁰, Bethlen and others who had also been consulted. Bárdossy, however, would have had none of it, so a reply was sent to the effect that the declaration of war had been made not under external pressure but of our own volition, and that in the war against Bolshevism we were tied to Germany through a common fate and an ally's honour, and it was not in our power to alter our decision. It was only after this reply had been given that the declaration of war from the US arrived. [...]

Appendix

Report by György Barcza to Foreign Minister István Csáky on a talk with Winston Churchill

(Source: DIMK IV, No. 229)

London, 14 July 1939

Strictly confidential

74/pol.-1939

The other day I had occasion to talk at length with Mr Churchill after lunch at Lord Londonderry's²¹ home. Your Excellency is no doubt familiar with the fact that Mr Churchill is the leader of the most extreme wing of the Conservative Party, that which advocates the necessity of a war of extermination against the Germans and which, while belonging to Mr Chamberlain's party, considers the foreign policy of the Prime Minister and his followers to be too weak, too slow and too irresolute. The difference between the two groups is best described by saying that Mr Chamberlain, despite many disappointments, still believes in the possibility of maintaining peace, which he seeks with endless patience, endurance and even at the sacrifice of his reputation. He considers actions by this

20 ■ Kálmán Kánya, Secretary-General (State Secretary) of the Foreign Ministry from 1920, Minister in Berlin from October 1925, Foreign Minister from 1933 to 1938.

21 ■ Lord Londonderry, Charles Stewart Henry Vane-Tempest-Stewart, British conservative politician; Minister for Air between 1931 and 1935; Lord Privy Seal.

peace front to be a means of defence to contain further attacks. Mr Churchill on the other hand is now definitely warlike and ends all his addresses, talks and articles with *Carthaginem esse delendam*. For this and other reasons I looked forward to speaking with him, though my acquaintances had warned that he was usually quite blunt when talking politics. This merely increased my curiosity.

I first asked Mr Churchill if he knew something of Hungary, and upon his positive reply a longer conversation ensued. He started by saying that the situation Hungarians find themselves in nowadays is extremely difficult; he, unlike other Englishmen, can read a map and draw the political consequences from it as well. He understands the foreign policy we are conducting, he went on, for a small country usually does not choose the policy it follows of its own volition; this is rather determined by its geographical position and economic needs. After all, he said, a country and its people should get on some way or other and try to be content, they cannot survive on fruitless political emotions. That is why he understands our foreign policy; however, he is afraid, and this he has to say quite frankly, that unless he is mistaken the international situation will sooner or later develop in a way that the smaller states will have to decide on which grouping of the great powers to join. When that happens we will be judged by, and our fate in the future will depend solely on who we adhere to, whatever sympathies he may personally feel for Hungarians. Whoever stands by the warmongers, the aggressors, the "political gangsters", as he said, the perfidious, will share their lot, and whoever stands by those who uphold peace and the rule of law will be supported, protected and rewarded, whatever roles they may have played before.

Mr Churchill went on to say that he saw a dark future ahead—dark even if no further attacks against the vital interests of independent states were launched by the Germans. He can see, though not approve of, why the Germans are trying to rid themselves of the decisions and consequences for them of the Treaty of Versailles, and he could also understand the German demands for reuniting with Germans living beyond their borders (excepting Austria). However, the occupation of Prague and Bohemia and Moravia was so brutal and a political mistake on the part of the Germans that it can have no excuse, legal, political, ethnographic, economic or other. Should that political regime continue to exist and not be restrained or even destroyed by fire and sword, Europe can expect to revert to the Middle Ages, Churchill said in anger. Bohemia and Moravia must and will be restored; nine million Czechs cannot be kept in slavery by an alien race and state.

For my part I corrected his comment, saying there were at most seven, not nine, million Czechs, and added that I noted with satisfaction that he too saw that Czechoslovakia, patched together artificially of several alien nationalities, was an unviable creation. This Churchill admitted and he could also only accede to my remark that as long as large numbers of nationalities were in the power of

states alien and even hostile to them, Europe might enjoy political caesuras or lulls but no lasting and solid peace.

Mr Churchill subsequently spoke of the role Great Britain was to play. Militarily and diplomatically, he said, the country is fully ready to defend herself and within six months will also be ready to take the offensive, and then the world will see to its wonder what the Great Britain that some "over there" prefer to see as a shareholding company outmoded, obsolete, inefficient and lacking in dynamic force is capable of. Fascism and national socialism, he continued, claim with pride that a renaissance of the German and Italian nations has been achieved and these two nations, reborn in power and will, are invincible and can take on anybody. Well then, I can say, Churchill went on, that we were unfortunately asleep and idle for a long time after the peace treaties had been signed, but we are now awake thanks to Herr Hitler, and have made good progress on our way to renewal. It should also be taken into consideration, he added, that we and our allies have inexhaustible sources of money and raw materials and equally enormous human resources, and should a war break out we would grow stronger by the week and by the month, while the other side would rapidly decline, having no supplies whatsoever, human, financial or material. And a short world war, Mr Churchill concluded, is a myth that the Germans had already been taken in by in 1914.

In the past few days, news of Mr Churchill becoming a member of the Cabinet has been going around among those in the know. More recently I have heard that, despite constant and strong demands made by the radical wing in the Conservative Party, Mr Chamberlain cannot bring himself to invite him to join his government. The reason why is that he does not wish to take measures that could be seen as provocative by the Germans and which would further aggravate a rapprochement that, albeit little hope is held out for it, is still not entirely impossible. However, should the situation become more acute, either because of Danzig²² or other issues, unanimous opinion here has it that Mr Churchill's being taken into the Cabinet is highly probable.

Barcza
Minister Plenipotentiary

FM pol. 1939-2-3628.

Original copy.

Copies have been sent to the Prime Minister,

Chief of Staff of the Royal Hungarian Army and the missions.

22 ■ Danzig, now Gdansk in Poland, was originally a German port on the Baltic. Under the terms of the post-Great War peace treaties, it was taken from Germany and placed under the control of the League of Nations. The Polish corridor, which ensured Poland access to the sea, divided Eastern Prussia from the rest of Germany. Nazi Germany started the war at Danzig on 1 September 1939.

Ernő Marosi

Between East and West

Medieval Representations of Saint Ladislav, King of Hungary

This year marks the nine hundredth anniversary of the death of King Ladislav I (1077–1095) of the House of Árpád, who was canonized in 1192. Given that the laws governing our remembrance are guided by centennial anniversaries and are spell-bound by the decennial, the year will be in many respects the last chance for our generation to engage in retrospection. Important anniversaries during the past decades (including that of the canonization in 1083, on his request, of the founders of the medieval Hungarian State) have been the occasion for various recollections. These laid their emphasis on different aspects, according to the relevant historical and political moment.

Saint Ladislav has been an important subject in Hungarian art as well. Up to the present day, his representation has been prominent as an iconographic element,

both in Hungarian and Croatian art. In Croatia too, he is honoured as a national saint, being the founder of Zagreb cathedral. Ladislav is clearly one of the knightly national patrons, similar to Saint Maurice in Germany, Saint Wenceslas in Bohemia, or Saint Oswald and later Saint Leopold in Austria.

We do not know how much of the historical figure has been taken into the tradition of his representation. A member of a branch of the House of Árpád he had to flee to neighbouring Slav territories and take the throne by force during the life of his rival Salomon, the crowned king. He had to fight for the ecclesiastical recognition of the legitimacy of his accession. When the Catholic dynasty of Croatia died out, he occupied that country by force and annexed it, in the face of papal objections. Even though his wife was the daughter of the German king, Rudolf of Swabia, a rival of Henry IV's, he sided with the Emperor against the Pope in their dispute over investiture.

All these are features that make it mysterious how, less than a hundred years after his death, he could be canonized. It seems that by then many concrete details concerning his life had sunk into oblivion, and his person had been thoroughly reshaped in the liturgical texts in his honour taking form around that time—hymns, an-

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He has published numerous books and studies on Romanesque and Gothic architecture and sculpture and medieval art in general.

tiphons, legends and sermons. These texts constitute the basis for his representation in the later Middle Ages and they draw the image of a knightly patron saint. One of the key expressions was *athleta patriae*—champion of the fatherland. All the indications are that the word *patria* then still only referred to the diocese of Nagyvárád, the place where the royal saint had been buried. Soon, however, it must have been used to include the whole realm of Hungary, in the sense of belonging to its kingdom (this is the sense that “patriotism” was used during the Middle Ages). Ladislás became a national saint only more recently, particularly in the 19th century. The foundations for this were laid on through the late Middle Ages, Catholic revival started in the 17th century. By examining this iconographically, art historians can contribute to our knowledge of the early history of national consciousness.

We do not know how Saint Ladislás was represented in the centres where he was venerated before he had been canonized (in Somogyvár, in the monastery he founded for the French Benedictines, and which presumably was his first place of burial, in Nagyvárád cathedral, where he was later put to rest, and in the diocese of Zagreb, which he established). Nor do we know of any representation of him from the late 12th century, as the first artistic relics that have come down to us derive from the last decade of the 13th century or later. Then, in the art of the 14th and 15th centuries, he appears frequently despite the great destruction which befell works of art from this period. The art historian can only start out from these tangible relics including the first known representations of him as a saint and a king in knightly attire, in keeping with the description of him in the liturgical texts.

From the 14th century, this knightly saint often features as one of the triumvirate of the “three Hungarian royal saints” (the kings Saint Stephen and Saint Ladislás and Prince Emericus, Stephen’s canonized son). Their differentiation in type seems to be connected with their joint venerations. As *sancti progenitores nostri* they first appear as “royal saints” during the time of the last Árpád (the dynasty died out in 1301) and later in the propaganda intended to emphasize the legitimacy and commanding authority of the Hungarian Angevin dynasty. Apart from distinctions based on their ages, only Ladislás acquired a singular attribute: an archaic battle axe whose origin and meaning has to the present day eluded explanation. This seems to be a domestic development in his iconography; wherever it appears, some kind of Hungarian source can be surmised.

Saint Ladislás’s knightly figure became the embodiment of the ideal of Hungarian valour in the 14th century. Wherever this figure appears abroad, it usually expresses an avowal, a declaration of identity with Hungary. In content, this avowal acknowledges the fact that the person concerned accepts this Hungarian embodiment of the *miles christianus* as his personal paragon, as the subject of his *imitatio*. In the title page of Miklós Vásári’s *Decretales* codex of Padua (which, along with its companion piece, was presumably completed in Bologna in 1343), the personal context is also emphasized (apart from the holy Hungarian kings) by Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of the codex’s owner. (Miklós is the Hungarian variant of Nicholas.) The emphasis is on Saint Stephen, as the four narrative pictures come from his legend. Vásári, who had studied in Bologna, commissioned the codex as a diplomat, presumably on the occasion of the Italian visit of Queen Elizabeth, widow of King Charles I



Scenes from the Life of Saint Stephen King of Hungary and the Three Royal Patron Saints of Hungary. *Decretales of Nicolaus Vársári, frontispiece miniature, 1343. Padova, Biblioteca Capitolare.*

of Hungary, mother of King Louis the Great of the House of Anjou. The queen donated an antependium, decorated with figures of all the Hungarian saints and stressing the holiness of the Hungarian Angevin house, for the high altar of Saint Peter's in Rome, the same altar for which Cardinal Jacopo Stefaneschi had commissioned a triptych from Giotto's workshop, stressing the spiritual presence of the Avignon popes. Following J. Polzer's reasoning (and rejecting the early dating and

the supposition that the type had been formulated upon the initiative of Maria, the Hungarian consort of Charles II of Anjou, King of Naples) I consider it more credible that Simone Martini's Altomonte Saint Ladislav panel was made for Filippo di Sangineto on the same occasion.¹ The fact that the figure of the Hungarian holy king featured later on the tomb of the powerful supporter of the Hungarian faction in Naples indicates that he conscientiously professed himself "Hungarian".

Saint Ladislav—and this is important to keep in mind—represents western knight-hood against eastern paganism. This is emphasized by his weapons and the cross on his shield, invoking the sign of the crusaders, just as in the iconography of Saint George. The woodcut in the Augsburg edition of the *Thuróczi Chronicle* (1486) bears the rubric *historia Sancti Ladislai*, indicating a secular, knightly and romance genre; not being a hagiography, it cannot exactly be called a legend. In 1453, when the Hungarian "natio" of Vienna University opened a new register of students, alongside the standing figures of Saint Stephen and Saint Emericus, they opted for the crucial event of this *historia* as appropriate to represent the *virtus* of those professing themselves Hungarians. The picture unites two knightly ideals: fighting the enemies of the faith, being a protective shield and gal-lantry.

Around 1400, these elements of consciousness counted as common knowledge. The widely found murals depicting the *historia* of Saint Ladislav also helped in their propagation. By that point of time, Saint Ladislav was no longer only the saint of those wishing to live as knights, nor was he only a saint of the dynasty: he embodied the country as a whole. The crusaders' cross on his shield was replaced by Hungary's heraldic sign of a dual cross, that same cross used, for example, by the

prelates and barons who, while Sigismund of Luxemburg, King of Hungary and Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor, was confined in 1401 in Siklós, governed in the name of the Holy Crown embodying the feudal country.

In Sigismund's reign, the banner with the dual cross by which offices were conferred, according to the feudal rite of homage, was presumably called the banner of Saint Ladislav. It is possible that it might also have had a role similar to that of the *Oriflamme* in the kingdom of France, or Saint George's banner in Genua or, in Cola di Rienzo's time, in Rome. The biographer of Sigismund, Eberhard, Windecke, writes of the Wallachian Voivode Vlad, who because of his membership of the Order of the Dragon (founded by the Emperor Sigismund) is also called *Dracul*, that Sigismund provided him with a mace, the emblem of princely power, and also "made him lord of Great and Little Wallachia, and gave him the banner of Saint Ladislav with the dual cross, as well as his order with the dragon and the cross." "The king accorded great honour and esteem to him, but he acted as a whoreson is wont to act."²

Since the 14th century, the portrayals of Saint Ladislav in the *historiae* centre on the clash and implacable battle with eastern paganism. According to many current hypotheses, this narrative cycle—apart from adhering to absolutely archaic iconographic formulae, possibly extending back to the migration period—may perhaps be rooted in Romanesque stereotypes of continual narrative.

On the other hand, there are indications that the cycles were in the process of being formed in the 14th century. The strongest proof for this seems to be in Stella Mary Newton's observations and distinctions concerning the presentation of

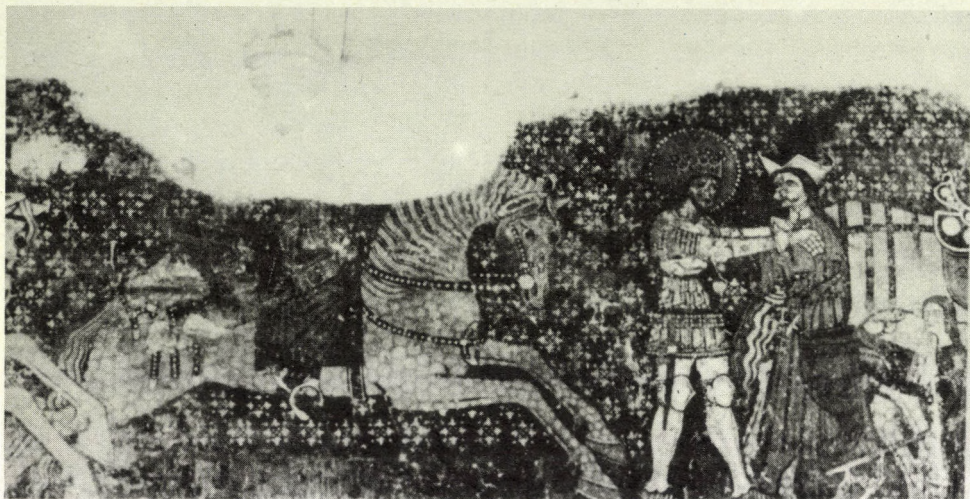


György Marky

The Election and the Coronation of Saint Ladislav, King of Hungary. *The Illuminated Chronicle of Hungary*, miniature, after 1358. Budapest, National Széchényi Library.

eastern types. In connection with Simone Martini's Saint Martin cycle of Assisi and Tomaso da Modena's Saint Ursula scenes of Treviso, she distinguished two types of oriental (Hungarian) costume that can be clearly separated chronologically.³

This distinction is all the more significant for the history of Hungarian art, since it also concerns illuminated manuscripts. Accordingly, the images of the *Illuminated Chronicle* reveal a "scholarly view" in their depiction of the *folk costume* of peoples who had had a role in Hungarian history, while the miniatures in the Hungarian



Saint Ladislav Fighting the Cumanian. Detail of wall painting with his *Historia*, 1417. Unitarian Church in Székelyderzs (Dirjiu, Romania).

Angevin Legend are much more typical of the domestic point of view. The two can be clearly sensed and even used as dating criteria for the series of Hungarian historic portrayals of Saint Ladislav. The earlier portrayals often employ random attributes in distinguishing and characterizing Cumanian warriors, as for example in the murals at Kakaslovníc. A good parallel for these is a miniature among the substitutions of the *Manesse Song Book*, which depicts a scene that is clearly not a tournament, but rather a real combat between Kristan von Luppín, ein *Thüringer*, and presumably a Tartar warrior.

Just as in the case of the miniatures in the *Illuminated Chronicle*, the later portrayals fit more consistently into the 14th and 15th-century iconography of the "learned" representation of eastern types, which spread all over Europe. This spread was fostered by medieval treatises on geography such as the *Mirabilia mundi* of Hellenistic origin, and the popular itineraries. The illustrations in eastern travel books "amend" the text of the account of

travels to make it tally with conventional notions. In the Middle Ages, notions on the Orient originated from those that came down to us from Alexander the Great. Rudolf Wittkower well describes the situation: People do not believe Marco Polo, they only believe Odoriso and Jean de Mandeville.⁴

At this point it becomes obvious that the notions formed of the Orient and oriental peoples are organic parts of the medieval world view, in the same sense as the *imago mundi* inseparably includes the geographical and historical world view. It was not only Marco Polo whom people did not believe: the Franciscan friar Johannes Marignola, who travelled to the Orient in the service of the Emperor Charles IV, did his best to fit his personal travel experiences into the traditional historical picture.⁵

An important element in the geographical picture is the division of the world among the sons of Noah, and as part of this, the demarcation of Europe, the inheritance of Japheth.⁶ Part of the eschatologi-

cal history of the world is the geographical location of Gog and Magog, of the peoples who according to the legendary story are enclosed behind Alexander the Great's gate. The augury of their escape and the dread of the arrival of doomsday always emerge whenever new, unknown barbarians invaded Europe from Asia. Earlier traditions localized their enclosure to the mountains of the Caucasus, and medieval geography looked to the distant regions of Asia for it.⁷

At this point the history of the eastern peoples is related directly to the question which also occupied Márk Kálti, the Hungarian canon who compiled the *Illuminated Chronicle* in the second half of the 14th century. Kálti, as has been pointed out by Andor Tarnai, intended to eliminate the first tyrant, the Hamitic Nimrod from the genealogies of the earlier *gestae*, suggesting an origin similar to that of the peoples of Western Europe instead. This correction corresponded to a fashion,



Saint Ladislas, King of Hungary. Reverse of gold coin (forint) of King Louis the Great, 14th century.



Head Reliquary of Saint Ladislas from Várad (Oradea, Romania). Silver gilt and enamelled, first quarter of 15th century, Cathedral Treasury, Győr.

common amongst western nations according to which all the western peoples looked up to the Trojans for their origins. Tarnai argues that a tendency towards this can be seen in the corrections of Biblical genealogy, "the growing self-esteem ... of a narrow group," the locating of the country of origin in Europe, and the special interest "in the Trojan myth of the Franks in connection with the origin of the Hungarians."⁸

The story of the deeds of István Lackfi included in the charter of October 30, 1350, issued by King Louis I (the Great), which is also quoted by János Küküllei in his chronicle, justifies the campaign against Naples, as punishment for tyrants. He compares István Lackfi's campaign to the Trojan wars: "This combat would have earned well-deserved praise even from the brave Trojans."⁹

There is a parallel here with the picture in the codex of the *Historia destructionis Troiae* by Guido delle Colonne, illuminated



Bernhard Strigel: Votive panel of King Vladislav II the Jagiellonian of Hungary (kneeling before the Virgin and presented by his patron, Saint Ladislav). 1511–12. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

in Venice and now in the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana in Geneva. The codex, created in Venice in the entourage of the Doge Andrea Dandolo, has parallel depictions of the Greek and the Trojan characters. The Greeks appear as 14th century "modern" knights and the miniaturist depicts the Trojans as Asians. Dux Nestor is depicted with the same princely headwear as the princes and dukes in the *Illuminated Chronicle* and the crowns of Priam and Menon are also similar. The attributes of

Paris are the crossbow and arrow, those of Protesilaus and Antenor a caftan-like mantle and pointed high cap with a tucked up edge. Aeneas also wears a caftan-like cloak and conical cap. The *Illuminated Chronicle* provides direct parallels to these figures among the depictions of the conquering Hungarian chiefs, in oriental costume and with oriental weapons.

In the orientalizing elements of the iconography of the *Illuminated Chronicle* a medieval historicizing can be seen which was similarly applied all over Europe. Naturally, this does not mean that I deny the possible presence of oriental costumes and weapons in 14th-century Hungary. However, the oriental character was achieved by the use of appropriate pictorial formulae, and not through the illuminators' direct observation, "after nature". Here, most of the misunderstanding springs from the fact of modern interpreters anachronistically attributing studies from models and documentative intentions to medieval painters. Even Stella Mary Newton allowed impressions do mislead her: she thought she recognized contemporary Bessarabian costume on the warriors who feature in the miniature of the *Illuminated Chronicle* and accordingly called these "Bessarabian tribesmen".¹⁰

By the 15th century, Mongol or Tartar types were replaced in their iconographic functions throughout Europe by the more widely known and more topical adversary—the Turks.¹¹

They appear in Hungary too and, as regards negative figures, this fact can easily lead to the assumption that they contain an anti-Turkish attitude. However, as the illustrations of the *Thuróczi Chronicle* (1488) best conveyed, a general cultural orientation has a part here too. In the Brűnn edition, the woodcut of the arrival of the seven Hungarian chiefs obviously follows the *Primus ingressus* miniature of

the *Chronicle*, but the costumes of the chiefs and the people are now in a Turkish Style. In the woodcut of the *historia* of the Augsburg edition, the Cumanian warrior alongside Saint Ladislás is in Turkish costume; another example is the initial letter of the register of students of the *Natio Hungarica* at Vienna University. The change is not entirely fortuitous: Turóczi's text also shows an awareness of a Turkish-Hungarian relationship, or rather of the fact that the Turks were considered as having Scythian costume and weapons: "The Turks have maintained their old customs brought from their Scythian homeland, both in their garments and weapons." A Turkish-Hungarian relationship also features in the diplomatic correspondence of King Matthias ("the same blood is flowing in our veins").¹²

The battle scenes in the Augsburg edition also freely followed this Turkish orientalizing. This is one of the ways how medieval historicism, apparent in the depiction of orientalizing costumes, was transformed.

Speaking of historicism, we presume that phenomena and ideals valid in the present are attributed and referred back to the features of the past. The converse is actualization. The actuality of the figure of

Saint Ladislás in medieval art was created by the desire for moral examples, that is *imitatio*. Both in the texts and the images the picture of the *miles christianus*, fighting for justice and defending the weak, became applicable to ever widening circles, and by the end of the Middle Ages certainly to the whole country. It is in this manner that his enemies, the Cumans, known from the chronicles and legends, always appeared as the well-known figure of the current enemy now threatening from the East, that is in a historicizing manner. Moreover, the knowledge of the eastern origin of the Hungarians was also alive and this was presumably reinforced in the viewer by the costume, the customs and the way of life. In this sense the pictures from the *historia* of the saint to a certain extent represented the dilemma of the Hungarian *miles christianus*, his inner conflict, Oriental, thanks to his origin and Occidental by religion. This dilemma could never again appear in this form later than the 15th century. This also explains the singular phenomenon that the memories of the popular *historia* disappear precisely at the time (during the 15th century) when narrative descriptions start to prevail in all subjects in European art. 20

NOTES

1 ■ I follow the late dating of Polzer, J.: "L'ultimo dipinto di Simone Martini", *Antichità viva* XIX, 1980, pp. 7 ff. For a summary of different views, see the exhibition catalogue *Simone Martini e "chompagni"*, coordinamento scientifico: A. Bagnoli, L. Bellosi, Siena 1985, Florence 1985, pp. 73 ff, cat. No. 8 (F. Bologna); Martindale, A.: "Innovazioni in Simone Martini: i problemi di interpretazione", *Simone Martini, atti del convegno*, Siena 1985, a cura di L. Bellosi, Florence, 1988, pp. 233-37. On the difficulties in dating Simone Martini's "middle" period cf. Boskovits, M.: "A dismembered Polyptych, Lippo

Vanni and Simone Martini", *Burlington Magazine* CXVI, 1974, pp. 367-76. The early dating of the table was subscribed to by Prokopp, M.: "Simone Martini Szent László képe Altomonte-ben", *Szent László és Somogyvár. Tanulmányok a 900 éves somogyvári bencés apátság emlékezetére* (Saint Ladislás and Somogyvár. Studies in Memory of the 900 Year Old Benedictine Abbey of Somogyvár), Kaposvár, 1992, pp. 137-44

2 ■ "machte (ihn) der konig zu eime herren in dem selben lande in der grossen Walachien und der kleinen und gap ime sant Laszlau baner mit

den zwein cruzen und sein liberige mit dem worm und cruz" and "der konig... det im grosz ere und wurde; und er det doch hernoch also huernkinder gerne thunt." *Eberhart Windeckes Denkwürdigkeiten zur Geschichte des Zeitalters Kaiser Sigismunds*, ed. W. Altmann, Berlin, 1893, pp. 316 ff. Cf. Marosi, E.: "Die Persönlichkeit Sigismunds in der Kunst, Sigismund von Luxemburg, Kaiser und König in Mitteleuropa 1387–1437" *Beiträge zur Herrschaft Kaiser Sigismunds und der europäischen Geschichte um 1400*, ed. J. Macek, E. Marosi, F. Seibt, Warendorf, 1994, pp. 266 ff. On the significance of the banner in installation ceremonies, see: Bruckauf, J.: *Von Fahnlehn und von der Fahnenbelehnung im alten deutschen Reich*, dissertation, Leipzig, 1906; on Banner and sceptre see *ibid*, pp. 64 ff.

3 ■ Newton, S.M.: *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince. A Study of the Years 1340–1365*, Woodbridge, Suffolk—Totowa, New Jersey, 1980; Newton, S.M.: "Tommaso da Modena, Simone Martini, Hungarians and Saint Martin in Fourteenth-Century Italy", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* XLIII, 1980, pp. 234–38; followed Gibbs, R.: *Tommaso da Modena. Painting in Emilia and the March of Treviso, 1340–80*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 128 ff, 139, 149, and Gibbs, R.: "Bolognese Influences on Bohemian Art of the Late 14th and Early 15th Century" *Umeni* XXXX, 1992, p. 284.

4 ■ Wittkower, R.: "Marco Polo und die Bildtradition der 'Wunder des Ostens'" (originally: *Oriente Poliano*, Rome 1957), *Allegorie und Wandel der Symbole in Antike und Renaissance*, Cologne, 1977.

5 ■ Van den Brincken, A.-D.: "Die universalhistorischen Vorstellungen des Johann von Marignola OFM. Der einzige mittelalterliche Weltchronist mit Fernostkenntnis", *Archiv für* **1**

6 ■ Fischer, J.: "Oriens—Occidens—Europa. Begriff und Gedanke 'Europa' in der späten Antike und im frühen Mittelalter", *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte*, Mainz, Vol. 15. Abteilung Universalgeschichte, ed. M. Göhrig, Wiesbaden, 1957, pp. 10 ff ("Die Japhet-Geschichte"); Van den Brincken, A.-D.: "Die 'Nationes christianorum-orientalium' im Verstandnis der lateinischen Historiographie von der Mitte des 12. bis in die zweite Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts", *Kölner Historische Abhandlungen*, Vol. 22, Cologne—Vienna, 1973.

7 ■ Anderson, A.R.: "Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Enclosed Nations", *The Mediaeval Academy of America*, Cam-

bridge/Mass. 1932. On the modified localization see: pp. 7 ff; on the peoples connected with the legend of Gog and Magog (Huns, Alans, Khazars, Arabs, Turks, Hungarians, Parthians, Mongolians and ten tribes of Israel): pp. 12 ff; the localization of Alexander the Great's gate in medieval cartography and its relative position to the Caspian Sea: pp. 87 ff. In the *Ebstorf World Atlas*, the land of Gog and Magog appears east of the Caspian Sea, and the place of the *Goti* in the East: Rosien, W.: "Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte", *Schriften des Niedersächsischen Heimatbundes E.V.*, N.F. Vol. 19, Hannover, 1952, pp. 42 ff.

8 ■ Tarnai, A.: "A magyar nyelvet írni kezdik" ("The Hungarian Language Is Beginning to Be Written Down"), *Irodalmi gondolkodás a középkori Magyarországon* (Literary Thinking in Medieval Hungary), Budapest, 1984, p. 209.

9 ■ "quod quidem prelium etiam apud Troyanos fortissimos potuisset decentissime commendari" in Mályusz, E.: *Királyi kancellária és krónikairás Magyarországon* (The Royal Chancery and the Writing of Chronicles in Hungary), Budapest, 1973, pp. 69 ff.

10 ■ Newton, S.M.: *Fashion in the Age of the Black Prince*, op. cit. 1980, p. 94.

11 ■ Goetz, H.: "Oriental Types and Scenes in Renaissance and Baroque Painting", *The Burlington Magazine* LXXIII, 1938, pp. 50–62, 105–15.

12 ■ Horváth, J.: *Thuróczy János: A magyarok krónikája* (János Thuróczy: Chronicle of the Hungarians), Budapest, 1978, p. 38; see also *ibid*: pp. 37 ff: "Scythia nurtured many other peoples at its bosom and presented them to the world, most recently—reputedly—the Turks. Although there are many who believe that the Turks originate from the Trojan nation and have received their name from King Teucros—who in the commotion of the war went to help the city destined for ruin—in the form of Teucro and not even Turk." In the critical edition of the *Thuróczi Chronicle: Johannes de Thurocz: Chronica Hungarorum I*. Textus, ediderunt Elisabeth Galántai et Julius Kristó, Bib:otheca Scriptorum Medii Recentisque Aevorum, Series Nova VII, Budapest, 1985, (10), pp. 31 ff; and *Commentarii*, composuit Elemér Mályusz, adiuvante Julio Kristó, Budapest, 1988/I, pp. 76 ff, with criticism of the sources used by Thuróczi. See also: *King Matthias's Peace Offer to Sultan Mohamed II, Magyar humanisták levelei, XV–XVI. század* (Letters of Hungarian Humanists, 15th and 16th Century), ed. V. Kovács, S., Budapest, 1971, No. 121, pp. 263 ff.

Ildikó Nagy

The Artist on a Pedestal

Gold Medals, Silver Laurels. The Cult of the Artist and the Patronage of Art in Hungary in the 19th Century. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Hungarian National Gallery, March–November 1995, MNG–Pannon GSM, 1995, 392 pp. 300 black & white, 32 colour illustrations.

This major exhibition at the Hungarian National Gallery is a genuine sensation. For one thing, by far the greater part of what is on display has not been shown for some considerable time. These items were found in the vaults by Katalin Sinkó, who arranged the exhibition. The most striking of all is Mihály Munkácsy's large sketch for the ceiling of the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna, which, newly restored, was hung at an angle in the vast dome of the Royal Palace in Buda, housing the National Gallery. Its original title was "The Triumph of Art", and through this emphasis it becomes an emblem for the whole exhibition.

The picture shows the allegorical figures of *Fama* and *Gloria*, accompanied by winged puttos, descending from heaven to welcome the Renaissance giants (Raphael, Michelangelo and Titian) who were looked on by painters of the Academic tradition, including Munkácsy, as their forerunners. This implied that the academic painters considered themselves worthy successors of the great masters, in that they were following principles extrapolated from their

lives and art, principles they had learned at their academies and handed on to their own students. They firmly believed that art could be defined by rules and norms which, in turn, could be taught in school. The chief merits in a fledgling artist were perseverance, diligence and scholarship. These were rewarded with academic prizes. The purpose of art was seen, in the last resort, as a moral one—the practice of virtue—and thus it could be regarded as a cause to be supported by society as a whole. By supporting art, patrons themselves would be sharing in virtue, and through the prizes awarded to artists—the gold medals and the silver laurels—they would win respect for themselves.

Hence, the theme of the exhibition is widely different from what we are accustomed to. What inspired the arranger was neither the embracing of an epoch or an interest in style and trends but looking at the nature, causes and changes of artistic success. That is an issue which is closely linked to patronage, the creation of public collections and the values incarnated in those collections. Thus the question posed by the exhibition is not who painted the picture or how well it was painted, and not even whether the picture is a masterpiece or not, but why it had come into being in the first place, why it was bought and by whom, why it was admired, in other words, what kind of social consensus lay

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behind its background. That is an entirely new approach to 19th century Hungarian art. Indeed, it seems to be the most adequate one at the moment.

The exhibition reviews Hungarian art from the foundation of the Pest Art Society in 1839 to the first decade of the 20th century. In doing so, it traces the evolution of the relationship between society and art from the emergence of a consensus to its breakdown, the point where consensus became completely untenable. It traces this evolution from genuine success to the point where success in art became suspect, and the divorce between social recognition and genuine artistic merit became final. If, however, the basis of consensus between society and art was, indeed, a shared knowledge and a common set of values, then the disappearance of consensus was not simply an aesthetic but also a moral issue. This is what led to Art Nouveau at the *fin de siècle*, with the artists involved demonstratively "walking out" on society, hence they are known as *Sezession* in Vienna. The true achievement of the exhibition lies in its success in making these rather abstract issues clear, visually perceivable, and in transforming them into spectacle.

The designer of the installation, Gábor Németh, was able to bring a unity to this rather heterogeneous material. In addition to the pictures, sculptures and drawings, the decorations awarded to the artists and other personal items and relics are on show: objects which used to be part and parcel of the cult of the artist, from Munkácsy's palette and armchair through the sculptor István Ferenczy's pen-knife and money-weighing scales to a ribbon from the funeral wreath of the painter Károly Lotz. Gábor Németh has succeeded in evoking 19th-century interiors through the placing of heavy drapery here, a standing vase or glass cabinet there; elsewhere,

he uses a wall-dividing motif—that well-known element in Historicist architecture, the *trompe l'oeil* of dividing ledges and wall pillars—which brings the familiar solemnity of actual buildings into the gallery. It also gives a familiar and personal feeling to the whole exhibition. This is due to the fact that Budapest was transformed into a metropolis by the same era, and the visitor experiences the presence of the same spirit and taste day after day by walking through the city centre and its public buildings. What we are confronted with is, thus, our immediate past, the past so vehemently despised, rejected and misunderstood by 20th-century Modernism. This exhibition is the first attempt to actually understand it.

The exhibition consists of two parts. The series of ground-floor rooms which always house temporary exhibitions, display works brought up from the store-rooms or borrowed from other museums. Some of the pieces of the permanent exhibition on the first floor are also involved: although left in their normal places, a special sign and description indicates that the item is connected to the display. These are the most widely known 19th-century Hungarian paintings. Their artistic excellence has never been questioned, but no-one has ever attempted to think over why precisely they are taken as representing the art of the last century everywhere, from school textbooks to quiz shows, and by the public as such.

Katalin Sinkó has the courage to treat taboo topics, and the sensitivity to detect even the most delicate turning points in value-judgements and attitudes.

The first room pays homage to the founders of museums. Among them is the Palatine Archduke Joseph, who was one of their main supporters, even though his role here has frequently been ignored by

the strongly anti-Habsburg Hungarian public. There are the great ministers of education, baron József Eötvös and baron Ágoston Trefort, who, in the spirit of the generally accepted European norms of the times, established the institutions and the form of support for art which was to be the framework for the cultivation of the fine arts in Hungary. The foundations for the individual museum collections were laid by generous donations from famous patrons of the era—among them János László Pyrker, Arnold Ipolyi, György Ráth; they continued to grow and turned into genuine centres of scholarship following the work of eminent curators and museum directors like Ágoston Kubinyi or Ferenc Pulszky.

Those who supported the cause of museums were also active in art patrons' organizations, donations from whom added to the collections. The Pest Art Society was a limited company founded by educated art lovers. It organized exhibitions, arranged purchases, and held a lottery at the end of each year, also distributing lithographs or copper-engravings as dividends for its members. The paintings from which the graphic reproductions were made would be bought by the society and donated to the National Museum. Those donated between 1853 to 1866 were, with



*Sándor Wagner (painter)—Leó Schöninger(engraver):
Titusz Dugovics's Self-Sacrifice, 1860.*

one exception, continuously exhibited from the moment they reached the museum and are included in the permanent exhibition even today. By finding their way, in the form of reproductions, into homes, these paintings gained wide popularity; in effect, they formed a national "treasury", items known to all and which contributed to a common artistic education and a common historical consciousness. Certain events became etched onto the public mind, gaining special prominence and turning into emblems for every Hungarian, precisely because of these paintings; such were the self-sacrifice of Titusz Dugonics, who pulled a Turkish standard-bearer into

the abyss along with himself, or the captive Ilona Zrínyi forlorn in the fortress of Munkács. This process was only strengthened from 1856 on, when the paintings used for these "dividend engravings" were selected through a competition in which a Hungarian historical subject alternated every second year with genre paintings or landscapes. The competitions were accompanied by debates, so the pictures that came to museums reflected the taste and will of a wider audience, unlike the state purchases of subsequent years. The development of the collection was still of public concern in the middle of the 19th century. Signatures were collected in support of one painting or another; occasionally, pictures were bought with money donated by the public.

The core of the material in the present National Gallery was supported by the common will and shared views of the general public, the curators and art critics. That shared attitude, however, started to gradually disintegrate from the 1860s or 1870s. By then, the country's art life was being dominated by different types or organizations.

In 1861, the National Fine Art Society was founded, merging with the Pest Art Society in 1867. Although it completely lost its importance by the 20th century, it survived until 1945. The Society protected the interests of artists, tried to reduce the influence of outsiders and took over an increasing number of functions from the state. First and foremost, it was given the task of selecting pictures to be sent to international exhibitions; the committee of judges also decided on the awarding of the foundation prizes given by various associations and even by private individuals. Their spring, autumn and winter shows were the most prominent art events of the year. These would be attended by the Emperor-King and were the occasions

when prizes and state purchases were decided upon. Those who failed to be shown in these exhibitions were not recognized as artists. From 1881, the Society also awarded a prize of its own. The judges were originally four artists and three patrons of art, but the proportions changed over the years, with the power of decision gradually coming into the hands of the senior teachers of the Academy of Fine Arts. Although there were attempts at rejuvenation, and new talent was sometimes recognized with an amazing swiftness (the painter Károly Ferenczy, for instance), the mechanism of decision-making became rigid, and the judges exemplified conventional taste. From 1897, artists could only participate in the Society's exhibitions by invitation. Although this measure was meant to prevent artistic overproduction, the National Fine Art Society's time was over. When the Nagybánya artists' colony was founded in 1896, the art scene itself took a new and modern turn, with young artists creating forums of their own for themselves.

The exhibition illustrates how the Society operated through the paintings which won prizes and thus ended up in the National Gallery either via donations or purchase. The holdings of 19th-century paintings are in fact faithful mirrors of the judges' tastes as well as the preferences of those who sponsored prizes. Thus, for instance, Arnold Ipolyi founded a prize for historical and religious pictures, György Ráth for landscapes and genre paintings, the Vaszary Foundation for "recording the glorious events of Hungarian history, first of all the lives of the saints", and Count Tibor Károlyi for salon pictures and sculptures. On the other hand, the prize given by the upper middle-class Lipótváros Casino was not tied to a particular theme, and the recipients appear to have been practically only non-Academic painters.



Mór Than (painter)—Lajos Michalek (engraver): King Matthias Corvinus in the Company of Scholars and Artists at his Court. 1882.

A part from the support extended by the societies, the most important means through which items were acquired was that of state purchase. The various forms of state patronage were formulated by the Minister for Education baron József Eötvös in 1869, who saw it as a set of responsibilities for his department. His attention extended to everything from the ornamentation of public buildings to pictures employed as teaching aids. The latter's inclusion in the exhibition provides a special treat. Even those specializing in the era knew little about them, despite the fact that our grandparents had actually used them at school. The forty-page series was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and made between 1872 and 1877 as an aid to "speech and intelligence practice" classes. The original ink drawings came from the hands of the finest artists of the time (Mór Than, Bertalan Székely, Károly Telepy, Soma Orlai Petrich, et al.); these provided the lithographed, later printed, sheets which were supplied to the elementary schools. The series covers three large subjects: the home, various trades and professions, and the natural sciences. The aim, in the spirit of

Pestalozzi's educational principles, was to introduce children to the joy of work; this it mainly tried to do by providing information on life in the villages and on farming. The typical farmyards of the Great Plain or the mountain regions, the workshops of potters and weavers, the portrayals of various types of mill, the depictions of lumberyards or fruit-drying are today of special interest to the cultural historian and the folklorist. In contrast, Bertalan Székely's page on the phenomena of the sky (clouds, rainstorm, lightning, rainbow, etc.) or Gusztáv Keleti's rendition of the flora and fauna of the marshlands have a picturesque beauty. These sheets were so little known that no mention is made of them in the artists' standard monographs. In a study written for the catalogue, their discoverer, László Szabó, turns to one to show how the subject and composition of one page recurs in an oil painting by the same artist. He also traces the history of these illustrative pictures. The series was in use until the turn of the century when the then Minister for Culture, Gyula Wlassics, decided to replace them by a series of historical portrayals. The goal of educating for work was replaced by the desire to influence ideology. That meant

the elimination of the last vestiges of Eötvös's Liberal cultural policy, a move that was so successful that no public collection has the full series today.

The most prominent forms of official art patronage were the various commissions, competitions and purchases. During Eötvös's term as minister, universal human values and Hungarian culture, ethos and history were closely linked with one another. Programme and iconography (thus, the frescoes and sculptures of the National Museum) reflect a view of history which sees the nation not as a separate entity but as part of universal mankind, and the nation's past can only be judged from that vantage point. The historical events chosen by Eötvös for contests were meant to emphasize the European relations of Hungary. As models or ideals, he selected historians or monarchs who had supported the cause of national culture. Thus, for instance, he wanted busts of the great figures of Hungarian culture and education to be placed into a Pantheon which was to be set up in the National Museum; among the topics for the historical painting competition, a major place was given to Prince Gábor Bethlen of Transylvania, a famous seventeenth-century patron of the arts and sciences.

It was in the 1880s that there was a change in the approach to historical painting, a change which would become completely effected by the time of the preparations for the Millennium Commemoration (1896). By then, historical painting was expected to express the "national character" or "national genius". Historical paintings contained ever more topical political references, and were increasingly representative. Parallel with that, however, there emerged the desire for artistic autonomy, a refusal to regard history and representative art as moral lessons. Museum collec-

tions, too, came to be divided according to historical and aesthetic viewpoints, thus, in 1884, a Historical Picture Gallery was established in the National Museum.

In a separate section, extensive space is devoted to works that received the state prizes of "gold medals" or had been state acquisitions. Royal purchases were of special importance for artists and became regular from 1880 on. Those bought by Francis Joseph I were mainly genre paintings and landscapes. Although his personal tastes must have been very conservative, acting under advice, he also bought pictures by those artists who were following modern trends: Pál Szinyei Merse, László Mednyászký and even the young Károly Ferenczy, whose career had just begun.

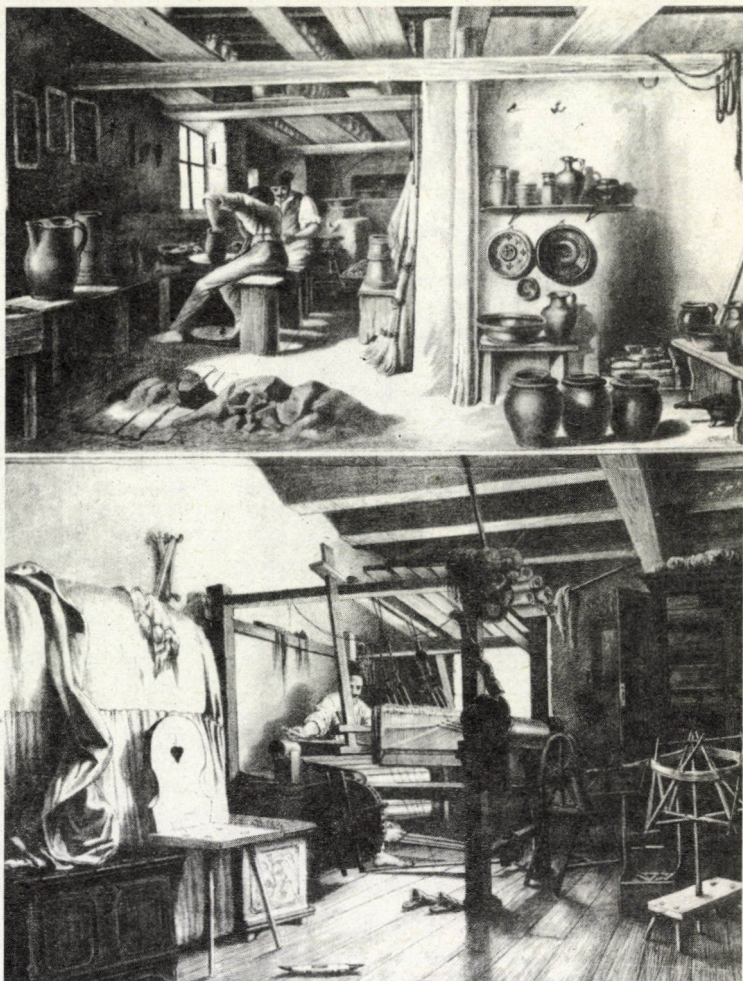
At the international exhibitions of the Fine Art Society, the government also bought works by foreign artists: Franz Stuck, Akseli Gallén-Kallélla, Fernand Khnopff or Giovanni Segantini are among the painters whose internationally acknowledged pieces are now in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts. Hungarian works bought by the government at the time proved to be of lesser importance.

Famous artists—and the artist per se—enjoyed special worship in the second half of the 19th century. This cult of the artist is illustrated by a rich collection of pictures, photographs, documents and relics. The National Museum had been collecting mementos of famous artists since its foundation. In the former picture gallery of the Museum, three rooms were actually named after major artists—there was a Markó, a Munkácsy and a Zichy Room—with statues of the artists in the centres. All three had also become famous abroad and were especially respected not just as renowned artists but as "sons of our homeland" who had won glory for the nation abroad. When in 1870 that picture

gallery was established, the director of the National Museum, Ágoston Kubinyi, urged the creation of a portrait collection of Hungarian artists. The plan never materialized; this present exhibition of the National Gallery displays together the portraits that would have constituted the basis of "artists' gallery".

A spectacular manifestation of the cult of the artist was the way in which the artist was celebrated. In 1853, Károly Markó, who lived in Italy, came home for a visit. For the occasion, his works were exhibited at the National Museum, banquets were organized in his honour, a memorial leaf was given to him, his portrait in the museum was decorated with a laurel, and he was eulogised by poets. Yet this was restrained compared to the pomp and festivity surrounding the celebration of some artists

at the end of the century. From the 1880s on, a regular ritual was developed; gala theatre performances, deputations marching to greet the artist, panegyric orations, gifts, laurels and banquets. The object of the greatest cult of all was Mihály Munkácsy. His visit home and his funeral were turned into huge public events. Katalin Sinkó's sharp eye has recognized the cause: the view of the artist taken by



Károly Telepy: Potter and Weaver. An illustration as a teaching aid for elementary schools. 1877

society had undergone a sea change within a few decades. While the landscape painter Károly Markó was celebrated for being the great artist that he was, the real subject of the cult of Munkácsy was unequivocally the "national genius", who embodied the necessary virtues of the artist and those of the national character. These, however, could not be deduced from the artist's oeuvre—no matter how



Mihály Munkácsy's coat of arms on his patent of nobility. 1879.

hard the theorists of the times tried to—but appeared purely on a verbal level. The artist declares his loyalty to the nation which, in turn, bestows on him the title of its genius. This explains the proliferation of artists' laudations, their flourishes and bombastic metaphors. In the catalogue, an excellent study by Erzsébet Király investigates this issue for the first time, giving a summary of the history of the genre of the laudation from Antiquity, and of its peculiar Hungarian examples at the end of the last century.

The cult of the artist, however, also allowed for the bohemian, or even what was racy in the artist. The exhibition treats the various forms of the role-models at the end of the century one by one. Society appreciated not only "the great man" in the artist but also the eccentric,

bohemian figure, who could be the subject of gossip all over the country. The artist, for his part, would enjoy being talked about, and he himself would help inflate his own legend. He would enjoy exterior appearances, like, for example, the sculptor Alajos Stróbl, the chief organizer of artists' parties and bizarre masquerades. He often dressed as a medieval knight; similarly, Munkácsy had himself photographed in the costume of Rubens, while the sculptor János Fadrusz, the creator of King Matthias's equestrian statue in Kolozsvár, enjoyed masquerading as Lucifer. Károly Lotz portrayed himself as Zeus on the ceiling fresco of the Opera House.

The cult of the artist was inseparable from the cult of the artist's muse. Károly Lotz's gentle affection for his foster daughter, Kornélia, the model for many of his paintings, was widely known. The exhibition contains two pieces of Kornélia's Neo-Rococo room furniture, a painted glass cabinet and a folding screen, which were decorated by Lotz with idyllic love scenes. The "shepherd girl" in the small pictures bears the features of Kornélia, as does the Muse Calliope that Lotz painted onto a guitar for his foster daughter.

A separate section of the exhibition is devoted to the prize medals, orders and decorations received by artists. Of these, five gold medals and five decorations were Mihály Munkácsy's. The first is the gold medal of the Paris Salon from 1864, given to the then unknown artist for his *The Condemned Cell*, the painting which won him instant fame. That medal was the source of pride for the Hungarian public for a hundred years, and rightly so. The collection also includes Munkácsy's Officer's Cross of the Legion d'Honneur, the Commander's Cross of the Swedish Northern Star Order (founded by Frederick I in 1748) and a shower of medals that poured down on him in the last years of

the century, especially at the time of the Millennium. Every artist received medals and decorations of one kind or another, and the famous "painter-princes" received them in large volume. During his fifty-year career (from 1884 to 1934), the sculptor of the Millennium Monument on Heroes' Square, György Zala, won 15 major prizes and decorations including the Great State Gold Medal, regarded as the highest recognition an artist could receive, which he was awarded at the age of 29 (in 1887) and, at the end of his life, the Corvin Chain (1931) which was very rarely given to artists. His contemporary and perennial rival, Alajos Stróbl was raised to the nobility, his long-held ambition. (The recognition of artistic merit by a title of nobility had a long tradition in Hungary, with King Matthias being the first to grant nobility to an artist in 1468.) Such a deluge of prizes obviously resulted in their devaluation. At any rate, the new generation at the turn of the century naturally did not seek the recognition of a society whose system of values it rejected. In consequence, aesthetic value and social recognition coincided less and less often.

Before ridiculing the artists of the last century for their vanity, one must not forget how natural such vanity is. In 1994, the Union of Hungarian Sculptors re-established the old tradition of giving laurels to artists by deciding to award the title "Sculptor Laureate" every year to the sculptor who, at a given exhibition, wins the greatest number of votes from his colleagues. Thus, artists recognized each other's merits. There is no financial gain to go with the award, only respect, and—in all likelihood—affection.

If there are certain points where the closing years of the two centuries appear to coincide, it is only through nostalgia or irony. Katalin Sinkó's major study in the



Gyula Benczúr's illustration for a Károly Lotz Festschrift published when Lotz died in 1904.

catalogue drives home the point—and the exhibition illustrates it very well indeed—that the ethos of art became divorced from that of society in the last century, which inevitably led to the loss of consensus for artistic norms and to the evolution of autonomous art. "Man is on his own, the artist is on his own... and no universal formula exists," the art critic Ludwig von Hevesi put it in 1898, brilliantly grasping the basic position of art and the artist in modernity. The history of the art of the new century is, in fact, a history of that heroic solitude. 22

Miklós Györffy

Three Everymen

Miklós Vámos: *Anyá csak egy van* (You Only Have One Mother). Ab Ovo, 1995, 219 pp. • György Dalos: *A kulcsfigura* (The Key Figure). Ab Ovo, 1995, 207 pp. • Kornél Hamvai: *Márton partjelző fázik* (Linesman Márton Is Cold). Ab Ovo, 1995, 187 pp.

Miklós Vámos is a successful man. His previous novel, *A New York–Budapest metró* (New York–Budapest Subway), with a hero who can be easily identified with him, tells us that though he did his best to make it in America he failed. Not so back at home. He has launched a publishing house, is the presenter of a popular television show and, in domestic terms, is successful as an author. True, this means no more than a few thousand copies sold, but his new novel, *You Only Have One Mother*, published by his own company, Ab Ovo, has achieved that.

The novel is about the illness and death of Ladó's mother. "Funny" Ladó, as he is known, is a popular television personality and humourist aged 44. Once again, this novel includes the author himself scarcely disguised or changed. The book's protagonist is his "only" mother, Mrs Andor Maros, widow and pensioner, suffering long from manic depression and, now approaching seventy, lung cancer. More than anything else, the novel is a homage to her

and her fight for life. Vámos may have been encouraged by Péter Esterházy's *Helping Verbs of the Heart*, which is about his dying mother. However, true to himself and his humourist alter ego in the book, Vámos tackles the theme with grotesque humour. Two texts alternate chapter by chapter: one a soliloquy by the mother, the other on Ladó in the third person. The two texts cover the same events in parallel or complement one another by offering separate insights into mother and son.

Ladó's life is dominated by a wish to stand by his mother and look after her as best he can. Manic-depressive as she is, suicidal when "down", when she is "up", ebullience and a zest for life involve her in wild ventures. She turns to casual and confused love affairs, which usually end up badly, scampers abroad on an adventurous trip and makes absurd business deals. She sells the entire furnishings of her flat at a give-away price to buy Czech bicycle chains in the firm conviction that she can make a killing. On a day out in Szentendre, she buys up bric-à-brac by the ton, then gets herself taken home by an ambulance. Meanwhile she continues to see doctors, is treated in hospitals and mental homes, and takes no notice of the lung cancer growing inside her. Her relationship with her daughter and son is stormy: refusing to be their "ward", she accuses them of

Miklós Györffy

is our regular reviewer of new fiction.
A collection of his reviews for HQ has
recently been published in Hungarian.

neglect. In short, she is monstrously insufferable and uncontrollably vital.

The soliloquies that lay out her past are full of gaudy colour, grotesque exaggeration and stringent contrast. But the narrator is not so much the mother, languishing or hyperactive, muddling and recalling at random; it is much more her humourist son so adept at processing his mother's problems, thoughts and feelings into consumable, bittersweet, yet always digestible stand-up jokes. The licentious, diffuse and overbearing style could be ascribed to the mother, but the way it is rounded-off and pointed, together with the occasional cheap one-liners shows the hand of the professional humourist. (Indeed, his own selfishness and shortcomings are presented with a similar humorous self-irony.) In this Vámos's model may have been Woody Allen, to whom he does make a reference. Ladó is a weak man and husband who wants a wife and a well-run home just as much as he wants his mistress in the background. His life is chaotic enough and his mother has no right to make matters worse with her whims and demands. "You only have one mother": Ladó feels he ought to put up with her now that she is approaching the end of a strenuous life and about to make her final farewells. As it happens, he is on holiday with his family when news of his mother's death reaches him. Vámos's book is adeptly written, pleasant, amusing and at places funny, occasionally moving even, but it lacks the depth which would make it really memorable.

György Dalos's novel *The Key Figure* is also witty and readable. Dalos was born in 1943, took a degree in history in Moscow. In the late sixties he was a member of a small, isolated New Left-Maoist group which hoped to revitalize Marxism from the left. When the authorities cracked

down, he was banned from publishing for a while. In the Seventies, he joined the civil rights movement that the emerging "democratic opposition" had started; later, in the Eighties, he spent more and more time in Germany, mainly in West Berlin, until he moved to Vienna in 1987. Currently, he is the director of the Hungarian Cultural Institute in Berlin. Sporadically published, he is relatively little known in Hungary, and better known in Austria and Germany. A number of his books have appeared in German, some of which still await publication in Hungarian.

The Key Figure offers an ironic picture of the classic period of the Kádár era in the 60s and 70s. (In some of its details the life of Tamás Kohen, the protagonist, is much like the author's, and some features of other characters are from real life, but it is not a *roman-à-clef*.) On 16 November 1979, Tamás Kohen disappears from home without a trace. He has probably gone to the West using a passport he obtained for a trip with his girl-friend. Chapter One, entitled "Kohen Disappears", is followed by an account of events past, going back over some twenty years.

Kohen was born right after the war, to a Jewish lower-middle-class family. His father, lucky enough to have survived forced labour, reopens his watchmaker's shop, which is nationalized soon after and, in 1956, Jakab Kohen emigrates to Israel to start a new life. His abandoned wife remarries and moves outside Budapest to join her new husband, a Swabian (German) greengrocer, leaving her son to fend for himself. Tamás is mostly taken in charge by an uncle who climbs higher and higher in the communist apparatus, eventually becoming a deputy minister, sincerely condemning his brother for choosing Zionist Israel over the building of socialism in Hungary.

The young Tamás drifts aimlessly, at first wanting to become an actor. He recites

poetry well and concentrates on the humanities since he has a gift for languages but he finally drops out of college. He marries early, his girl is pregnant and her parents, also leading apparatchiks, reluctantly accept the marriage. (She miscarries and five years later the marriage is over.) Tamás makes his living as an interpreter and becomes friendly with Ákos Csató, an erudite and magnetic teacher of history. Csató is the centre of a group who oppose the Kádár regime from the left, on the basis of true, unadulterated Marxism. The group is betrayed, Kohen is interrogated for a full day but the case is dropped since the regime does not want to lose face in a West from which it expects financial and political support. Kohen has temporary difficulties in obtaining work as an interpreter and for years is not able to get a passport.

Staying well clear of politics for a time, he slowly wins his way back to favour, thanks in part to the influential uncle and in part to his own gestures of loyalty. He is allowed to interpret again on sensitive official occasions and once again acquires a passport. His love-life is chaotic to the point that he finds himself manoeuvring among four lovers. Just to complicate his life even further, he once again finds himself involved in politics through Csató: the illegal civil rights activists in Hungary are preparing for a gesture of solidarity with the Charta '77 signatories in Czechoslovakia. As their every move is known to the secret police, his uncle and other big shots (one of them could be the Party's chief ideologue, Comrade Aczél, fictionalized) try to talk him round and persuade him not to go too far. Fed up with his own messy life, Kohen escapes to West Berlin.

Dalos depicts "Kohen's flight" with cool and ironic distancing, as though he were taking minutes. Kohen is indeed a key figure in the sense that the Kádár regime cannot be understood without

knowing him. This is exactly the point where there have to be reservations about the novel: its intentions do not come through sufficiently forcefully. At one point Kohen is summed up: "Throughout his entire bungled life he was either in a state of expectation without any aim and direction, or in listless anxiety caused by the possible consequences of his pursuing the moment." Kohen is after great moments which only women are able to provide. His life is all procrastination, ersatz, improvisation. But this emerges through declaration rather than from the episodes themselves, written up in a superficial and summary way and unappealing to the reader. The book is not convincing on the idea of Kohen as a key figure of the Kádár regime. Dalos's message that Kohen, through his many temporary bondings, is a characteristic figure of that neither-fish-nor-fowl world that reigned here is all very well, yet we learn nothing about this world from the novel that we have not known before. We are not given that extra knowledge that could make the idea of Kohen as a representative and key figure valid.

Young Kornél Hamvai's first book, *Linesman Márton Is Cold* also comes from Ab Ovo. This is a novel to pay attention to, for after the somewhat colourless and stunted productions of recent years it exudes life and originality. However, signs of acclaim and acknowledgment are yet to come from the literary quarters, so much drained and divided by political clashes.

Hamvai's novel is written in a stream of consciousness form; the narrator is the pensioned off, 78-year-old Jakab Márton, formerly a football linesman and worker in an engineering works in Újpest. A grotesque note is struck right at the beginning—the novel opens with Márton finding himself on the sloping and slippery glass roof of Budapest's Western Railway

Station, the big World Atlas under his arm, and policemen struggling with their own fear of heights only manage to get him down with difficulty. Márton spends his days rambling in the streets as well as among his memories. Though he has a small flat on a housing estate, where he has lived alone for thirty-three years, he spends little time at home because of his fear of dreams, darkness and loneliness. He whiles away his time in parks, bars and staircases, carrying on an imaginary conversation with figures from the past, mainly his ex-wife Denise and Miholka, a former drinking companion. He lived with Denise for nineteen years, a marriage that eventually turned empty. His failing and fragmented memories give the impression at first that when she packed her bags one day to walk out on him he stabbed and killed her. However, his memories show no traces of time spent in prison, and eventually the probable truth emerges—Denise did leave the flat, did disappear for good and not even the police could ever find her. In this light, a statement by a former classmate and rival of his, who suddenly shows up, claiming that years later he saw the woman in the town of Sopron, assumes strange significance.

Many other details in Márton's past come to light. He was, for example, a "confidential person", an informer that is; he could have been promoted to the referee's list had not a match been called off because of fog. These are not the details that round out a life story; they are recurring elements, motifs with variations in stream of consciousness idiosyncratically narrated in the present. In each of the book's eleven chapters Linesman Márton appears in a different set-up—freezing in the street, hospitalized, fumbling about his flat, wandering in the cemetery, coming across Gejzlinger, an old classmate who, from a forced labour camp fled straight to

the West in 1945. Apart from the indirect description of various incidents as they are filtered through his consciousness, it is primarily his stream of consciousness that "resounds" ceaselessly in him that is captured. It is made up mostly of reported dialogues, the versions of how they happened are mixed up with versions that now appear in the mind. Similarly, incidents that really happened are washed together with imaginary ones. All this is told by a half-educated, confused, self-respecting but wounded man, in a language reconstructed with such sociological, syntactic and grammatical authenticity that he is much more of a key figure of the past decades than Dalos's protagonist. The father of Hamvai's character was an Újpest worker, already class-conscious, self-educated, a trade unionist of the type that created the Communist Party. The son's story, approached more through his way of thinking and diction than from the biographical side, provides a narration of the sad conclusion that follows those antecedents—all the way to pauperization. Linesman Márton has always been taken in by slogans. He serves the communist regime while the ground slowly slips from under his feet. Indoctrinated to blame others for everything, his attitude ruins even his marriage. He seeks consolation for disappointments and loneliness in drink. When, for once in his life, a commentator praises him for flagging offside at the right time, he was not on the air.

Hamvai is not judgemental in any way, handling his character with love and understanding. Whether this is due more to his charitable irony or his character's attempts at self-justification is delicately left unclear. Brilliantly written, *Linesman Márton Is Cold* is more than just a first novel promising a fine talent; it is a full-blown achievement and a real delight to read. 20

"Not to be described"

Ernő Szép: *The Smell of Humans: A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary*. Translated by John Bátki. With an introductory essay by Dezső Tandori. Central European University Press, Budapest, London, New York, 1994, xxvi + 175 pp.

Ernő Szép's journal from 1944 raises anew one of the most difficult questions about Holocaust literature: What constitutes—what qualifies as—Holocaust literature? The question implies a need to measure suffering and we are therefore uncomfortable with it, and may even think it improper, indecent. Yet it is a legitimate question. Many believe that only people who perished in extermination camps could be properly called victims of the Holocaust; and survivors are those who remained alive after spending time in one of the death camps. According to this narrow definition, the Holocaust, as distinct from other wartime atrocities and killings, refers specifically to mass annihilation in German-run concentration camps during the Second World War. In this view, the Holocaust took place in the camps, for nowhere else was genocide carried out quite so systematically and efficiently.

What may appear to some as mere hairsplitting, an unseemly quibble over de-

finitions, is a matter of utmost importance to the purist who believes that using the term Holocaust too loosely lessens the martyrdom of its real victims, and strips the entire phenomenon of its singular significance.

The Smell of Humans relates the three-week ordeal of a sixty-year-old Hungarian writer during the final phase of the Second World War, when organized deportations of Jews from Hungary more or less ceased, but a reign of terror was unleashed by Hungarian Fascists who seized power in mid-October of 1944. Along with hundreds of other elderly Jews, the writer was picked up by Arrow Cross thugs and led on a forced march to a village near the capital, where the captives were made to dig trenches—completely senselessly, since everyone knew the war was just about over. Or did they? Ernő Szép's book is at its perceptive best when describing the uncertain state of mind of both victims and aggressors—their despair, their terror, their cruelty, and above all, their delusions. The Russians may have been only a few kilometres away, and the Germans in retreat, but there were still Nazi-sympathizers who believed in the invincibility of the German war machine, and Jews, likewise in awe of German might, who feared that the Reich's last gasp would last a long

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time. In early November, most of the prisoners were allowed to return to Budapest, just in time to witness the two-month-long siege of the city. Although Ernő Szép ends his story by saying that this last chapter "is not to be described, not to be believed," the ordeal he did choose to concentrate on was over.

The makeshift compound in a brick works where Ernő Szép and his fellow unfortunates ended up was no concentration camp. Indeed, no extermination camps were to be found anywhere in the territory of Hungary. Strictly speaking, then, the subtitle given to the English version of this book—*A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary*—is incorrect, and to answer our original question, perhaps *The Smell of Humans* should not be classified as Holocaust literature. But again, the counterargument is that it's absurd to insist on these distinctions. After all, Miklós Radnóti, who only now is beginning to be recognized in the West as one of the great poets of the Holocaust, on a par with Paul Celan and Nelly Sachs, was never deported to a concentration camp. As a Jew, he was drafted into the Hungarian Labour Service, and with other members of his battalion shot to death inside Hungary by Hungarian guards. (Incidentally, neither Celan nor Sachs was ever an inmate of a *Vernichtungslager*.) But even if we opt for a broader definition of Holocaust literature, should we not circumscribe the term, and delimit the genre?

It so happened that in 1945, the year Ernő Szép's journal was first published, another book appeared in Budapest, Lajos Nagy's *Pincenapló* ("Cellar Diary"), which is strikingly similar to *The Smell of Humans* in form, length, even content, although it deals with the very period Ernő Szép doesn't touch on—the terrible last days of the war in the besieged capital. So much of Lajos Nagy's short narrative—the

scenes of privation, the picture of cowed civilians, the tiny acts of kindness, the cruelty of desperadoes having their last fling—reminds one of Ernő Szép's book, yet no one would think of classifying "Cellar Diary" as Holocaust literature, primarily because Lajos Nagy was not a Jew. But the matter isn't that simple. First of all, throughout the siege Nagy was hiding his wife who *was* Jewish, so he had to experience some of the fear and humiliation of the branded and persecuted. What's more, Lajos Nagy, a bitterly outspoken writer, temperamentally very different from Ernő Szép, refuses to extract "meaning" from the slaughter of innocents, and in this he is like the boldest commentators on the Holocaust. Lawrence Langer, a leading scholar of Holocaust literature, has said that the most uncompromising Holocaust writers confront a terrible reality without flinching, and recognize that no consolation is to be had from committing the facts to paper. A rigorous critic and editor himself, Langer maintains that someone like Anne Frank "has been ill-served by fervent admirers who have refurbished her work with their own sentimental provocations."

At first glance, Ernő Szép's book also seems to be an occasion for "sentimental provocations." He makes it clear, for example, that certain things are too terrible for a sensitive human being even to contemplate. "It was not the first time that I heard about Jews being taken to the gas chambers in Germany," he remarks at one point in his journal. "But I did not believe it. And I still can't believe it. Deep down I cannot believe it. I just cannot." And he also clings to the notion—an illusion, say the Holocaust analysts—that describing suffering is a way to transcend it: "During my nights of torment I consoled myself with the thought that I would write about our vicissitudes, and they would be of

some interest in retrospect. But what about these others who suffered blindly, the ones without any recourse; how were they to find relief and consolation?"

But such comments and reflections may be interpreted differently—not necessarily as the musings of a soft-spoken, delicate poet whose sense of decency keeps him from thinking ill of anyone, but as somber conclusions drawn by a sharp-eyed if stoic witness. When he says that this or that "is not to be described," he may not be revealing artistic squeamishness so much as reminding us, as do so many writers on the Holocaust, that language here ceases to be of help, it cannot do its job.

Ernő Szép is known in Hungary primarily as a poet of subtle moods and nostalgic evocations, a consummate literary artist whose language and imagery have the makings of *poésie pure*. But this is a simplified view. Szép's prose is actually quite robust, in spite of the delicate use of language, and even as a poet he wasn't quite so ethereal or apolitical. (His "Imádság" [Prayer] is one of the most fervently patriotic poems in Hungarian literature.)

Szép's guilelessness and self-effacement are part of a carefully cultivated literary persona; as is his mock-innocent style. Indeed, like most Central European writers, Ernő Szép was a superb ironist with an eye for the odd, the grotesque. What is remarkable about his wartime journal is its sparseness. This time the languorous, utterly refined poet keeps his mannerisms and bohemian affectations to a minimum, and like a no-nonsense reporter concentrates on facts, details, proving that he is, above all, a highly professional and disciplined writer. That brickyard in the village of Erdőváros may not have been a concentration camp, yet Ernő Szép's neatly framed narrative and descriptive snapshots

evoke its spirit—the successive stages of dehumanization and psychological fortification. We see respectable elderly gentlemen being reduced in a matter of days to selfish, bickering captives, although their former selves keep flashing through, just as sadistic guards at times are caught acting like normal people. What Ernő Szép shows us—and this is what links his episodic, "anecdotal" narrative to the searing testimony of a Borowski, a Primo Levi—is that people even in a state of degradation remain reassuringly, terrifyingly human.

There is no question that after reading *The Smell of Humans* the image of Ernő Szép, the infinitely gentle and humane poet, has to be revised. The hard-edged reporting he comes up with doesn't always jibe with his low-key commentaries, or his wide-eyed wonderment at atrocities. What he ultimately conveys, with not too many palliatives, is that in the situation he found himself, everything from physical and mental torture to random murder became commonplace. He highlights moments of supreme humiliation—a marching Jew hit in the face by a burly stranger because the former had the temerity to ask a little girl on the street to mail a postcard for him; a woman insisting that a policeman arrest a Jewish passerby for supposedly uttering derogatory words about the Hungarian nation; a Jewish lawyer kicked and slapped because "he dared to look like gentry." The mild-mannered poet is no more considerate when singling out Jewish anti-Semites: the convert, for example, who wouldn't sit next to Jews, declaring indignantly: "We have been Catholics for over two years;" or the outcasts who insist that they are anti-German out of patriotism, not because they themselves are threatened: "If the Germans were to win the war, there would be nothing left of Hungary." Despite the momentary bafflement, the

gasp of disbelief, Ernő Szép manages to suggest the banality of these incidents. Indeed, as the narrative progresses, the authorial interjections grow less frequent: he simply observes, describes, quotes, and keeps his thoughts to himself.

Yet to many readers Ernő Szép remains, even in *The Smell of Humans*, the tolerant, generous, ever-so-gentle poet, quick to embrace even his enemies. Doesn't he try to see the good in everyone, including the young Arrow Cross tough who may have been turned wild only by his revolver, the bayonet, "and the ideology, of course;" and the ferocious bully of a guard, a "strapping lad with a handsome... face," whose soul, alas, "reflected none of that beauty?"

The truth is that even the most magnanimous of Szép's gestures are tinged with irony. The surface astonishment reveals tough-minded worldliness. When he says of a friend, a relative: he "received the Jewish fate as his terrestrial lot;" "she had the misfortune of being Jewish;" he had "no trace of the 'birth defect' in his face," we know he is being tactful, compassionate, and ironic. When a captive exclaims in exasperation, "But I converted out of conviction!" Szép has another inmate answer back: "That's right, you were convinced that it would be to your advantage." The very title of the book is ironically ambiguous. Does Szép have in mind the comforting smell of human presence, or stale body odor? Probably both.

But when it comes to his own sense of Jewishness, he is genuinely pained and puzzled. He declares his solidarity with fellow sufferers, naturally, but he also keeps his distance. Long removed from Jewish traditions, he is nevertheless respectful toward those who are religious, even if the rituals themselves strike him as alien. Like so many assimilated Hungarian Jews, he

considers himself Hungarian first and foremost, yet when pressed, he is willing to admit that perhaps he should have been a better Hungarian, internalizing in this way the criticism leveled against Jews. When he hears, while trudging along the highway, that the group may be led to the village of Csomád, he as well as the others wonder aloud where it may be and what kind of place it is; they'd never heard of it.

I hung my head in penance... I, too, had always been running off to Paris, and in Italy there was no village, no matter how tiny, that I hadn't been curious about. And I had ignored my own homeland. I had never been to Brassó or Kolozsvár; nor to Eger, Nyitra or Pécs. I am forever driven: something calls me to see the world, to visit every last island in the oceans; to see each and every human, all my contemporaries; to caress with my eyes every strange tree, flower, bird. Whereas it should have been my sacred duty to scrutinize my own homeland, and to look at each man, woman and child, every grandmother and young girl, to let my eyes take in, as long as I had sight, each horse and each little dog. Now I was atoning for my disloyalty; I had to march and see Csomád.

He, too, would like to know why the Jews are hated so by his countrymen. A rambling discussion on the subject, faithfully reported, includes all the conventional answers and attitudes ("Because we are smarter." "We should all go and make music at the tavern instead of being company directors, and then we would not be persecuted."), though Szép considers it important to point out that "we had all kinds among us: shoemakers, umbrella repairers, exterminators, janitors, porters, barkeepers, chauffeurs, news vendors, street hawkers, you name it."

Ernő Szép was of the generation that believed wholeheartedly in assimilation,

yet in 1944 he, too, experienced a crisis of identity. (This crisis, and the resulting sense of alienation and abandonment, is the major theme of Imre Kertész's novel, *Fateless* [Sorstalanság], perhaps the most profound Hungarian examination of the Holocaust.) But neither Ernő Szép nor Imre Kertész (nor countless other assimilated Hungarian Jews) can be completely open about their resentment; the hurt is too deep for words. How much easier it is for a writer like Lajos Nagy to show anger and declare, as he does in his "Cellar Diary": "I am ashamed that I have in common with these criminals that I, too, am Hungarian and a Christian. Oh, what will I say if, after the war, I should have to go abroad? A Hungarian! How will I deny it?"

As we can see, there were attempts to come to terms with the nightmare of 1944 right after the war, but for a long time afterward there was only silence, on both sides. "It is no accident," notes John Bátki in his introduction, "that *The Smell of Humans*, written and originally published in 1945, was not reissued until 1984." (Bátki, however, is not entirely correct in assuming that it was this book, as well as a volume of selections from Ernő Szép's poetry and prose edited by Dezső Tandori, that restored his literary reputation. In the year of Szép's death—1953—he may well have been considered a minor writer, a relic of the past, but already in 1957 an important collection of his short stories was published, and the nineteen-sixties and seventies saw the appearance of attractive new editions of his novels and plays.) And while it is true that Dezső Tandori, both as a poet and an essayist, has done a great deal to revive interest in Ernő Szép's work, credit for the rediscovery should also be

given to such critics as László Kardos and Pál Réz, especially the latter, who edited several volumes of Szép's writings.

Unfortunately, Tandori's introductory essay in the present volume is too idiosyncratic and self-referential to be of any help to the English-speaking reader. If anything, it is misleading—it connects Szép's person and art to so many different writers that what emerges is not a portrait but an impossible composite resembling both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and also Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Kafka, Delmore Schwartz, Beckett... Actually, there is something to the Beckett parallel: nothing unnerves Szép more during his three-week ordeal than standing around and waiting. What Tandori clearly meant to be a lyric paean to Ernő Szép turns into a self-indulgent exercise that completely ignores the work at hand. In fact, the cryptic raves and elliptical effusions after a while become virtually unreadable, in spite of John Bátki's valiant attempt to render them in lucid English prose. Once he gets us past the eccentric introduction, Bátki offers a highly readable if somewhat streamlined translation of Ernő Szép's narrative, which hints at Szép's range as a writer. For as controlled and unadorned as it may seem, Ernő Szép's diction, even in this grim book, is a pungent blend of urban vernacular, quaintly archaic, regional usages, and other, more personal stylistic quirks.

The Smell of Humans is significant both as literature and as a historical document. It is heartening to know that after the works of Miklós Radnóti, which are available in several English translations, and the 1992 American edition of Imre Kertész's *Fateless*, this third important literary record of the Hungarian Jewish tragedy can now be read in English. 21

András Batta

Professor Szabolcsi

György Kroó: *Szabolcsi Bence*. Budapest Proceedings of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 1994. 669 pp.

This latest publication of the proceedings of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest is a monumental work based on a huge mass of documents on Bence Szabolcsi, perhaps the greatest figure in Hungarian musicology. The author, György Kroó, heads the Academy's musicological department that Szabolcsi founded. Kroó was one of Szabolcsi's first students at the department, set up in 1951 at the suggestion of Zoltán Kodály. Thus he is one of the few who is really familiar with Szabolcsi's ambitious dreams (I use the expression deliberately) for musicology, his guiding principles, his role in the movement aimed at reviving 20th-century Hungarian music (generally identified abroad with Bartók and Kodály) and the tragic consequences of his Hungarian-Jewish origins. Kroó, as the member of a much younger generation (born in 1926) has also had personal experience of all this, having lived through the years in question.

This by itself would not be enough to make the book sufficient to its subject.

That it succeeds in being so is above all due to the fact that Kroó has managed to retain the strands that linked and still link him to Szabolcsi in his own subconscious and engaged personal feelings only to the extent needed to produce an affectionate tone. Throughout he remains a historian in the most objective sense possible, and through his examination of the vast documentary material and the musicological interpretation he offers, has produced a seminal work of 20th-century Hungarian musicology.

Bence Szabolcsi was born in 1899 in Budapest, into a pious Jewish family from the eastern border region of Hungary. It was a family that had played a significant role in the history of Hungarian Jewry. His father, Miksa Szabolcsi had Hungarianized his name from Weinstein, taking the name of his native county, Szabolcs. This symbolic act was an attempt to express an attitude common to a large number of Hungarian Jews; the rabbinical student and brilliant Talmudic scholar wished to maintain his ancient faith as a Hungarian patriot. In other words, he acknowledged Jewry as a religion and his land of birth as his fatherland. Theodor Herzl's suggestion of a Jewish state was received in these quarters with astonishment and aversion. It is not surprising then that Miksa Szabolcsi became a journalist and not a

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is a musicologist whose book on operetta
Álom, álom, édes álom
(*Dream, Dream, Sweet Dream*)
appeared in 1992.

rabbi; as such he helped, at the risk of his life, hunt out the truth in the first Hungarian blood-libel anti-Semitic trial, the notorious 1882 Tiszaeszlár ritual murder case. That same year saw the first issue of *Egyenlőség* (Equality), a patriotic Jewish newspaper written in Hungarian. A few years later, Miksa Szabolcsi, father of the musicologist, became the editor of this important journal, shaping its perceptions and those of Hungarian Jews.

As a young man, Bence Szabolcsi absorbed equally the Talmud, Hungarian history and Hungarian literature. Up to the death of his father in 1915, this family atmosphere determined his education. He met his spiritual father, Zoltán Kodály in 1918, at the end of the Great War, on commencing studies at the Budapest Academy of Music. This proved to be an encounter that was to determine his life. What he studied under Kodály cannot be described as a single subject: alongside—or, rather, under the pretext of—composition and theory, he acquired a musical and scholarly approach, ethics and sublime plans; he continued to study with him even during the period when, after the short-lived Hungarian-Soviet Republic in 1919, Kodály was temporarily dismissed from the Academy of Music. Szabolcsi was also enrolled in the arts and even the law faculties of Budapest University. The retributions after the revolution, directed by an ultra-right government, did not make it possible for a large number of Jews to attend university. (By the second half of the 1920s there was a certain, unfortunately only temporary, easing of this restriction.) Like other young people of Jewish origins, the twenty-two year old Szabolcsi tried his hand at university in the Weimar Republic.

In Leipzig he worked with tremendous energy and, in a year and a half, completed his musicological studies at the department of the great Mozart scholar Hermann

Abert. Meanwhile, he remained in constant correspondence with Kodály, and became, possibly involuntarily although successfully, a propagator of new Hungarian music among the German professors and students. The musical and intellectual élite of the Weimar Republic welcomed the "Oriental light" as lending new perspectives to the age-worn scholarly tradition in music. At least that is how the young Szabolcsi interpreted the situation, since, under Kodály's influence, he considered the work of the great post-Romantics in German music (including Richard Strauss, Max Reger and Hans Pfitzner) as a historical impasse. (Kodály's anti-German attitude, rooted in the anti-Habsburg feelings of the turn-of-the-century, and his consequent interest in things French, influenced practically all his important students who were later to play a role somewhere in the Hungarian musical scene.) In Leipzig, Szabolcsi did not turn to German music for his doctoral thesis, but opted for two forgotten maestros of 17th century Italian monody (*Benedetti und Saracini, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Monodie.*)

Upon returning home in 1923, Szabolcsi flung himself wholeheartedly into the newly established discipline intended to fill the blank spots in Hungarian musical history, which was proceeding with tremendous verve under the guidance of Kodály. It was in these years that Szabolcsi, together with a few of his Budapest Academy of Music colleagues, who had also graduated from universities abroad (especially Dénes Bartha, Antal Molnár, Lajos Bárdos, and later Benjámín Rajeczky) brought Hungarian musicology into existence. He edited an encyclopedia of music, laid the foundations for research into Hungarian music from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, wrote a one-volume history of music and filled the gap in Hungarian monographs on the great

European composers, above all by his book on Beethoven, which is still indispensable. He studied eastern and western melodic cycles, which later led to his momentous *A melódia története* (The History of Melody, 1950). He wrote many articles and studies on Mozart, whom he idolized, and had an interest in all subjects related to Hungarians and Hungarian music in every context. To accomplish this tremendous body of work, he had a grand total of twenty years between 1923 and 1943 at his disposal in which he was able to work under relatively tranquil conditions. He then had to fight literally for his own life. He was carried off three times into forced labour service under prison-camp conditions; on the third occasion, in the autumn of 1944, he managed to effect a near miraculous escape from certain death on a march towards Germany. Even so, he had to pay dearly for his Jewish faith which he shouldered as a Hungarian patriot: his son, fourteen years old, was dragged away by the Nazis from a Budapest street and he never saw him again.

This was a personal tragedy he was unable to recover from and the loss overshadowed those post-war decades when, through his appointment as professor at the Academy of Music alongside Kodály, he held a position of respect and authority in the Hungarian musical scene. These years also brought some significant studies, in accordance with the major principle of his life: to look at the history of music as a life-history, with special consideration paid to those composers who opened fresh chapters in their own oeuvre and in the history of music during the last years of their lives (thus *Liszt Ferenc estéje*, [Liszt's Twilight Years] 1956, and studies on Monteverdi and Carlo Gesualdo).

He continued to teach. A whole range of young generations of musicologists came through his hands from 1951 up to

his death in 1973. Let me relate here a personal experience. As a first-year-student at the Academy of Music I was able to attend Szabolcsi's last seminar. He lectured on his idol, Mozart (and this perhaps was a symbolic gesture: parting from his students with Mozart). He spoke in an undertone, in beautifully formed sentences. Sometimes he stood up and went to a map fixed to the blackboard. His gestures breathed life into 18th-century musical history. Then he sat down to the piano and illustrated everything (literally everything) from memory. When he spoke on a passage in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, he played that excerpt, as he did with the little song beginning "Ich möchte wohl der Kaiser sein", when that was what he was speaking of. He had Mozart's entire oeuvre in his head and, as his older colleagues told me, the oeuvres of all the great and minor masters as well. This tremendous knowledge was both overpowering and elevating. All this was coupled with a specific narrative gift, the power to evoke. His indeed was a calling in the strict sense of the word. György Kroó now throws light on how profoundly he was aware of a sense of vocation. He quotes from the 14-year-old boy's diary:

If I were a sculptor I would make statues of musicians. Bach's sculpture I would shape in basalt and cover with faience. Mozart's I envisage to be of snowy white china, Beethoven's of sad marble. I think Wagner's statue should be made of ore, those of the Italian composers of silver with a bluish sparkle. Those of the French of gold blended with copper, and the sculptures of the modern composers ought to be of grey brilliant. And once I know all of them, even those whom now I do not yet understand or know, and shall make their statues—then I shall place the small figures in a row ... in a bright hall, and they shall speak to me ... and I to them.

This entry is for June 30, 1913. The task he set himself, enveloped in a poetic vision, survived, and so did the poetry itself. Szabolcsi presented musicological information, old and new research in an impressionistic style with an abundance of adjectives. These passages practically con-jure up the work and its atmosphere.

Over the last twenty to thirty years, musicology has increasingly caught up with the exact sciences, and its practitioners have often been typified—particularly in the English-speaking world—by a technocratic approach, a rigid positivism, and in this process the ideal of musicology as art as held by Szabolcsi, has become eclipsed. His style has been dismissed by many, even in Hungary, as part of the bygone world of Romanticism. Indeed, more than one eminent Szabolcsi student began to disengage from this overpowering patriarch of Hungarian musicology by a sobering up of style. Kroó's book invites the reader to make a discovery in this respect as well. When his students had collected sufficient material on a given subject, Szabolcsi was prone to say they should "take down the scaffolding" and reveal the whole edifice in its intrinsic beauty. He himself always took down the scaffolding, and only if you read his works with adequate knowledge, can you sense the huge structure in the background, which includes the tiniest details: analyses, documents, descriptions of the age, contemporaries and surroundings, and relationships with the other arts. The concealment and stylization of this concrete information can be caught most easily in Szabolcsi's book on *Beethoven*, a wonderful synthesis of scholarship and a confessional essay.

While opening up the motifs of Szabolcsi's scholarly inclinations and attempting to follow the path Szabolcsi followed to reach a thesis or hypothesis, Kroó's book presents the history of

20th-century Hungarian music, and the as yet unwritten history of attitudes towards music; here the approach is sociological, an examination of aesthetical, critical and scholarly manifestations. What may well be most interesting here are the students who orbited Kodály like satellites; in the 1920s and 1930s these students unconditionally transmitted the light that radiated from their sun before, in the 1950s and 1960s, going their own way. Their turning away was partly connected with the international acknowledgment of Bartók's oeuvre and the recognition that Bartók was a composer genius of higher rank. In one of his last pieces, Szabolcsi links Mozart with Bartók, an idea which was far from typical in the mid-1960s when he wrote his study. Szabolcsi, the best of Kodály's students, claimed no less than that "revolutionary" and "barbarian" Bartók music had taken its place among the classics:

...those great bridge-works which lead from the old world over into the new are always the outcome of extraordinary self-denial. Old Christian music, Gregorian chant, renounced Greek chromaticism and enharmony; Josquin and Palestrina renounced the convolutions and intricacies of the late Middle Ages; Mozart and Haydn renounced the lack of restraint and dissonances of Sturm und Drang, and Bartók renounced the polychromy of impressionism, the form-breaking of expressionism, and atonality. In this perspective, all these sound as if they are puritan, almost ascetic works. As essentially they really are: the wealth of the past, its vanquished abundance shines from the depth as sunken treasure; that want is their message, and billows above all the immersed abundance; the whole past has turned in them into an inheritance from Atlantis.

Szabolcsi in old age, fanatic and idealist, founder and fellow combatant, experienced a sense of crisis. He felt—as Kroó's book suggests—that Bartók was the last

child of a submerged Atlantis, who still saw the "luminous depth". Szabolcsi, who in the 1920s had rejected with scorn the theories on the decline of European culture, by the 1960s was a pessimist. But his life's work, which has only now become fully and entirely clear even to

his students after György Kroó's research, has preserved the spirit of this sunken Atlantis.

So does this book on Szabolcsi: both in content and presentation it is worthy of this exceptional musicologist and man of letters. ♣



Tintoretto, 1936-38

János Breuer

Bartók and the Third Reich

Bartók gave his first recital abroad on December 14, 1903 in Berlin, the first at which he played his own works—but he never visited Hitler's Germany. This omission is all the more conspicuous as the well-trained city orchestras of Germany and German societies aimed at popularizing contemporary music played an important role in the dissemination of Bartók's works abroad.

Bartók's hostility to the right-wing regimes of his times is common knowledge. Thus when Arturo Toscanini was assailed by Fascist louts in Bologna, Bartók instantly formulated a protest. In numerous letters written in the course of the two and a half years between the Nazi occupation of Austria and his moving to America, Bartók gave expression to his uneasiness about the expansion of Hitler's empire to the borders of Hungary. In fact, Bartók's utter rejection encompassed all totalitarian regimes; not long before his death, in a letter yet to be published in its entirety, he expressed his concern about the Soviet occupation of Hungary. In what follows I shall confine myself to the development of Bartók's relation to the Third Reich be-

tween 1933 and 1938. Instead of citing the relatively well-known statements denouncing all forms of Fascism that Bartók made after the occupation of Austria, I shall focus on some little-known facts and connections concerning Bartók's relation to the Third Reich.

Bartók gave piano recitals in Germany on eight occasions between 1930 and 1932. We do not know if he was aware of the agony of the Weimar Republic and the shift toward the radical right in the political atmosphere—no documents relating to his perceptions are available. After 1933, he had to travel through Germany on several occasions every year on his way to concerts and recitals in Belgium, the Netherlands, London and Paris. We can only speculate about the experiences he had—if any—in his third-class compartment of the changes in Germany. Among the several hundreds of letters written before 1938 that have been published, only four contain references, and not necessarily emotionally involved references, to the Nazi regime.

The last time Bartók played in Germany he did so as soloist in the first performance of his Second Piano Concerto in Frankfurt am Main on January 23, 1933. The orchestra was conducted by Hans Rosbaud, who was well-known for his anti-Nazi views and denounced to the Gestapo a number of times for "spreading

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20th-century Hungarian music.*

the Jewish spirit". One wonders if the voice of the mob reached Bartók during a week-long stay in Frankfurt, a mere week before Hitler was appointed chancellor of the Reich on January 30, 1933.

It was with slight amazement, but without any emotional reaction, that Bartók informed his mother on May 1, 1933 of the conspicuous absence of Paul Hindemith and Arnold Schoenberg from an international congress on music that he attended in Florence. Presumably he did not as yet know that both Schoenberg and Hindemith had fallen into disfavour in Germany, the former for being a Jew and the latter for not collaborating with the Nazis. Soon enough, however, first-hand information was to reach Bartók. The Budapest and Vienna first performances of his Second Piano Concerto, on June 2 and 4 respectively, were conducted by Otto Klemperer. Since Bartók was the soloist in Vienna, he obviously had to participate in the rehearsals with Klemperer. By that time Klemperer, the brilliant musical director of the State Opera of Berlin who had just been awarded the Goethe Prize, was already on a leave of absence in line with a law passed on April 11. The law bore the innocuous title "Restoration of the Body of Public Officials"; it was aimed at purging German institutions of Jewish as well as anti-Nazi and left-wing individuals. Apparently, the Nazis considered Klemperer's final removal from the Berlin Opera so urgently pressing that his dismissal papers were mailed to him to Budapest. One can only imagine the straight-forward terms in which the great conductor, well-known for his sharp tongue, informed Bartók of this new turn of events in his vicissitudes in Hitler's Germany.

The first open confrontation between Bartók and the Nazis can be dated to the days following March 17, 1934. The Dutch pianist Else C. Kraus, who worked

in Berlin and earned a name as an inspired interpreter of Schoenberg, performed parts of Bartók's cycle *Twenty Hungarian Folk Songs* (1929) together with the singer Alice Schuster. As the word spread that Bartók was Jewish, Nazi propaganda launched a coarse attack against the composer. In an attempt to forestall any exacerbation of the Nazi offensive, Bartók's Vienna publishers, Universal-Edition, requested Bartók in a letter dated April 4, 1934 to send his certificate of baptism and the documents indicating his origins to the appropriate authorities—which Bartók categorically refused in a response dated April 28, 1934. This incident was aired even by the moderate wing of the Hungarian press. By that time, even documents proving pure Christian parentage no longer meant an incontestable letter of recommendation for a composer of modern music, anyway. One only has to be reminded that Alban Berg had his origins certified by the Reich Ministry of Home Affairs—but this could not stop the vicious attacks on Berg and Erich Kleiber, the conductor of the 1934 first performance of Berg's *Lulu* symphony in Berlin, forcing Kleiber into exile.

Despite Bartók's unwillingness to submit any verification of his religion and parentage, the possibility of his being invited to perform his own works in Berlin and other German cities was constantly on the agenda between 1935 and 1938. In the forefront of these negotiations stood the Berlin first performance of his Second Piano Concerto by the Berlin Philharmonic. From unpublished documents in the Bartók Archives in Budapest we can reconstruct a schedule of concerts to be given by Bartók in Germany which never materialized:

1935 April: Berlin

1935/36: concerts and ethno-musical lectures in Frankfurt am Main and other German cities.

First half of 1936: two concerts to be given at an unspecified date with the Berlin Philharmonic, one of them to be conducted by Eugen Jochum

1937 early April: Berlin, with Ernest Ansermet as conductor

1937 April 3–11: Berlin Music Week and a concert in Wiesbaden

1937 April 5–11 and 8 or 9: Berlin Music Week and a concert to be broadcast, lectures to be given at the University. Negotiations with unspecified German orchestras (not specified).

1937 early June: Berlin

1938 January 4: Berlin, with Eugen Jochum conducting

1938 after Easter: Berlin

1938/39 season: Berlin

The first invitation from the Berlin Philharmonic was conveyed in a letter dated February 4, 1935 from the Chamber of Music of the Reich. From the fact that it was mailed to Bartók's Basle address, at which he was to stay only between February 4 and 6, we can conclude that the invitation was of the utmost importance to the Chamber of Music. The response that Bartók mailed on February 7 shows great tact: Bartók crossed out in the first draft a reference to the accompanying conductors he had earlier worked with in Berlin—Bruno Walter and Erich Kleiber—no doubt because he knew that both Kleiber (in 1935) and Walter (in 1936) were under pressure to go into exile from the Nazis. In the same letter, Bartók suggested the performance of his Second Piano Concerto, which remained the object of later negotiations. However, Bartók set tough conditions. He demanded guarantees for the transfer of his performer's fee to Switzerland, although he must have known that in Germany—as in any dictatorship—the severe restrictions on the circulation and exchange of foreign currency would have rendered such a transfer extremely difficult. In addition, Bartók stipulated that his fee be paid even in the case

the concert were to be cancelled due to circumstances beyond his control. Indeed, the first draft originally used the unequivocal term "prohibition by the authorities", which, however, Bartók decided to cross out. He probably didn't know (yet?) that the authority entitled to make such prohibitions was the same Chamber of Music, then under the direction of Dr Goebbels, which had issued the invitation to Bartók.

Subsequently, it was Andor (Andrew) Schulhof who negotiated with the Berlin Philharmonic. Schulhof, the owner of the Budapest Concert Bureau which maintained an office in Berlin, was to emigrate to the US in 1939 and to become Bartók's less-than-successful impresario in America. Early in 1936, Antonia Kossar, who represented Bartók in Belgium and the Netherlands, also took some steps to promote Bartók's interests with regard to the Berlin Philharmonic. She gave up these attempts when Bartók told her that Walter Schulthess, the husband of Stefi Geyer (Bartók's early unrequited love), was in charge of Bartók's affairs in Germany. Schulhof was, therefore, a kind of sub-agent of the Swiss impresario.

The reasons for the four-year deferral of Bartók's Berlin engagement are unclear. It could not have been Bartók's reluctance, since he would have been willing to go on a tour before the occupation of Austria; nor were the Berlin Philharmonic to blame, for they would certainly have been delighted to perform with the world-renowned composer and pianist. Bartók, at any rate, commented with some irony on this procrastination: "I was supposed to travel to Berlin in April [...]. But now—after two years of negotiations—these Nazis once again put off the concert until June (if not *ad graecas calendas*): there seems to be quite a jumble over there, they don't know themselves what they want." (Letter, February 3, 1937). In any case,

Bartók didn't even care to respond to the question posed by his Vienna publisher on July 6, 1938 if he were willing to perform his Second Piano Concerto in Berlin during the following season.

Writings on Bartók's life mention merely three performances of Bartók's works after 1933 in Germany. Nevertheless, in the early sixties when I was collecting data concerning Zoltán Kodály's lectures in Germany, as a byproduct of my research I came across references to a total of forty-seven performances of works by Bartók in musical journals which appeared between 1933 and 1942. To be sure, this figure would seem to indicate a substantial decline in frequency in comparison to the Weimar Republic period. However, judging from the experiences I had in the course of my research on Kodály, I am almost certain that Bartók's works were performed more frequently during these nine years. This estimate is justified because music criticism in journals provided only concise, and by no means exhaustive, summaries of the thriving musical life of German cities and towns.

The significance of each of these performances must be assessed differently: we cannot ascribe the same value to the performance of a brief piece at a piano recital in Berlin—where on some days more than ten such recitals took place—as to a series of performances of a major work. Regardless of these details, however, it should be clear that Bartók's works were not banned in the Third Reich, even though Nazi-biased musical critics constantly attacked him. This relative tolerance toward Bartók's music was, it must be stressed, not a result of concessions on his part: he not only refused to submit evidence of his origin, but he also refrained from even minimal gestures that would suggest any affinity to the regime. Rather, we must look for explanation in a political

guideline on cultural programmes which was formulated in June 1933 by Hans Hinkel, State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture of the Reich. This guideline advised performance of works written by composers from those countries which entertained friendly relations with Germany. This requirement was more than sufficiently satisfied by the Hungarian government of the period, Bartók's own antipathies notwithstanding.

The relatively favourable atmosphere in Germany made possible even the international first performance of a work by Bartók. The first performance of the *Hungarian Peasant Songs* (orchestrated in 1933) was scheduled by Hamburg Radio for February 2, 1934, and the concert was broadcast by the Berlin and Königsberg Radio stations. Originally, it was Wilhelm Furtwängler who requested the right to conduct the Berlin Philharmonic in a performance, scheduled by him for January 14 or 15, 1934, and the new work was also featured in Furtwängler's tour of England with the Berlin Philharmonic, which was to include concerts in Newcastle, Manchester, Bristol, and London. For reasons which are unclear to me, both the Berlin premiere and the British tour were cancelled. The 1937 Baden-Baden Music Festival also commissioned a new orchestral piece by Bartók. The idea of such a piece did, in fact, occur to Bartók during the composition of his *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*, but he never completed this project. Since Bartók intended only a first German performance, and not a world premiere, for Baden-Baden, the piece which was eventually featured at the Festival—after a world premiere in Basle—was *Music for Strings*. The following year saw a performance in Baden-Baden of *Five Hungarian Folk Songs*, a piece composed for solo voice and orchestra. In another significant event on February 3,

1937, the First Piano Concerto was performed in Dresden. The piano part, whose staggering difficulties had thus far been mastered by Bartók alone, was played by Hans Richter-Haaser, then merely twenty-five years old.

Yielding to increasing political pressure, the German—and by far the most active—section of the International Society for Contemporary Music dissolved towards the end of 1933. In opposition to the "destructive" tendencies nurtured by the ISCM, a Permanent Committee for International Musical Cooperation was established, which organized contemporary music festivals between 1935 and the beginning of the war. At the closing concert of the festival, held in the spring of 1937 in Dresden, Bartók's Fourth String Quartet was performed. This choice is all the more remarkable as Bartók, one of the founders of ISCM and the honorary president of its Hungarian section, refused any contact with the Permanent Committee, showing resolution and considerable indignation. Indeed, Bartók did not recognize the Permanent Committee as a legitimate international organization at all, and rightly so, for it was nothing but a mouthpiece of German propaganda. Yet even more striking than the performance of the Fourth Quartet in Dresden is the favourable German reaction to one of Bartók's chief d'oeuvres, *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. According to the evidence of available documents, this work was performed twelve, perhaps thirteen, times in Germany between 1937 and 1941. In no other country was this masterpiece played so frequently in Bartók's life-time. Even the Budapest premiere (February 14, 1938) was preceded by the first six performances of the piece in Germany, the first of which took place on March 21, 1937 at the Baden-Baden festival. Bartók accepted the invitation of the organizers to attend this con-

cert, and he was supposed to leave Baden-Baden for the Berlin Music Week in order to play his Second Piano Concerto. When the Berlin plans foundered, however, the visit to Baden-Baden was cancelled, too.

The German series of the *Music for Strings* is particularly conspicuous, indeed almost perplexing, because the official musical critics of the Nazis denounced the piece in a way reminiscent of the tenor of charges by the Gestapo; a critic who had recognized the merits of the piece was removed from his position. Nonetheless, *Music for Strings* was performed in Berlin by the Philharmonic under the direction of Furtwängler on January 30–31, 1938. Bartók, for his part, expressed his regret that he was informed too late about this concert, for he would have been pleased to attend the January 31 concert on the way back from Brussels. Beside major cities such as Dresden, Essen, Hamburg, Lübeck, Frankfurt am Main and Munich, the *Music for Strings* was performed in relatively small towns, including Bielefeld, Braunschweig and Oldenburg, under the direction of such renowned conductors as Eugen Jochum, Oswald Kabasta, Paul van Kempen and Franz Konwitzschny.

Bartók's conflicts with Germany became more frequent in 1937 for reasons which were only partly financial in nature. As is usual to this day, the scores for the orchestra parts of a piece were released by the publisher to the orchestras performing it for a loan fee, a certain percentage of which the composer was supposed to receive. Thus, Universal-Edition of Vienna used to send Bartók a statement of accounts at six-month intervals. When Bartók received the statement for the second half for 1936, he was quite surprised to find that Germany had stopped paying loan fees for the scores. (This detail, by the way, is one of the data which suggest

more performances of works by Bartók than I know of, for I have found no direct indication of any performance in Germany of an orchestral piece by Bartók for 1936; making orchestra parts available, however, would seem to imply such performances). In a letter of March 13, 1937 to his publisher, Bartók explicitly demanded that scores not be sent without preliminary payment of loan fees to countries which still owed him such. It is worth quoting one particularly important sentence from this letter: "I cannot accept that fees remain unpaid just for the sake of the production of more armaments". In his own way, then, Bartók protested against the Nazi slogan of "guns before butter".

In 1937, Bartók refused to allow Hungarian Radio to release his piano recitals for broadcasting by German and Italian Radio. The news of his decision leaked out, with the Budapest press adding that Bartók's prohibition also concerned the broadcasting of all of his compositions. This latter rumour was denied by Bartók without delay. He claimed that the reason he did not wish to be featured as a performer by these radios was their refusal to include him in their programmes. Even worse, the rumour reached Berlin via France. This turn of events led to a statement by the Chamber of Music of the Reich in the January 1938 issue of its official journal, *Die Musik*, threatening that if the rumour proves to be true Germany must reconsider its relationship to Bartók—to put it bluntly, his works must be banned. This was followed by speculations by the Budapest press concerning a statement that Bartók was believed to have sent to Germany in which he supposedly denied the rumour that had irritated the Nazis. Thus, in March 1938, Bartók once again felt compelled to turn to the papers in order to inform the public that he had made no statement to any German

organization in this matter. We do not know who eventually straightened out this obscure affair, so inflated by irresponsible journalists. In any case, Bartók's "reconsideration" was never undertaken by the Nazis. Indeed, his works were performed in Germany even after the American declaration of war resulted in a wholesale ban on works by composers living in the United States. One can only suspect that, however well-organized a police state Germany may have been, the officials considered Bartók Hungarian and did know that he had gone into American exile.

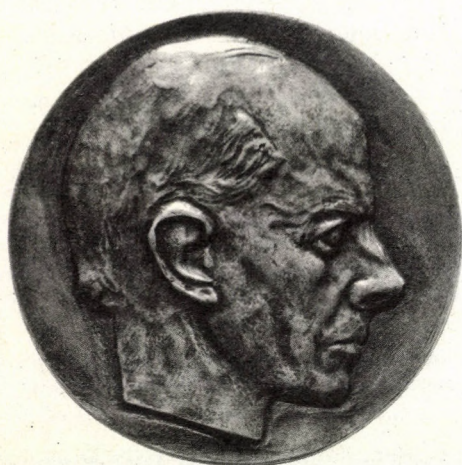
The only statement that Bartók actually addressed to Germany is dated March 28, 1938. In this, Bartók protested against the German policy of paying him only 30 per cent of copyright fees for his transcriptions of folk songs, and prohibited any performance in Germany of these pieces. Since the transcriptions were already in circulation, there was no question of enforcing this prohibition; yet its significance as a political gesture is evident.

The origin of this confrontation can be traced back to a decree of the Court of Justice of the Reich passed on December 2, 1936 aimed at modifying German copyright regulations, and setting the copyright fee for folk song transcriptions, as "non-original" works of art, at a rate of 30 per cent. Henceforth, it was up to the German copyright association (STAGMA) to determine the extent to which a folk song transcription was "original" or not. It is worth mentioning, incidentally, that this amendment was in no way in accordance with international copyright practice.

It was, however, only in the autumn of 1937 that Bartók was informed about this legal violation. Money was clearly not at the heart of the resultant conflict, which eventually prompted Bartók to issue a statement and to prohibit performances of his folk song transcriptions in Germany.

The intention to rob Bartók of the dignity of original artistic creation and of the reputation won by a series of masterpieces spanning decades must have lent the conflict a much more fundamental, aesthetic significance in Bartók's eyes. The very notion that some "experts" in the

Berlin copyright bureau—which almost certainly lacked a composer of Bartók's standing among its officials—would be entitled to judge Bartók's works in matters of artistic autonomy, was a profound offence against his integrity as a musician. •



Bartók, 1936

Paul Griffiths

"The Voice That Must Articulate..."

Kurtág in Rehearsal and Performance

One of György Kurtág's songs gives advice to a snail to climb carefully up Mount Fuji: perseverance—never mind how small the present achievement and vast the task ahead—is the great Kurtágian virtue. By the time he had reached the age of forty-five, nearly a quarter of a century ago, he had completed only eight numbered works, most of them very short, and none for a group of more than five players. Latterly, he's been composing more abundantly, and producing works that are longer and bigger; though this may be partly because growing recognition has brought him growing opportunities, the development must be due largely to his persistence. He began with first faltering steps up the mountain. Now he can look further. December 1994 saw the premiere of *Stele*, his first piece for large orchestra in forty years; last summer, his *Rückblick*—an entire concert for four musicians (a trumpeter, a bassist, and two keyboard players)—did the rounds of the European festivals: Holland, Cheltenham, Edinburgh. In Amsterdam, too, there was a hugely successful performance, under Reinbert de

Leeuw, of his setting of a late Beckett prose piece, *What is the Word*—a setting which uses relatively large forces (a reciter struggling to utter, a pianist accompanying her, an answering or provoking quintet of singers, and twenty-seven instrumentalists stationed around the hall) and has the unusually long unbroken span of fifteen minutes.

The scale has changed, and yet these larger works are still fragmentary. Mr. Kurtág often assembles pieces as chains of short elements: *Rückblick* has more than fifty of them, lasting on average just over a minute. Even when his musical spans are longer, as in *What is the Word*, he eliminates all aspects of formal presentation: there are no preliminaries, no developments and no extensions—nothing that does not exert itself as gesture. And since gesture is a leaping-out from context, Mr. Kurtág's art of gesture counters continuity. His music needs, as all music needs, to unfold through time, but its ideal is to exist at the sudden instant, with a fragment's torn edges. Magnificently made as his pieces all are, the best of them have the roughness of immediacy and the rawness of truth. After the performance of *What is the Word*, he was asked, during a public discussion in a crowded small room of the Concertgebouw, about his plans for an opera. He paused, then loudly smacked one fist into the palm of his

Paul Griffiths

is the regular record reviewer of this journal.

other hand. That, he explained, was his idea of drama.

This Concertgebouw concert had included, before *What is the Word*, the first performance of his *Songs of Despair and Sorrow*, for chorus accompanied by a miscellany of instruments meant to provide, typically, more character than homogeneity: groups of brass and strings, a piano, harps and percussion, two harmoniums and four piano accordions. As the title suggests, these are songs of violence and pathos, and of pessimism that becomes, as so often with this composer, a furious elation. Setting six Russian poets from Lermontov to Tsvetayeva, the music makes the clear, cold light of their vision audible, and creates from their several voices just one, proceeding from a dissatisfaction with life's futilities to a point at which not even the cause or the nature of hopelessness can be expressed. There is singleness of voice, too, in the choral writing. Though the music may be in up to twenty parts, the many mouths seem to make one mouth, voicing itself through them. What one hears is not so much counterpoint as a diversity of surges and sways—urgent, nostalgic, luminous, bleak—within one consciousness. The score is also full of striking images: the stabs of harmonium, normally so felted an instrument; the combination of tollings and sustained tones on the same word, "night", conveying at once repetition and sameness; the refusal of something like a folk-song melody after a few jaunty phrases with a desperate "No!"; the huge, slow, solemn chords of the finale, when the voices become voiceless. However, the Amsterdam performance, under John Eliot Gardiner, was only partial (omitting the biggest of the songs) and indistinct. This is a major work, which should have its proper birth when it's next performed, at the Edinburgh Festival in August 1996.

Also last summer in The Netherlands—but at the abbey of Rolduc, in the far south-east of the country, where the Orlando Quartet leads a happy summer academy for amateur chamber ensembles—Mr. Kurtág was around to supervise performances of almost all his works for smaller forces. I wanted to be there, because I'd heard so much about his strenuous demands—and would hear more, at Rolduc, before I ever got into the rehearsal room. Erika Tóth, a violinist who studied with Mr. Kurtág in Budapest, told me of spending half a year on just the exposition section of Mozart's F major Sonata. Was that, I asked, because he wanted her to try different possibilities? "No." Was he, then, working towards an ideal? "A super-ideal. You could never get there. Nobody could get there. It was wonderful, but then you never want to play the piece again. You could not have a career like that: you would die." Stefan Metz, the cellist of the Orlando, talked about being coached by Mr. Kurtág in a Haydn quartet, Op. 64 No. 4: "He would play everything on the piano—and you know how difficult that is, to phrase four different lines at once. It was wonderful." I asked what happened if the musicians disagreed with the offered interpretation. Mr. Metz's reply was quick and short: "We never disagreed."

Next morning I was able to watch how Mr. Kurtág works. The quality of his attention is evident in his stance. Leaning slightly forward from the waist, holding his forearms level in front of him, swaying a little from fullness of tension, his face tightly alert. Nothing matters more at this moment than to get the music right, which means listening acutely to what the performer is producing and might produce. If Mr. Kurtág indeed has a "super-ideal" in mind, the image comes not just out of the score but out of the musician's potentiali-

ties. In his rehearsals, as in his compositions, there are no preparations, no explaining. The musician just begins. And, more than likely, soon stops.

On one occasion, the performer being coached by Mr. Kurtág was the soprano Susan Narucki, who was starting with the last of his Seven Songs Op. 22 for singer and cimbalom—the one about the snail on Mount Fuji. She got through the first two notes before he interrupted. “More support for the voice.” She started once more, and was stopped once more. “Not louder! More *weight*.” (This turned out to be one of his commonest requests, for emphasis to be obtained not by a raised dynamic but by another colour: heavy, dark, solid, present.) Again Ms. Narucki sang the two notes, which by now were starting to sound momentous—though not yet sufficiently for Mr. Kurtág to be satisfied. “Like Boris Christoff.” Ms. Narucki tried again, and was halted again at the same point. “Like Boris Christoff singing Boris Godunov.” Now, after singing these two notes for the fifth time, she got the go-ahead—“Very fine”—to continue to the third.

In another of the Op. 22 songs, where the singer just repeats three times a glorious long phrase on the words “Labirintus: Nincs Ariadne, nincs fonál” (Labyrinth: No Ariadne, no thread), Mr. Kurtág showed his concern for melody that makes harmonic sense. “It’s a difference to sing correct intervals and to sing within a tonality—and the tonality I miss a little bit.” One note, he suggested, should “have a spotlight on it.” Ms. Narucki sang that part of the phrase again. “Only don’t have an accent!” Here, too, weight was to be conducted onto a note by colouring, not loudening, so that the integrity of the phrase would be preserved.

Throughout these rehearsals, Mr. Kurtág stated his requirements entirely in

technical terms. He might refer to other music, indicating, for instance, how the plainsong *Dominus ad adjuvandum meum* lies secretly behind one song in *S.K. Remembrance Noise* for singer and violin, or indicating how another song in this set ought to swing: “Mahalia Jackson is doing this so naturally”. He might also, though more rarely, propose a dramatic situation: the middle song of Op. 22 was to begin as if stammered out by someone breathlessly pursued. But the expressive meaning of a song was never a prerequisite: it had to come out of technique, analogy, situation. By the end of the morning, Ms Narucki looked different. She had begun with her weight on her heels, stable, in command of the music. She ended poised, ready, the music in command of her.

That evening her performances were exceptional, and not only in terms of musical force and precision. In one number of *S.K.*, where Mr. Kurtág makes a string of operas out of minuscule poems by Dezső Tandori, the soprano sings against—and of—the violin’s accompaniment: “The lawnmower hums (over there) / My electric razor (over here)”. Ms. Narucki turned her head slowly and deliberately back, then turned slowly and deliberately toward him again. The effect was extraordinary, and I don’t fully know why. (Certainly I wouldn’t want anyone to imitate her: Mr. Kurtág’s music asks performers to discover things—whether with his guidance or not—for themselves). Partly it was that she was showing herself to be thoroughly at one with the songs’ voice, resilient.

There was resilience, too, and bite, in Kim Kashkashian’s declamation of a sequence of pieces for solo viola (pieces to be heard on her magnificent new ECM recording), and in the Orlando Quartet’s performance of the *Twelve Microludes* which constitute Mr. Kurtág’s second

quartet. As he said afterwards, the Orlando made these brief drafts of music into one whole experience, not a sequence of studies. And again this is a matter of finding the right voice: the voice that must articulate these things, and must do so now.

At these concerts by the Orlando and friends, Mr. Kurtág's pieces were being programmed with the peaks of the chamber music repertory: Mozart quintets, music by Schumann and Brahms. Not many

living composers could exist in this company, and if Mr. Kurtág can, that must be because the great tradition is very much his tradition, and has set the exacting standards he demands of himself. Yet his insistence on music that is violently actual, almost physical in its grip, is also a scourge and a challenge to that tradition. In his intolerance of what is good form, he is a thoroughly non-traditional artist. Heard in his company, even Mozart and Brahms seem at times to be doodling. *20*



Goya, 1934

Tamás Koltai

Life-Styles of the Poor and Infamous

Endre Fejes: *Rozsdametű* (Scrap-Iron Yard)

Friedrich Dürrenmatt: *The Visit*

The era of historical parables is over. Freedom of speech means playwrights no longer have to encode what they wish to say to their audiences. Yet, the lack of literary freedom yielded paradoxical results. Sophisticated dramatic forms and metastatic poetic expression were among them. Quite a number of plays and productions tried to find answers to philosophical questions and the dilemmas of existence, and in their attempts referred to conflicts in our everyday lives.

Now the everyday has become the primary source of conflicts. The quality of life has become the basic problem. Although no major plays dealing with it have yet appeared, there have been some gifted attempts. As they have been few and far between, companies are reaching back to older plays tested by time and seeing them in a new light.

Endre Fejes's *Scrap-Iron Yard* was a huge success in the 1960s. (The original novel appeared in a dozen European languages.) In Hungary its original reception was not unequivocal, with much debate over how it should be interpreted. Now we can see that how it was judged, indeed the

very fact that it was put on, was linked to the political power struggle of its day.

Scrap-Iron Yard adopts as its motto the famous Pascal quotation about man, the "thinking reed", easy to crush yet nobler than the universe that crushes him, since he recognizes that he is subject to death, "while the universe knows nothing about its advantage over man." Thus man's moral starting point is that he should think properly: "All our majesty lies in reflection."

The characters in the original novel, in which some fifty years of their history is covered, are not granted the opportunity to reflect on their fate. History passes by the Hábetler family, from the Great War to the present of 1962. They have their joys and sorrows, they love and quarrel, get married and divorced, oblivious to what is happening around them. The Great War comes to an end, after the brief Hungarian Soviet Republic the Treaty of Trianon deprives Hungary of two thirds of her territory, there follows the great depression, the persecution of Jews gets under way, the Second World War breaks out, the Hábetler boy is called up, his Jewish girlfriend is taken to Auschwitz, the Russians enter the country, a Soviet imposed system called socialism comes into being, and after the suppression of the 1956 revolution (then called a counter-revolution), the system is "consolidated". The Hábetlers had

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been "left out" of all that, they go on living as they can, unconsciously, holding to no ideals. On every holiday mother fries fish and cooks pasta with cottage cheese, and she rules husband and family as *mater familias*. Despite this, or perhaps just because of this, the family is breaking up, the girls drift from man to man with no moral principles behind them, and day-to-day life is one senseless quarrel after another.

The boy, János Junior, is the only one who feels handicapped by this absence of a meaningful life. He cannot get over the death of his girlfriend, and presumably silently reproaches his mother, who during the war "forgot" about the girl. János is unable to find himself, he does not know what to do with his life, and is scared by the others' senseless vegetation. When János's brother-in-law, a heavy drinker of a middle-class background (a class-alien in contemporary parlance), after fruitlessly trying to turn into a professional man, criticizes his family's primitive, insensate way of life, that of the "victorious working class", János knocks him down in impotent rage. The unfortunate man falls among the discarded machinery in a scrap-iron yard, where János is employed, strikes his head and dies. The "murderer" János Hábetler Junior "did not understand some things of the world, that's why he was helpless," is how Fejes's narrator formulates it and starts to trace back the Hábetler family's story: the road that led to that fatal blow.

We can now clearly see the grotesque ideological dilemma, quite serious at the time, which determined opinions on *Scrap-Iron Yard*. Those who dismissed the novel, accused Fejes of "existentialism", and protested against man being a reed which can be trampled by nature. For them, the "socialist system" elevated man and awakened him to class-consciousness, and this was particularly true of the working class, of which the Hábetlers can-

not be taken as typical. (According to official ideology, the working class was the leading class in the socialist system, the foundation stone of society, and so it could not be as Fejes portrayed it.) For them *Scrap-Iron Yard* was a flawed novel, and since it failed to present reality as the hope of mankind, as a Soviet-type socialism, it harmed the reader.

More moderate literary and party ideologues, in this case the majority, argued that Fejes "is concerned on our behalf". He describes "Hábetlerism" (which soon became a household word for a futile, petty-bourgeois way of life) in conformity with its reality, and passes harsh judgement on it. "It is inadmissible and impermissible" wrote one ideologically reliable, painstaking conformist, "to live like the Hábetlers do, like tens and tens of thousands are still living; this life is unworthy of man and a disgrace to the socialism under construction around them."

Thus, Hábetlerism is something like a malignant growth, undesirable in a healthy body, for which the victim himself is to be blamed. To straighten things out, one only has to cut out the tumour. Only two or three of the more subtle critics suggested that the emergence of Hábetlerism is also due to conditions which, though naturally rooted in the past, in the "old world" of capitalism, could still survive, owing to the "grave errors committed in socialism." Fejes therefore is justified in his criticism, at most he does not notice that after correction of the mistakes (to be understood as Stalin's death) there is every opportunity for the Hábetlers to become class-conscious workers. In other words, most of the responsibility now rests on them if they still desire no more than rising into a "well-heeled petty-bourgeois vapidness" instead of finding the sensible life which society is offering them on a silver plate. Fejes should have made Hábetler

Junior join, if not the Party, at least "socialism". In that case, the fatal blow would prove purposefulness rather than impotence.

Despite all the attacks, *Scrap-Iron Yard* did meet with ideological support from the Communist Party moderates. It was a much too good and gifted book to be shelved and it was sufficiently multifarious (perhaps even puzzlingly so) for it to be used, in spite of its "problematic character," as a vindication of the tolerance of the system. Nobody dared to risk the interpretation that it portrayed the contrast between victorious socialism and reality, between the high minded political slogans and the dreary daily life they obstructed. It would have been tantamount to denouncing the writer, if any one had showed himself willing to publish such a comment. That, with the knowledge we now have of the conditions of the time, can be taken as impossible.

A dramatized version of the novel ran for years in the Thália Theatre. Now a new company using the same theatre has selected the play as their first production. In the view of the director, Imre Csiszár, the play is really timely since the family story is also the story of that period. Now we are not restricted by any ideology, we have been delivered from illusions, and last but not least, we can say what we think. Particularly we can say what we think about the conditions which shaped the lives of the characters in *Scrap-Iron Yard*.

Of these conditions, the minimum to be said is that they did help man to fancy himself the frailest being in nature, Pascal's thinking reed swept about by the storms of history, revolution and counter-revolution, war, invasion and occupation, mental and physical insult, economic crisis, ideology and despotism, all trying to crush him. Across the forty years the play covers, it is history that is in the dock rather than the individual at history's mercy.

The period concerned made survival itself difficult, let alone becoming class-conscious and living a meaningful life. Given the constantly changing, always contradictory ideologies and slogans one is inclined to say that avoiding them and their influence was practically "resistance". To aim at "well-heeled petty-bourgeois vapidty" can no longer count as a capital crime either, particularly if the confined living conditions of the period are considered. One may ask why people of simple origin and a low level of education did not read Tolstoy, why they did not go to see Shakespeare, why they did not storm the universities, (in the post-1945 years culture really cost a pittance and "working-class origin" gave preferential entry to the universities), but it is not appropriate to criticize people when it was precisely society that was unable to open their intellectual horizons. Watching *Scrap-Iron Yard* now, the first reaction is to consider what stratagem was needed—and is perhaps needed even today—to survive daily politics. One thinks of the immunity system that had to be developed to fend off the direct effects of the tiniest political change on one's own daily life. One thinks of the kind of world it was in which the life or death of politicians, the struggle for power between them, the rise or fall of some ideological or economic line turned into a life-or-death question for ordinary people. It is this that *Scrap-Iron Yard* presents, a real drama of the absurd, and in this sense it is still valid today.

A successful revival could probably have been achieved by using the period gush which flowed from the radio, from news-reels, (later from television) and to which no one ever paid any attention. This could have provided the contemporary background to the plot, accurately reflecting the period in which the Hábelters lived—and from which they opted out. However, the

director feels the need to counterpoint events, and in short interludes between scenes the "outside world" is indicated through a shadow pantomime on a white screen. These callisthenic shadow shows are questionable. Presumably intended to display all that had happened "meanwhile" in the outside world: war, demonstrations, or simply the "other", more colourful life, they mainly fill the long intervals required to change sets cluttered with all kinds of furniture and paraphernalia, requiring quite some time to be carried on and off. This, however, is not the only reason why the four hours of the performance feel long: more and more details have been taken over from the novel without their function being entirely clear. The character of the writer in the play remains that of a neutral narrator. Who the author's judgement falls on is not clear. Perhaps on those who even today have a "well-heeled petty-bourgeois vapidty" as their ideal? Those who do not consider this idea an awkward one presumably take no notice of the fact that the educated classes, the traditional consumers of culture, are rapidly being reduced to poverty, unemployment is into the hundreds of thousands, and more people are vegetating below subsistence level than at any time in the past fifty years.

The Csiky Gergely company of Kaposvár, always sensitive to what is happening, undoubtedly selected Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit*, a parable of pauperization and prosperity, for the topicality they saw in it.

The story is obviously meant for us: the destitute small town of Güllen is being promised untold prosperity by a millionairess daughter of the town now living abroad if the citizens kill an ex-lover of hers, who had deceived her and produced false witnesses in a suit brought against him. When the play was first performed in

Hungary, it exemplified the "wolfish laws of capitalism". Its particular validity *hic et nunc*, however, is rooted in the ending: the Gülleners do kill Alfred Ill, and with Claire Zachanassian's money the town begins to prosper. The question is whether we can now be identified with Güllen. Are we really on our last legs? And if so, what are we doing about it, or rather, how far are we willing to go? For an injection of a thousand million Swiss francs, say? Will we actually kill for it or (for the time being) only murder our own conscience, our self-esteem, our moral norms. In sum, do we murder our morals day by day for survival?

The director, Tamás Ascher, surprises audiences by staging the play virtually in a literal version, mostly following the author's instructions. He does not draw parallels, but simply narrates a grotesque tragedy, and thus remains faithful to Dürrenmatt. The Swiss author presumably was not flaying Switzerland in choosing a small town in Central Europe to set the play in. Rather, he was trying to find out whether divine predestination can be replaced by the predestination of money. For Dürrenmatt, Claire Zachanassian's thousand million has the role of destiny in Greek tragedy: it punishes the criminal—in the given case Alfred Ill. It is not the individual who punishes—Claire is passive throughout the play—but money raised to a mythological plane. The punishment is disproportionate to the crime and the criminal becomes victim and dies with a certain dignity. As the price of his death emerges what is called the welfare society, of whose salutary character the author does not seem to be thoroughly convinced.

Ascher has opted for the more difficult but more sensible course by not interpreting the plot parabolically. It calls for courage today to perform *The Visit* in the form it was written, with a grotesque "Greek" chorus, Brechtian didacticism, and

all those elements once considered daring but that have since become clichéd. The Kaposvár production even retains those scenes where the Güllen citizens imitate trees, shrubs, a deer and a woodpecker, even though these are usually omitted today by directors because of their "amateur" appearance.

What we see is itself an overstatement: sets and costumes are both dilapidated: reinforcement sticks out of the broken ferro-concrete, even the mayor uses a string instead of a belt to hold up his trousers. This is no longer poverty, it is the frightening utopia of total misery. The citizens constantly go to the railway station like shabby dreamers, grotesque protozoans, engrossed in nostalgia while watching the trains flash by. Alfred Ill is as miserable and commonplace as the others. He fades into the crowd, just as the mixed chorus and welcome address of the mayor fades into the rattle of the train. Under these conditions predestination cannot be questionable. The more these little, grotesque people protest against the incitement to murder the more obvious it becomes that they will kill. However, the evidence here is the weakest part of the play. Those who improve their lot on credit, collecting an "advance" on the murder without being aware of it, while the millionairess's escaped panther brings a growing number of innocently threatening weapons into their hands, are the pieces of evidence that Dürrenmatt left in a rough-and-ready state. Nor has Ascher been able to solve the problem of maintaining tension throughout. After the parody of provincialism in the opening scenes, the production definitely falls off.

The final third of the production brings out more convincingly Ascher's subtle

sense of the average man's ingenuity in self-manipulation. The scene in which judgement is delivered turns judicial murder falsely claimed as justice into ritual. The public becomes a mass meeting, the audience mute actors. (They ought to vote, as without voting they become accomplices.) The principals sitting behind the dais readily deliver the ideology for the joint decision in the presence of media. Through the mayor the unctuous demagogue speaks, through the Teacher a sophistry, which soon stifles any rational reservation over murder.

In the principal role Piroska Molnár is a Claire Zachanassian who carefully avoids giving the impression of an assembled monster; she is malicious and vulgar only to the extent necessary to comment on the events that happen of their own impetus. She is without cruelty or cynicism. She does not play-act her rancour for Ill or her grotesque nostalgia. In this final farewell one would expect a counter-play: an emotional moment of romance before the execution. Nothing like this takes place: Claire remains just as impassive and Ill just as ir-resolute as they have been throughout. Before the nocturnal silhouette of the town's new neon lights, built at the price of murder, the soberly dressed chorus (omitting the lines mentioning that favourite phantom of the 1950s, the nuclear mushroom), arrives at the emphatic conclusion that nothing is more dreadful than poverty. This teaching of a *Beggar's Opera*-cum-proletcult flavour is threatening but ironical. Ascher seems somewhat indifferent as to whether or not the original Dürrenmatt has an effect today, and this objectivity does not suffice to make the production, despite its unquestionable professional quality, one that touches the elemental. 24

Cutting the Cloth

A Conversation with the Film Directors Károly Makk,
Miklós Jancsó and Pál Sándor

Erzsébet Bori: *"Episode films" were at their peak of fashion in the 1960s. Is there any particular reason for reviving the fashion?*

Károly Makk: I don't know. I haven't spoken to Martin Scorsese or Woody Allen who have made films of this kind in recent years, and I haven't asked them why. There was a great vogue for them in the Sixties, and some charming films were made by the Italians, the Czechs, Wajda and company, all of which I enjoyed tremendously at the time. I think it was a reasonable idea on the part of our producers since the names of three or four directors like us may be well enough known to bring in some money at least, and a half-hour movie is not all that expensive to make. We all began with great enthusiasm, and all of us more or less picked our stories from the news.

E. B.: *How have you managed to put up with an enforced silence for so long? And that after some of your films were recognized as classics of the Hungarian cinema as soon as they were released?*

K. M.: I think that is something of an exaggeration. Look, men are rather silly creatures who think that change will always bring something better. Well, great changes are interesting enough, no question about that, but they are not always, or

in every way, better—at least not yet. By the time you get over the disappointment, you've lost much precious time. What happened was that it took three or four years to realize that it was perhaps simpler for me to talk to foreign producers than to queue up for the little money that there is here. Well, even longer than that.

E. B.: *Why did the hopes that we all pinned on the changes fail to come true?*

K. M.: In 1989, I was invited to sit on the committee of judges of a minor festival in Umbria, from where I went to Rome. Some Italian journalists, all of them old friends, came to see me at the Hungarian Institute, to talk about what was going to happen in Hungary. I said: "Well, what can happen? There will be freedom, there'll be no more wrangling, censorship will be at end, we'll live like kings." Then one of these Italian friends, who is a very well-known name in the Italian press, told me: "Look, Charlie, everyone in Europe is working hard trying to get some government money, and you are happy that the government is getting out of the business with all its money. Just mark my words, and remember what I've said!" Well, I'm remembering.

E. B.: *You're known not to be happy about how the Hungarian Motion Picture Foundation operates.*

K. M.: Knowing the system of direct and indirect support that works in Europe, I don't think that a single organization can cope with the management and full responsibility for the entire industry.

E. B.: *In other words, the system isn't good enough to stand on its own?*

K. M.: Some way ought to be found for funds to flow in from several sources, not just from the exchequer, and these funds should be grouped into two or three dispensing places, clearing houses, if you will, because once you are told by the Foundation that you'll get no money, there is no other place in Hungary to turn to. Never again. And where could you go? Private capital isn't available yet. The Hungarian tax system is no help. The film world is trying to convince those in charge but the film world itself is divided. And that's a shameful situation.

E. B.: *A script itself is not enough to make a decision on a film. The track-record of the film-maker concerned should also be taken into consideration, and, especially, there should be some sort of open forum in which you can argue your case. Those rejected are offended if no one tells them why. All they see is the rejection notice.*

K. M.: There is some confusion over different roles. In Western Europe there are many kinds of foundations, and a lot of indirect government money is available, for example there are quotas on how much money public television is obliged to spend on films in a year. Everywhere there is a producer who really knows who is who trying to sell the director's script. Our studios call themselves producers, on the basis of the old system, but they are not true producers as yet, and the foundation acts as a foundation—it does not feel in

SELECT FILMOGRAPHIES

Károly Makk (1925)

1954
Liliomfi

1955
Ward No. 9.

1958
The House Under the Rocks
San Francisco, 1958: Grand Prix.

1960
Don't Keep off the Grass

1961
The Fanatics
Budapest, 1962: Hungarian Film Critics' Prize for Best Direction.

1970
Love
Budapest, 1970: Hungarian Film Critics' Prize for Best Direction; Cannes, 1971: Special Jury Prize, especially mentioning the actresses, Lili Darvas and Mari Törőcsik; O.C.I.C. Prize; Chicago, 1971: Prize Silver Hugo to Mari Törőcsik, as best actress.

1974
Catsplay
Hollywood, 1975: Academy Award nomination.

1977
A Very Moral Night

1982
Another Way
Cannes, 1982: FIPRESCI Prize, Best Actress Prize to Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieslak; Figuera da Foz, 1982; Diploma of the CIALO Jury Budapest, 1983: National Feature Film Festival: Prize for Best Direction.

1990
Hungarian Requiem

this transition period that it ought to have a more personal relationship to the artist and quit the role of an unapproachable committee of judges. At present, they alone have the money, which means it is they who are responsible, not for what the films are like, but for making it possible that the best films are made under the given circumstances. A new and strong group of producers must develop, recruited from young people unscathed by the last twenty years, people who instead of wailing and complaining, drive the director forward and lobby for funds, for real money. Public television could be one such source, if there were a Media Act, and if part of the profession, especially those close to the Foundation, were thinking differently, and did not say more than just "all right, give us the money, and we'll make the film." National film production and public television are closely linked in every country in Europe, and that kind of link ought to be forged in Hungary, too. Also, there should be a Film Law which would keep in mind that the turnover of the industry is quite a few billion forints, a certain percentage of which could be reinvested in Hungarian filmmaking. A film could be financed from several sources, and I can imagine a solution whereby an official might say, "if this film has already received money from three sources, I will automatically add my own 15 per cent".

E. B.: *It is surprising that your episode, almost slapstick, ends on a tragic note. The situation can imply such an ending, but there is a mood to the episode for which this seemed unexpected.*

K. M.: I deliberately heightened those colours. My feeling is that we weren't thinking along the wrong lines when we made the film turn out that way. And Jancsó also based his story on a news item. Three men

take a girl to an apartment, and it turns out that she is willing to go to bed with only two of them. The third happens to own the flat, and he is promptly thrown out of the window by his two mates. Naturally, Miklós placed it into his own world, and used his own ways of filmmaking. As yet, we have not seen each others' films and I am very curious about Pál Sándor's piece, too.

Miklós Jancsó: But even these little 30 minute pieces aren't cheap to make. Quite the contrary. Just think, it came in at 16 million forints [about \$1.25 million] even though we're working really fast, with János Kende and a few more of my friends. Filmmaking is incredibly expensive even in Hungary and, since a film will never break even in a small country like this, it is a hopeless investment. The film economists had worked that out a long time ago. A French friend of mine, who runs Canal Plus, says that it takes a population of forty million for a film industry to be profitable. If Hungarian film can count on no sources other than what is available now, then sooner or later there will be no place to get money from. It is impossible that film production should not collaborate with the various television companies. That's one of the basic questions, the other is distribution—not many films are distributed well in Hungary.

E. B.: *What do you mean by successful distribution? Good marketing?*

M. J.: Yes, that too, but the main part is played by the cinemas. Most cinemas are owned by local councils or by foreigners, and all they show are American movies. There should be a chain of cinemas which show European and Hungarian films as well as American but that would take real money. The American

Miklós Jancsó (1921)

1959

Immortality

short film on art

San Francisco, 1960: Prize for the Best Film on Art.

1964

My Way Home

Pécs, 1965: National Feature Film Festival: Main Prize, Prize for Best Direction.

1965

The Round-up

Budapest, 1965: Hungarian Film Critics' Prize for Best Direction

Pécs, 1966: National Feature Film Festival: Main Prize, Prize for Best Direction; Locarno, 1967: British Film Critics' Annual Film Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

1967

The Red and the White

Budapest, 1967: Hungarian Film Critics' Prize for Best Direction; Pécs, 1968: National Feature Film Festival: Prize for Best Direction; Paris, 1968: Leon Moussinac Prize; Adelaide, 1969: Silver Southern Cross.

1968

Silence and Cry

Budapest, 1968: Hungarian Film Critics' Prize for Best Direction; Avellino, 1968: Gold Prize.

The Confrontation

Budapest, 1969: Hungarian Film Critics' Prize for Best Direction; Adelaide, 1970: Gold Southern Cross.

1969

Winter Wind

Atlanta, 1970: Director's Prize.

1970

Agnus Dei

1971

Red Psalm

Cannes, 1972: Director's Prize; Santiago de Chile, 1972: Film Critics' Prize for Best Film from Abroad shown in 1972; Milano, 1972: Gold Globe; Paris, 1972: Patrick Pouget Prize for Camera Work to János Kende.

1976

Vices and Pleasures

1978

Hungarian Rhapsody—Allegro Barbaro

Cannes, 1979: Jury mention to Miklós Jancsó for his oeuvre; Barcelona, 1979: Audience's Prize; Cartagena, 1981: Prize for Camera Work to János Kende.

1987

Season of Monsters

1987 Venice: Jury mention.

1988

Jesus Christ's Horoscope

1990 Venice: Life-time Achievement Award.

1990

God Walks Backwards

1991 Gijon Film Festival: Mention.

1991

Blue-Danube Waltz

1992 Montreal: Director's Prize.

1993–1994

Message of Stones

A television series on deserted synagogues and Jewish cemeteries.

cinema is a genuine industry, one that makes enormous profits. It's one of the strongest and fastest-moving areas of the American economy. In contrast, we are in the situation I have just described, and un-

der those circumstances we should be happy that we are able to make any films at all.

E. B.: Under the old system, you were strongly in favour of market-type relations.

Only a Miracle...

In the beginning there was the studio system. The studios—Budapest, Dialóg, Hunnia and Objektív—were formed within The Hungarian Film Producing Company, the single monolithic film company, to replace its relatively independent units divided along genre lines (feature films, documentaries, animation and dubbing). All Hungarian feature films came from these and from the Balázs Béla Studio for young filmmakers, and a later arrival, Társulás (Association) Studio. When they were set up in 1972, the people involved probably had an eye on Hollywood, a model difficult to imitate when filmmaking is a state monopoly.

The Hungarian cinema was regarded as one of the success stories of the Kádár era. The state footed the bills, exercised censorship—tough or gentle, depending on the prevailing political wind—and the films won prize after prize at international festivals. At the time, the first screening of every new release was a major event, cinemas were filled with people ready to exchange knowing looks with the filmmakers behind the back of the censors. That tacit consensus—the director would criticize the regime in a coded language, the audience would get his meaning, the state would shut an eye and pay up—disappeared ultimately by the 1980s. Until then the number of western films imported had had a quota, domestic films had hardly had any competition. (In the Sixties, an average of ten American movies were shown annually in Hungary, in the Seventies, 20, and before 1989, 30; that figure leapt to 86 in 1989, and was over a hundred in the 90s.) And, as if the earlier generous financing had been a kind of compensation for censorship, state support dwindled at the same rate as the freedom of artists grew. The number of cinemas showed a similar trend.

In 1990 filmmaking ceased to be a state monopoly. In 1991 the Hungarian Motion Picture Foundation was established, born out of a

Have you changed your mind, now that things have gone topsy-turvy?

M. J.: Look, what I always said was that in reality film-making was an industry, and the product, professionally made films, are goods. My view is still the same, even

though things have happened here which I didn't really expect, because some people seem to keep their naiveté as long as they live. What this is all about is not simply how films, as a commodity, are being marketed, but that the market has been occupied.

coming together of the entire Hungarian filmmaking profession. Although the board of trustees has been under heavy criticism from the very beginning, there is full agreement on the necessity of its existence; in more sober moments even its sharpest critics concede that the root of the trouble is not the foundation itself but a lack of money. How to entice financing from several sources is, however, an issue that has not been resolved. Today the cost of a decently produced Hungarian film (no extravaganza, but no poverty row product) is estimated at Ft70 million (i.e. just over \$1/2 million). Not half of that can be expected from the foundation; Western co-production partners, European support and sponsors must be found. Investors cannot be counted upon. Every economic index and numerous examples are evidence that film production that pays for itself in Hungary is an impossibility. The financial path taken by the biggest success in recent years, Róbert Koltai's *We'll Never Die*, is highly illuminating. The film was a low-budget production, Ft34 million in 1992, of which 12 million came from the foundation. The rest was put together piecemeal by begging from a thousand places, frequently in return for disadvantageous contracts (thus distribution rights sold cheaply in advance). *We'll Never Die* has been seen by several hundred thousand people, was successfully shown in America, and was even in contention for an Oscar nomination. Despite all that, the best that can be said for Koltai's film is that it did not lose money. In such a situation (and in the absence of a media and film act, the unsettled link between public television and the film industry only makes things worse), a situation where the issue of the actual need for Hungarian film production is one of central will and decision, only a miracle can help. Fortunately, there are still miracles. What else than a miracle would you consider the fact that despite all this, twenty films are still made in Hungary every year?

E. B.: *You mean, by buying up the cinemas?*

M. J.: Not only that. What has happened to cinemas is the same thing what has happened to other businesses, the market itself has been bought by uninhibited, rapacious capital. It will exploit this market as

long as it is alive, then it will retire, and that's all there is to it. Everything that the so-called Socialist regime managed to put together over forty years has been looted and dispersed, the spoils pocketed by people some of whom I could name. Even what they bought and for how much. There is little we can do after all that.

There will be poverty on an enormous scale, and no buying power at all. That's the situation, and I just don't know what else I can say about it all. The only way out for the cinema would probably be a Film Law protecting national interests, but we now have our third government which is doing nothing, because it has no idea what to do about the arts in Hungary as a whole—and not only about the arts. They have no vision of the future at all. Of course, there is also another side to the problem, and that's what kind of films should be made? Can we make films which the audience wants to see? Péter Bacsó's *Witness Again* has been seen by about 80,000 people by now, which is an enormous figure, although Róbert Koltai's *We'll Never Die* has actually pulled in 200,000. Now that is a figure that only a really good American movie can manage in Hungary today.

Under Kádár we got used to being able to do anything, to getting our money even if the film had no paying public whatever. In fact, the actual making of a film should not even begin before there is an agreement on distribution. Of course, lots of people make films without that, spending their own money or the sponsor's, but those are films that usually stay in their cans, even though some of them are fine films.

E. B.: *I have read that many people object to the French proposal that the cultural quotas of 1989 should not only be retained but actually made even tighter. Most countries argue that cultural products are not potatoes to be treated on a quota basis. Yet for material goods they are willing to accept the protectionism which they reject in the spirit of the free market when it comes to European culture. Is it only the French who care so deeply about national and European culture?*

M. J.: Yes, they are the only ones. This is an old tradition of theirs, to oppose every-one, especially the Americans. They won't let businesses or companies have English names, and the French are a nation still large enough to be able to get away with it.

E. B.: *Should we not even demand at least a minimum contribution to Hungarian film making from distributors or television channels with American interests?*

M. J.: That would only result in an immediate uproar everywhere, and especially in America, that freedom is being trampled upon here. And they would object on the basis of the free market, the nature of which no one can even define.

E. B.: *You haven't made a feature film for years. You have been teaching, making documentaries, staging concerts and other events. Did you seek those opportunities, or did they find you?*

M. J.: Well, they found me. But almost all of these things were done free. You no longer work for money, just to keep yourself in shape physically and intellectually. Indeed, I do these things to keep fit.

E. B.: *Have you any hopes of making a feature film?*

M. J.: It's terribly difficult. I have a script for which I've been promised twenty million but that amounts to being promised nothing at all, since many more millions are needed before shooting can begin.

E. B.: *How about foreign backing?*

M. J.: There are people who can get some but not me. I don't make that kind of movie.

E. B.: *Doesn't the name Miklós Jancsó open wallets?*

M. J.: Well, my name is bad rather than good, no matter how well known it may be. Producers tell me, "Look, what you do is marvellous but I won't give you money for it".

E. B.: *Three or four years ago it seemed that the protagonists of the time were the intellectuals who changed the system, and the new businessmen. Now social sensibility has returned to both fiction and film with attention turned again to the underdog. You have never addressed social problems, only historical and moral situations. Now you suddenly turn toward people on the downward spiral, the socially underprivileged. What's the explanation, especially in your case, since you have not made a film for eight years?*

K. M.: The country is undergoing a profound trauma and it's a first reflex to turn towards those who have it worst, those who are the most helpless. My story is a grotesque, even frivolous, comedy which, up to a point, makes a joke of a situation in which two people are forced to break into a house to eat the meal of three other people. I actually read about this in a newspaper. In real life, they left afterward, after a job well done. In a film, of course, things would turn out differently. I took my characters into a darker, more fatal situation.

Pál Sándor: I am not interested in poverty as such this time either. That is only an *à propos*. There is a piece of bread. But that is a pretext for me to speak about human relations again. My characters' occupation is sitting at the edge of existence. They could be sitting anywhere else, for that matter. In this sense *Deliver Me from Evil* is about has-beens, it's set in a dark and lyrical, grotesque world. The starting point with Zsuzsa Tóth, who wrote the

Pál Sándor (1937)

1967

Clowns on the Wall

Karlovy Vary, 1968: Special Prize of the Author's Jury, Diploma of the Technical Jury; Chicago, 1968: Prize for Best Black and White Film.

1969

Love Emilia!

Taormina, 1970: Cup Volpi.

1971

Sarah, My Dear

1974

Football of the Good Old Days

Budapest, 1974: Hungarian Film Critics' Prize for Best Direction; Tehran, 1974: Jury Prize; Palermo, 1984: Main Prize.

1976

A Strange Role

Berlin, 1977: Silver Bear, Prize of the CIDLAC Jury; São Paulo, 1978: Second Prize.

1978

Deliver us from Evil

Montreal, 1979: Prize for Camera Work.

1980

Salamon & Stock Show

1982

Daniel Takes a Train

Budapest, 1983: National Feature Film Festival: Main Prize; Cannes, 1983: FIP-RESCI Prize; Zimbabwe, 1985: Prize for Most Original Film of the Festival.

1985

Just a Movie

Gdansk, 1986: Prize for the Best Foreign Film of the Year.

1987

Miss Arizona

script, was not that we would have to make a film about poverty. That problem is simply in the air. A third of the country, even half the country, is gradually finding itself in an impossible position. But that is simply an area in which I can speak about how we have managed to get on with each other. What I've always been interested in was how people were able to communicate with each other in extreme situations. In that sense, this film absolutely continues what I have always done. This time the sense of humiliation or deformation is not political or historical but mainly social. Characters in a situation like this try to love each other, betray each other and steal from each other. The film is about very poor people, the subject is not their poverty but their humanity.

András Bálint Kovács: *It's about the homeless.*

P. S.: About the homeless out of a fairy tale. About Lot himself in the Bible, if you like.

A. B. K.: *All three films are set in extreme situations, and all three are comedies.*

P. S.: I meant my film as a series of slapstick vignettes. If I experienced the situation of my characters at a depth and seriousness matching the real hopelessness of their lives, I just wouldn't know what there is to live for. Things have to be kept in some kind of an equilibrium in order to go on living. I must scrape up my remaining faith to be able to believe that there still is comradeship, that there is love, friendship, betrayals, but reconciliation, too. That there is still the escape rope of looking at the world in a certain slanted way. Because I refuse to believe that what I see around me is what really exists. We're qualified to race on a different racecourse. The little people, my characters, are like you or me

or any of us. No matter that it is so cold you can see breath, they still try to follow each other, to love each other, to catch up with each other. The whole story is about a chase. They are running, one after a cat, the other after her son, and the third after love. So, the two things that keep me alive today are humour and the conviction that we can survive our present predicament only if we have a human environment into which we can withdraw. Otherwise, who the hell would have thought that I would be making a film which closes with people turning into pillars of salt and ending up as statues, as mementoes, in the middle of the Árpád Bridge?

A. B. K.: *Any plans for a longer film?*

P. S.: So much has built up in me during these past nine years that, if it turns out that I am still capable of making films, then I will go on making them.

A. B. K.: *You've been a businessman for nine years. Doesn't that require an entirely different way of thinking?*

P. S.: That was pure survival. Incidentally, I consider it my great fortune that I did not have to live through the complete disintegration of the profession, the emptying of studios, the dispersion of skilled staff for lack of work. For me this was a long period of preparation, out of which films may be born again. Before, I used to shoot a film every two years. Now there's been a break of eight or nine years. The world turned upside down and I became confused myself. Now I'm back where I was before, only the interval between two films is longer, and it will probably stay longer, too.

A. B. K.: *Is there any hope, in your view, that the Hungarian cinema can find any kind of stable base?*

P. S.: The hope lies in the disappearance of the mediocre Hungarian art film. There always will be money for six to eight movies a year which people really want to see. If, at long last, television will be willing to come in too, setting aside all jealousy, then there may be ten to twelve films a year which can be shown in the cinemas and be bought by television as well. And there is also a third class, which requires a great deal less money, because the films may be shot on H8 cameras, and they don't necessarily have to be shown in cinemas, but in clubs and at special festivals, in the places where they belong. What is needed is six or seven Hungarian films that have a real audience appeal, and not "Hungarian art films", whatever this used to imply. The élitist attitude of not giving a damn whether the audience goes to see the film or not has to be abandoned. Our lives may be portrayed in many different ways. In a relaxed, light-hearted way, in a wild comedy or in a profound drama. The label "art film" is meaningless. The coat has to be re-buttoned because things cannot go on like this. I would even say that it is high time to buy a new coat, with entirely different buttons. We have maintained an outdated structure, with an artistic attitude that belongs to the past.

A. B. K.: *Where would the money come from for these six or seven feature films?*

P. S.: I have both government funds and private funds in mind. And I'm thinking of co-productions, too. Of course, with co-productions you must be cautious. Because the producer will come up with his own demands, from casting foreign actors to script rewrites, up to the point where the original intention cannot be recognized in the movie any longer.

A. B. K.: *Are there any private funds for Hungarian films?*

P. S.: Of course there are but not for everyone. The interest is still personal. Róbert Koltai (*We'll Never Die*) for one, is now in a position to ask for money. I may sound immodest but I think that if I want to make a film next year, I can get the money. *Football of the Good Old Days* and *Only a Movie* were screened on television too, and people liked them. Well, the critics, too, must learn to appreciate a good film. It is absurd that a film that audiences loved should be beaten to death by some idiot reviewers, which is what happened to Koltai's movie. They don't realize that if three or four films like this were made in a year, criticism would be more important too because it would be dealing with something seen by hundreds of thousands. There is, for instance, this young lad József Pacskovszky. I've never met him, but if he directs another movie like *The Wondrous Voyage of Kornél Esti*, he will prove that he has a voice that has popular appeal, and he will be able to make money too. It's directors like him who are going to make the new Hungarian cinema, not the underground people—that's the way it is all over the world. The young will come along, and we will be able to create the new Hungarian film, and I also hope that I'll still be around, and be part of it. But as long as the present studio system survives, as long as the same old thinking prevails, then this is a story that will go on and on. But one day it will end. ♣

Erzsébet Bori
and András Bálint Kovács

Sir,

Working on an introduction to a new edition of my father's *Raggle Taggle Gypsy. Adventures with a Fiddle in Hungary and Roumania* explains my presence in Budapest and my going through the files of *The (New) Hungarian Quarterly*.

You (No. 119. p. 20) describe Sándor Kányádi as "a Hungarian poet and translator living in Kolozsvár (Cluj), Transylvania, Rumania." That is Hunglish unless you wish to imply that his presence there is analogous to Joyce's in Trieste, Gertrud Stein's in Paris, or László Cs. Szabó's in London.

Kányádi writes: "*Minyan* was the first Jewish word I learned. I learned it from my father, who often helped to make up the *minyan*, either as a fraternal or as an occasional member, when the rabbi called in our village." That, since his father was a Calvinist Szekler peasant and not a Jew, places Kányádi firmly in the tradition of Iván Boldizsár, the founding editor of your journal. The latter's encounter with Kafka, and his attendance at the coronation of the last king of Hungary are still the source of much hilarity whenever two or three old Budapest hands meet over Barack or Bull's Blood.

In both Boldizsár's and Kányádi's case the import of the gaffe is not the display of particular ignorance but that it makes it clear beyond doubt that the story told was a whopper of a lie.

Why did no-one, all the way from original appearance in a magazine, through publication in a book, to your own English version, correct Kányádi? The answer is quite obvious: at the time of publication, five or six years ago, not one of the editors, translators, or proof-readers involved would have wanted the suspicion to arise that he or she was existentially qualified to know what a *minyan* is. Readers stayed silent for similar reasons. As we know, Jewish self-identification in Hungary is one of the by-products of post-Communism. Boldizsár's readers, on the other hand, gleefully caught him out. The whole of Budapest rocked with laughter.

There is, however, a crucial difference between the two cases that counts against Kányádi.

The credibility of an apologist for the Kádár regime does not matter—I am sure Boldizsár himself would prefer to be remembered as an inventive raconteur—that of a spokesman for the grievances of his people is a *sine qua non*.

Do I have to remind you that the story of Hungarians in Transylvania is not post-modern fiction?

Stephen Stanislas Starkie
London

■ Sándor Kányádi, the Transylvanian poet, declines to respond and insists that his memory does not betray him. — The Ed.

The Hungarian Quarterly

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The majority of publishers active in the continuously shrinking market of high-quality books, operating, in principle, as business ventures, are probably all money losers, and have been in the red for a long time. They have been kept alive only because their owners (in most cases identical with their staff) are prisoners of their own companies: they cannot (perhaps do not even want to) find another job, and even if they put their company up for sale, there would be no takers, not at a realistic price. There is no other choice than to continue to operate the publishing house or the bookshop. Operation here means gradually declining reproduction, the eating up of capital at an accelerating rate.

In the worst-case scenario, before total exhaustion and total loss of capital, these publishers will change their field of operation out of sheer self-defence. What will remain will be small companies which will publish books regarded as important by benevolent sponsors.

That, however, will no longer resemble anything like professional, business-type book production. It will be a cottage industry.

From: *Transition and Privatization in Publishing* by István Bart, pp. 36–45.

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