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Ottó Orbán 1936–2002

The Smell of Prison, Part 2

Sándor Márai & His World

Kossuth: Hopes of a Much Celebrated Exile

Institutional Barriers to Growth

Contemporary Art & the Market

A Celebration of Kurtág



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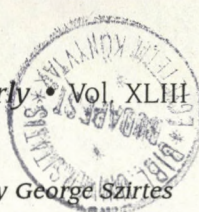
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Song of Time's Raised Finger

Dal az idő fölemelt ujjáról

*Where has it gone, that frenzied summer by the lake?
What has caught up with yesterday's high achiever?
Into what cubby hole has the well-thumbed issue of last month's Playmate
Disappeared with its exciting flash of beaver?*

*It's drought from here on in, nothing but constant drought,
Time points out with its admonitory finger.
What opens up ahead is a windy, cavernous mouth
Where all flames are blown out and no lights linger.*

Song of Daily Disaster

Dal a mindennapos vereségről

*Daily disaster is suffered by the body, this holed
Sack through which life pathetically dribbles,
If night at the end of the world decides to fold,
The vampire bats remain like tortured sybils,*

*And hell's small teeth in all those tiny grins
Bring you the news, flesh garnished with smoke and burning.
Whatever your lot was before, the night begins.
Bid fond farewell for ever now to morning.*

Song of the Flame in the Ice

Dal a fagyban bolygó lángról

*In the beginning flowers of darkening coal,
The coupling of cells out of which love arises.
The desired is human, blind, out of control,
And leads poor-fool-me to its booby prizes.*

*For it survives us, as idea survives mere neurochemistry,
Like a compound dissolved, in the new-born child's nerve-centre.
This is where things begin, where nothing is lost to eternity,
And thin flames dance on through the terminal winter.*

Ottó Orbán

The Witching Time

Az éjszaka rémjáró szaka

Translated by George Szirtes

From *Fifteen Songs*

Tizenöt dal

"Tis now the very witching time of night [...] now could I drink hot blood"

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

William Shakespeare

Song of the Blaggard Hope

Dal a szélhámos reményről

*Ever closer the grenade exploding by my operated skull,
Like birds my severed limbs fly off into the distance;
This is how I must clear life's debts in full
And pay for my being's culpable persistence.*

*The hot blood may still run laps through my veins,
Though what confronts me is a mile-high ice-escarpment
Heartdeath and Braindeath wink across frozen sheets, the foxy dames:
Black-clad nurses both, from the death department.*

*After suffering for twenty years from an extraordinarily debilitating case of Parkinson's Disease, **Ottó Orbán** died of a sudden heart attck on May 26, at the age of 66. The fifteen poems of this cycle, his last publication, appeared in the May 2002 issue of the literary monthly Holmi.*

Song of Warning: Dangerous Side-Effects

Dal a kockázatról és a mellékhatásról

*Your life hangs on such threads, can't count them all:
The myriad forms and manners of disaster
That may pronounce you dead are too many by far to call
Each individual terror your sole master.*

*Our youthful heedlessness keeps us alive,
This flood-fomenting, grassblade-showing power,
Billy the Kid enters the cardsharps' dive,
Twists on eighteen and bankrupts the whole shower.*

Song of the Era's View of the Future

Dal a jövőképről

*Our cherished ideals prophesying redemption, that if
We worked together the world would improve, turned to ordure;
Our sad history, we thought, might take a more fortunate drift
Should we desist from crucifying the Son of God, Our Saviour—*

*Forsaking hominis lupus, man would no longer call
On limb-shredding bombs to render his victims harmless.
But night is coming, the moon has no belly at all,
It is dark, there is nothing to see, it is utterly starless.*

Song of Successive Generations

Dal az egymást váltó nemzedékekről

*Looming through mist the generations rise
But I remain what I was, there's no new version;
My teachers, the years of war, filled all my skies,
My skull carved by a scalpel-wielding surgeon.*

*There'll be no New World or Last Chance: No Dice.
Our lewd brains nourish toxins of the spirit.
John Doe, executioner and sacrifice
Go to the bubbling lime-pit, vanish in it.*

Song of the Divan and the Ocean

Dal a heverőről és az óceánról

*The divan on which I spend the best part of my time,
Serves as both table and sea-worthy appendage:
My head spins verses, dizzy from rhyme to rhyme.
I patch my head with words like strips of bandage.*

*It's slower now than it was, the intellect creaks and groans—
Ideas lumber forth in leaden-footed motion:
I notate the orchestral score of my seized-up bones
And sink beneath the waves of the icy ocean.*

Song of the Green Leaf

Dal a zöld levélről

*Humanity's wormkind wriggle on the bough:
The green leaf chunters: jewboy, tinker, sambo!
The lads are not subtle thinkers, and have trouble in seeing how
Words may anticipate bullets or outshoot Rambo.*

*Successful parasites rot in office once they reach the top,
Use show trial and base instinct, to keep their feet under the table
And should that fail they still have a secret multipurpose prop:
The club with which Cain crushed in the skull of Abel.*

Song of the Taste of Bitterness

Dal a keserű ízről

*Up and down the bomb-shelter all day
Robbed me of childhood, nor did it make me fitter.
They brought me food in hospital on a tray
But suffering made the taste of it seem bitter.*

*Bitter the water I drank then and bitter the law
That supports the usurper and the interloper,
Bitter the fact that everything sticks in the craw
Drowned in the bloody vortex of Mitteleuropa.*

Song of the Body's Tiredness

Dal a test fáradságáról

*Sixty-five years, then sixty-six: now death and despair
Fill up my poems gradually, by inches.
You can't fight metal-fatigue with fervent prayer
Nor with a dissolute choir of tits and finches.*

*Spring with its grass hairdo arrives, but not for me,
It's winter I get with its bald and frozen graces,
My song is headed for the cemetery
Of the common wordhoard's great wide-open spaces.*

Song of the Created World

Dal a teremtett világról

*Do you hear me, ancient of days, old man?
Is this the very acme of your creation?
This lightless cosmos with its enigmatic plan,
Where supernovae ignite worlds by conflagration?*

*Myth is the dream of naked upright apes.
No angels zip about in space. You're either baloney
Or you exist. Struggling and hobbling instinctively I traipse
Towards my grave on foot, by Shanks's pony.*

Ottó Orbán

An "Interview"

If one has a past like mine, it is easy to be a poet or a writer. I'm a millionaire. I'm a millionaire because I had such a marvellously-troubled childhood. To say my childhood was nightmarish is understating it. It was almost impossible; it could have been an unwritten novel by Kafka.

If one has a past like mine, it is easy to be a poet or a writer. My father was from the upper middle class; a Catholic convert; an officer in the Hungarian army at the time of the Second World War; still, according to laws applied to countries occupied by Nazi Germany, he was considered a Jew. My mother was gentile, from the lowest level of Hungarian society. Their marriage had caused a scandal. During the War he was stripped of his rank and sent to a temporary camp in Hungary, and later marched to a German concentration camp. He never reached the second camp because he was killed on the way—not by Germans. He was killed by Hungarian guards who came from the same part of society my mother came from. In a sense, my father was killed by my mother's relatives. And I remain here with questions, *Who am I? What is my background? What is my heritage? What can I do with this damn thing?*

I was considered a Roman Catholic, so I didn't share my father's fate. Instead, I had the pleasant experience of the siege of Budapest, which lasted four weeks. We lived in an apartment house cellar while the city was bombed. Three bombs fell on our house; they were duds and failed to explode. I was a child, yet at the same time an old man. I knew everything and I understood

This interview was originally conducted by Tracy Moral and Paula Moyer, Ottó Orbán's students when he was a visiting professor at the University of Minnesota, and appeared in the Spring 1987 issue of StreamLines, Minnesota Journal of Creative Writing. It was later somewhat amended by the poet and then given its final form by Jascha Kessler, the American poet and translator when he published it, along with a large selection of his translations of Orbán's poems, in a volume he edited and introduced, Our Bearings at Sea: A Novel in Poems. Philadelphia, Xlibris Corporation, 2001. Available from www.xlibris.com

everything, though it was a hazy nightmare. It's not precise to say I *understood*: my senses were awake and perceived everything, so that I recall details. But there was something which simply couldn't exist for me, and that was the connections between them. My story was just a heap of shards, all very sharp memories.

Near our apartment building was a famous bridge, the first one built across the Danube. Constructed in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Chain Bridge connected the two parts of Budapest. We were a block away. And this famous bridge, together with the others, was blown up by the retreating Germans. When it exploded, I heard first an unearthly deep voice, a horrible voice. Then there came an earthquake. We had no electricity in the cellar, just a candle attached to the wall. The candle fell down and it was dark, and in this dark hell of dust and shaking ground, I heard screaming women and children. I well remember such details; at the same time I was a child. I wanted to get out of the cellar and play. My consciousness was split, schizophrenic through and through.

At that time, I could make no connection between my father's fate and my life. I recall my mother, a simple, warm-hearted woman, hugging me, "Oh you poor orphan. Your daddy died." I was detached from the things she said because I was accustomed to being an eyewitness. I noticed her tears dropping on my shoulder and felt how cold they were. I didn't intentionally bring about this alienation; it was just created by circumstances, by the War. Everything I write goes back to that time, even if my subjects are different. My basic experience of life, my sense of culture, and my approach to poetry are profoundly connected to it, because I had to endure such a range of human behaviour.

I have a good memory for dialogues. I believe I recollect them because they reveal the heroic aspects of survival; and yet, they were an everyday part of life's routine, even mundane utterances like, "Please scratch my back." I was reminded of this later when I came across T.S. Eliot's "*The Wasteland*". When I read the section "A Game of Chess", I got a sense of *déjà vu*. It recalled something that once happened to me. Some years later, I don't really know where, I found a postcard sent by my father from the temporary camp. He'd written, "God is good. And he will take care of our sweet son." As in Eliot's poem, the situation and words didn't match because something was split. The sort of split was in me.

The War shocked and crippled me, I didn't know how severely neurotic I was. Oddly, that was how I came to write poetry. But I'm the luckiest person on the earth, having learned fundamental ethics and the limits to human behaviour. I found a method, a certain way to think about things, about people and society, because I was subjected both to surprising good and surprising evil.

Liberation was not an event with a capital "L." The Red Army came to our apartment house and it was the same old thing. They too had dirty faces and burning eyes. We stayed in hiding. Later, two months later, we ventured onto the city streets for the first time. We had just reached the Opera House, which

was burned out, when suddenly a car stopped near us. I was scared; I was trained to be scared, to duck behind something. From the car, a Russian soldier with a moustache and a round face shouted, "*Malchik!*" I didn't know a word of Russian, and couldn't guess it meant "kid". I thought he was going to kill me. He reached me a huge piece of army bread. For me, those minutes of my life were symbolic—they somehow followed logically from our plight in the cellar. Again an unlooked-for good and two players in the scene, a frightened child and a middle-aged man. They didn't speak each other's language. They could do nothing for one another—except to make this gesture, a piece of bread. It's like part of the Mass; yet for me more than symbolic. I came to understand its meaning only much later.

A writer would be lucky to be like me, expected to do only one thing, to survive: survive childhood, and then survive the first writing years without dying of hunger. And if those things can be managed, one is free to write one's masterpieces—if possible. Of course I'm joking; still, I mean it.

The process lasted at least thirty years. The most curious part was the moment it started. When my father died, my mother had no job; she was a housewife. After the War, times were difficult and she couldn't keep me at home. We were fortunate enough to have an institution for war orphans that finally took me. I spent five years there.

Most of the children had backgrounds like mine, and it was hell. One of the teachers, however, was a relative, and a kind of genius. He was depressed because he couldn't make contact with the children; so he invented a wonderful pedagogical exercise. He urged us to write poetry. Exactly how he did it, I don't know; but finally he inspired us to write. At first we laughed; then gradually we were caught and held by his trap; we wrote unconsciously, almost accidentally. We didn't think about it. It was just a good excuse not to do homework.

He took notes. Years afterward I found myself and my story among them. I was impossible. I couldn't make contact with the other boys. I was always crying. I was a nightmare for the teacher. After about a month of writing childish poems, I went to him and told him I had written a poem about my father, and wanted to read it to the class. I was adamant about that. At first he was anxious I would start bawling and make a bad impression; but I was so stubborn that he finally said yes. And he was greatly surprised. I was proud. I was stable. I did not tremble. I felt my achievement. In a way, I was over the pain. And I was over it. After class I went out in the yard and started to play with the other children. It was a kind of cure so efficient I even forgot all about it.

That was the start, and I was not conscious of it. For a long while I forgot about writing. I wanted to be an engineer or something like. At eighteen, I fell ill again and began writing poems—pretty bad poems. My basic experience was the same. I was moving in the same troubled direction. I struggled until I was about thirty-five, until I had somehow created a whole landscape for myself. My vision

of the world became more or less clear. But it was unintentional. My life was too heavy a burden and I wanted to get out from under it. Again and again I tried writing; it turned out I was just working at a means to think about my life. Of course, when I reached a certain level, I realized my poems were a kind of summary: I understood now what had happened to me.

I was lucky in so many ways because not only was my childhood troubled, but my adolescence. I was thrown out of my family because they were scared of me, scared of having a writer in a family. The only thing they knew about writers was that they had tuberculosis and were paupers. In their own foolish way, they wanted to help me; they thought I'd give it up if they didn't support me. I also had many hopeless and not-so-hopeless loves; I lived a quite disastrous life—until at twenty-one I had a nervous breakdown. I was always walking on the edge. There was a real danger that I'd just fall off in the dark somewhere. That was my fate. I was lucky I couldn't marry any of the three crazy loves of my youth: I thank God now a hundred times a day for my escape, because they'd have been catastrophes. At the time, I felt my life was just a continuation of the War's nightmare.

In one respect, my life had enough problems for two normal people, rife with quite horrible fears before taking a better course. My first volume of poems was published in 1960 when I was twenty-four. Later, my early years proved to be essential, because in the life of some poets and writers, or of any kind of artist, there may come a perilous moment, that of sudden, even overwhelming success. It can prove more threatening than past troubles because it corrupts surreptitiously. When one grows interested in success, eager for any possible prize, it is deadly. I was prepared even for that.

I had no desperate desire to be an early success. At thirty, I was considered by some literary folks to be the most promising talent of my generation; but my writing did not receive general critical acceptance. I was accused of being phony, of lacking true talent, of being simply an imitator. Later, I realized it was quite reasonable for me to have had that problem. Because of my background, I was open to almost any influences. I took them in and built on them. It was a survival technique. It was a learned behaviour, as well as a way of writing. It took a long time for me to arrive at that blend of styles that became mine.

At that time, a friend of mine told me that they would recognise me as a poet when I was forty. He teased me, saying I was only in my thirties and had ten years to go. I called him an idiot and told jokes about him. I was unjust. He proved absolutely right. At forty, the critics and the public somehow realized that these experiments with different stylistic elements created a unique effect. I was never a mere imitator. And I never feared the influence of many kinds of poetry. I was lucky at that time in my life because I could translate such different poets as Geoffrey Chaucer and Allen Ginsberg, Dylan Thomas and John Donne,

just to mention my English-language poets. As I approached fifty, I was suddenly awarded prizes. I realize now the timing was quite good. Thanks to my background, I hope I may survive these prizes, and even this more or less late success, such as it is.

In any case, success doesn't concern me. I am happy about it; but that's all. It has nothing to do with my work. I'm only in pursuit of my story, of the war-like times in life, and their significance. I hope to send a message worth sending to the next generation.

I hope it's not the message, but something that can be attached to such a message. I must go back to that child, and to those four weeks in the cellar. The craziest thing of all was that life at that time and under those circumstances was somehow, in some extraordinary way—I hate to say it—beautiful. There is something in us strong enough to cope with the worst.

My heritage is not a question of religion. I have a curious attitude about that. During adolescence I fought bitterly with my mother. Later she became fond of my wife and for her sake tried to accept me. When she became a grandmother, she was crazy about that, and somehow the family peace was restored. But even then, I thought, I am my father's son; I identify with his heritage.

Then my mother had a brain tumor. She had an operation and I visited her in the hospital. Her head was shaved and I realized her blond hair was white with age. I saw myself lying on her bed; it was my face on the white pillow. I realized I had been foolish not to grasp the duality, that I cannot distinguish between them. Sensitivity, perceptiveness, the cultured part of my talent comes from my father; but the stubborn, struggling, warrior-like drive for survival—that is hers. Even now, when I comprehend, I can't say which is more important, because one without the other just wouldn't have worked.

My poems, whether they derive from my childhood or not, tell a Hungarian story. Although my approach to writing and my account is personal, it's also Hungarian, as in the disparity that existed between my parents and for me. My father thought he was Hungarian, but he was considered only a Jew. My mother also thought she was Hungarian, but she was merely proletarian. As their inheritor, I remain here with the complexity of my questions. ❁

George Szirtes

Within, Beyond and Under

Remembering Ottó Orbán

The death of a friend who is also a remarkable writer is both a private and a public loss. Even within the private sphere you are aware of the life led beyond, or even under, the friendship.

Beyond the friendship lies the world of books, influences, reputations: the whole of the vast part-commercial, part-masonic and part-angelic mirage of Parnassus with its higher and lower slopes, on which the friend has as an as-yet-unsettled place, where literary mountaineers make and strike camp, and on which, if you yourself are a writer, you too may be situated (if only you could see yourself, find yourself or be assured of anything at all). This part of your friendship extends outside the door even as you are speaking, drinking and exchanging pleasantries. The magic mountain of beyond is what has brought you together in the first place.

But magic? mountain? Even as I weave this little *mappa mundi* for myself I am aware that it is too pretty, too cute, for Ottó, the least mythopoeic of poets, who, in "Verdi in Old Age" wrote: "I'll fart you the *Dies Irae*, / everyday life is the key to everything", and who, in "The Choice", imagined himself as a Japanese businessman weighing up options based on efficient market research. Out there, beyond the windows of friendship, there is no magic mountain only multifarious everyday life, the hard material business of survival that does not deal in allegories or romances. The world beyond is its own brutal truth, and we—Ottó and I—met, not because I had flown like an angel to the call of some literary trumpet on the peak of a mountain, but because I had received some money from a public fund in London to visit Budapest in April, 1984 and because the Hungarian branch of PEN had rung a few available writers and editors and prevailed on them to gather in a small conference room in Vörösmarty tér in order to meet a

George Szirtes's

Selected Poems (1976–1996) was published by Oxford University Press in 1996.

His latest collection, *An English Apocalypse*, was published by Bloodaxe in 2001.

creature they had never heard of but who might be of some interest or use to them at some stage. Later, in the course of that same visit, on a general invitation, I called in at the offices of *Kortárs* where Ottó was then an editor, and so, from that time onwards, over the years, aeroplanes, buses and all the other forms of public transport, facilitated meetings with coffee, with meals and with glasses of wine, and we moved seamlessly into the world of friendship and families (Juli, Clarissa, your children Kati and Eszter, and our children Tom and Helen) without ever quite forgetting, or ever wanting to forget, the world beyond which set the conditions for all our meetings.

Under the friendship though, moves the mysterious submarine engine of creation. Under the friendship there were mysterious reasons and needs that drew me to Hungary and generated the raw material of my poems. Under the friendship lay the great organic machinery of Ottó's own drives and perceptions whose mechanism produced the phenomenon of his poetry, a poetry where *"the orange malleable lava of the day before yesterday / is hardening to a dark basalt grey that one might study, / and the dumb snow falls like lint on the open wound of the world"* ("The Snows of Yesteryear"), and where, *"under the tongue the god deposits the shema as if it were a simple memo, and where the poet spits the millennium in small balls of paper back at the world"* ("The Golem"). Because the engine is hidden and because we only see what it produces, we can never really know it: nor is it, we feel, our business to know it. Do we really want to spend time in the kitchen of the restaurant, or the engine room of the ship? The engine of the poem is rustier, oilier, more archaic and more makeshift than we like to remember. It is more like Yeats' *"foul rag and bone shop of the heart"* than like the clothing department of Harrods; more like a cobwebbed old Meccano set through which mice scurry than like the design of the latest Formula-1 Ferrari.

All too true. This is old knowledge. Even dressing it up in images lends it a false glamour. Under the life of our friendship, which was affectionate but occasional, undemonstrative, rarely backed up by correspondence and not always fully relaxed (but how could it be in the tragically deteriorating conditions of Ottó's illness, given my awareness of my lack of easy authority in Hungarian, and my fear of tiring him by switching between two languages—and then the guilt, always the uncomfortable guilt, of the awareness of awareness); under this life, the engine of the poems was going into overdrive. There was little on the surface to show it, but one could feel a certain juddering and would know that, under the slow waves, there was an extraordinary fever of production under way.

Romantic images again: the mountain and the ocean. I am in danger of mixing metaphors. I have said that Ottó was the least mythopoeic of poets, and yet, in some respects this is not quite accurate. There is a version of the mythopoeic process whereby the poet transcends the poem. It happened with Sylvia Plath in some manner. The submarine engine finds itself at the top of the mountain just

as the figure between grows thinner, cracks, vanishes or blows up in a spectacular form of self-sacrifice to the process of self-making. But this is not what Ottó did: his poems are not attempts to recreate himself as an isolated, chosen spirit but, from the beginning to the very last poems, an instinctive project in which autobiography acts not as the exemplary life of the Romantic Hero, but as the strange, burning, attenuated life of Everyman. This project takes enormous energy, wit, fury and compassion, all of which Ottó possessed to a remarkable degree.

Under the friendship, it was this I sensed and was shaken by. From within the friendship, there remains a lovely little drawing he did for me inside one of his inscribed books which showed Britain and Hungary on a crude map, and above it a cloud bearing the legend: YOU.

Beyond the friendship there is the point at which his poems opened their doors to me: it was when I realised something apparently dry and technical about his use of metrics, the way they freed the tongue to strike, gallop and mourn. Through the doors I saw a version of swaggering comedy that led by a series of twists and jolts into tragic vision. The series of fifteen songs he wrote near the end of his life demonstrate this stretch at its virtuosic extreme, its epigrammatic, full feminine rhymes reminiscent of Kosztolányi but speaking out of darkness, understanding and despair.

Yet not despair: the comic ingenuity of these poems is the equivalent of someone turning fifteen triple somersaults over a precipice. The man who can do that, whatever his suffering, however bleak his vision, is nobody's loser. And that's how he seemed to leave life too, not in a slow lingering descent but in one neat somersault. 🍀

Bruce Berlind

Ottó

I first met Ottó Orbán sometime in the late 'seventies or early 'eighties. My sense of him from the beginning was of a man who knew the ways of the world and was wryly amused by them. Only later did I learn—less from his demeanour than from what he wrote about his formative years—that the wry amusement was, in part at least, a hard-won dodge to live with some painful, unhealed wounds. The basic facts are by now well known: that his Jewish father was beaten to death during a forced march between concentration camps; that his poverty-stricken mother placed him for a time in what he termed a “Dickensian boarding school for war orphans,”¹ how he was traumatised by the air raids over Budapest; and that a decade later he required hospitalisation in a psychiatric clinic. But the pain was not yet over. In the mid-to-late 'eighties he was stricken by a rare form of Parkinson's Disease that became progressively worse for the remainder of his life. It took the form of violent, almost continuous spasms that incapacitated him for a normal life. After 1988, he wrote me, “I travel mainly between my armchair and my PC, making the Fates (and my colleagues) angry with the rapidly growing number of my books.” (1994)

But even as the pain of his disease was increasing, so was his recognition as one of the best poets of our time. This elated him and fuelled both his energy and his sense of irony: “God is chasing me [with] a creative horde of his angels, I am writing like crazy, have finished two new volumes of poems, a book of essays, survived a grim winter and two series of long lasting infusions in a day-time hospital, and most recently won the Kossuth Prize... I was on the TV,

¹ All quotations attributed to Orbán are from his correspondence with me.

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a flaming spirit chained to a wreck, a guy knocking with his newly got silver-headed stick on the marble floor of the Parliament Building's Great Hall. Shaking hands, champagne, speeches, cables, guests..." (1992). And the honours kept coming: ... "in 1993, I [was] elected member of the Széchenyi Academy of Letters and Fine Arts, which is closely connected to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. You see, that's what I really am: an undercover Albert Einstein who receive[s] a lot of invitation cards day by day which he must throw away again and again because he is unable to sit for two or three hours at a meeting or something like that. *Thrift, thrift, Horatio!* Working at home, taking care of my flowers on the balcony of our fourth floor city flat, that's my new life style." (1994). When I wrote him that my wife was suffering from a herniated disc, he replied: "Please, give my best regards and sympathy to Jo Anne. I know what ruptured disc means, [I'd] been a Disc Jockey too some years ago riding like [a] devil on my own spine." (1995). And this, where even the wit is painful: "There is a war in my home, my illness and me are fighting for each square inch of my body. The latest reports bring news about my attacked hands. Some burning nerves or whatever coming from my spine." (1997).

A word about our book, *The Journey of Barbarus*, which was published in 1997. Originally, the manuscript was absent for the first section, now subtitled "Travel Documents." Although most (perhaps all) of the poems had appeared in Hungarian, there had been no book with that title; and while a book of 1993, *Útkereszteződés Minneapolisban* (Minneapolis Intersection) was devoted to Ottó's "American" poems, he was especially anxious, after the times he had spent here, and the importance of those times to him, to have a book published in America. The title was his, as were the contents and their arrangement. My job, in addition to making the translations, was to interest a publisher. When that finally happened, the publisher had reservations. He read the American poems as objective accounts and failed to understand why they were important to Orbán. He missed what can be summed up as personal warmth. I sent the letter on to Ottó, commenting that I would be entirely sympathetic if he asked me to terminate negotiations. His response was long, and I shall quote what seem to me the most revealing parts.

I can't agree with him, of course. I have exactly 1001 arguments against him. Let us see just one: what he is seeking in every poem, in vain, he states, the vulnerable human element[,] is implied in the entire composition as a whole. My impersonal way, my Jamesian Professor style—that is my intellectual sanity and sensitivity I tried to preserve during the endless period of 40 years of Communist Rule. Living in an ill-fated, crippled and misinformed small country a more or less clever intellectual is predestined to adore a stable and strong empire. I, on the contrary, wanted to find my personal way, to discover what I think of America. It was quite a pleasant surprise to understand I love it—our best choice among the bad ones on this earth. If this is not a personal approach, what is?... He is simply not right.

But then, in what is a characteristic acknowledgment of opposites—what is in fact a major strategy of his aesthetic as a poet—Ottó continues:

And yet, in a curious way, he is. Here in Hungary the audience knows me and my story. All those fine details of a Nineteenth Century Gothic novel which I must entitle *My Life*... And now they are listening to the ageing poet's daily struggle with his incurable illness, as between two attacks he feeds poems into his oldish PC... A rather human story, I dare say. And all that is completely unknown for the possible American reader. Let's cut it short. My offer: a new opening chapter of six poems [there were finally eight] on personal matters, entitled *Travel Documents*. All the poems are among my best and none of them was published in English so far.

It was a brilliant solution: the additional poems provided a biographical background, and consequently a prefatory rationale, for his life in America. (I must add that the superb roughs of these poems were made by the Orbáns' daughter Katalin, who was then a graduate student at Rutgers University.)

Our final meeting was in late May of 1995, when my wife and I had dinner at the Orbáns' apartment with their two daughters and our mutual friend, Miklós Vajda. Just before we sat down at the table, Ottó took a medication which immediately overcame his uncontrollable, spastic movements for the duration of dinner. Afterwards he was clearly exhausted, and we soon said goodbye. But it was at that final meeting that he gave me a new poem which he asked me to translate: "*N.N.Á. az égben.*" (Á.N.N. in Heaven, see *HQ* 140 for the translation.) N.N.Á. was of course Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Orbán's early mentor and the first Hungarian poet I'd ever translated. She had died in 1989, and the fact that I still felt her loss (and still do) made my work on Ottó's poem all the more strange and moving. As I wrote him that August, "Working on the poem has been eerie. Over and over I'd say to myself 'Now what does she mean by this?' or words to that effect—and then the circuitry would straighten out: 'BUT THERE'S NO SHE—OTTÓ WROTE THE POEM.' But it happened again and again. This must attest to an uncanny accuracy in your resurrecting Ágnes—pictorially, but more important is how her mind and sensibility moved, or might have in the circumstance." And Ottó's response: "It's just great. I've resurrected poor Ágnes, you have resurrected me. It's an enterprise. The Everlasting Spirit Distillery." (1995). I'll drink to that. •

Ádám Bodor

The Smell of Prison

Responses to Zsófia Balla

(Extracts)

Part 2

So between 1952 and 1954 you spent two years in jail. Where exactly?

The first two months in the underground lockup of the Cluj Securitate headquarters on Majális Street. This, to me, was rather significant. I was born a few houses away, in the Charité Hospital. And on that street, which wound its way up a hill, stood our family home.

You are referring to a neighbourhood of fine homes and gardens, one of the most beautiful in Cluj.

It was that, yes. But the location of our house turned out to be our misfortune. Next to it was a handsome, not very large government building with a sizeable garden behind it. The building had always housed top agencies and offices. In 1949, when the state security organisation broke away from the Ministry of Interior and became an independent department, and the principal law-enforcement agencies, the political and the regular police, went their separate ways, the "Firm" had its eye on this structure and made it its headquarters. But the building's location, scale and design made it unsuitable as a place of detention, interrogation and torture—especially at a time when wholesale arrests were taking place all over the city. In such a quiet, residential neighbourhood, screams could

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be heard several blocks away. What is more, the building faced a main thoroughfare, used to get to the city's three important landmarks: the botanical garden, the planetarium, and the lunatic asylum. All around there were tidy apartment houses and well-maintained, stylish villas that still had the air of old, bourgeois Cluj about them. But these people hankered after this location; they wanted to house their terror organization right here. To move in and create the right conditions for their work, the Securitate expropriated the neighbouring houses, laying claim to four or five dwellings on either side of the main building. Residents were also forced out of the apartment house across the street. Flats were converted into offices, and a number of high-ranking officials moved into the area. Because so much property was now in the Firm's possession, the configuration of the various lots changed. Fences were torn down and individual gardens stripped of all their charm. The backyards of the former family homes became one large, amorphous track of land. They trampled flower beds underfoot, destroyed lawns, rooted out beautiful shrubbery—remade the quiet, affluent middle-class neighbourhood in their own image.

In our garden alone, nine pines were cut down, as well as a birch, a beautifully slender ash tree, three chestnuts and two huge lindens. Oh, and the arborvitæ by the garden gate. Actually, I had a chance to take stock of the barbaric destruction when, already under arrest, I was suddenly allowed to take a short walk in our former home. Not that I did this on my own initiative. After the official investigation, as a closing act, a few of us, those who took part in the illegal dissemination of leaflets, were sent out to what had been gardens, handed a sheaf of leaflets, and told to reenact our crime. The Firm's photographers stood behind scaffolds snapping pictures. They had to prod us at first, as we kept milling about rather awkwardly, and then put on a pathetic performance, more of a parody. Like farmers sowing seed, we scattered the leaflets with broad, sweeping motions. Now and then a slip of paper was caught by the wind, whereupon an alert and shocked agent leapt up and ran after it, in case the gust blow it beyond the fence into a neighbor's yard, or—a dreadful prospect—out into the street, where with their own busy hands they had already collected them once.

Ever since we were forced out of our house, I had an intense desire to return, to be back in the shady garden, the scene of my childhood. And now I suddenly found myself within the confines of my parental home, the exact place where my life had begun, at the very starting point. The setting was more or less the same, but, stripped down and tastelessly done over, it had become cold and inhospitable. I could actually peer into what had been my nursery—I did have a proper childhood, you know—but all I saw inside were strange, dark pieces of furniture. Disconcertingly alien smells came through the open window. It rarely happens to anyone, anywhere, I suppose, that the scene of one of the low points in his life coincides with that of his fondest childhood memories. To repeat, I end-

ed up in that garden not because it had once been mine, but as a result of an improbable happenstance, a cynical quirk of fate. And no one but I knew this then.

This place became doubly the wellspring of my conscious life. Everything I saw there told me that our immediate world, the space my parents and I once inhabited, had been permanently altered. Those grubbed out trees would never grow again; no one could move back into these houses without fear and revulsion. Within a short time, everything had gone to pot, and no force in the world could reverse that. My life would never turn out the way it had been imagined here, in this house. The past had been cancelled out, and now something else was coming into being. I again stood at the starting point. It was at once a devastating and chastening moment; as much as it stirred me, it also calmed me. Whatever was going to happen to me from here on, I would have to learn to survive it. I began to suspect that if things went on this way, I might not become foreign minister, after all.

Where were you first confined as prisoner?

After the pre-trial interrogation, we were all taken to a detention centre inside the Cluj city jail. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I had no idea that in the heart of my hometown there was a large house of correction, one that met all the requirements of such an institution, including certain romantic expectations. It looked exactly like prisons in the movies: a huge, glass-roofed hall with stretched-out wire netting, several tiers of circular galleries lined by cell doors, and bars, bars everywhere. The appropriate background noises were also in evidence. Our entrance, for instance, was accompanied by the clatter of wooden shoes, the clinking of metal doors, commands, shouts.

And everywhere, a pervasive yet indefinable emanation—the smell of prison. An added atmospheric touch, this smell made the place, and our situation in it, real. Wherever you looked, at a particular thing or person, whether jailbird or turnkey, it seemed to be coming from that one. Its true nature would be difficult to describe to anyone who was never there. It was probably the combination of many smells, from the miasmatic stench of the mops and the delousing powder to the overpowering stink of the truly horrible slop buckets. And underneath it all, the exhalation of humiliated, rejected, vanquished men, the unmistakable smell of fear, a little bit from each and every one who had ever spent time in this jail. I am haunted by it still; it's there in my nostrils when I least expect it.

Who were your prison mates?

If you are interested in names, I can no longer give you an accurate answer, I am afraid. The first two floors were set aside for common criminals—thieves, for instance, who from the point of view of the authorities were there for minor, in-

significant offenses, and who could therefore move more freely within the prison walls. They were entrusted with the household chores—they did the washing and cleaning, and helped out in the kitchen. Running up and down the passageways in their prison stripes, they demonstrated with each practiced motion just how familiar they were with prison routine. On the third floor, where the political prisoners were held, it was always quiet. In my cell—#26—there were four bunk beds shared by ten inmates; several of the beds slept two. My neighbors for the most part were silent and sullen, long past the initial shock of being there. One of them, Stefan Traian, a kind-hearted Romanian peasant, told me in a whisper, right after introducing himself, that he was completely innocent. Naturally, I believed him. The poor man couldn't come to terms with the fact that he was behind bars, and was deeply ashamed of having been charged with a political crime. He still wore peasant moccasins, and in his free time, when he wasn't busy praying, he tried out new ways of lacing them. His weekends were taken up with religious devotions. On Sundays, around mass time, he hummed parts of the Orthodox liturgy with a secret glimmer of hope in his eyes. Among my other cellmates there wasn't one but two Romanian colonels, one of them an old-fashioned, proud, dignified gentleman (one didn't often meet this type in real life), and the other, a former military judge, who during the war years had been the governor of the Aiud penitentiary, the prison that at the time held the newly convicted members of the Iron Guard. Another cellmate, who shared the former governor's bed, was an Iron Guard leader in the flesh (skin and bones was more like it), a man who through an ironic twist of fate had spent time in the very prison run by his present bunkmate. Violent hatred flared up between these two. They hissed and spat at each other like two furious tomcats. I wouldn't have been surprised if at night they had reached over under the coarse blanket and proceeded to scratch each other. But the beds were assigned by the prison administration, and such forced cohabitation couldn't be changed on a whim, or on the bases of likes and dislikes. During my stay, my cellmates kept changing, but there were always interesting characters among them. I came across diplomats, spies, and men who'd do anything for money. Our cell had a southern exposure and was therefore quite light with a real window that we could open whenever we wished, so we were able to enjoy the fresh air and, on bright days, the sunshine. Compared to the subterranean warrens of the Securitate building, our accommodation here was more like a guest house.

We spent exactly six months in the Cluj city jail, waiting for our trial to get underway. From our cell window, over the roofs of Attila Street, we could make out the pines of Feleki Heights, and also look into the courtyard of the neighbouring army barracks. There was never much movement there, no drill of any sort; we saw only soldiers playing ball now and then, or stretching out lazily on a bench, listening to music. From morning to night, Romanian folk music blared from loudspeakers fastened to trees and walls, alternating with military marches

and rousing Communist songs. I can still hum these songs. For six months, this slice of reality represented the world to us.

One morning I noticed a woman standing by the barrack wall. She stood in a spot that had the best view of our window. I kept staring at her, wondering what on earth she was doing there. After a while, she began to wave to me. To make her happy, I waved back. And a good thing I did—she was my mother. When I was arrested, my glasses were left behind in the mountains. I am so nearsighted, I recognized her only by her walk. When she got tired of waving, you see, she sadly began to walk away.

On the morning of our trial, we woke up to funeral music. It filled the early-morning twilight with sorrowful foreboding. Apparently, our jailers were hoping that by daylight, grief would penetrate the deepest recesses of our souls. Listening to even deeper prompts, we quickly figured out who the great departed must be. On our way to the courthouse, one of the guards whispered to us without visible emotion, though to our very great satisfaction, that the Great Teacher of the Nations had passed away. The terrific news notwithstanding, we each received a five-year sentence that day.

Could minors be given such stiff sentences?

Yes. And not only in Romania but evidently in the rest of the socialist world. Wherever juvenile delinquents could pose a danger to the state, a citizen from the age of fifteen was responsible for his political acts. In the eyes of Romanian law, a fifteen-year-old was a politically mature person and could therefore be tried as an adult. A case in point was a fifteen-year-old boy I met in the Gherla prison. He was a sweet country kid who felt like constructing a kite and with that in mind, ripped out several yards of telephone wire from a line that ran through his village. Out of ignorance, as it happened, for that type of wire was too heavy to send up a kite. The poor boy could not use the stolen wire for anything, so he rolled it up and hung it on a nail outside the stable. It was found later by nosy investigators. It's also true that nobody in the area could make a telephone call until they replaced the missing wire. Which, given the conditions prevailing in the country at the time, must have taken months. The members of the tribunal, mature men, all of them, trained in the law, sentenced this boy to five years in jail for planning and carrying out an act of sabotage. And in all probability he served out his sentence. Sometimes I wonder if the universally admired Marxist philosopher, who right about this time made the startling discovery that the very worst form of communism was still better than the best type of capitalism, had ever heard of such cases. From a legal point of view, of course, no objection can be raised to the culpability of a minor. In a way, we were flattered that they considered us adults. It was reason enough to transfer us to Fort Martinuzzi in Gherla, one of the more notorious prisons in the country.

In Transylvania the name of the town stood for its prison, and the conditions there.

Quite apart from the classification, severity and duration of one's sentence, Gherla was in fact a penal colony, and—I assure you—a far more cruel place than its reputation may have led people to believe. My father's younger sister, who was a teacher of literature and my favourite aunt, lived in Gherla. I respected and loved her dearly, and visited her often, so the prison exterior—she simply called it "the fort," tactfully avoiding a reference to its function—had long been familiar to me. Very familiar, in fact, because my aunt lived right across the street from the "fort".

The prison complex consisted of structures built in three different periods (the baroque one must have been beautiful in its day) and included a huge, wildly overgrown park with a small prison graveyard. It was surrounded by a twelve-foot-high wall complete with watchtowers and armed soldiers on sentry duty. At long last I had a chance to see all this from the inside. In the prison yard, where there was even an ancient gallows, our group was welcomed by Warden Goiciu himself. He began by pointedly reminding us that he knew inmates who even after their term was over continued to enjoy the state's hospitality. So we shouldn't delude ourselves with the false hope that we could diligently count the days and months, and when they were up, we could simply walk out the front gate. There was a charming little cemetery here, full of crumbling skeletons... He was a particularly ferocious beast with fang-like teeth, though at this point we did not take his words too seriously. As far as the prison cemetery was concerned, we said to each other with a chuckle, it was surely the burial mound of the unknown warden, which one day would make a touching addition to that graveyard.

We arrived on Easter Monday, a splendid day in spring, feeling vigorous and optimistic. When one of the prison guards happened to inquire what we had done to end up in jail so young, we gave ambiguous, flippant answers. Laughably enough, we would say, we were sentenced to a couple of years, except we were not the ones who were going to serve the sentence, but the individuals whom we shall pick for that honour. The baffled guards just stared at us. But as time went by—with each passing hour, I would say—our good mood and youthful joviality dissipated, until our initial high was all but gone. After a few days, the routine of prison life, the cold reality of walls and bars began to make it clear to us that this was a self-contained, timeless world utterly different from the one we had left behind—a place where our previous experience was of no use to us. Almost nothing we had taken for granted in our relatively conventional life outside the prison walls applied here. The unlimited power, resolve and ruthlessness of our jailers were reflected in the callous indifference and iron discipline that reigned within these historic walls, and all this was epitomised by the ubiquitous presence of that half-beast, half-human creature: the prison

guard. We had to consider ourselves fortunate that we stayed in Transylvania and were not shipped off to one of the prisons in the Romanian hinterland—though it should be fairly clear by now that Gherla was not in any sense a friendly place. Even for me, who knew this charming little town and its surroundings, Gherla became extra-territorial, lying outside the boundaries of the known world, totally alien. Experiencing an absurd reality inside meant consigning everything else to the realm of the imagination, or simply suppressing all that lay outside, rendering it abstract and unreal. We arrived here full of self-confidence, in the certain knowledge that we would survive the ordeal. For a while we went on chuckling and sniggering, but then it slowly dawned on us that we were in a penal colony.

Did anyone have a breakdown, or suffer from depression?

No, none of us did. Even though there was nothing remotely encouraging about our situation—if only because we soon learned that the bloody period called political reeducation had ended only a few months before our arrival, and it could be restarted at any time. Those who only lately became fellow prisoners, the silent ghosts we saw staggering about, were survivors of unspeakable horrors. The bloodstains were still there on the walls. I am reluctant to talk about these things, not being really competent. I did not experience all the horrors of this awful period, only the threat of their recurrence. At most, I am one of those who first learned what had really happened. Most people still know very little of what went on in Romanian prisons between 1949 and 1952.

Still, can you tell us a little of what you know?

I'll try, though only briefly, because I might go too far afield. In the first weeks of compulsory isolation, those of us who arrived in Gherla on the same day stayed in one huge room, but as soon as the quarantine period was over, prisoners were assigned to one of the workshops, either to the day or the night shift, and told which cells they were going to occupy. A large table laden with files and other papers was wheeled into this common room, and we saw several men in brown overalls and cloth caps bustling about. The fact that they were all dressed the same led us to believe that they, too, were prisoners. But it occurred to us that they must be doing confidential work, recording secret information perhaps, and therefore had to be insiders as well. Fully aware of their importance and relative power, they treated newcomers with haughty arrogance. They were prisoners all right, kapos, I should say, members of the in-house security, with faces that were not in the least confidence-inspiring. There they were: Juberian and Calciu and Reck and Hentes, all of them commissars of in-house security, and all recruited from among the prisoners.

I was assigned to the locksmith shop, put on the day shift, and given a bed in a large dormitory—Number 76—on the third floor. When I left the large common room with my few belongings, Juberian came after me in the corridor and knocked the cap off my head. I bent down to pick it up, and he gave me a good kick in the rear. A guard who stood nearby saw it happen. But when I turned to him and asked: "What's this man got against me?" he stared at me: "Why, what did he do to you? I didn't see a thing." Then he turned respectfully to the kapo: "You have any idea, Mr. Juberian, what this kid wants, starting up with you like that?" "Let him be," said Juberian, "he'll have plenty of time to tell us what's bugging him. One of these days, I'm going to have a little chat with him." He was a squat, dark-complexioned man with blazing eyes. I'd still recognize him if—Heaven forbid—his ghost were to greet me on the street.

There were thirty or forty prisoners in Number 76, all looking terribly emaciated. It wasn't easy to make friends with them. After my first meal, one of them did address me, in Hungarian. He was a young man, an ethnic German from Timișoara named Egon Hutzl, who nevertheless spoke perfect Hungarian. I told him right away about the strange incident in the corridor. He turned serious and immediately lowered his voice: "You've got a problem, boy, if he has his eyes on you already." He went on to say that Juberian was the chief kapo, the head of the prison security, once an Iron Guard student leader and, later, a leading member of the group that organized and carried out the "reeducation programme". His hands were drenched in blood. He drove a number of his fellow prisoners to their deaths here in Gherla. "But how could he do all that if he is a prisoner himself", I asked Hutzl in total bewilderment. We stood by a window, far from the others. As if he knew he had little time, Hutzl quietly began talking again. In precise detail, step by step, like a good teacher, he told me the bloody story of the reeducation madness.

What exactly was meant by "re-education"?

An inquisition. It may be hard to explain and just as hard to understand, but I'll try my best. For the Romanian Communist leaders, it wasn't enough to imprison their real or imagined enemies for various lengths of time—they wanted to get rid of them once and for all, and break their will. In the Pitest prison in 1949, at the suggestion of the then commander of the Securitate, the young inmates, mainly Romanian students with Iron Guard sympathies, formed the Association of Conscientiously Communist Prisoners. One of the chief aims of this organization was the reeducation of their fellow prisoners. The members of the group were given a free hand, and could use any and all means, including physical torture of course, to extract confession after confession from people serving long prison terms, thereby making them accomplices of the new rulers. These henchmen, who, as I said, had been part of the intellectual elite of the Iron Guard, ac-

cepted the assignment not only in the hope of receiving favours and privileges unattainable by the others; most of them also figured—the enticing possibility was held out to them—that their prison sentences might be reduced, and, what's more, on the hoped-for day of their early release, they would exchange their coarse prison stripes for the blue-braided uniform of the security police. In very short order, they got down to business. The particulars of the confessions, extracted under duress and usually containing accusations against close friends and relatives of the prisoner, were passed on to the Securitate. But the real objective was to destroy the individual's sense of his own self. The torture, applied in stages, went on until the chosen victim broke down completely, denied his past, his family, his beliefs, his faith—he was “reeducated,” in short. Which meant that by endlessly reviling himself, he proved that he'd become completely, abjectly submissive. Then, he was given the task of reeducating one of his cell-mates, who was often his closest friend, a relative, a fellow sufferer, whom he had to subject to the same tortures that had been inflicted on him before. By now he knew what he had to do. Only those former victims did not turn into henchmen who died in time, under torture. They were aware of being both martyrs and executioners, so their personality simply dissolved; all feelings of solidarity and morality were gone. In 1951, this entire murderous contingent was transferred to the Gherla prison. Here everything continued, or rather began anew. Gradually—since by then, as can be imagined, no more useful information could be gotten out of these wretches—the beatings and tortures became an end in itself. The assemblage of young convicts, through an odd sort of natural selection, was divided into two groups: the torturers and the tortured. And the roles could be reversed at a moment's notice. Only those who directed this charade, the leading henchmen, remained the same. There is no proper expression for what happened other than the hackneyed phrase: all hell broke loose. The prisoners committed horrible massacres among their own. Those who directed and supervised the infamous reeducation programme were given such liberties as executioners, they gained so much power, that the guards themselves were unable to interfere; even they submitted to the kapos' will. Prodding starved victims to eat their own excrement was an act of kindness; usually they were made to eat the “reeducators'”. Jumping up and down a tubercular prisoner's chest was a kind of warm-up exercise. During torture sessions, the only thing the victim could do for nourishment was to lick blood and faeces off the cement floor. And if they were offered a piece of dry bread crust, their tormentors pushed it down their throats with a broomstick. Many died as a result of these heinous acts. In the morning corpses wrapped in blankets were rolled toward the prison morgue.

When I entered the Gherla prison in the spring of '53, the horrors known as reeducation had stopped being a regular feature of prison life, though the in-house security, led by Reck and Juberian, together with a whole network of

informers, were still in place. The prison administration was run by the same thugs.

The information about what had been going on filled me with terrible anxiety. On my first workday, I was mulling over these horror stories, and could hardly wait for the day to end so I could talk a little more with Egon Hutzl. But this didn't happen. The conversation I had had with him the night before was considered such a flagrant violation of prison regulations—obviously he'd been reported—that that very day he was removed to another building, a prison within the prison, and placed in solitary confinement. According to the rules, the punishment for such a breach of discipline could be a few months of isolation, in addition to which, years could be added to one's sentence. It was another boy from Timișoara, Edömér Szilágyi, who called this to my attention, advising me not to talk to anyone for a while; I was being watched. You may think once you're in prison, you are done with surveillance and denunciations—after all, you're already locked up. It wasn't so simple. Everyone dreaded being sent to solitary. My life in Gherla began with this deadly fear. I never again saw my courageous friend, Egon Hutzl. But thank God, I never again had to confront Juberian, either.

What happened to these murderers?

Not too long after we got to Gherla, Juberian was removed, and we heard later from the guards that along with a few other, similarly inclined chums of his from Pitești, he was sentenced to death by a military tribunal. But this information turned out to be false. They were indeed tried, and he and many of his friends were executed, though the trial, in a regular military court and not a general court-martial, took place a year later, in 1954, in Bucharest. A month after their sentences were handed down, Juberian and fifteen of his associates were executed in Jilava prison. Apparently, the prison guards knew the outcome of the trial beforehand. So Calciu the "Clerk," Hentes the "Catcher," and a few of the other sadistic inquisitors were gone, but Reck the "Furrier," remained with us for a while longer. As a mark of his privileged status, Reck wore a black fur collar—hence his nickname. While I was there, he beat to death an elderly prisoner named Fluieras, a former member of parliament. In February of 1954, in a general purge, the most prominent reeducators were singled out, including Bărboșu, the prison doctor, a civilian, and they ended up where they had sent their victims before: in solitary confinement, in chains. They were later tried, and a few of them may have shared Juberian's fate; I doubt if they were ever released. I take that back. Calciu, about whom I don't know if he had personally sent fellow inmates to their deaths, did gain his freedom, for a few years, at any rate. A key figure in the prison atrocities, he was shipped off to Bucharest, as Juberian had been before him, but because they needed his testimony in subse-

quent trials, he wasn't executed along with the other ringleaders. Not only did he stay alive; eventually, he was released. Sometime in the late 70's, while listening to the Romanian broadcast of Radio Free Europe, I learned that to atone for his terrible sins, Calciu enrolled in an Orthodox seminary and had himself ordained as a priest. He became an implacable foe and outspoken critic of the Communist regime, and for this he again landed in jail, though by then he served with all his heart the poor and the downtrodden. Members of the Romanian exile communities in the West prayed for him regularly. All in all, a horrifying story, with demonic, horrifying characters, a few of whom I knew rather well.

It could be something from your own fiction. Is it possible, though, for a reformed murderer to renounce all violence, including violence in the service of utopian ideals, and try meekly to minister to the outcasts of the world?

It is possible, why shouldn't it be? Especially after living through the worst hell imaginable. These monsters, including Calciu, were not born killers; they were turned into murderers. And—though this may not explain anything—almost all of them were educated men. We like to think that intellectuals always have a harder time coming to grips with outrageous acts. Everyone, unless they are born scoundrels, has a dual nature, so there is always a chance for some inner explosion, a true change of heart. A perverse footnote to a perverse age: Calciu's name now figures among the martyrs of that age.

After that inauspicious start, how did you get on in prison?

I began my career in prison as a metal worker. Using an ordinary file for the most part, I had to smooth the rough edges on pieces of wrought iron. It was tedious, exhausting, dehumanising work. And we worked hard twelve hours a day, including Sundays. In time I learned to handle machine tools. Whenever one of my fellow workers let me get close and watch, I tried to learn the tricks of the trade. For a time I worked in the carpentry shop, and eventually ended up in what turned out to be the best place of all: the paint and dye shop. The food in all three shops was god-awful.

Were you able to stay together with your friends throughout?

Oh no. For one thing, only some members of our secret organization ended up in Gherla. And those of us who did were placed in different workshops, in either the day or the night shift, and assigned different cells, so we didn't have a chance to see one another regularly. And it wasn't advisable to walk over to another shop for a friendly chat, because somebody was bound to squeal on you. Even in prison what you dread most is prison itself. That you'd be deprived of

the little freedom you had left, your daily ration would be taken away, and you would end up in solitary confinement. It wasn't a lucky day if on your way to the latrine, which was in the prison yard, you came upon the warden. This beastly man usually walked around with a studded ruler, and if he noticed anyone walking or even hurrying along, he ran after him. People were even more afraid of his assistant, the dreadful Mihalcea, who was the production supervisor. He walked daily through all the shops, barking orders and meting out stiff punishments. (After my release, I did a little snooping around myself, and learned that this scoundrel was known to the ladies in the town as a gracious, courtly gentleman. Some called him Prince.)

Did you think it was lucky that you were able to work in prison?

Definitely. For the underfed inmates work was exhausting, but to stay in an airless cell, on half rations, was even worse. In addition, I was fortunate enough to spend the last months of my incarceration under more favourable conditions. What I did during this time was more like idling, goofing off. In the spring of '54, forced labor in our prison came to an end—temporarily, as it turned out. But then it looked as if the decision was final; the machines were going to be disassembled and carted away. In the morning, prisoners could stay in their cells, the workshops remained silent. Of the approximately eight hundred inmates, only the maintenance crew went off to work: the electricians, the cooks, the bakers—and me. I had the special honour of painting white inventory numbers on the now unused equipment: machines and other tools. In the morning, and not at the crack of dawn, for a change, a guard picked me up, walked me over to the work area and left me there. With a can of paint and brushes, I worked alone in the empty shop. It was not my nimble fingers or my skill at daubing numbers on steel that earned me this special treatment. Shame or no shame, I might as well admit that I was well connected in jail.

How did that come about?

One day, a few months after our arrival in Gherla, I happened to be filing away furiously at a stone-hard piece of iron in the locksmith shop, when one of the prison officials, Sergeant Szócs, came over to me. A non-commissioned officer with a clerk's job, he was a pleasant, modest-looking handyman-type, who walked through the shops wearing an overall over his uniform. He and Mihalcea, the warden's assistant, were in charge of supervising production in the workshops, and work-related matters in general. "How is it going?" he asked me in Hungarian. "All right, I guess," I said with a sigh, "though I have to say these metal pieces are not easy to work with." The soft, empathy-filled look in his eyes warmed my heart, and for a moment our eyes met. This made me

more bold, and I asked quietly, after carefully looking over my shoulder: "Do you happen to know Gábor Bodor, the photographer? He lives here in town." He had to know him. Gherla was a small town, at that time with only one resident photographer. "I know him, yeah," he said under his breath. "He is my cousin," I offered. "Really?" And with that, sensing that things might get a little too intense, he hurried away. A few days later he came up to me again. This line of work was not for me, he said. I should let him know if I'd rather work in another shop. He'd be glad to have me transferred to the paint and dye shop, if I'd like that better. The "painters' studio," in the Martinuzzi wing of the penitentiary, was considered an elite workplace. My cousin's name was not mentioned again, but the next day I was working there, along with Zsiga Palocsay. Johann Mildner, a sign-painter from Braşov and the father of Renate Mildner, a well-known Munich artist, was the "master painter" and Fag Negrescu, a reeducated young man, the shop steward. Two mild-mannered artists from Iasi also worked there, as well as two unskilled labourers. Considering prison conditions in general, this was pleasant company indeed. I got to like the work itself, and acquired a certain amount of professional skill fairly quickly. So when "productive labour" came to an end in prison, and Sergeant Szócs wanted to help, it made sense to give the job of painting inventory numbers to someone who already knew how to handle a paint brush. In spite of where he worked and with whom, Szócs remained a sensitive, intelligent, good-natured man.

Am I to understand there were also Hungarians among the prison guards?

There were quite a few, though I am not filled with much warmth when I think about them now. They were mostly from the lowlands, the village of Szék in particular, where there must have been a tradition according to which the first-born in every family had to sign on as a guard in the Gherla prison—or some such barbaric custom. Theirs is not a particularly attractive calling—a guard, after all, spends half his life in jail. But there is no need to pity them: most of them were mean and nasty, as bad as the goons representing the majority population. They may have been Hungarian, but we detested them all the same. There were exceptions, of course. But someone like Sergeant Szócs, who became my protector, was special, may his memory be blessed forever. It did happen sometimes that a prison guard, out of pity, gave in to his weakness and did small favours for a prisoner. But Szócs took it upon himself to inform my relatives regularly about the state of my health, conveying both good and bad news. (All this came to light after my release, and now, decades later, I think I can safely reveal it.) A piece of good news might be that I didn't die of serum poisoning. By the way, it was strictly forbidden at that time to correspond or have any kind of contact with prisoners. Passing on messages and other information was a serious breach of prison regulations; you could be severely reprimanded or even court-

martialed for it. Szócs, needless to say, had to know all this. The only thing I hold against him is that he got me hooked on smoking. Every time he walked into the workshop and came near my station, he lit up a cigarette. Then, taking it out of the holder, he would leave it on the edge of the table and quickly walk out of the room. I've been smoking, more or less continuously, ever since.

How did your happy days in prison end?

Unexpectedly. With a suddenness that was dramatic. As I mentioned, after they put a stop to forced labor, I was able, through the kindness of Sergeant Szócs, to leave my cell in the morning with my little can of paint and my paintbrushes, and stroll over to the deserted work area. I was given a small notebook that contained the work schedule for that day, or rather a list of the numbered pieces of machinery. I had to find the objects themselves and paint the number on each one. I was in no hurry, I fiddled with the brushes and purposely went about it slowly, to make sure the work would last at least until the end of autumn. Once the cold weather set in, shivering in the unheated rooms wouldn't have been much fun. So I would lounge about and daydream for hours on end sometimes, and just watch the passing clouds, or the birds streaking by below them. September 3, 1954 promised to be another one of these lazy days. And yet—though during my two years of captivity, I didn't once have the feeling that I'd had enough to eat—I couldn't look at lunch that day, and did the unthinkable: I flushed the food down the toilet. But I couldn't have swallowed a single bite. Something was in the air, I didn't know what, but I did sense something. Still, as on other days, after the lunch break, I stretched out on an empty table for a little rest. Then, looking out the window at the yellow prison wall, the endless row of boarded-up windows, I was overcome with a feeling of despair. A whole year was left of my sentence, with the day of freedom still in the remote, unseen distance. I felt I had lost the game; there would be no escape from here. As I said before, it was the third day of September, an unusually hot late summer day, between three and four in the afternoon, the hour of death, when you hear the sound of silence, a hiss slowly blending into the buzz of a fly. In that silence of decay, I suddenly heard the grating sound of the iron gate below. Somebody was running across the empty, gravelled yard, the front door was torn open and that somebody was breathlessly leaping up the stairs, two steps at a time. It was my good friend Endre Delbács, unaccompanied by a guard. He stopped at the door and began shouting furiously: "Come, quick, leave everything, we're going home." "You and your bad jokes," I said. "Come on, they're handing out soap; the barber's waiting. It's real soap." This guy's out of his mind, I thought. Barber? What barber? But by then, a guard was there, too. He could hardly keep up with my friend. "Didn't you hear?" he said. "No more painting. Get your stuff and let's go. The barber is ready for you."

One thing seemed clear: our time in Gherla was over. Maybe they were transferring us to another jail. But then, why the barber? There were prison barbers, one on each floor, but all they did was shave you, and at regular intervals, they gave everyone a close crop—everyone, that is, except the kapos. When the barber showed up in your cell, it was better not to object; it would not have made sense. I for one didn't want to look good for anybody, and wouldn't have noticed if, say, one of the Iron Guard toughs had made advances. It was rumoured that in order to discourage any sort of physical attachment (they couldn't very well castrate everybody), they mixed tranquilizers into our food. According to one well-informed source, sacks of bromide were stored in the kitchen, as well as other pills that dull your sex drive. I had just had my hair cut, so not even a master stylist could do anything with what was left. Still, an officer took me over to the barber, a prisoner, actually, who'd been cutting hair all along, and told him to get rid of the hairs around my neck at least, and then try to give me some sort of hairdo. The agitated officer followed us even to the showers. By then the suspicion began to build even in my skeptical mind: Maybe they *were* serious about letting us out. And sure enough, at the shower door, our street clothes, quickly retrieved from the storeroom, were already laid out. While we were getting ready, three or four grinning guards stood around, envious perhaps that we were about to leave this place and start a new life, while they remained behind, in prison. They were being remarkably considerate, though, seemingly ready to do our bidding, all but carrying us up the stairs to the main reception room. We had no idea what was going on; it took all we had not to burst out laughing. They asked us to sit down, pointing to comfortable leather armchairs, and to our astonishment, even brought us newspapers and magazines, in case we got bored waiting. So many smiling faces, so much understanding, attentiveness, solicitude—an absurd scene, in short. We hardly dared look at one another. The mood turned truly theatrical when Warden Goiciu, wearing all his decorations, entered the room, flinging out his arms and flashing a toothy smile. Among ourselves, we called Goiciu, with childish frankness, Comrade Wild Boar, partly because of his fang-like teeth, but also because he really was a beast. "Dear children," he intoned, "didn't I tell you that you'll soon be going home?" I already mentioned, I think, that two years earlier, Goiciu received us in the prison yard, and screaming like a madman, let us know that our dead bones would rot away within the walls of the prison under his command. We didn't feel like arguing with him now. In the meantime, the number of dignitaries grew. Followed by his entourage and wearing a gray general's uniform, the federal prosecutor, Comrade Alexa himself, arrived. He read out the presidential decree according to which our sentences had been annulled, along with all their consequences affecting civilian life, and our discharge from prison was to take effect immediately. We almost thought he was going to apologise and congratulate us on starting a conspiracy. We were practically kicked out of jail.

But at the gate, I suffered one more indignity. Before the great gate closed behind us, just to make sure, they searched us one more time, and in my pocket they found my striped prison cap—I wanted to take it with me as a souvenir. Stealing from jail? It certainly looked that way. "Hey look," a guard cried out and triumphantly held up the cap, as if to say, these were the sort of people we were letting go. How did it end up in my pocket, he wanted to know. I replied with regained self-confidence, like the free man I now was: "Somebody must have slipped it into my pocket, as a joke—perhaps a guard." He took it away, of course. And to this day I am sorry he did. With this thorn in my heart I walked through the gate.

Who or what was behind this unexpected turn of events?

It's a long story. A true Eastern European tale. My friend Zsiga Palocsay's father, Rudolf Palocsay, was originally a fireman who early on, for reasons known only to him, got disenchanted with his job. He owned a piece of land at the edge of town, on the slopes of Békás Hill, where he planted flowers and fruit trees, and in time became an avid plant breeder, no doubt acquiring some professional know-how along the way. This happened back in the thirties. His passion to improve strains bore fruit, quite literally, in the form of splendid peaches; and before long his flowers, too, appeared in the market. The enterprise took off, and Rudolf's sister, Karola Palocsay, opened a flower shop on Wesselényi Street next to the Hintz pharmacy. Not even the post-war political transformation seemed to discourage him; he continued to prosper. In fact, he was seen as a self-made man, and his lack of schooling rather impressed the proletarians now in power. In early summer, even before the end of the school year, Zsiga had huge peaches in his lunchbox, and in the winter there were shiny Jonathans and Romanian Batul apples. Sometimes he also produced empty shells from his pocket, for his father had new friends now; he went hunting with local party bigwigs and even members of the central *nomenklatura*. His splendid peaches ended up on the tables of the powerful and famous. In the meantime, he kept breeding his plants, his garden was soon declared a research center, he attended consultations and conferences abroad, visited Moscow, where he met the pope of crossbreeding, the great Michurin. And his rise in the world continued: he became a member of the National Assembly, and with his fireman's certificate, a member of the Academy of Sciences. If it was flowers, the name to remember was Palocsay. His gorgeous bouquets were flown to Bucharest; his gladiolas became a virtual status symbol. They were ordered for school celebrations, weddings, party functions. One year there was a big dog show in Cluj, where suspicious dogcatchers in dark suits also put in an appearance. From behind huge gladiola arrangements, they watched and waited for their chance to intervene. In 1954, the authorities felt the time had come to recognize his unquestionable achievements,

and on the August 23rd national holiday, Rudolf Palocsay was to receive the highest state prize.

The man of the hour—I had a chance several times to see this for myself—was a rather strange, dour, puritanical sort. It seemed he kept his emotions for the prominent representatives of the plant world. About his personality, not even his own son, my friend Zsiga, had much good to say. Though even he admitted that in spite of his austere, strait-laced character, his father was a man of unimpeachable integrity. As soon as Rudolf learned that he was going to receive this high honour, he left for Bucharest and immediately asked for an audience with Gheorghiu-Dej, then president of the country and general secretary of the Communist Party. As an academician, a parliamentarian, and someone soon to receive the highest civilian decoration in the land, Palocsay was in a position to ask for a meeting. And as a straightforward, decent man, he had no other choice. When the two met, he quickly presented his problem. His decoration unfortunately was not timely, he said, since his only son was at present serving a prison sentence for a serious political offense. This revelation must have caused some anxious moments for the general secretary. The authorities were clearly negligent in their work, how else could it happen that in the eminent scientific worker's files there was no mention of the fact that his son was a sworn enemy of the existing social order. It is conceivable, of course, that the records kept on such a distinguished citizen had been carefully sanitised, with every incriminating reference assiduously expunged. Gheorghiu-Dej was not a particularly smart man, but he realised right away that he had to make a gesture, or rather, reciprocate Palocsay's. "It's all right, Comrade Palocsay," he told him. "We'll release your son forthwith." Unmoved, Palocsay shook his head. "It wouldn't be right to make an exception. My boy is not alone in this. You don't want to know, Comrade Secretary, how many more there are." If reports of this meeting are to be believed, and why shouldn't they be, the General Secretary withdrew at this point, for a breath of fresh air perhaps; or, feeling squeezed, he may have even placed a call to Moscow. But then he returned, his face beaming: "We'll free the whole gang. But only if you accept the prize." Good old Palocsay continued to object for a while, but in the end agreement was reached. They could notify the Prosecutor General and the Presidium. A few days later, the decree announcing their pardon was published.

After two years in jail, at the age of nineteen, with the smell of prison still in my pores, I was set free. Not a moment too soon, for though I was a grown young man, my knowledge of physical love came only from books or juicy hearsay. In short, I had not yet been with a woman. And, fortunately, not with a man, either. The prison door closed behind me, yet I had this strong feeling that what I had left behind, the sounds and the smells, must never fade from my memory. It's a clichéd phrase, but I have to say it: a new chapter of my life began, though I had a sneaky suspicion that I wasn't in for a joyride.

Were all of you fully rehabilitated?

Supposedly we were. But in reality, it didn't happen. Our legal status remained ambiguous. According to the prosecutor general's statement, our release and the cancelling of the remainder of our prison terms was tantamount to dropping all charges against us. But that sounded too good to be true. It would have meant that the authorities considered the charge of conspiracy itself null and void. Could they have been that generous? Could we have been so wrong about them? We ran right away to the prosecutor's office to get an official statement to this effect, before they changed their minds. And we did receive a brief summary couched in incomprehensible legal language. The fact is that one can gain one's freedom as a result of an amnesty, a presidential pardon, or after a retrial and a brand new verdict. The president of the republic can make a decision about the future status of a convict, but that has no bearing on the legal classification of his offense. Not even in the Balkans did the law consider full restoration of civil rights as proclaimed by the president retroactively binding. We soon found out that at state security, where the most important decisions about people like us were made, they did not take our legal rehabilitation very seriously. Almost all of my friends were first admitted to universities, where they did very well in their first year. But all of them were later expelled on account of their criminal record. It didn't help to whip out the paper issued by the prosecutor's office. The response was a shrug, a wave of the hand, or an ironic smile. Evidently, they received their instructions from a higher authority. Zsiga Palocsay could continue his musical studies at the conservatory, and I, and a few others who with sound instincts chose the theological seminary, were also allowed to stay. But as for the rest, appeals and petitions were to no avail. The authorities were clearly telling us that we had better be careful: this was a one-time show of goodwill, and not a real pardon.

Could the others resume their studies later?

After the requisite number of years had passed, and having gone through the usual legal rigmarole, my friends did have their rights restored. Most of them finished their studies by correspondence while holding down jobs. And they all did excellently. At the urging of people concerned about my future prospects, I, too, turned to the courts, but my petition was found to be without merit and therefore rejected. In the judgment of the court, I had not mended my ways. This, in spite of the fact that at that time I was already a published writer. Maybe this was the problem. I guess they didn't like what I wrote all that much. You should have heard the words I used on the courthouse steps as I was leaving. That, too, is probably recorded somewhere.

As for the certificate we got from the prosecutor's office, I did try to use it once, without much success. In 1962, one of my fellow inmates, who was also a

good friend, applied for a passport to travel to Hungary. He told me to hurry up and do the same. "You're crazy," I said. "Just do it," he insisted, and warned me not to mention anything in the application about having a criminal record. And once I got my passport, I should hop on a train bound for Hungary. He must have been tipped off, I decided. Actually, what he told me had quite an effect on me. I was filled with nostalgia for Budapest. We had lived there between 1944 and 1945, on the corner of Ménesi Road and what is now Bartók Béla Road, and had stayed at that address during the siege of the city. Considering I was only nine at the time, I got to know Budapest pretty well—but then, I have always found my way around in a new city. The tranquil air of the street where we lived, the yellow trams with their open platforms remained vivid memories. And then the six weeks we spent in the air-raid shelter, the terrible spectacle of the ravaged city... Still, I kept dreaming about living in Budapest; I longed for the city. So I went ahead and filed my application for a passport. To my astonishment, within a short time, I received the travel documents. Before I could change my mind, I got on the train and journeyed to Budapest, where I looked up my relatives and stopped in at the famous Anna espresso bar on Váci Street. Twistomania was at its height; the city seemed more vibrant than ever. I was practically euphoric at being able to revisit my old haunts as an adult. But soon after my return, the Firm sent word that they wanted to see me. When I showed up, I was told by an officer that what I had done was a disgrace: I lied on the application form, I misled the authorities, though I could rest assured that the person whose job it would have been to check the information was going to pay dearly for his negligence. As for me, I could be certain of one thing: never again would I be able to travel abroad. "I rather doubt that," I said, and confidently pulled from my pocket a piece of paper I had saved just for this occasion. "Please read this." With a sardonic smile, the officer glanced at the paper, and then with a graceful motion let go of it and watched it drop or rather drift over his desk, and watched, too, as I tried to catch it. The prosecutor's office? Yes, he knew those chaps. Lovely boys, all of them. Funny, too. They could say anything they liked; it was none of their business. I could also keep saying I had no criminal record. So what? Was I or was I not convicted of a crime? What were we talking about then? He would advise me not to press my luck but instead forget about traveling for good. I was one of those people who would never, under no circumstances, be issued a passport. In this one thing they kept their word. In the next ten years, all my requests for a passport were promptly turned down. ■

Translated by Ivan Sanders

(To be concluded)

Ádám Bodor

Dogfights in Dolina, Rotunda and Dobrin

(Short story)

Nikifor Puszta was in the second week of cohabiting with Odessa Serafim in a guard's van near the railway station, and it seemed they were just starting to get close to one another, the thing about to turn serious, when the appeal was posted up in Dólina's station square, on doorways, on house walls, and in its watering holes, a sort of wanted poster with the identikit image of a woman. A price had been put on her head, no small one either, with seventy-five dollars promised for information to whoever put them on her trail. Converted to lei, that amounted to roughly a million and a half, or going on for a quarter billion Ukrainian karbonavets, and even in new forints it meant close to a hundred grand: for that much one could think of driving a bargain over a small team of fighting dogs at Bob Sinetar's breeding kennel.

The leaflet gave the woman no name, nor was it clear why she was wanted, or whether she had done anything at all, but the likeness, smudged though the fresh printer's ink was in places, resembled Odessa Serafim. That is to say nothing about the hair ornament, the Lipovan head-dress, the likes of which was worn by no one else in the district. There were no two ways about it: she was the wanted person.

I was working for Stationmaster Popp at the time, and I know a thing or two about him, including—it so happened—the fact that the advertisement had been produced on his orders. The drawing had been the work of the ladies' hairdresser, Lupe Anies, for the most part, though I can disclose that at the very end, on the trickier bits, such as the eyebrows or the creases around the mouth and at the corners of the nose, I myself lent a hand. We availed ourselves of ordinary cosmetic articles, the mascaras, vanisher and eyeliner pencils that are to be

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A collection of short stories, The Euphrates at Babylon, was published in Britain by Polygon in 1991.

found in the better sort of hairdressing establishment, doing the hatching by fingertip. When it seemed it could be improved no further, it was ready to be reproduced, and a total of fifteen or twenty prints were made of it with an ordinary photocopier.

Besides everything else, Nikifor Puzta was my drinking pal, a friend you could say, which meant that, whenever we had the time, we would play rummy on the steps of the guard's van, have a drink or two in the Flitter-Mouse, the boozier run by Fathers Hermelin and Punga, and often helped one another out in our day-to-day affairs.

On that particular day, for instance, he had to go into the barracks district for consumptives—a part of town that was also known as the Lost Souls' Quarter—in order to drum up patients for community work, in line with Stationmaster Popp's wishes, and it was me who chauffeured him all round the notorious area, from courtyard to courtyard.

Archbishop Teleorman was preparing to pay a visit on the town, and in order to roll out the customary red carpet from the steps of the special train to the Chaika limousine waiting by the kerb, it was necessary to spruce up the vicinity; nor would it have done any harm to have the entire area scoured with lime while they were at it. The archbishop usually travelled by train, then had himself driven in an open-topped eight-seater Chaika, like in a landau, to wherever the visitation was due to take place. It didn't bear thinking that he might be jolted by some surprise, put out of humour by some distressing oversight, the moment he arrived.

If only because Stationmaster Popp had important business with the archbishop. He had taken it into his head to have his daughter canonized, and he wanted to put out feelers to this end. He supposed all it would take to set the ball rolling on getting the child declared as Blessed were one or two bigwigs in the Holy Synod, a few pleasing gifts, trivial tokens of attentiveness—that should pull off the trick. Now the chance had come, the first steps could be taken. It was Archbishop Teleorman, if anyone, on whom much rested, what with his access to the patriarch and his being hand in glove with the metropolitans.

One fine day, years before, when the mountain infantry units pulled out of the district, Stationmaster Popp's daughter had set off after the departing jaegers. At the edge of town, she had sought to cut across the prohibited area of Dolina Meadow, an abandoned shooting range, in order to get to the head of the dust cloud thrown up by the receding column of trucks, and she had simply disappeared. Swallowed up by the earth, anyone would say. And that is literally what had happened: she fell into a bottomless pit.

Nor was she ever found, but in the course of the feverish search for her they had discovered a bunch of huge underground cavities, a whole warren of passages under the meadow. It had turned out—the ancients had possibly suspected as much—that the ground beneath the town was, near enough, one big hole,

so it had to be filled up with something. They had arranged for rubbish from the neighbouring parishes and later from more distant provinces too; then word got round, and large sums of money were promised from abroad to take the refuse off their hands as well. The pits had filled up long ago, but ever more waste just kept pouring in on lorries and railroad freight cars. The reason Dolina is how it is today can be laid at the door of that unknowing young girl. Her name was Eufrozina, by the way.

But Stationmaster Popp knew an awful lot still hung on the archbishop. It would be unfortunate if something were to dampen his spirits no sooner had he arrived. Even what another might take to be an insignificant trifle was capable of blighting the mood of an archbishop, not the cheeriest of beings at the best of times.

Dolina station, however, was a sort of gathering place, with crowds of people dwelling in the waiting room. Benches and window sills were jam-packed with jostling, reclining people, entire families and bands of friends camped out on floors and stairs, and it was no different outside in the open. To top it all, this throng would even attend to the calls of nature, big and little jobs alike, on the spot. Most of them stood around motionless on one leg, gazing blankly into the void, for hours or days on end, and in their midst, like cosy family hearths, fly-blown piles of steaming excrement. With their supreme negligence, their glazed looks, they emanated an air of such boundless indifference that even the Elfrath brothers' henchmen didn't have the nerve to address them. Stationmaster Popp was secretly hoping that even they might be persuaded to budge if the cleaners—as it so happened, tubercular patients in the garb that all of them were forced to wear, with a string of rattling tin discs round their necks—were to turn up suddenly, and then the red carpet due to the honoured guest could be laid down on the pavement.

If not, time was pressing, and some other way would have to be devised. Maybe it would be possible to greet the prelate on the open platform. Or splash out good money on engaging the Sinistra Brass Band to screen off the surroundings with the curtain of their racket, the blare of horns, tubas, trumpets and trombones.

It was hot in Dolina that day too. The air over the valley was becalmed, quivering; over the Lost Souls' Quarter the coughing hovered like a translucent cloudlet, even the birds gave the place a wide berth. Few cars rattled over the stony, rutted streets; nobody drove in amongst the dust-caked fences unless he had good reason. The black Volga that Stationmaster Popp hired for the occasion from the Elfrath brothers was being driven by me; one could well believe some VIPs had come to the settlement. And people did indeed peek out in astonishment from behind the gauze curtains, and whenever the Volga slowed down a clutch of pallid, flush-eyed, scraggy-necked patients would try to surround it.

Nikifor Puszta even climbed out of the car several times to ask, with a reassuring smile, how they were and sauntered into the lifeless courtyards amidst the lime-washed walls of the barrack blocks, but he had no luck. The instant community work was mentioned, as if by pre-arrangement, the circle edged away from him, not one patient put himself forward as a cleaner. Neither blandishments nor pleas, not even the frequent dropping of Stationmaster Popp's name, succeeded in winning the consumptives over. Rather, it seemed they were taking the cheek, just shrugging their shoulders, and when it became clear what the car's visit was about, the big deal, they drew away from his proximity in disgust, as if he was carrying an infectious bacillus. They hadn't the slightest intention of working, even though for a job well done each one would have received a medical almanac, a flagon of spring-water and a bag of "Eufrozina" biscuits.

Stationmaster Popp did not like it when one of his men came back empty-handed from missions like this, so Nikifor Puszta got out of the Volga close to the station and, to gain some time, went into the Flitter-Mouse, the boozier run by Fathers Hermelin and Punga. So as not to give the impression he was neglecting his duty and hurrying back to his woman, he thought, with a drop of drink inside he would surely come up with some acceptable explanation as to why the patients were unwilling to work. Something not too depressing, though. Because, when they had deigned to give any answer at all, they had said things like, "A fine one, you are, using biscuits as bait. In case you don't know, you need saliva for biscuits, but we spit out most of our saliva." He could not repeat these and other indecorous words of that ilk to Popp. He ordered a soda water, half a wine glass of pure spirits, and a tot of elderberry syrup, mixed them, stretched out his legs and unwound. He waited for his imagination to take hold.

After dropping off the Elfrath brothers' Volga, I too went into the Flitter-Mouse. By then Father Punga had stuck up the notice with the identikit image of the wanted woman over the bar. There is no denying, I was curious to see how things would pan out.

It became obvious immediately that meanwhile the alcohol had been at work in Nikifor Puszta's brain. He'd hit upon telling Stationmaster Popp that the consumptives were not signing up for community work because they were ill. They sent their greetings to Stationmaster Popp, their best regards, and kissed Archbishop Teleorman's hand, but sadly they were not feeling too well; they were unwilling to risk the trip to the station and back. They had no money for the tram, and to make it on foot under a blazing sun, up to their ankles in cough-provoking dust, would do their health no good. First and foremost they were not keen at all on moving away from the vicinity of the barracks on account of the dogs. Nikifor Puszta seemed very pleased with this explanation.

There was some truth in it too. Ever since Dolina had been making its living from waste disposal, and foreign trucks dumped their garbage virtually from

dawn to late at night, till the tipping sites girdling the town were on the verge of engulfing the nearby hills, the town's dog population had been expanding at an incredible rate. Above all, that slightly hump-backed, broad-muzzled, vacant-looking, droopy-eared type that dogcatcher Bob Sinetar was now even starting to breed on his farm. The strays roamed the streets and, apart from the inflated nylon bags that fluttered over the town, were frightened of nothing. They wandered around even in broad daylight in silent packs, not letting out a single inadvertent yap, their approach signalled solely by a sudden shivering of the air and the rustling, like no other, of a thousand dog claws pattering on paving stones. Noiselessly, they would hove up unexpectedly on street corners or bends in the road, bowling passers-by over just for the fun of it, sniffing out the weak and children from afar. Sometimes they would even surround cars, panting in that doggy way, and simply not allow the occupants to get out. There had even been cases where they had paid calls on the town's public hospital, invading it just when lunch was being served, racing along the corridors, jumping up onto patients' beds, and slurping up the soup from the mess-tins. Given that, if the consumptives were loath to leave the barracks, even Stationmaster Popp must surely understand.

Nikifor Puszta only took a closer look around when I was already standing before him, and that was also when he first glimpsed the wanted notice over the bar. At first the colour drained from his face, but it soon returned: he flushed to the root of his neck. Running his fingers through his hair, he took a sip from his drink. Seventy-five dollars. That was a lot of money.

"And her name, why don't they spell that out, I wonder?" he spluttered confusedly.

"You'll tell them that."

"Will I just! Then you can see it's her as well."

The spittle-flecked floor of the taproom glistened as if there were loose coins lying scattered all around.

Looking at the matter from Nikifor Puszta's angle, aside from the absolutely clinching proof of the hair ornament, the official sketcher had failed to capture even the shape of the woman's head. She had drawn it with a rounded face, though in reality it was more narrow and sunken, and had given her buttons for peepers instead of voluptuously peachy eyes, whilst the hair, which she allowed to cascade, loosely combed, behind the head ornament and bound only at the end, in the Dobrudzha fashion, had been coiled up by the confidential artist—the hairdresser Lupe Anies, that is to say—frizzed up on either side, in accordance with local taste. Yet still, the knitted eyebrow, the slightly startled gaze, the creases of defiance on either side of the mouth pointed to Odessa Serafim alone, who had moved in with him, into the guard's van, roughly two weeks previously. And whom he was just starting to grow fond of. Who would have thought a vagabond girl like that would bring so much money to his door.

When Nikifor Puszta made her acquaintance, Odessa Serafim had been hanging around on the whores' beat near the railway station. Though her hair had a combed sheen, her eyes were bleary from lack of sleep, tears had washed muddy rivulets down her grey, dust-caked cheeks, her nails were gnawed down to the quick. Like someone who has long been astray on the paths of perdition. But once Nikifor Puszta started chatting her up it immediately transpired that she was no hardened pro, at most a beginner, for she was unaware of the going rates and didn't have a clue when it came to dickering. On the pitches around the station, the tariff ran between five cents and a dollar and a half a day, depending on age and looks; that was the fee for a woman who hired herself out for a man's exclusive use. By comparison, Odessa Serafim was only looking for a trial period and didn't want to hear about money; all she asked was lodgings and board, on the grounds that friendship comes first. As for the rest, time would tell. What little she revealed about herself was that, succumbing to the lure of foreign parts, she had made her way from the far away Danube delta to see the world in the Carpathians. In secret, she was also hoping that the summers hereabouts were a bit cooler. She liked people a lot and wanted to get to know as many of them as possible. Nikifor Puszta paid no heed, took not the blindest bit of notice of this nonsense; one thing all these girls had in common was that they were only able to talk, with ever more obsessive obstinacy, about love. Besides which, from what he guessed was under the dress, the one thing that struck him was the woman's modesty; and, not being the most talkative of types himself, he was secretly counting on prolonged silences from the taciturn nail-biter when he swiftly made a deal with her.

For safety's sake, he promptly searched through her handbag, turned out all her pockets, and even rooted around in her combed, beautifully cascading locks, but all he found, apart from a few crumpled paper hankies, a pencil stub, toothbrush and comb, were old ship and train tickets. All these went to show, at most, was that she sometimes blew her nose, tidied her hair, and days ago had boarded ship at Sulina, got on a train at Brăila, and had reached here, in the north, via stop-offs in Moldavia. If she had any belongings to start with, they had clearly all been filched from her during the long journey. A few coppers aside, she had no money on her, no documents.

"I'll wangle some for you," Nikifor Puszta reassured her at once. "After all, I work for Stationmaster Popp. Just tell me in what name the papers should be made out."

"The name doesn't matter, as far as I'm concerned," the woman replied, even as she was evidently giving it a bit of thought. "But let's make it, say, Odessa Serafim. That's what they call me anyway."

"Nice. No doubt people also have a pet name for you."

"Some do, yes—Dessy."

"So listen up, Dessy. You seem to be a decent girl. And I like your hairstyle."

Her hairstyle? Could be. More likely it was her name, though. Several decades ago, Nikifor Puszta had served in the border guards on the Dobrudzha coast, in the south, and he too still had clear recollections of the great Odessa craze. The concentration camps of the Midia, Medgidia and the Peninsula sometimes rewarded their guards—particularly those who regularly acquitted themselves with distinction in the tests of alertness—by taking them on a steamer trip to Odessa at the weekend or on public holidays. True, the boat did not dock there; it would just make a turn in the bay, right in front of the docks, and all that reached the jetties was at most the odd wave from its wash, but behind the gossamer of afternoon mist, the well-nigh inert plume of smoke from the ship's funnel, the mewling of gulls and the foghorn blasts the town, like a woman hidden beneath her veils, transfixed the trippers. As a result, heaps of female off-spring were christened Odessa in those days. That too carried some weight when Nikifor Puszta made up his mind and took the girl home with him to his caboose on Cannibal Row.

Dolina was the terminus of the branch line. The rails came to an end at rusty sets of buffers in front of the station building, except for one track, which, snaking out to the street past the goods sheds and open-air depots, carried on a bit alongside the pavement, towards the derelict sawmill, before finally petering out amidst mounds overgrown with dried weed stalks and clumps of burdock and yarrow. So, when the waste disposal business started up, they had shunted some small guard's vans that were due for the scrap heap onto the siding, and these were set up as grocery stores. The colorfully painted lorries, with their loaded containers, passed by them on their way to the rubbish tips. In the stores and on the steps up to them, on sheets of newspaper laid out on the ground, were the cigarettes, chewing gum, biscuits, cans of beer, lottery tickets, even condoms in various sizes and booklets of medical advice, that were on offer to entice the wealthy truck drivers into parting with as much of their earnings as possible. Along the row could also be found several money-changers, and loitering there, on wistful look-out, were the kids—a motley mix of boys and girls—who, gesticulating from afar, would wheedle their way into the drivers' cabs and, whilst the truck made its run between town and refuse tip, crouching before the driver's legs, for a few coppers would divert him with various artful and sophisticated titillations. Ordinary folk wittily dubbed them the cannibals, and Cannibal Row was the name given to that whole section of the street, with its line of bazaars on rails.

The people who traded here were mostly cowed preachersmen, the pallid monks of Bishop Bombonel, or ex-army officers in threadbare uniforms shorn of insignia of rank, with the Elfrath brothers keeping them all in order. My friend Nikifor Puszta worked for Stationmaster Popp. He slept on a mattress in a recess at the back of one of the wagons, behind the crammed shelves, crates and boxes of goods. That is where he took Odessa Serafim too.

Barred inside and out, the windows were tiny, and one could only see out of them at certain places where Nikifor Puszta, whenever curiosity got a hold of him, had rubbed a peek-hole with his index finger in the ages-old deposit of dust, smoke and exhalations. The view looked out on the freight yard, the flocks of pigeons that took wing at every clatter of buffer-pads, the straggly brown puffs of smoke from the shunting engines, through which pierced the occasional glint of sun on the shiny metal roof of a goods wagon. Nikifor Puszta had indeed promised that one day, if Stationmaster Popp agreed, he would lock up the shop early in the afternoon and take Odessa Serafim to the shooting gallery, the knife-throwers' tent, or, when evening drew on, to the seminary yard, where before supper the trainee priests played volleyball in public; but the propitious occasion kept on being put back. Apparently the girl's papers were still not ready. At those times when, like on this particular day, Nikifor Puszta was given a special assignment, he would therefore lock up Odessa Serafim along with the shop. He instructed her to be on her toes, pay attention to the noises outside, and showed her an iron pipe wrapped in barbed wire with which she was to lash out at anyone who would not take a polite hint and tried to enter the carriage by force. So, when the wanted woman's likeness was put up on walls in the vicinity of the station, Odessa Serafim was whiling the time away in the gloom of the caboose.

Nikifor Puszta did not find Stationmaster Popp in his office. Only his confidante and adviser, Lupe Anies the hairdresser was seated there, in one of the chairs reserved for colleagues, so it was to her that he spun the story about why the consumptives were unwilling to come forward for community work. It had been more than forty years since Lupe Anies moved into town from unknown parts, and she was reckoned to be the most desirable woman in Dolina; even the air around her belonged to her body, and Nikifor Puszta savoured it appreciatively. The hairdresser asked him to make a renewed attempt and pay another call on the Lost Souls' Quarter, this time in the evening, so as to surprise the patients, who this time, having been jolted out of their first dreams, might show more understanding. If only because there was no need for them to work; it had nothing at all to do with community work, merely a stroll in the patients' compulsory sackcloth uniform, with the string of jangling tin discs round their necks. They should feel free to cough as much as they liked, everywhere they went, and be sure to smell of medicine. She would send a special tram for them at dawn, breakfast would also be thrown in, with double helpings too.

Nikifor Puszta spotted a bundle of the freshly printed wanted notices on the corner of the table, picked one up, and, as if seeing it for the first time, studied it closely.

"I'll take one of these, if I may."

"Do. You may need it."

Before setting off home to Cannibal Row, Nikifor Puszta dropped into the shop run by the Elfrath brothers, who, besides a grocery business, also ran the

sort of rental service where any piece of equipment could be hired for an appropriate deposit. Nikifor Pusztá asked for a pair of handcuffs for twenty-four hours. He arrived back at the guard's van with the freshly printed circular in one hand, the handcuffs, already well buffed to a shine by human skin, in the other.

"Recently I recognized you from your step, but this time you came back noiselessly, like a thief," said Odessa Serafim when she saw him framed in the doorway. As always, she was waiting for him in just a chemise, hair combed.

"I don't tramp around at any time. And I have to ask you not to address me familiarly," Nikifor Pusztá said very quietly. "Things have taken an unexpected turn."

He bolted the door behind him, stepped before the mirror hanging on the cabin wall, spat on it at several spots, then plastered to it the circular he had brought back, on which was the drawing made by hairdresser Lupe Anies. He lit the carbide lamp and placed it under the mirror; Odessa Serafim's likeness began to quiver in its light. The acrid, bittersweet whiff of fear suddenly surged amongst the cellophane bags and packets of chewing gum, biscuits and rubbers. Then it dispersed just as suddenly as Odessa Serafim took a grip on herself.

"What are you going to do with all that money?"

"It'll find a good home," Nikifor Pusztá nodded. "Despite appearances, I'm not one of the better-off."

"Then I'll get dressed straight away."

"Not yet. I'd like to take my leave of you."

After the hurried minutes of farewell, Nikifor Pusztá opened the door and spread out a blanket before it. He got out the rummy pack, turned the stones over, and squatted on the ground. They played snap till sundown.

"I liked being with you," Nikifor Pusztá said after they had finished, "we were pretty similar. It's not in my nature to like games that have been played out in advance. But I think we can get going now."

Though the sun was setting, its rays were hitting the trench-scoured, gullied sides of the Red Paltin full on, the warmth of the whole sun was now being beaten back onto the town from the reddish-purple crags. Nikifor Pusztá nonetheless made Odessa Serafim dress up to the nines, and gave her a heavy railwayman's cape on top of that, even pulling its hood over her head, lest anyone recognize her and perhaps snatch her away from him in order to pocket the reward money on offer. Finally, in a single well-considered movement, as if he had long practised it, he clicked one bracelet of the handcuffs—its pair was dangling round his own hand—onto his sweetheart's wrist.

Manacled to one another, as if strolling hand in hand, they cut across the freight yard towards the square where the tram turned round. On the single cross-town line ran the rusty, dented, blue-yellow-brown carriages of local manufacture, the last service setting off at seven in the evening. After that only the

Elfrath brothers' omnibus, drawn by four ponies, creaked its way along the length of the Avenue of Reforms. Taking that, they got off in front of the episcopal palace, where the town's affairs were also seen to at that time. Only inside, in the interior courtyard, surrounded by buildings on all four sides, did Nikifor Puszta uncuff the woman from himself and also relieve her of the heavy railway-man's cape.

When the diocese of Sinistra split in two, one half had moved to Dolina and installed itself in the mountain infantry's former barracks. The herbal borders in the centre of the courtyard were still a hangover from the military days, with flower beds in the shape of a cannon, tank and shells. They had been watered not long ago, and around the benches in front of the duty-officer's former office—where Bishop Titi Bombonel now held his audiences—a snuffling of damp soil could still be heard. Exquisite wisps of vapour quivered amidst pearly-beaded petals and leaves, charged with the scent of phloxes, tuberoses and lilies.

"What do you think? Are they going to beat me badly?" Odessa Serafim asked. "I hear that's what they start with."

"Reckon on being slapped a few times, at any rate. But there's nothing I can do about that."

"I don't have a single bad word for you, Nick."

"Please, it's high time you dropped the Nick. But I promise, as soon as I receive the money I'll get some through to you."

"I could sense you were beginning to care a little. One morning I spied whilst you were trying out my toothbrush in your mouth. That cheered me no end at the time."

"I had my plans for you," Nikifor Puszta suddenly admitted. "But that's all in the past. As the illustration shows, I misjudged you. It's not ruled out that I'll get a bit of a roasting too, along with the reward."

Beside his desk, amongst his mitred colleagues, Bishop Titi Bombonel sat smiling, with the unearthly glints of the sheer silver of his rows of teeth glittering in the cavity of his mouth. Nodding, he heard Nikifor Puszta out, casting an admiring side-glance over to Odessa Serafim from time to time, then finally congratulated him on his catch. Yet he still said that he would have to wait a while; he could only pay out when the hairdresser Lupe Anies had also inspected the captured woman in person.

It was me who took Lupe Anies somewhat later, in the Elfrath brothers' Volga, from the railway station to the episcopal palace. She went into the duty-officer's former office, but from the courtyard I distinctly saw her fish out the detector from her hairdresser's valise. Like a hair-dryer, that's how she held it in her hand and, raising Odessa Serafim's items of clothing, palpated here and there all over her bare skin. She shook her head, impassively at first, but then a little glumly.

"What makes you think it's her?" she asked Nikifor Puszta.

"She's the one drawn in the picture," Nikifor Puszta responded unsurely.

"Because this one, I'm sorry to say, isn't her. She slightly resembles her, that's true, but the one milords the bishops are looking for has a current in her body."

"A current. But this one doesn't even have any documents," Nikifor Puszta fumed. "She must be worth a couple of dollars at the very least."

"Not this one. There can be no question of any reward, I'm afraid."

"Not even a small one?"

"No, Puszta. Just go back home, nice and quiet." She flitted her grey eyes tenderly over Odessa Serafim as well. "You too, you poor dear."

By the time they stepped outside, I was already loitering before the gate. I offered them a ride back to the station, for free, in the Volga with which I had brought Lupe Anies. Nikifor Puszta climbed grumpily into the back seat and, as if he feared everyone would be looking at him, pulled the window shades to. By that hour few passers-by were to be found on the streets, but a lot of people were sitting out in front of the houses, on chairs, stools or cobblestones, and they stared at the black Volga with inscrutable gazes as it rolled slowly down the street beside the tramlines. Dolina's main street was lined by single- and two-storey houses, but the old inhabitants, for who knows what reason, had moved away. Those who had taken their place, seemingly having no head for heights, for the dizzying second storeys with their forgotten chandeliers, the curlicues of their wallpapers, and the musty odours seeping out from below them, stayed on the ground floor, under the gateways, from where the street was but one step away. On the uninhabited upper floors the walls had cracked, the pipes had burst, then, purely of their own accord, the windows had smashed; of an evening the sword-like shards flashed in the fiery hues of the sky.

"Why didn't you say anything?" Nikifor Puszta burst out in a choking voice. "Why didn't you tell me straight out you weren't the one. How could you do that to me?"

"I couldn't. I myself thought I was the one. I am too, only there is no current in my body."

"I thought I had! Talk about your nose put out of joint! But I've learnt something too. Oh well, no matter, we can go back to being on familiar terms."

"Not yet."

"I can imagine you're a little peeved with me now. Who knows what you think of me. But it's not certain, in fact far from certain, that you're right."

"I'm only sorry you were robbed of the reward. I can imagine it would have come in handy."

"Uhuh. I would have bred dogs. But I wouldn't have forgotten you either."

They got out in front of the railway station and headed off for the Elfrath brothers' hire shop. Nikifor Puszta hoped he would get some kind of rebate for returning the rented handcuffs early. Before long, from my watch-post, I saw the

light of the carbide lamp starting to flicker in the guard's van on Cannibal Row. Each time it flared, shedding a more brilliant light round about, I knew that Nikifor Puszta was shaking and banging the lamp to drip sufficient water onto the carbide. Meanwhile he offered hidden delicacies from the shelves, the choice items set aside for well-connected truck drivers. As I fancied, to no avail.

"Just point, Dessy, anything at all, and it's yours."

"I'm not hungry right now."

"This here is smoked salmon, for instance. I've just been keeping it all this time, but now we'll have a taste of it at long last."

"I'm not too keen on eating strange food. And I couldn't get a scrap down my throat right now."

"Later, then. Come on, be a good girl and strip down. I have business to attend to before too long. I have to go soon. Let's forget the whole business."

"I'm not going to undress. We've already taken our leave."

Terse shrieks floated up over the freight yard, the whistles of the shunting engine, punctuated at intervals by the slamming of buffers; the curtain of darkness too was rent at intervals by a distant gunshot. It grew quiet later, and Nikifor Puszta's steps could be heard on the sandy platform. Before long he was standing in front of me; we could be on our way to the Lost Souls' Quarter.

"She doesn't care for smoked salmon," he grumbled, "since she won't eat strange food."

"Don't push it."

"And hear this. She doesn't want to undress. She says she's already taken her leave."

"That's up to her, isn't it? You can go down the market tomorrow and buy yourself a new woman. Just take care there's no hair ornament on her head."

"Hmm. It's as if they set the whole thing up. I don't know what the point was, but it was a set-up. And I think you had a hand in it as well."

"What, me? Well, it could be."

"You did a good job: some similarity, but not too close either. You and the great hairdresser, Lupe Anies. Cunning, you Paltin foxes."

"Uhuh. But you've been around the block a few times yourself, Nick."

The black whale-like form of the Volga was waiting by the kerb. From the bubbled glistening it was clear from a long way off that the street people had spat all over the windscreen; fat fire-flies were flitting around above it. I asked Nikifor Puszta to fetch some water from the station hall and throw two or three bucketsful over the car so we could get going.

"I don't feel like it. I'm not fetching it." And so he climbed into the back seat, like a bishop.

The evenings in Dolina are warm; the air, laden with miasmatic stench, barely stirs, not even to let sounds through. Ever since the town has been surround-

ed by waste dumps there has been no need for lighting either; the dome of air over the mounds of garbage glimmers from enchanting fires, as though teeming with dancing fireflies. The tramlines on the dusty street were now glinting clamorously from the distant lights.

"And a current in her body—the very idea!"

"All right, you've made your point. Now cool it. Tell me instead, if things were to work out so you got it after all, what would you do with all that money?"

"You know only too well that I've long been wanting to set up a dog kennel. They put on regular fights in the area. I would have taken them out to Rotunda, even to Dobrin at the weekends."

When it was windy, the barking of Bob Sinetar's fighting dogs from the cages was sometimes audible on the other side of the mounds of rubbish even as far off as this. But right now the air was motionless. All that opened in the curtain of stench was a slight chink when the screech of nocturnal birds from the distant meadows and the scent of wild thyme from the damp leas penetrated this far, like a pair of signals from a world beyond that I think of less and less these days.

As soon as we reached the first barracks, Nikifor Pusztá climbed out and soon stumbled on an empty tin can, then kept on kicking it ahead of him. He made a complete circuit of a building without ringing the bell, then returned to the car. He leaned in through the window.

"And it's not impossible, is it," he asked, "that by the time I get back I shan't find the Lipovan woman there any longer?"

"That could be, Nick, if she's disappointed in you. Once a woman wants to go, not even seven locks will hold her back."

He knew, in other words. He pushed off again for the blind, mute courtyards, violently kicking the empty tin cans out of his way. For a while I couldn't figure out why an old sweat like him was unable to conceal his anger. Then, bit by bit, I twigged that he was already completely over it and was now thinking only of the job in hand, and that if he wanted to get into negotiations, he first had to wake the patients up somehow. ■

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Ágota Steinert

Sándor Márai and His World

Sándor Márai's books have recently been well received in translation, drawing interest first in Italy, then in Germany and now in Britain and in the United States. This interest may be attributed to a new sensibility, a reaction against the sterility of much of contemporary literature with its emotional restraint and contrived structures. Márai's works are intellectually conceived, but they are permeated with emotion, a captivating element (occasionally too much so) and this may sometimes conceal the writer's deeper thoughts and messages and the finest characteristics of his art, a masterful style. Far from being a writer of best-sellers, Márai created an original literary universe with a peculiar atmosphere, and probed the questions of human existence and of Hungarian society. Not for nothing has his best known work, the 1934 autobiographical *Egy polgár vallomásai* (Confessions of a Bourgeois), recently become a set book in Hungarian secondary schools.

To Hungarians, the present international interest in Márai means confirmation and rediscovery. Between the two World Wars his name was better known here than that of many a politician or film star, and his devotees frequently discussed the music of his sentences and the entrancing nature of his style in drawing rooms and cafés, at home and in company. Márai's style combined the clarity and elegance of French prose with a restrained sensibility and dignity rooted in Hungarian prose tradition. His sentences are gleaming blades, burning and scintillating, cutting to the bone and inducing a cold sweat. They are miniature marvels, constructed on the hidden musicality of the language. His atmosphere is dense and tense, the approach icily objective and refinedly, almost studiously, simple.

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Márai was, however, more than a stylist. As a burgher of Kassa (Košice in Slovakia), who regarded himself as a citizen of Europe, he despised all that was cheap and tawdry, trusting only the moral values of the spirit. That fragile sense of worth, of character and fastidiousness gave his prose its significance and its unmistakably individual flavour. He was uncompromising and unforgiving, in politics as well as in his tastes and culture. For him, respect for form in life and literature meant the same thing: the chance to preserve our self-realisation and our very selves.

He was born in Košice in 1900 into a well-to-do middle-class family. Košice was the industrial, commercial and cultural centre of the northern part of the old kingdom of Hungary, what was known as *Felvidék* or the Upper Country since the Middle Ages. It had always been considered a hospitable town, where in addition to Hungarians (and originally in greater numbers) there lived Germans and, later, a much smaller number of Slovaks and Jews. The Košice middle class maintained their traditions, and tolerance was as much a feature of the community as their colourful cultural life. Košice had a university as early as 1660, the first independent Hungarian-language periodicals were published there in the eighteenth century as well as the first Hungarian serialised novels, and it was this town that later established itself as the centre of a famous printing industry. The town also gained a reputation as one of the cradles of the Hungarian-language theatre where, in 1833, the most celebrated Hungarian classic, József Katona's *Bánk bán*, was first staged.

Márai spent his childhood and early adult years in Košice, and there he formed that attitude and outlook which determined his life and writing. He considered himself first and foremost a member of the bourgeoisie, and that awareness and tradition finds expression in all his work, in his moral stance and outspoken aestheticism alike.

As Márai conceived it, to be of the bourgeoisie means possessing tastes that are creative, sovereign and refined, particularly in morals. It means being cultured and, through culture, serving the common good. Creativity for such a person is not merely manifest in the creation of a piece of work, but its nature, moral quality and capacity also define the quality of everyday life. In the sequence of novels *A Garrenek műve* (The Work of the Garrens) Márai declares:

The bourgeoisie established a civilisation after the feudal social order... What was the Garrens' work?... Atmosphere. Something atmospheric, in which human life found value and status beyond mere existence... If we ask a biologist "What is life, where is the threshold at which inorganic matter changes and becomes organic?" he replies, "Life is a chemical reaction." And that is true from the point of view of a biologist. But life is something more still: it needs atmosphere. The Garrens knew about this and when they built towns and houses they also produced atmosphere...

His native Košice and his paternal home were for him the embodiment of that and to the very end of his life he was unable to come to terms with their loss

(not only the disappearance of childhood but a physical loss, as the Treaty of Trianon, which followed the First World War, awarded Košice to Czechoslovakia).

For a true representative of the bourgeoisie creativity according to Márai should be intertwined with sovereignty as the guarantee for the feeling of freedom, the preservation under all circumstances of spiritual and moral independence. As he writes in *Füves könyv* (Herbal):

Sovereign is the man who has staked his life on the proclamation and practice of truths that he has acknowledged and, come what may, espoused.

This is what, all his life and in all his art, he strove at all times to adhere to. He made no concessions to the ephemeral and he did not bow to dictators. Characteristically, he condemned Hitlerism at its first appearance. In 1933 he attended one of Hitler's rallies in Berlin as an accredited correspondent, and produced an account of National Socialism and its leaders in a denunciative article "Messiah in the Sports Hall". His voice was raised against Nazism later too, and with increasing vehemence. In the meantime he saw clearly that Russian domination was inevitable for Hungary and at the outset of the Communist takeover, in 1948, he decided to leave the country. He noted in his diary:

One morning in the city. The news, which I can't help hearing, makes me feel sick. It's as if I were going about in a medieval plague city, with unburied corpses rotting in the streets. I talk to friends and sometimes I feel that I ought to hold my handkerchief to my mouth. For days now two lines of Karinty's have been going round in my head: *Better that the worms eat me / Than that I should eat worms.*

To Márai's understanding, culture and morals are closely interrelated. Culture is not merely a maintenance of traditions, a constructive aggregation and utilisation of experience, but a moral force, reasonableness and acceptance of responsibility. "Because culture amounts to the revelation and toleration of truth, of the true awareness of everything."

This is a fundamentally ethical concept and is clearly linked with Márai's view of Europe, a philosophy which defines his writings. He wrote and spoke German, French and English with accomplishment, Italian and Spanish selectively, spent some fifty years of his life in Germany, France, Switzerland, the United States and Italy, had been on friendly terms with Thomas Mann and gained the respect of André Gide. He embraced the traditions of European humanism as his artistic and moral credo. In his late work *Föld! Föld!*, (Land! Land!) he sums up what Europe had meant to him:

Was not "everything", the value of life, Europe? If so (and I have believed in my bones all my life that it was and have declared that it was), why this tremulousness, reluctance, dragging of feet? What was Europe to me, really and personally?... There used

to be in Europe something—as I have at times said and written—called, perhaps naively, “a sense of vocation”. The concept is grandiose. Nevertheless, even for my generation there was in it a somewhat diluted reality: in the knowledge that to be born in Europe, to be a European, was not only a natural or legal situation but a profession of faith... Wise old politicians have said that an economic union must be created in Europe, contrary to and above nationalist aspirations, but an economically united Europe without a sense of calling cannot be a world power, as it was for centuries, when it believed in itself and its vocation.

Together with moral traditions, free and democratic political regimes are the guarantees of the rights of the individual:

In the political arena, I can see the future of our part of the world in a United States of Europe... The future of Europe depends on mutual understanding between France and Germany... I do not wish here to attack Bolshevism, but I am far too fond of the freedom of the individual and those ideals which inspire us democrats for me not to wish that we might live in a social order which corresponds much better to our European concepts than does Bolshevism.

When living abroad before the War, reputable foreign newspapers regularly published his articles and he was in touch with all that was best on the continent. He returned from his first period of some ten years abroad because he felt that he must speak as a Hungarian writer, that his duty lay in Hungary, and that he must call attention to those values which in the modern age meant lasting strength. During forty-one years of exile he stubbornly wrote and published only in Hungarian. His patriotism is first and foremost that elemental attachment to his native culture and, especially, its language. For Márai language is what transmits traditions; it is a communal creation of greater value than all else one's ancestors have called into being over millennia, it is the bearer of collective wisdom and a tool for the sensitive expression of one's own thoughts. The complex association of feelings, moods, past and present, archaic linguistic monuments and everyday expressions, “high” literature and vulgar slang, is a medium which sustains and which alone ensures a sense of being at home and a confident sense of belonging; it offers writers an audience which will understand the covert meanings of words, their “aura”. As one of his poems says *“Only in Hungarian / Do you understand / ‘I love you’ / Butterfly, swan, star, my angel / In this tongue there will be more than the idea”*.

Alongside the condition, life and outlook of his class, a leitmotif in Márai's work is the mysterious relationship between men and women: a woman is sometimes the enemy, and always an opponent. “Never see the duel between man and woman as anything other than a hopeless conflict, inflamed by the most merciless selfishness and unbridled vanity,” he writes in *Füves könyv*. In his novels, nevertheless, the dramatic duel is somewhat one-sided, because the weight and worthiness of the contending parties is not identical. Women are for

the most part sketchily portrayed, stereotypes, and also somewhat contrived, bloodless. They are indeed present, but always in the background, as the setters of the emotional scene and material guarantees of male existence. For this reason they appear as timeless, because they figure not in the real, deeper events of life, its inner course, but only in the moment. It is man's business to perceive the deeper value of existence, and this mystery keeps them at a distance from women, who carry neither universality or law. They are not initiated, but function as opportunities for men on the road to recognition.

I have used women after I grew out of puberty, in my adult life, as pleasant and necessary companions, who have *at times* [my italics] allied themselves to me in the great tasks of life and in the endurance of that serious fate, human fate. But in no other terms have I expected loyalty from them, nor out of the ordinary sympathy, nor sacrifices. I have taken pleasure in their gentleness, the exciting and calming narcotic power of their bodies, their quick wits, instinctive and sometimes heroic moods, I have watched their lingering and meticulous cleverness; as well as their cunning childishness—by which they wish to fix human feelings. But after they have gone from my room or my life I have not given them another thought. Such is my nature, and, I believe, only that conduct is worthy of a man.

It follows from the casual role of women that they cannot mean more than an adventure—interesting, exciting, passionate, even long-lasting—but something transitory, too general and too unique. For their lack of continuity they are stills clipped from a film, and no development of character is to be detected in their portrayal. They ensure the gentle warmth of biological existence, provide solace, beauty and voluptuousness, but are never companions on an equal footing, genuine or spiritual partners. This last function devolves upon friends. The best example of this is *Embers*, an international success for some time, which deals with an ordinary middle-class triangle in a particular historical setting. In illuminating the depths of the relationship of wife, husband and friend the author not only highlights the curious, contradictory, bizarre and grotesque nature of love, friendship and human relationships in general but, by the description of the destruction of a way of life embodying real worth, hints at the consequences of the disturbance of the traditional order. The gloomy, ceremonious setting, redolent of divine judgements is theatrical: it announces in advance, as does a Greek tragedy, that the fate of the characters is preordained. All three—the General (the husband), Krisztina, his unfaithful wife, and Konrád, his childhood friend (the lover)—can, in the moment of truth, do only what their inclinations, habits, characters and tastes permit. Events do not shape them, nor do they events, but rather they endure them as they live out their destinies.

Márai's personal experience of sixteen years of fervent and tempestuous friendship with a young poet certainly helped him to portray friendship in depth.

In adolescence they had tried to start up a periodical, and their common enthusiasm bound them together just as much as teenage adventures. Márai immortalised him not only as a character in *Confessions of a Bourgeois* but also in his novel *A zendülök* (The Mutineers), which owes much to Roger Martin du Gard's *La famille Thibault* and Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles*. *A zendülök* is on the rebelliousness of post-war youth against an adult world in ruins. It is interesting that Márai's brother Géza Radványi, the film director, produced many years later the important film *Valahol Európában* (Somewhere in Europe) about children abandoned and left to their own devices after the Second World War and their rebelliousness. Unconditional devotion characterises the friendship of Márai's heroes, as it does the link between Martin du Gard's characters Jacques and Daniel, but in later works, such as *Embers*, the evaluation and depiction of friendship undergoes a change. Now he scrutinises the emotional experiences of his youth through the glass of Stoic philosophy:

There is no bond between human beings more affecting, more profound, than friendship. How great is the selfishness and vanity in the bond between lovers, even between parents and children... only the affection of a friend is selfless and not a game of the emotions.

Friendship is service, powerful and serious, the greatest test of a person and their greatest function. Its value derives from its selflessness and from its being a deliberate undertaking by those concerned; this makes it, despite its instinctive elements, a rational affection. In *Embers* nothing can shake it other than an irrational thing—music. (The role of music in Thomas Mann's *The Buddenbrooks* is similar.) Friends, like medieval knights, abide by a "stern human law", which represents what the author holds the most important of virtues, loyalty.

Loyalty is the keyword when it comes to a study of Márai's life and work. It determined the two most important relationships in his own life—those to his father and to his wife—as it did his writing and politics. His wife, née Ilona Metzner, known as Lola, was born as a member of a well-to-do family of Jewish merchants in Košice; she just about never appears in person as a character in Márai's novels, but the air she breathes, her radiance, can be felt in every location, in every scene. It was probably an inner modesty that stopped Márai writing about her, she was the only woman whom he was prepared to accept as a companion or friend. Theirs was a relationship for life, with no cracks, which spanned wars and revolutions, exile, success and persecution. It was based on shared tastes, a shared culture, ideals, memories and lifestyle; it stood for a powerful solidarity, a sense of belonging together and loyal friendship. It meant service, to each other and the shared ideals. Márai himself said in an interview he gave in 1987 after his wife had died:

Lola played an important part in my life, she stimulated me, she was never judgemental, she never said that something is good or bad. The relationship of two people, a man and a woman, especially within a marriage, sex, cohabitation, the quotidian, social life, implies tenderness and it implies cares. Then there is radiance, or there isn't. What is radiance? Isn't it just blue haze? No. There is such a thing as human faith. It is in the genes, is it in the chromosomes, nobody knows... Lola was my wife for all of sixty-two years, we both lived our shared life, and our own life, but right to the end, to the very last moment, I owed that energy to her.

Not dodging the responsibility of "clerks" and unbroken loyalty to the noble ideals of 19th-century liberalism, liberty, human dignity, free thought and culture was true of Márai all his life. He always took the side of the fallen and the persecuted, he never fell for fashions or appearances in art or politics, nor did he allow himself to be tempted by vanity or money. His rigour was fed by conviction. That is why—in exile—he would not allow his books to be published in Hungary (albeit he longed to get through to the readership there of his own native language) until Soviet occupying forces had left the country.

I am a Hungarian writer and it will always be a great honour and source of satisfaction for me whenever one of my writings reaches Hungarian readers. This summer forty years passed since I left Hungary because freedom rights were suspended there. I do not know if I will live to see the changes, but I do not wish for publication of any sort in Hungary before they happen...

he wrote in 1988 in answer to offers by Hungarian publishers. He did not live to see the success of his works in Hungary, and later, elsewhere in Europe. Old and ill, in isolation and solitary, he took his own life on 21 February 1989 as an escape from the humiliation of mental and physical decline. At his request, his ashes were strewn into the Pacific.

In the course of almost sixty years Márai produced a total of fifty works—novels, minor prose works, plays, journals, and books of poetry. His most distinctive genre, however, was the essay-novel such as *Confessions of a Bourgeois*. This is not only because of the direction in which his ability lay—he kept a journal all his life, in which he recorded public events and his own doings and reflections; he has other aphoristic writings on his philosophy of life such as *Füves könyv, A szegények iskolája* (The School of the Poor) and *A négy évszak* (The Four Seasons), but also because of his avowed ideas about the novel and the short story. Instead of the realist short story which moves in a straight line through time he brought the spiritual reflections of his characters into the foreground under the influence of contemporary French writers, most of all perhaps of Gide. He dissolved the unity of time and space and created its own composition in which the exposition of psychological situations and the analysis of the

characters' emotional and cerebral states push the action, the narrative texture, into the background. His great skill in creating an atmosphere, however, and his intensification of internal situations (in direct contrast to a manifestly dispassionate descriptive style) impart movement and flourish to his prose, despite the relative lack of action. In Márai's estimation "literature is life dissected". Situations, feelings and attitudes appear in essence, while crude reality in its natural state is unlovely, and the condensed, convincing counterpart to it has to be created in the spiritual sphere, in art. Because of this his world always seems a little contrived, "visionary", but at any rate, highly suggestive. He himself admits this:

One's conduct, that authorial attitude, the painful adjustment of the outlook denotes vision, "second sight", which looms behind people and phenomena and seems to the writer a truer reality than the tangible.

A tool to this effect is Márai's highly individual, idiosyncratic, selective style. He wrote prose full of emotional warmth, shot through—he was also a distinguished poet—with poetic imagery, comparisons, associations. The meandering sentences, sometimes pages long, echo the rhythm and melody of Gyula Krúdy. (Márai wrote a novel in honour of this great early twentieth-century Hungarian writer, in which he imitated his style perfectly, and in which he recreated Krúdy's tones, tastes, methods and bearing—his whole world.) These sentences are fundamentally musical in concept, replete with adjectival construction, word repetition, associations and antitheses. Their atmosphere is derived from the coalescence of time-planes, the refined blending of notional reflections. His descriptions are full of colour, scents, sounds; they are palpable, sensual. The carefully chosen words and expressions fill his lines with a slightly old-fashioned flavour that is wonderfully capable of counterbalancing the tense rhythm, the changes in cadence, the abrupt curtailing of images. It is as if the writer were always on tiptoe: his prose has about it a surrealist suspense, an internal oscillation. This style is in complete harmony with his idea of what literature is about; it exudes not the aroma of raw reality but its quintessence, and therefore is almost dreamlike in its sedative effect and magic in its expressiveness:

In Dieppe the train ran intimately through the streets, down to the harbour, to the inferior, cheap-coal-burning Channel steamer; and when we stepped onto the deck, the other world began, the mysterious world of England. Everything was suddenly quieter, more disciplined, more melancholy. The ship set sail, the steward served the soup, and five minutes out of Dieppe—the smart seaside restaurants, in which paunchy Normans were spooning up tasty lobster bisque and drinking excellent red wine were still in sight!—the travellers were already chewing real, unpalatable stuff, sprinkling frozen mutton with green mint sauce, the smell of mutton-fat permeated the dining-room, the bread was tasteless and stale, the wine expensive and adulterated: England

had begun. The travellers looked different, spoke more quietly, the waiter served us differently—more politely than his French counterpart, and even so somehow more self-consciously—the diners gave their orders differently, less confidently, or friendly and yet more humane. The sweetly stifling smell of Virginia tobacco wafted in the air, even here on board the tea was scented, and one could become intoxicated with it... I liked arriving at the white cliffs when the sun was shining, the Channel tossed the tiny ship about, and English children acclaimed the speed of the ship with knowing cries; I liked looking at the dark blue of the sea half an hour before Folkestone or Newhaven, when the shore was already gleaming, and huge ships were sailing from the ports of the Empire towards the colonies, the sun was shining, and the wind, the merciless wind on the Channel, lashed our faces with a cold salty spray, the English all went on deck enveloped in their scarves and waterproofs, exactly as in Jules Verne's novel about Phineas Fogg's journey round the world; they smoked pipes, scanned the shore through field glasses and smiled... The bony elderly women too smiled, the wind tugged the veil from their hairy chins, the young people tensed the self-conscious, disciplined lines of their supple bodies against the wind, they all chattered and struck up acquaintances, because there in the distance, that white line at the edge of the blue water, there was England. They were very much, very manifestly, going home, even the waiters, even the sailors, who plied day in day out between the island and the Continent. One could not fail to sense on the English ship, in the half-hour before arrival, that the Channel was something other, something more than a natural line of demarcation between the island and the world; so frighteningly different was the world that began over there behind the white cliffs, different to anything that Continental Man knew, loved or desired, a different justice and different honour, different-tasting beer and different-natured love, so terrifyingly different that it was as if a voyage of several weeks separated the traveller who crossed the Channel and Dieppe.

In the case of Márai the aphorism that style makes the man is doubly true. Not merely because his style is the expression of his view of literature and life, but also because he was typically a writer's writer and devoted his life to the demands of form. ■

A SHORT MÁRAI READER

Herbal

(1943)

On what your duty was here on earth

In the end, you must know what your duty was here on earth. On no account was it to keep a certain quantity, consistency and quality of bone, flesh, fat and entrails in chemical operation. Nor was it to amass titles and dignities, to become the president of a society, to strut around in all your finery, ringing the bell. Nor was it—and this is more painful—the pursuit of happiness, for happiness is an illusion: at the very moment of its realisation, every desire becomes distorted, a hindrance rather than a source of joy. Such is man.

No, your only duty, the sole purpose of your existence on this earth was to familiarise yourself with the true nature of human and earthly things, with the interdependence of human and earthly eventualities; and to be just and fair at all times, even when you were treated unjustly by your fellow men.

That was your duty here on earth, nothing more.

On human character

The most fascinating phenomenon that human life has to offer us is human character. Nothing can be as interesting, as surprising and unpredictable as the process through which a man reveals the peculiarities of his character. Of all the things that the world can show us: landscapes and the wonders of nature, the infinite variety of the flora and fauna of this earth, none is as special, as distinctive as the character of each and every man. When, during our contemplation of worldly matters our attention turns to the cognisance of human character, we feel at once that this is our true mission in life. All that we have experienced so far has served to enrich our knowledge. But only the knowledge of human character can enrich our spirit. For this is the most direct human experience; yes, character is man himself.

■ *The Hungarian Quarterly* would like to thank Mrs Irene Vörösváry-Weller for permission to publish an English translation of this selection from the work of Sándor Márai.

And since character is man himself, all efforts to conceal our character from others will be vain: one can no more hide one's true character than one can hide one's corporeal self under a veil of fog. We can put on false beards and disguise ourselves for a time, but the moment will come when the masks fall and the truth is revealed. A gesture, a word, a deed will, finally, give away our true character: the masked ball can only be incidental. And the encounter with the true features of a character is the greatest human experience we can share.

On sovereignty

A sovereign person, who has dedicated himself to advocating and living by the truths he has learned and accepts responsibility for, is naturally moderate and polite at all times. Even in the advocacy of the truth. The distinctive feature of a sovereign person is that he fears nothing except his own conscience but at the same time, never takes offence. A person who takes offence is neither brave nor sovereign. A person who is afraid and is easily offended cannot consistently stand for a truth in the world, come life come death. Whoever feels offended will quarrel. A sovereign person never quarrels, never even argues. He will assert his own truth, and will then stand his ground to the last, accepting all that follows from the truth and the impatient misunderstandings of the world. Everyone else will answer back. If you are somebody, you must not be afraid. And only bunglers take offence, and those to whom the opinion of the world is more important than the truth.

On having high standards

And you must train yourself to insist on the highest standards. This is of the utmost importance. The masses are greedy but they have no standards. You must remain moderate and exacting. The world is becoming more and more like a Woolworth's, where you can get anything for a dime, shoddy goods which satisfy the quotidian desires of the hedonist masses quickly and cheaply. The dangers of this mass gratification are already apparent in all the domains of life and the spirit. A culture will be destroyed not only when the barbarians descend on the fine squares of Athens and Rome with their battle-axes, it will also be destroyed when these selfsame barbarians descend on the public squares of a culture and there trade and barter with no regard for quality. You must be particular, and hard to please. Do not be finicky or squeamish when you pick and choose, be rigorous and relentless. You cannot be too exacting where moral and intellectual principles are concerned. You cannot be too consistent when you judge this first-rate, that tawdry, this valuable, that worthless. This is your duty if you are a man and want to keep this status.

On forms and civilities

Forms and civilities must be respected to the last. Taking your meals, talking in bed and at table. At a time when social life is increasingly becoming less formal, you for one should remain true to the existing, final and crystallized forms of greeting, bowing, handshaking, expressions of sentiment and opinion. In an age when everyone demands that you don a uniform, you just keep your jacket on at all times, and in the evening, when asked out, wear a dark suit. Not for the sake of the clothes, but for form's sake.

It is not only books that can save a culture. It is also the small reflexes of everyday life. When an age comes at you with its fists up, answer calmly and politely by raising your hat.

That's all you can do.

On how to live and write

Every wise man whose thoughts I managed to familiarise myself with has taught me that we must live and write as if our every act were the very last in this life; as if death would place a full stop after every sentence we write. It is only the unsentimental, unafraid, rational acceptance of death that gives our life and writing its proper bearing. One must live and write fatalistically, in other words calmly, with great care, paying equal attention to the world and to ourselves, to our intellect and our passions, to the intentions of others and our connections to the universe. This is the only mode of behaviour worthy of man: even God does not demand more of us. And there is no greater sin nor vainer effort than to desire more or something other than what God desires of us.

On masterpieces and their magic

For a man to succeed in creating a masterpiece, and for that masterpiece to lastingly dazzle and delight, something more is needed besides the perfection of talent, subject-matter and execution. There is an element of magic in a masterpiece that irradiates the whole with its wondrous light, gently and entrancingly, like the northern light that shines on summer nights, unreal yet tangible, for it allows you to see and read. A masterpiece must be real, precise, clever, purposeful, well-proportioned, finely wrought, faithfully executed—and it must also be something more. It must be magic. Besides being thought out, deliberate, it must also be unrestrained. It must be precisely constructed in conformity with the rules of architecture, but it must also include chaos, a coffee-spoonful of that primary cosmic dust that rises in the wake of the constellations, flecked

with gold. Without that element of magic, there are only "great" or "perfect" works of art. But a true masterpiece is sometimes not quite perfect. It just glows, and within it you will find all that is "just a dream", starlight, magic. And this part of its creation, the moment when the artist can do no more to improve his own work, the last brushstroke, the element of magic is God's work.

On friendship

There is no human relationship more moving, deeper and stronger than friendship. There is a great deal of selfishness and vanity even in the relationship between lovers, or between parents and their children! Only a friend is truly unselfish; for if he is selfish, he is not a friend. Only a friend is without vanity, for he wants all beauty and goodness for his friend, and not himself. A person in love always wants something from his beloved, a friend does not want anything for himself. A child always wants to get something from his parents, wants to surpass his father; a friend does not wish to receive, does not wish to surpass. There is no gift more mysterious and more noble in life than the gift of modest, understanding, patient and self-sacrificing friendship. Nor is there anything more rare.

Reflecting on the feelings that tied him to La Boétie, Montaigne wrote: "We were friends... because he was who he was, and I was who I was." This is a remarkably precise definition of friendship. Seneca writes to Lucilius: "He who is a friend loves you, but he who loves you may not always be a friend." This observation is more than precise: it is the truth. Love must always be looked at with suspicion, because self-interest and meanness lurk in its ashes. Only a friend's love is truly unselfish, because it is disinterested and the play of the senses does not enter into it. Friendship is service, staunch and sincere service, the greatest test and role man can experience.

On love

Never look upon the conflict between man and woman as anything other than a hopeless struggle, fuelled by the cruellest self-centredness and immoderate vanity. When you are facing a woman, do not let seductive moments, emotional situations, occasional softenings of the heart make you forget that you are a fighter who must save his skin, his life from his adversary. Fight chivalrously, but defend yourself. Should you meet with magnanimity, pay back in kind; should you be offered tenderness, return it without sentimentality, with the same tenderness you were given; should you meet with passion, respond with unconditional passion. But do not forget for a single moment that naked self-interest and vanity smoulders at the bottom of every sentimental encounter. He who lies in a woman's bed lies on live coals. He may burn his skin; he must save

his human dignity and honour. Be constantly vigilant and prepared to fight. You are surrounded by enemies with feathers in their hair and war paint on their faces, like savage warriors of old.

Diary

1943-44

I have lived through liberalism, communism, the White era, neobaroque democracy, fascism and national socialism, and I may have to live through several variants of pink and red ages. But I have never lived, nor am I likely to live, under the aegis of political or ideological slogans, when the paralytic and the epileptic will not hate the healthy, when those with little or no talent shall not level a torrent of unfounded and ridiculous accusations against those whose talent distinguishes them, raises them just an inch above the rest of their profession. Anyone who does not know this does not know mankind. It is a fact, like death, that must be reckoned with.

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For a long time a European could say, with calm assurance: "My God." Then, flaring up in sudden protest, sullenly and in a menacing voice he began to say: "My religion." Then, gabbling excitedly, he began repeating like a parrot: "My country, my nation." And now, jabbering idiotically in his rage, he is loudly chanting "My race."

At this point he has ceased to be a European.

1945-57

In a letter, the customary—insincere—lamentation: "How unfortunate that you are a Hungarian writer! If you were to write in English or in French...!" It is not a misfortune that I am a Hungarian writer. In a certain sense it is tragic that I cannot live in my own country and cannot write in Hungarian for Hungarian readers. That is perhaps a misfortune. But to write in the mysterious, solitary language of a small nation is at the same time a great opportunity for a writer. In every language, a writer is read by the same small circle of readers: those who think and feel as he does. Five hundred million speak English, yet there are a great many outstanding English writers, living and dead, whose lifework is so to speak completely unknown to those five hundred million—a large scale does not mean great "possibilities" for a writer in the "creative" sense of the word. Individual writers and their work can sink without a trace with miraculous ease even if they are written in one of the "major" languages. And from the "lesser

languages"—a foolish expression, as if languages that were not mature and cultured, but primitive and barbarian languages could exist at all—an intellect may emerge and shine with a dazzling light. It is not a misfortune to write in an isolated, solitary language as long as there are people who understand that language. It is an incentive, rather. "Even if it is late in the day, even if it is incomplete, even if it is for no one: write!" wrote Arany. This is poetic exaggeration, Arany himself could not have believed in it. One cannot write for "No one". But one can write for the few who read Hungarian, and perhaps this sporadic, lonely, faint call—which here in exile becomes weaker year by year, since here, abroad, readers and writers die out together—can be a great incentive. And even within the "major languages" writers can feel terribly lonely, pass almost unnoticed, find little response—it is perhaps more difficult to break out of this other kind of immeasurable solitude intellectually than from the confined seclusion of the lesser languages.

1958–67

A young woman was stabbed to death in the small hours somewhere in New York. Hearing the victim's screams, the neighbours all rushed to the window but no one rang the police. The police later interrogated those who lived in the neighbourhood. They admitted—thirty-seven of them!—that from their windows they had watched the killer finish off his screaming victim but had not picked up the phone because "they had been afraid of getting involved." The police indignantly recorded this "cowardly indifference". But it is not only the householders of New York who show such apathy. When in November 1956 the Russian Bolsheviks ruthlessly murdered the Hungarian revolution, the neighbours—the French, the English, the Americans—leant on their windowsills, lamenting, and watched the tragedy without lifting a finger. No one picked up the phone to protest that the innocent were murdered under the eyes of the world. Why not? They were probably afraid of "getting involved."

Confessions of a Bourgeois

(1934)

The apartment was large and spacious, the rooms high-ceilinged, with long rows of windows, yet looking back it seems it was always dusky. Perhaps because in our childhood the governess, my brothers and sisters and I had to spend most of the day crowded into the *alkóv*, this vaulted, windowless room where the children's cribs and desks completely filled the space. This alcove connected my parents' bedroom with the dining room; a stained-glass door separated it from the

dining room overlooking the street: there was never a chance of even a stray ray of sunlight entering. Here we slept, did our homework, and played if the weather was bad, or if we were forbidden to leave the apartment by way of "punishment". It never entered anyone's head that the magnificent, spacious drawing room which sometimes remained unused for months would be more suitable and healthy for the children; it was perhaps the largest and best-lit room in the house, and it held nothing but furniture covered in white sheets; with its cool bourgeois splendour it always gave me the impression that someone had died in it. The *alkóv*, this dark, airless, warm little nest, that was our real home; no one wondered over this, even the "governesses" thought it natural that we should have to study by artificial light when the rest of the apartment was still bathed in the light of day.

There were five rooms in all, laid out as an *L*, three front rooms and two facing the courtyard. Apart from the children's room, all were large and airy. The occupants of these *fin de siècle* middle-class apartments were not overly concerned about the quality and placing of their children's rooms, not even those well-to-do families who otherwise doted on their offspring and begrudged them nothing in the way of education or clothing. Opinions on "hygiene" varied considerably. In those days the hypothesis that "germs were a health hazard" drove many housewives distracted, I knew several old ladies who were obsessed with the idea of cleanliness, they dusted all day, walking up and down in their apartment wearing gloves, hunting germs with feather-dusters. It was the ambition of every middle-class housewife to have not one speck of dust mar the surface of her French-polished furniture; visiting gossips held veritable inspections under the pretence of partaking of coffee in their friends' homes, and woe betide the miserable wretch in whose home the slovenly housemaid had forgotten to run the dustcloth over the piano that day. My mother, the two maids and the "Miss" housecleaned all day long. In the morning the maids cleaned the rooms, their work was supervised by the Miss, and later my mother appeared like a general mustering her troops and subjected their work to ruthless scrutiny, running her fingers along the hidden crevices of the furniture, hunting for specks of dust half the morning. The watchword was that absence of dust was the main condition of "modern hygiene". But the children's rooms in most apartments were a sorry sight, only hidden closet-like rooms were designated for this purpose, and though the back of the piano was always polished, in most homes the bathroom was sparingly used. In our family the bathroom was regularly used as there were many children, and in any case, my parents had unusual and not at all up-to-date principles regarding personal hygiene. The nursery-maid stoked up the battered iron stove in the bathroom morning and night and the Miss bathed the children; but general opinion had it that "too much bathing was injurious to children's health", as it made them soft. In most places the bathroom was used as a lumber room, where family members did go occasionally to wash, but because of the hand-laundered wash of underclothes hung up to dry, the piled up suitcases and

tools for cleaning shoes and clothes stored there, they could not move around freely in the dark room. In the apartments of many of our acquaintances luggage gathered dust in the bath, which was restored to its proper use only at the end of the year, on New Year's Eve. Towards the close of the century, the middle-classes bathed only in case of illness or marriage. But they insisted on having a bathroom in their apartments, they just did not have much use for it. The gloomy bathroom in our flat was also crammed with all sorts of odds and ends, my mother struggled desperately to keep some kind of order among the towels and bathrobes, everyone had their "own special peg", the towels, dressing-gowns, wraps hung there all jumbled up as in the cloakroom in a theatre, no one knew which one was theirs, where it was supposed to hang, when their turn would come. The bathroom was in eternal chaos, a hotbed of resentment and turmoil.

As opposed to the childrens' rooms or the bathrooms, perfect order reigned in the larders. Huge stores of food were laid up—superfluously—in large, dry, light rooms, as if it was a besieged castle that was being stocked with flour and lard, or the larder of a country mansion, where there are no butcher's or grocer's within a day's walking distance. In fact there were huge supplies of everything amassed in my mother's wardrobes, in the cupboard drawers; bolts of linen, knitwear, skeins of wool, but we laid up stocks of everything else, including boot-laces and dustcloths. This craze for hoarding would come upon my mother from time to time, and she would return from her shopping trips as triumphantly as if we were living in the desert and she had managed to procure rare and precious articles of consumption from a caravan passing through. We bought flour by the sackful, cooking fat by the barrel, millwheel-size rounds of cheese, nothing was ever measured out by the decagramme in our house. But even in possession of these large stocks we lived soberly rather than extravagantly. There were already three children squealing in the house, two servants living in, and the cook prepared meals for seven every midday, yet my mother was given no more than a hundred forints for kitchen expenses a month, and she may even have managed to put some of it by now and then. We ate meat twice a day, my father did not hold with the custom of eating reheated leftovers from luncheon in the evening. My mother kept a good table, we ate hearty, rich Hungarian meals, but a hundred forints sufficed to feed seven people. A Canaan-like bounty and low prices characterised the Hungarian world at the time, not the inevitable slump in prices that followed the war, when lack of money determined prices, and the goods and products of destitution were used as barter; the low prices of peacetime profited everyone. We lived in great style, in a rich, materialistic world. Even breakfast was a festive family occasion, like a nameday or a wedding. My father would arrive from the bathroom to the elaborately set breakfast table freshly shaved and faintly smelling of eau-de-cologne and hair-oil, sit down at the head of the table in his tobacco-coloured house-coat and reach for the local paper—we subscribed to the church paper, the *Northern Hungary News* which was published at episco-

pal cost by the episcopal press. While he waited for the tea to draw in the onion-patterned Meissen porcelain tea-pot, he would skim through the news. It was a ceremonial moment. This early in the day the moustache-press still stretched beneath Father's nose, he took it off only before eating, and with a small brush would carefully brush his brilliantined moustache to the left and right. My mother sat down opposite him, and on both sides of the table a pair of children watched round-eyed the celebration of breakfast. The children had coffee for breakfast with buttered rolls, and thick brown soup in the winter, but watching our father partake of his breakfast made up for everything and was an uplifting experience. My father breakfasted with such grace, in such a dignified, majestic way; his tobacco-coloured house-coat with its brown silk lapels, the light, graceful movements of his small, feminine, signet-ringed hands, his self-possession and that air of benevolence proper to a *pater familias* charmed me anew every day. He drank fragrant, golden tea with a lot of rum for breakfast, ate ham and lightly boiled eggs, honey and Hungarian butter (he often quarreled over the butter with my mother, who for reasons of economy, or for heaven knows what reason, sometimes bought Danish butter, and I remember the scene my father made one morning when he somehow formed a suspicion of this betrayal, he got up from the breakfast table and threw the "Danish butter" into the water closet!) he had toast especially made for him, and I could have watched this solemn ritual, his high-bred airs and graces for ever. This morning idyll seemed like a bourgeois religious service. Only a successful man, for whom the day could hold no unpleasant surprises, could prepare himself for it in such a leisurely, refined manner. In reality my father had not yet "arrived" at the time, it was the class to which he belonged that had arrived, and it was the irradiant awareness of belonging to this class that lent his behaviour and gestures such dignity. Those who belonged to this class and had a good record of service could begin the day with perfect equanimity.

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Lola was sent to Berlin this winter to "forget". She was a spoilt young lady from the provinces who had defied severe paternal opposition, and she got off the train at the Anhalter Bahnhof with the sulkiness born of thwarted puppy love. In Berlin the carnival was in full swing. She stayed with relatives, who lived in the vicinity of the Kurfürstendamm, her uncle on her mother's side, the director general of the largest German newspaper company. These relatives were well-to-do, they ran a large household. Lola lived a busy social life in their house.

The man she wished to "forget" was my friend. One day he wrote me a letter asking me to look up Lola, to speak to her on his behalf. I read the letter, put it away and did not think about it again. One evening a few weeks later I met her at the theatre. It was the day my father paid me a flying visit in Berlin. He'd come from Prague, just for the day. My father was a senator of the Hungarian party in Czechoslovakia at the time, and as the Upper House was not sitting that day, he

had seized the opportunity to call on me. He had never visited Berlin before then, and he never visited it again. I don't know what chance is, whether there is any sense in such classifications, at all events I will note here that chance so ordained that these two people, Lola and my father, met that night in Berlin. They were the only two people who had something to do with my life. We ran into each other in the foyer of the theatre. My father, when I'd reminded him to do so, greeted her mechanically, then stared after her myopically, "Who was that?" he asked in passing. And when I told him, said politely: "She's very beautiful." Then we went back to our seats, and did not talk about her any more.

The next day my father returned to Prague, as if he had come to Berlin—for the first and last time in his life—just for this occasion. In the afternoon I met Lola in one of the tea-shops on the Kurfürstendamm. I gave her my friend's letter and mumbled a few words. Then, self-consciously, I fell silent; she did not speak either. We both knew very well that there was nothing to be done. Encounters of this kind are always very simple. Birth is simple too, and so is death. I did not for one moment feel remorse because of my friend. I was incapable of false and deceptive chivalry. Such encounters are in any case not the consequences of purpose or decision. There was nothing I could do, I did not hold myself responsible. Later it was often to happen that a woman left a man for my sake, or left me for another man. At such times I did feel guilt, or shame, or picked a fight, at all events I always tried to explain away these quadrilles. But when I met Lola I did not try to explain anything to myself or to anyone else, just as one does not feel the need to explain that one is alive and breathing. A friend of mine picked up the woman he was to spend his life with on the Avenue Wagram in Paris at four o'clock in the afternoon. The woman was a virgin, yet she went with him without a word of protest. They went to one of those hotels of ill repute where you can pay by the hour, then stayed together for fifteen years. All human relationships begin this way. I have never courted anyone. I do not know how to do it—a rendezvous either speaks for itself from the very first moment, or else all talk is useless. We sat in the tea-shop on the Kurfürstendamm, talked for half an hour, then we fell silent and watched the dancers. Every detail of that afternoon is sharply etched in my memory. We had not yet talked about anything personal, yet I was already a little anxious as I sat there beside her, watching the dancers and thinking about how we were going to earn our living. The basic feeling that decides the significance of the relationship of two people is unmistakable. Later on we went to the theatre, Reinhardt's. They were playing Strindberg's *Dreamplay*. "*Es ist Schade um die Menschen*," sang Helene Thimig. It was a festive evening, but one without pathos. We were both in low spirits. It was a "That's all we needed" kind of feeling, embarrassment and being ill at ease, a sadness. Getting to know someone with all their secrets and all the consequences: this is what is called, in lukewarm and general terms, love. Getting to know someone, coming to know them completely and in every way, is never idyllic.

The Work of the Garrens

(1988)

The doctors agreed that the father was sinking fast; but in those days, as so often happens, he was feeling tolerably well. "I'm going to die," he told Anna in the morning. "Perhaps tonight, perhaps in two or three days. Tell them that I want to see them. Tell them to come and see me in turn, in order of precedence, it would be a bit theatrical if they were all to come together." That was all he said. He received the arrivals in silence, staring at them bright-eyed, as if he wanted to assure himself for the last time of their physical shape, of the signs and imprints that bound them to the family and the Work,—watched them with bright, curiously dilated eyes, taking short, shallow gasps of breaths all the while, as if he were climbing up a slope, towards some kind of joy and radiance, panting, excited, happy. His eyes had never gleamed with such a strange, blazing, curious and mysteriously intelligent light as in these last few days. They stood in front of his bed, looked into his eyes, kissed his hand, and left the room silently, on tiptoes, the way they had arrived. Wrapped in coats and shawls, the Garrens bustled about, busying themselves with mysterious activities; they all wanted to help, but the most they could do was to spring up from their seats every now and then, rush into the next room and move an object from its place absolutely unnecessarily; or else they would stop in front of the window and stare dully before them. And yet, everyone in the house was occupied doing something. The bell kept ringing like before a family celebration, when there is a constant stream of deliverymen bringing packages. The doctors visited in a seemingly accidental, random way; they gave the father injections, gripped the hands of the family members; stood about for a while in the entrance hall in the company of one of the Garrens, examining their nails, then left as they had come, in a businesslike manner, despite having done nothing. The father was dying, but in the house everyone was bustling about as if someone could still be of help. At four in the afternoon the lamps were lit in the dining room and the drawing room; and around four o'clock Márta sat down to dinner, red-eyed and choking on each mouthful, yet she made a creditable job of eating, as if eating now were nothing out of the ordinary; she ate like someone who does not lose her head even in the general panic, the overwhelming dread, but obeys instead a base but sane and healthy command, that of life which, to use Márta's words, "clamours for its rights". Thus she ate, by lamplight, at four o'clock in the afternoon, two veal cutlets and spinach. The children had been put to bed in the music printing office. The children, especially the greedy little boy, could scent that something was going on in the house; a festive occasion of some sort, one could not tell exactly what, a celebration perhaps, or something like when the grown-ups sing and cry at the same time, but in any event something different, out of the ordinary, and at the end—so they felt—there would be a feast, and pre-

sents would be handed out. Albert did not eat because he was ashamed to do so; he sat beside Márta with his coat slung around his shoulders, staring at the veal cutlets and the spinach, rubbing his face with all ten fingers until it turned red, and repeating softly, mechanically: "So quickly! Who would have believed it?" What Albert now felt to be "quick" had been progressing at an incalculable, barely perceptible pace just the day before; but the house, the furniture, the Garrens' nerves, the town were all filled now with this "quickness", permeated with the miraculous which they did not understand, which they stared at in bewilderment, which was more incomprehensible than every dream and nightmare that had preceded it. Edgar, who only last night had asked how long it was going to take, now sat pale-faced in the drawing room, the collar of his coat turned up, staring at the ceiling with a pained expression, and shivered with cold. At this moment Edgar did not look cool or distinguished; rather, he seemed forsaken and miserable. He had a sneaking suspicion about how long it was going to take—and suddenly, shaking, felt that time was not simply a concept, but reality; that it had volume, and could be as confined as a cell where one did not have the space to turn. At times he thought he heard people making a noise, creating a disturbance somewhere in the house. Every now and then he would jerk up his head irritably and look around. No, at this moment Edgar did not look distinguished. Two red stains burned on his white, delicate cheeks as if he had been rouged, and his palms and forehead were moist with sweat.

At this moment the father already seemed somewhat strange, as if he had extracted himself from the rule of the law of the Garrens. His matted hair, his pinched, at this unreasonable, early hour still unshaven face, his perspiring brow, slightly elongated nose and bloodless lips showed a stranger, who is living an unfamiliar, incomprehensible adventure, a physical adventure according to all the signs—the only adventure where he will be left completely on his own, where he will not think of the family, and for the first time in his life will forget even the Work, to which he has become indifferent. From time to time he still opened his eyes; watched Anna for a while, and nodded, as if he were approving or confirming something. Anna knelt down beside the bed, took the father's delicate hands, ennobled by adventure and civilised, useless work, into her own, felt the uncountable, rapid pulsing of the bluish veins, wiped the father's brow, watched him attentively, and gave orders in a low voice. Of course, now I understand, reality is different, thought Anna. The vision which loomed at this hour was not "horrific", not even painful; the horror and the pain were still demurely lurking behind the event, like two monsters in the Stygian myths, behind the unspoken plot; the reality was the pulsing of the veins and the glance with which the father still registered Anna from time to time, the footsteps of the people in the room and Lacta's slightly shaking hands, smelling of cigars, fluttering around the father—and especially that feeling of haste, that quickened pace which filled the room, filled the objects too; it was as if they had left something undone, and now everything that had belonged to the father began to quicken, to rush, memories and

surging blood, the hands of the clock and panting lungs, everything rushed, almost without purpose, as if this were a race, a race without a goal or meaning, a rushing for the sake of rushing, a kind of running amok in one place, the end of which, though not its purpose, would be death. Anna felt that she was running with her father; this feeling was the numbed race of nerves, or the consciousness, a race with an indifferent and ruthlessly determined, stubborn competitor. The father's fob-watch, which had to be wound with a key, lay on his bedside table, and from the corner of her eye Anna could see that the hands were still moving. This ticking, this humble and tenacious sign of mechanical life calmed her anxiety for a moment. "The watch is still working," she thought. And: "The watch cannot be stronger than life."

Anna stood in the bright sunlight and looked around blinking, like someone who'd come from the dark and whose optic nerve was hurt by the brightness of daylight, and it was as if she were seeing a completely new image of the world, a version which surprised her. It was with such guarded curiosity that she now surveyed the fountain and the garden, which at this moment was filled with the festive play of light and clouds. She stood tall and slim, and it seemed as if she had lost weight in these last few days, or perhaps during these last hours. As if anguish and fear, these wondrous masters, had touched Anna's figure with their potter's fingers, perfecting and refining its proportions and contours so that the young, though not shamelessly young body now walked through this garden with renewed freshness and self-assurance, with firm steps and with modest pride. Her hair, always so carefully combed, parted in the middle and smoothed down on her head, now fell on her shoulders in tousled disarray—she walked hetæra-like, as if she had spent the night carousing, or had come straight from an incredible, inconceivable escapade, a bout of revelry and sensuality, casting herself, her old self aside, like an oriental girl who had been offered in sacrifice, who had been touched by a sensual, physical force that had initiated her into her new destiny. Thus she walked through the garden, calm, slender, her hair loose on her shoulders, in that plain gray uniform which seemed to be the worldly-pious uniform of an order—Anna's order—but at the same time a costume, the fancy-dress of illness, of the father's death, of service.

Now they heard the bell. The town had been told the news. Perhaps Albert had sent word to the sexton, perhaps the bishop had made inquiries, but perhaps there had been no need to send word, the town had learned the news with that miraculous intuition of organisms tied by kinship, as the people here had known, without words or signs, here on the bench in front of the summer house, opposite the fountain and the house, beneath the blue-grey, bright and restless sky. They heard the tolling of the bell up on the hill, and in the distant, deserted mansion, and in the bay over the hill, the tolling of the bell flowed over the sea and in their boats the fishermen dropped their nets, doffed their leather caps, crossed themselves and said quietly: "Garren, the old Garren is dead. That's one Garren less." Or else they

thought: "There aren't many of the old ones left." And the natives of the town awakened in their homes, sat up in their beds, thought of the father, looked up at the ceiling, breathed in the stale, stuffy air of their rooms and stared blinking into the gloom with bleary eyes, they too crossed themselves and sleepily mumbled: "He was an artist all the same. Now there are no artists left in town." And they knew they did not have much longer to live either. The belfry is sinking and so is the bishop's palace, the stone figures of the church are crumbling, the old town is slowly disappearing off the face of the earth, and the earth, the ancient earth is slowly filling up with stones and bones, the bones of the Garrens and the other natives, with the people who still retained in their consciousness and nerves something of the father's work, a bow, a greeting, or an elegant gesture. A number of faded women whom the father had made love to in the old days, in the productive period on the beach, in the shuttered hotel, noted the tolling of the bell and began to remember. They remembered the deceased with the secret, special knowingness of women. The bishop too took note of the bell; he had been lying sleepless on his camp bed; now he clambered off, walked to the window with faltering steps, looked down on the town and the valley, listened to the tolling of the deathbell and thought of the adversary, and thought that without an adversary there was no real meaning to life; he thought of Rousseau, and he too crossed himself. Then he knelt on his prayer stool, lowered his head onto his folded hands and began to pray in silence.

Now that the house, the town, the hill and the bay had filled with the news of the death, the brothers and sisters sat passively, as when at a certain stage of one's life one suddenly stops, looks about, becomes aware that something has ended, and that one has nothing left to do: thus they sat, spent, shivering slightly in the cold morning light, and drew a little closer to each other.

They sat this way for some time, the sun now warming their faces, their bodies sending messages to each other with slight ripples and quiverings, peaceful and self-possessed. Then Anna stood up and went back into the house. They followed her in single file.

Translated by Eszter Molnár

Miklós Györffy

Language as Literary Role-Play

Pastiche and Parody in Sándor Márai's Novels

The earliest modern Hungarian first-person-narrated novels appeared at the beginning of the 1910s. What I have in mind is Margit Kaffka's *Színek és évek* (Colours and Years, 1911) and Mihály Babits's *Gólyakalifa* (The Stork Caliph, 1913). There are fundamental differences between them and yet in both the narrator is a character in the narrated story, the involvement is direct and personal. Both are biographies of the principal character, who is also the narrator. Especially in *Colours and Years* the position of the narrator shapes the form in which the world of the story is narrated. What Kaffka's narrator tells is not the "true" story of her life but subjective remembered images. She relates how she herself remembers her life, how "the fading, ponderous and tough, dark texture of time" constantly shapes her persona and life, affecting the way she sees the past and the present. Babits's novel is a depth-psychology analysis of someone who experiences his life on two different and mutually exclusive levels, as if he were split into himself and his *Doppelgänger*.

These novels show a clear endeavour to realise a narrative form that makes use of modern psychology by focussing on the inner life of the character—hence the first-person narration—but characterization through language is less in evidence. One occasionally feels that the manner of speech of the narrator is as in an other-narrated story, that the story might as well be told in the third person. Signs of a desire to soliloquise are seldom in evidence, as the most poetically tinted forms of the soliloquy are employed. In Babits's novel the first-person narration is justified by the device of referring to a later formulation in writing; in *Colours and Years* the meditative and reflective memories of a woman getting

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on in years provide the basic situation. Remembered images are elaborated as a succession of fragmentary, impressionistic sensations. The listing of these images sometimes comes close to the effects of soliloquies. Later on, as for instance in Virginia Woolf's novels written in the twenties, this method led on to the interior monologue.

These important early attempts by Kaffka and Babits to write first-person-narrated novels were mavericks in their time in Hungary, a period and place which otherwise produced great things in narrative fiction. The novels by Zsigmond Móricz, Gyula Krúdy and Dezső Kosztolányi tended to be written under the ægis of the other-narrated tradition, albeit, both in narrative mode and the focussing, there were variants whose exegesis in the context of the modern ways is possible. Krúdy qualifies as such a variant since his novels can often be read as latent first-person narratives. The characteristic narrative mode of the Krúdy novels implies a narrator who does not actually take part in the action, but whose intimate proximity and insider status that is multiply reflected in language shows that this is where he belongs.

In 1928, the publication of Sándor Márai's *Bébi vagy az első szerelem* (Baby or First Love) brought into Hungarian prose the presence of a narrative voice for which the soliloquy and the first-person narrative were central; in later works there was also a light ironic touch, which expressed itself also in language and rhetoric that tended to parody. The very first novel can be read from this perspective: it is the journal of an aging and lonely small-town schoolmaster, who falls in love with one of his girl pupils and, perhaps, also with one of the boys, becoming involved in a sort of love-hate relationship with the latter. It is this first love of his life that leads to his ruin. One observes the gradual decline of the first-person narrator from his own perspective, a perspective that can only be described as infantile innocence. The schoolmaster understands neither his behaviour nor his feelings; indeed, he misunderstands them. At the same time, his journal entries must also make possible a correct reading of his behaviour. Thus two narrative perspectives are projected on each other, that of the first person-narrator and that of the author as narrator. At first they coincide, but diverge more and more as the story unfolds, so that, finally, the going insane of the schoolmaster can, from the perspective of the outside world, appear as a psychopathological case, while the narrative voice—that of the first-person narrator—stays the same.

This Márai novel still displays obvious weaknesses—the somewhat forced play between the relationship of the two perspectives appears to be more important in the eyes of the author than psychological truth or the reality of the principal character—but one cannot deny him the ideational originality of the narrative mode. The interrelationships of linguistically explicit perspectives are such as stay implicit; by making themselves manifest in what is kept secret an incipient irony is allowed to shimmer through; this, it must be said, here

still appears to be contingent. One reason why this irony—always presuming that it was intended—cannot make itself properly felt is because the story, on its explicit level, remains linguistically rather neutral. The narrator in his journal employs a language which shows no traces of his latent mental or psychological pathology.

In later novels by Márai a soliloquising first-person narrative and other narrated forms alternate. The second part of *Idegen emberek* (Aliens) and the autobiographical novel *Egy polgár vallomásai* (The Confessions of a Bourgeois) are of the first type. The novels *Zendülők* (Rebels) and *Féltékenyek* (The Jealous) are of the second. The former type, based on Márai's own experience, tells the story of a young Hungarian in the Paris of the twenties, who wants to make a break with his Hungarian background and to find a place for himself in Paris. He ends up in the vacuum of expatriates who belong nowhere, the aliens of the title. His being a stranger bears both a cultural and an existential import. *The Confessions of a Bourgeois*, arguably Márai's best book, certainly best known in Hungary, is an autobiographical work. The first-person narrator, who is the author's stylised literary equivalent, relates the life-story of a Hungarian patrician from his boyhood in Kassa (Košice) to making it as a writer. It is a memorial to a human type about to suffer extinction, related with documentary precision. Third person author-narrated novels make up the second type. *Zendülők* (Rebels) is a novel of adolescence, a type that appears in many variants at that time. The story, told from a refinedly ironical perspective, is that of a gang of lads in an imaginary small town, about to leave secondary school, who rebel against the bare-faced mendacity of the adult world. *Féltékenyek* (The Jealous) is the first volume of a family saga that will preoccupy Márai right through his life as a writer. It tells the story of the dying of the head of a patrician family which is in the process of breaking up, and of the "jealous" rivalry of his grown-up children. The setting is the symbolic town that keeps on cropping up in Márai's work, and the perspective is that of alienation. The two first-person-narrated novels, however, appear author-narrated in a way, inasmuch as the soliloquies increasingly display the features of the author's personal tone of voice—something that is particularly obvious to a literary historian writing well after the event: author-narrations, on the other hand, remind of first-person novels representing the rhetoric of soliloquies. In *The Jealous* the narrative voice expresses itself in long, elaborate sentences, gathering multitudes of attributes and similes. The similes frequently take tremendous detours, spreading themselves to become minor inserts, extending the dimensions of the narrative, bringing to mind Gyula Krúdy's associative and metaphorical similes. The tuning, as in Krúdy, is somewhat ironical.

In the three novels of the late thirties and early forties this irony is sometimes so pronounced that it turns into parody. The soliloquising and rhetoric of the Márai voice is pointed but also alienated, allowing what is personal in this

voice to appear as role-play. In *Vendéjjáték Bolzanóban* (Guest Appearance in Bolzano), the narrator assumes the role of Giacomo Casanova, who is interpreted as a sort of comedian by Márai. He plays parts, not only for the benefit of others but also for his own. He dons a mask and disguises himself as a woman in order to seduce a woman who appears in a man's disguise. There are momentary doubts, but nothing is given away to suggest that he is truly identical with his roles or adventures. The narrator plays a game, just like Giacomo. He identifies with Giacomo's parts, and surrounds himself with 18th-century rococco props, conjuring up the operatic nature of this world, using Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as a model. His themes resound in the orchestration of this tradition. As presented by the author, Giacomo appears as Mozart's Don Giovanni with unambiguously ironic hues. His first-person soliloquies are tenor arias. They are confronted by the great seventy-pages long, rhetorically spirited soliloquy aria of the Count of Parma, that luxuriates in stylistic devices, and which, with its ironic allusions, obeys the operatic conventions of the baritone voice. The aria of Franziska, who is disguised as a man and who shames Giacomo, represents the soprano voice. The manner in which the characters of the novel appear and speak their parts through several chapters in richly articulated magnificent linguistic runs of accumulations, repetitions and paradoxical and aphoristic declarations, no doubt points to the artificial and static artistry of the opera, which is cited with ironic and parodistic intent. But since the individual soliloquies are intoned in the same narrative-rhetorical voice, that is since all the characters in practice speak the same language, there is no linguistic polyphony in Bakhtin's sense.

In *A gyertyák csonkig égnek* (The Candles Burn Down, published in English translation as *Embers*) a novel which did unbelievably well in Italy and Germany in recent years, soliloquising speech dominates to such a degree that, starting with the second third, the narrative in fact consists of the soliloquy of the principal character. Just as the soliloquies in *Guest Appearance in Bolzano*, General Henrik's soliloquy is addressed to someone present, to a former friend whom he has not seen for forty years, and whose presence is barely noticeable. He is really present as figuring in the events of the past which are conjured up in the soliloquy.

This story of the past, pointed up and melodramatically stylised, can be read straight and taken seriously but it can also be understood ironically. Márai here produces an emphatically artificial situation that is thrown into relief both in space and time. The sterile and artificial circumstances indicate the alienation from the world of the General, who is both tired of life and as possessed. His soliloqui is indeed a true soliloquy, i.e., it is not addressed to the real friend who, in the meantime, has turned into the arch-enemy, but to his phantom which appears to Henrik only in his imagination. A consequence would be that the narrated story can be understood merely as the General's version and not necessar-

ily the whole truth. Perhaps it is no more than an arbitrary and false interpretation of past events. The spirited rhetorical flow of speech that appears to tell the long suppressed truth at last could, in that case, be interpreted as an endeavour to cloak the truth, thus, in a certain sense, anticipating the procedure later used by Thomas Bernhard to formulate his soliloquies. This, however, is not the case, since the ambivalence of the soliloquy is not sufficiently elaborated. It lacks those dimensions which limn the possessed delusion in language, something that Thomas Bernhard then accomplished in such a singular fashion.

S*zindbád hazamegy* (Sindbad Goes Home) is the novel in which the role-play of the narrator is also multiply reflected in language. There are no soliloquies in the strict poetic sense of the term in this novel; basically, however, the author-narration is one long pastiche and can therefore be interpreted as a literary soliloquy which throughout imitates the narrative manner of another writer. *Sindbad Goes Home* relates a day in the life of the old Krúdy, very likely his very last day, although that is merely hinted at. Any connection with Krúdy's documented biography is remote. Krúdy was presumably Márai's most important literary model, and Sindbad was one of his favourite figures, with whom Krúdy identified. Krúdy's lyrical and idealising traditionalism was of symbolic importance for Márai in the growing barbarity of the thirties, which he experienced and described as "the reign of terror of the herd-instinct", as "the invasion of the foreign", and as "the terror of a shallow mass-culture". "Where, Mr Sindbad, is the old country?", Mr Ede, the headwaiter of the Chicago Café asks the principal character who personifies Krúdy. "In the soul", the "seafarer" answers. This old country is also present in Márai's soul as that "other Hungary" which possibly did not exist anywhere except in the souls and the writer's imagination. In *Sindbad* Márai attempts to present this psychic world through Krúdy's figure. This Krúdy psychic world, the dream-world of Krúdy's novels and stories, created legendary figures and motifs, and primarily a "sound which was like the sounding of a viol in an empty room, where someone had left it in a corner". In other words, Krúdy's legendary sound of a violoncello. Márai presents not only this psychic world but also this sound. He wrote on Krúdy using Krúdy's voice.

The narrative voice of this story is too complex and too reflective, much more than a mere bravura imitation of a style. Indeed, Márai's Sindbad is not merely Krúdy, the authentic and genuine person, but also a condensation of all those Krúdy characters who created the Krúdy legend, an inseparable confluence of the narrator and of the characters identified with him. The two levels are welded together in Márai's work, just as the narrator and his ironically alienated protagonist are in Krúdy. In Márai's Sindbad, however, we also recognise features which link him to Márai himself, marks of an affinity of souls and of a literary homage. Márai's Sindbad is also a mask of the man and writer Márai, who dis-

covers in the Krúdy legend an occasion both for identification and for literary and linguistic alienation.

He relates a day in the life of this fictitious person, who is not really a flesh-and-blood literary character in a novel but a personification of a literary tradition and language. As a character in a novel he does just about nothing, on the level of action hardly anything happens to him. He travels around the metropolis, visits the baths, a coffee shop, a restaurant, he dines and drinks, says a few words on occasion, he laconically formulates home-truths that are both wise and banal. These are in themselves pretty ironically meant, and they are ironically attributed to a Sindbad who speaks them as ironically and anecdotally pointed formulæ of a vanished wisdom which perhaps never existed.

The author's narrative also hovers between irony and melancholy. In the first half and last quarter it is a pastiche of Krúdy's narrative voice, the third quarter, *pace* the overtones which here conjure up Krúdy, tends to be Márai's own rhetoric soliloquy. Here, in around fifty pages, the narrator answers a rhetorical question put by himself and, as it were, in the name of the principal character: why does he write, and what about? When and where did he hear the sound that prompted him to write? What things did he see in the vision of that vanished, legendary other Hungary?

One might well ask who it is who here speaks in Sindbad's name? What are we to make of this old other Hungary? It is obvious that Márai is not identical with the narrator, nor is the narrator identical with Krúdy. Nor is Krúdy's world identical with the vision of old Hungary that is here evoked. The day on which Sindbad goes home is rather one of Márai's days in the thirties. It is difficult to imagine, however, that Márai, the European burgher and citizen and the keen critic of the Hungarian neo-baroque should in his own name as narrator give voice to sententious commonplaces like: "In the Hungary of old, men still had polished manners" or, "A Hungarian could be stern, exuberant or extravagant, but he was never cruel." Such dicta are indeed parodies of a manner of speech that Krúdy too meant to be ironic. They are an allusion to Mikszáth's and Jókai's anecdotal and cosy, implicitly ironic, ways—and thus to the good old days, where everything had its proper place and there was no need to take things overseriously. This narrative voice is part of Márai's ironic and melancholy image of the old Hungary; for his purposes it is represented primarily by the characteristic Krúdy voice with its rank growth of metaphors, jovial sententiousness and impressionistic cult of the atmosphere. But the soil out of which it grew is also part and parcel of it for him, a certain carping and romancing coffee-house style, affecting wisdom, rooted in the good old days. Márai the narrator welds these sounds into a narrative voice that may well be intended to be a parody, but which is additionally effective since it is familiar yet painfully over and done with, a thing of the past.

A late journal entry by Márai is evidence of the great role which initiation in national concerns and familiarity with the native language plays in determining the key of a narration:

Krúdy, in German. Seen from the perspective given by a foreign language, it becomes clear that precisely that which is peculiar in Krúdy's works, that is parody, proves to be untranslatable. The way this great writer—always and about everything—wrote parodies. The way the writer presumed the reader to be an accomplice, that author and reader would laugh together [Márai, in Hungarian, used the verb *röhögnek*, which is closer to guffaw] about what he had to say about men or women, and about the way he did it... Wherever Krúdy's heroes or heroines sigh, turn up the whites of their eyes, or say high-minded or sentimental things, the author always presumes that readers are aware that all of that is meant to be a parody of reality. And it is precisely that what makes Krúdy magical—and Hungarian. The foreign reader must, however, accept all that as the literal truth—in that way the whole business is turned upside down.

In this connection similar methods found in Joyce's *Ulysses* should be born in mind as a distant analogy. Both authors similarly employ the structure-creating power of literary references, which determines their works and produces intertextual connections. These literary allusions are more or less parodistic in both works. The melancholic, mild and bitter parodies found in Márai and Krúdy are naturally totally unlike Joyce's, which are malicious and mocking. Furthermore, stream of consciousness or interior monologue are out of the question in Márai's *Sinbad*. What holds the floor here is not the consciousness of the hero who, as mentioned above, is a pretty diffused phenomenon, but a narrative voice created out of diverse traditions of discourse and literature that mutually mirror each other.

In the novels by Márai discussed here, literature appears as an ironic, sometimes parodistic role-play with cultural and discursive forms and traditions. There are trends which are present in the Hungarian narrative fiction of the time in other variants as well. What I have in mind is Dezső Kosztolányi's *Esti Kornél* (Kornél Esti), Frigyes Karinthy's *Utazás a koponyám körül* (Journey Round my Skull), Milán Füst's *A feleségem története* (Story of my Wife) and Miklós Szentkuthy's books, primarily the volumes of the *Szent Orpheus Breviárium* (Saint Orpheus' Breviary) cycle. A thorough examination of these parallel trends still lies ahead. •

Kossuth: The Vain Hopes of a Much Celebrated Exile

The 1848 Revolution and War of Independence is Hungary's most celebrated historic event: it left its stamp on all subsequent generations, it has divided and united, a main source of national pride, but also of doubt and self-laceration. Did Hungary go too far in the spring of 1848, or perhaps not far enough? What in fact took place: a social revolution for equality, or a national uprising against foreign oppression, or an archaic revolt of the landed aristocracy, clad in a nationalist guise, against the modern, centralising and supra-national Habsburg regime? Could the war have been avoided, and if not, could complete military defeat have been averted? Who was responsible?

So many questions left open.

The Hungarian War of Independence was the bloodiest conflict in the Europe of its day. The political and national sentiments it aroused still hold sway. Never before or after did the peoples of the Habsburg empire fight one another with such passion and determination.

Lajos Kossuth was the most influential and most controversial of the leading figures in this Central European tragedy, but his position in history is still unsettled. An internationally acknowledged advocate of the Hungarian cause, the most popular Hungarian statesman in Hungary (and often the least popular among our neighbours), the greatest orator and the best administrator, he is also an embodiment of the nation's vices: of nationalistic arrogance, pompousness, theatrical gestures, volatile enthusiasm and naivety concerning foreign politics.

In our neighbouring countries, Kossuth is accused of nationalist demagoguery, in Slovakia they speak of him as a renegade Slovak.

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If the United States granted him unrivalled popularity, it never became his land of success. Numerous friends and supporters notwithstanding, he failed to secure either money or arms to liberate his nation. The American government turned down even his request of "intervention for non-intervention," i.e. that America try to prevent the European powers from getting involved in the Hungarians' war of independence. American foreign policy could not go along with such an appeal at the time.

As Governor-President of Hungary, Kossuth left his country, along with several thousand followers, on August 11, 1849, after he had appointed General Arthúr Görgey dictator of Hungary. Two days later Görgey laid down arms, not to the Austrians but to the Russians (whose intervention had been requested by the Court in Vienna); this achieved nothing since the Russians handed over the entire Hungarian military and civilian leadership to the vengeful Austrian General Haynau. Among many other people, thirteen generals and Prime Minister Count Lajos Batthyány were executed. Once in exile, Kossuth reassumed the title of Governor-President.

By a special irony of fate and history it was the Ottoman Empire that welcomed the Hungarians, their former enemies. But the Porte was by this time so weak that it could hardly defend the Hungarian refugees from Austrian and Russian demands for their extradition. Eventually most of them were able to return to Hungary under an amnesty, while those who did not qualify under the amnesty or those who refused to live under Francis Joseph and Haynau moved on to other countries. As a result, when Kossuth disembarked on Staten Island in December 1851, he was greeted by Hungarians, many of whom had accepted the offer of the American government to start a new life in a free land as free farmers.

The US frigate *Mississippi* set out with Kossuth and his close followers on board in September 1881 from the Turkish port of Kutahia, where they had spent a relatively comfortable time of internment. When this man-of-war raised her anchor in the Dardenelles, a triumphal voyage started the like of which the world had never seen. At the main ports of call they put into, La Spezia, Marseilles, Southampton and London, people celebrated Hungary's Governor as the champion of liberty and the enemy of all tyrants.

Kossuth was welcomed in the United States with unique enthusiasm, he was compared on banners and flags to Jesus Christ, Moses and even George Washington. Hundreds of thousands were in a frenzy by the roads he drove along with his elegant escort of Hungarian hussars; spell-bound crowds listened to his splendid speeches, and even those who could not hear a word because of the noise and huzzaing felt that they too were party to a wonderful experience. Many praised his flawless, rich, old-fashioned English. As a matter of fact, we still don't know when and where he had acquired it, for it is only a legend that he had improved his command of the English language to such perfection in an Austrian prison, with the help of Shakespeare and the Bible.

Toast masters called for three cheers for St Stephen, the eleventh century founder of the Hungarian kingdom, and the newspapers carefully described Kossuth's distinguished demeanour, fine beard, interesting clothes and hat, which led to a long-lasting fad. Speakers welcoming him emphasised that the American and the Hungarian people fought for the same goals, and that Kossuth had been the most successful advocate of the American ideal of liberty in tyranny-ridden Central Europe. As Secretary of State Daniel Webster said, "we shall rejoice to see our American model upon the lower Danube and the mountains of Hungary."

We must note at this point how widely Kossuth and the Americans differed in their view of the future. He wanted to collect money, arms and volunteers for a renewed War of Independence; the American public expected this great republican to settle among them and take up farming, like so many other Hungarians exiles. Kossuth however, was no real republican: he had offered the Hungarian crown to most of the royal houses of Europe. He hadn't even set foot on American soil when speakers addressing the American Senate were charging him with duplicity: in Marseilles he had called out "Vive la République," in Southampton "God save the Queen."

The tragedy of popular, one might even say fashionable, public figures is that they soon acquire many enemies. Upon his arrival in the United States, idle tongues commented that Kossuth was becoming bald, that he was shorter than expected, and that his long sword dragged in the dust. The most serious crisis arose when the American public, then anticipating a civil war, demanded how he stood on the question of slavery. This he could not say, because the emancipator of the serfs knew support from Southern states and politicians was essential to him. He was consequently attacked by the most progressive American politicians and journalists as a traitor to the cause of emancipation.

There were some who resented what they deemed Kossuth's interference in American domestic politics, others that he did not interfere enough. Some complained that his attacks on the Catholic Habsburgs and the Pope hurt the feelings of American Catholics, especially those of Irish origin, and that the attacks provided support for ultra-conservative Protestant Know-Nothings. Kossuth himself, on the other hand, despaired of President Millard Fillmore's almost complete ignorance of, and even smaller interest in, Hungary, he also despaired of the fact that despite his having been received and feted by both houses of Congress, nothing was done for the Hungarian cause.

The outcome of Kossuth's visit to the United States, from December 1851 till July 1852, was mutual disappointment. The Americans expected Kossuth to settle in their country and contribute his fame to that of the United States. Kossuth, a great admirer of the American constitution, expected help from the American people for the common cause of liberty. But the foreign policy of the United States at the time was based on the principle of non-intervention, there was

neither the money nor the energy for any kind of intervention. The two expectations could not be reconciled.

The American president sent young Dudley Mann to Hungary to decide whether the country was free; if it was the United States would recognise the Hungarian state. Mann had not even reached Vienna when The War of Independence was over, and with every step closer to the country, the emissary, who initially had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Hungarian cause, became more and more converted to the Austrian point of view.

For this reason it is no more than patriotic self-delusion to take pride in the great success of the speeches Kossuth gave in America, in his illustrious admirers, or in the American towns named after him. When Kossuth and his wife took ship in New York—with a passport in the name of "Mr Smith and Lady", for fear of Austrian assassins—only a few Hungarians were at the pierhead to see him off. His visit nevertheless did have a lasting effect: Hungarians remained popular in America for quite some time. Many of them became colonels and generals in the army of the Union, others became American diplomats.

Kossuth remained popular much longer in Europe, collecting money for arms and giving hundreds of speeches. In England alone more than a hundred books and thousands of articles were devoted to his person and activity.

In the ensuing years there were promising moments, as in 1859 when he made an alliance with Napoleon III, practically obtaining his promise to liberate Hungary, but this and other plans came to nothing, primarily because his counsel was no longer heeded in Hungary. The country desired a compromise, development and economic prosperity, and understood that the army of the Habsburg empire was Hungary's ultimate guarantee against the national strivings of its ethnic minorities.

Thus Kossuth became an émigré, almost the only real one from Hungary, as Mór Perczel, General György Klapka, Count Gyula Andrassy and hundreds of others had long returned to their homeland and made careers there. Hungarians profoundly respected Kossuth, made pilgrimages to him in Turin, but did not heed his words. His own political party at home, the 1848 Party or Party of Independence, had become so chauvinistic and ethnically intolerant he could no longer bear association with them. Nor could he establish friendly links with the liberal-conservative Compromise Party, as he himself was never ready to reach a compromise with Francis Joseph—neither was, for that matter, the old Emperor King ready to forgive the other old man. So it was in Turin that Kossuth remained; the uncompromising champion of 1848 liberalism, denominational equality and the emancipation of Jews. He was said to be old-fashioned, failing to keep up with the times; he was in fact right, when it came to equality before the law, civil liberties, freedom of religion and ethnic tolerance.

Kossuth died in 1894 in Turin, at the age of 92. He had been the living conscience of the Hungarian people. ■

Tibor Frank

"...to fix the attention of the whole world upon Hungary..."

Lajos Kossuth in the United States, 1851–52

Hungary's pre-March 1848 reform generation knew a great deal about the United States of America, a country they all greatly admired. The writings of Sándor Bölöni Farkas (*Útazás Észak Amerikában* [A Journey in North America], 1834) and Ágoston Haraszthy (*Utazás Északamerikában* [A Journey in North America], 1844), along with Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique* (translated into Hungarian in 1841–43), provided readers with eye-witness accounts of "the young American giant", to use Miklós Wesselényi's expression. In his *Országgyűlési Tudósítások* (Parliamentary Reports), Kossuth himself regularly published his contemporaries' elated comments on the triumphant march of liberty and democracy in America.

A hero to worship

Kossuth, who was interned in Turkey after the Hungarian defeat in 1849 in the War of Independence, had a relatively good knowledge of the United States, even though he was nearly fifty by the time he first set foot on American soil. During and after the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, the American public began to reciprocate the enthusiasm he felt for the United States: the Hungarian statesman who had fought against Habsburg oppression overnight became the champion of freedom and the hero of the age. And when the Americans learned of Kossuth's internment in Turkey, Senator Pierre Soulé of Louisiana advised the President, as early as February 5, 1850, to intervene with the Porte on behalf of the Hungarian refugees in Turkey. Still, it took a full year and much informational wrangling before the Senate finally empowered the President to send a ship to fetch the ex-governor of Hungary.

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The *U.S.S. Mississippi* took Kossuth aboard, accompanied by a small group of Hungarian refugees, at the southern exit of the Dardanelles. Captain Long's instructions were to receive his charge with "all signs of courtesy" and carry him directly to the United States. However, Kossuth wished to break his journey in Great Britain. On September 22, following some argument with the captain and his superiors, the Americans finally agreed to Kossuth's stopping off in England. Leaving the American ship at Gibraltar, Kossuth disembarked from the steamer *Madrid* at Southampton, much to the disappointment of the American public.

The enthusiastic reception, the celebrations elicited by his speeches delivered in English and initial political successes prolonged his stay in England, which had originally been meant to last only a couple of days. Finally, "The Nation's Guest" resumed his journey to the New World on November 20.

"Kossuth fever" seized New York as it made preparations for the arrival of the freedom fighter, who received a hero's welcome after midnight on December 4/5, 1850 in the harbour of Staten Island. In reply to the guns of the *Humboldt*, the steamer that brought Kossuth into the bay, a thirty-one gun salute resounded (symbolising the then thirty-one states of the United States), promptly followed by the guns of Governor's Island, Manhattan Island and North River.

The New York reception surpassed all imagination. According to one of the Philadelphia newspapers, it was not so much a Kossuth fever but a Kossuth craze that gripped New York. Dénes Jánossy, the most informed student of Kossuth's journey in America to this day, describes one of the posters which showed "Kossuth flanked by an Austrian soldier with a tiger's head and a Russian soldier with a bear's head, accompanied by the American eagle above him, a Turkish soldier at his feet, and the British lion in the background." Street vendors were selling the stories of the Hungarian War of Independence in cheap editions and several newborn babies received the name Kossuth in baptism.

The New York press gave a day-to-day account of the visit, capturing every single detail, with the abolitionist journals taking the lead. The editor of the radical *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley, one of Kossuth's greatest admirers, sent a reporter with instructions to accompany the illustrious guest throughout his entire journey. Thanks to W. T. Coggshall's articles, published in book form as early as 1852, we can read about the events of the seven months in diary-like detail. The then recently launched *The New York Times*, just as *The Evening Post* and *The Independent*, published regular and sympathetic articles on Kossuth, while the conservative and anti-abolitionist *The Morning Courier* and *The New York Enquirer* relentlessly and vehemently attacked him. On such occasions there was a regular press war between *The Courier* and *The Times*.

An American orator

Almost immediately upon his arrival, the Hungarian guest delivered a series of speeches. He had begun to study the English language seriously as an adult, during the years he spent in prison between 1837 and 1840. "I told them to give me an English Dictionary and Shakespeare." (*Kossuth in New England*, pp. 106–107.) Reading Shakespeare, together with the English Romantics, left an ineradicable mark on Kossuth's English, his vocabulary, his grammatical structures and on his phrasing.

He began to speak English only in exile, at the age of 49, and the celebrated public speaker was often lost for words in private conversation. In the light of this, it is quite remarkable how, even on his arrival in England, but especially during his trip to the United States, he became known and respected as one of the great orators in English of the time.

"I heard him speak for about three quarters of an hour at the legislative banquet of last week," George Stillman Hillard wrote to his friend Francis Lieber on May 8, 1852. Himself a master of rhetoric and an excellent orator, whose occasional addresses "were famous in their day," Hillard was a competent judge of Kossuth's abilities as a public speaker.

That I hold to have been an oratorical achievement of a very high order. He spoke, in all, about two hours, without notes and standing out at full length upon a table. His voice is firm, his manner pleasing and persuasive, and his countenance full of animated expression. His management of his person, his legs especially, was admirable. I can perfectly understand that in his own language he must be a popular orator of the first class. I have no doubt, from what I hear, that he does exert a very fascinating power over all who approach him. He is a man of an Eastern, luxuriant, imaginative & feminine cast and he wins men and especially women, through the sympathies. His charm of his manner is a winning & sort of carressing persuasiveness. This is perfectly consistent with a dash of the theatrical and melodramatic which I think belongs to him. When I first saw him, he was on horseback, and he did not ride remarkably well, and he wore a shewy velvet coat, and altogether he looked to me like a troubadour more than a hero and that he ought to have had a harp by his side, instead of a sword.

For his most important speeches Kossuth prepared a draft, sometimes with the help of a native English speaker or a Hungarian who spoke the language well. Nevertheless, about two-thirds of the estimated 600–800 speeches of varying length he delivered in England and the United States by the summer of 1852 were off the cuff and the majority of these, as well as most of the letters he wrote in English, were considered masterpieces of 19th-century English prose. In the next fifty years, books such as *The Golden Age of American Oratory* (Boston, 1857) and several others quoted long passages from these texts. Fifty-two of his best speeches were published right away under the title *Select Speeches of Kossuth* (New York, 1854).

Of course not everybody was enthusiastic for the kind of oratory that Kossuth presented. Francis Lieber's critical comments were shared by several of his American contemporaries:

Do you remember what I say in my Character of the Gentleman, on exaggeration? It is both unmanly and ungentlemanly to spout and speak with the eloquence of a fire engine. See what a list of "down-trodden" words we could collect in America. *Splendid*, meaning now anything not much below par. *Magnificent*, so common you can hardly use it except you have proved on ten previous pages that you are not word-drunken. *Great* means almost distinguished, but not quite. *Admirable* has become so paltry, that it means 9 letters and no more. *Greatest man of the age*, means at times Webster, at others Scot [Sir Walter Scott], or Kossuth or Wellington, or Barnam [P. T. Barnum], or Jenny Lind, or Lola [Montez]—man, intellect or woman. Kossuth is the greatest orator of the age, if not of any age—my own eyes have seen this in print. Oh, it is beastly. Cows can roar too, and the articulated roar is the most brutal of the two. (Columbia, S.C., January 8, 1852)

Political realities

After the ceremonial procession in New York, similar receptions awaited Kossuth in the streets of Philadelphia and Baltimore, but by the time he reached Washington, D.C., the enthusiasm of official America had waned. From the start, the Austrian minister, Johann Hülsemann, made every effort to block Kossuth's official "stately" reception and registered a protest with President Millard Fillmore against the New York reception of the Hungarian rebel and against his being addressed as Governor. Washington politicians were divided in their opinion about the Hungarian guest's actual political weight. Fillmore undertook to receive Kossuth, though he viewed his mission as one of "having dangerous tendencies if encouraged beyond the limits of sympathy," and requested that Kossuth refrain from making an embarrassing political speech. (Quoted by Komlos, p. 101)

When Secretary of State Daniel Webster assured his President that Kossuth would not hold a speech in the White House, the date for the presentation was set for New Year's Eve, 1852.

Kossuth failed to keep his word. In a speech to the President and his government, he made a long list of the grievances that had brought him to the United States. America must intervene to guarantee non-intervention by Austria and Russia in Hungary's affairs, he said, bringing up the favours his hosts had shown him—securing his release from internment, his invitation to Washington, D.C., and his reception by the President—as evidence of commitment to intervention. However, Fillmore's frosty reply left no one in doubt about the political realities of the day: if Kossuth succeeded in achieving independence for his nation without American help, then the President would hail it as a victory for human rights in the Old World. "As an individual I sympathize with you in your brave struggle for the independence and freedom of your native land... my own views, as the

Walter Savage Landor

*To the City of New York,
on its Reception of Kossuth*

*City of men! Rejoice!
Not to have heard the voice
That rais'd up millions to its
Country's side,
But that thy sons respond
With voice that sounds beyond,
And shakes across the sea the
despot's pride.*

*My native Albion! thou
Mayst also glory now;
These are thy sons; altho like
Ismael driven
To desert lands afar,
Yet o'er them hung the star
That show'd the sign of freedom
bright in heaven.*

*Iron and gold are theirs:
And who so justly shares
These powerful gifts as they whose
hands are strong,
Whose hearts are resolute
To quell the biped brute
Trampling on law and rioting on
wrong?*

*Rise; one and all, as when
Ye hail'd the man of men,
And give not sumptuous feast nor
sounding praise
To that brave Magyar,
But wage a pious war
And shed your glory round his
closing days.*

(First published in *The Examiner*, December 27, 1851)

chief magistrate of this union, are fully and freely expressed in my recent message to Congress." Fillmore referred to his State of the Union address where he declared in no uncertain terms: "No individuals have the right to hazard the peace of the country, or to violate its laws upon vague notions of altering or reforming governments in other states..." (Quoted by Komlos, pp. 102-103)

In sharp contrast with the President, Congress was less unequivocal in its view of Kossuth. On January 7, 1851 the House of Representatives welcomed their guest by inviting him to address the assembly. Such distinguished treatment had earlier been accorded only to one person, the French hero of the American Revolutionary Army, the Marquis de Lafayette. On the same evening, the Congress gave a banquet in Kossuth's honour in the National Hotel, which was attended by over 250 guests. On this occasion Webster, who was committed to the Hungarian cause, delivered two speeches: first a cautious one, and then a somewhat more heated one in conclusion. He hailed Hungarian independence and self-determination, at the same time greeting Hungary's separate national place among the European nations. Few paid any attention to the cautious version, but everyone seemed to understand the heated one. The newspapers welcomed it as evidence of official support for the Hungarian cause, while the Austrian representative handed an ultimatum to President Fillmore: if Secretary Webster was allowed to remain in office, he would go home and diplomatic relations between the two countries would be suspended. In any case, Hülsemann left Washington and did not return for a full year.

It was all in vain, though: there was no real political commitment behind Webster's rhetoric. The duplicity shown by the great powers towards Hungary's successive struggles for independence was a tragic and recurrent experience in Hungarian history: it was to be repeated in 1956.

Tightrope walking

The visit to the capital was followed by a tour of the country. In a few months the initial enthusiasm gave way to flagging interest in the West, hostility in the South and ineffective support in New England. "There is a community in mankind's destiny"—these were the words inscribed on a ceremonial gate. The ex-Governor visited Maryland (Annapolis), Pennsylvania (Harrisburg, Pittsburgh), Ohio (Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati), Wisconsin (Madison), Indiana (Indianapolis), Kentucky (Louisville), Missouri (St. Louis), Louisiana (New Orleans) and Alabama (Montgomery), before returning to Washington, D.C. and then moving on to New Jersey (Trenton, Newark), and Connecticut (New Haven). Kossuth had particularly mixed receptions in the South, usually depending on the local balance of power between abolitionists and slaveholders. Many withdrew their support when hearing Kossuth profess a neutral attitude toward slavery.

Kossuth was performing on a tight rope in trying to rally American opinion to the support of the Hungarian cause at an ill-timed moment. On the one hand, 1852 was a presidential election year, implying extreme caution in the making of political promises. On the other hand, the conflict between North and South had been fermenting by the early 1850s, with the issue of slavery driving a great wedge into the American nation, eventually leading to the Civil War. Kossuth tried to win members of both sides to the cause of Hungarian independence, always putting the emphasis on the symbols of union in his speeches. Yet, Frederick Douglass, himself a former slave and a leading abolitionist, was right to suggest that for Kossuth to satisfy the Americans, "he must cease to be Kossuth." (Spencer, Diss., p. 121)

He visited the famous battle-grounds of the American War of Independence, such as Charleston and Bunker Hill, and met recognised leaders of American intellectual life, such as Longfellow and Emerson. The latter welcomed him in Concord, Massachusetts, declaring: "You may well sit a doctor in the college of liberty; you have achieved your right to interpret our Washington." (*Kossuth in New England*, 1852, p. 223)

In his own speeches, Kossuth persistently returned to two points. He appealed to freedom-loving Americans to espouse Hungary's effort to continue her war of independence by lending both political support, and financial aid. As well as donating generous sums, the American public, especially in New England, responded by setting up numerous Kossuth committees and issuing statements embracing his person and work.

Kossuth dollars

Soon after his arrival, Kossuth, Hungary's ex-finance minister of 1848, hit on the idea of setting up a Kossuth Fund, asking for a one-dollar contribution from his American supporters. Later on he also issued bonds in various denomi-



Lajos Kossuth.
*A daguerrotype by Thomas Faris.
Cincinnati, Ohio, 1852
Hungarian National Museum*

nations, featuring his portrait and own signature. However, he was of the opinion that, apart from showing great enthusiasm, America did very little to help Hungary restore her independence.

A hitherto unpublished letter Kossuth wrote to Mayor of New York Ambrose C. Kingsland, reveals his impatience and disappointment as early as mid-January, 1852. He clearly expected something more from gallant America than just words of enthusiasm.

But one thing there is, Dear Sir! which I am sorry to say, causes me much affliction, and incalculable embarrassment. That is the entire inactivity of the New York Financial Committee. The honorable gentlemen placing themselves at the head of the loan and subscription business (which I felt highly gratified thankfully to accept) have of course tied my hands to carry on matters by other means, in some other way. Thus while there nothing is yet done, I on the other hand am obliged nothing to do.—And it is already nearly a month that I left New York and the loan is not even started yet.—In full reliance to this Committee's generous efforts, I entered into engagements which I am not able now to answer and instead of the expected efficient aid I see my credit injured; and see myself without any means after a log of time of 6 weeks. ...Time is extremely precious to me, every moment may call me back to Europe,—I must look to some efficient means, unless I were not willing to see proved true that suggestion, that the sympathy of America means nothing more serious, than hospitality, and words. (Kossuth to Kingsland, Harrisburg, January 17, 1852)

Kossuth dollars were coming in at a very slow rate, but even so, by June 10, 1852, the date of his departure, Kossuth had collected \$83,442. About one-fifth of this sum was spent on supporting Hungarian refugees, on paying mailing and printing bills, and on Kossuth's travel expenses. Approximately one-third was allocated to diplomatic and secret service expenses, with the remaining \$36,000 spent on weapons. His critics have often scolded Kossuth for being a spendthrift. By the time he left the American soil, hardly any money was left in the kitty.

Admirers and critics of a visionary

Kossuth's assertive politics and inflamed oratory divided Americans. As demonstrated by the correspondence of Francis Lieber with his friends George Stillman Hillard and Charles Sumner, now in the custody of the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, the East Coast elite respected Kossuth's fight for the freedom and independence of Hungary, but questioned the reality and rationality of his claim that the United States should get involved in what seemed to have been an internal conflict within the Habsburg Empire. To the best of my knowledge, the letters below are published here for the first time.

Born in Germany, Francis Lieber (1798–1872) acquired fame in the U. S. as a liberal political philosopher and jurist with his “laws of war,” a systematic, institutionalized code of behavior to regulate the conditions of warfare. In a Christmas 1851 letter to George Stillman Hillard, Lieber glorified Kossuth:

I have a very high opinion of Kossuth, and even that against which I should write should not be laid to his charge; for if he is presuming, even impertinent if you choose, he has but his one great thought in his mind, one great sentiment in his soul—up with Hungary and down with Austria—God speed him; and the way that the Americans have given in so far shows that *he* is not wrong in his presumption. But that Americans should fall in with a Hungarian, when he tells us we are totally wrong, and that Washington did not mean what we always have held him to have meant, and that Americans should, apparently at least, taken the key from a strong democratic Gallican element in N. York, that is shameful.

Much as he respected the Hungarian leader and his cause, Lieber was disturbed by the role Kossuth expected the United States to play in the European conflict. For him Kossuth was too much of a visionary. “But, then,” he told Hillard,

I should enter upon the true mission of the U. States—the path laid out for them and the means of their influence. I should then ask what are we asked to do? Tell the Czar “Dont do that”, as the Chinese, you recollect, let down a large pactboard, from the walls of Hong Kong, on which was written “you must not come in here”, for the benefit of the redcoats, who approached with powder and bayonet? Shall we send money? How much? And who shall send it, the Government, or the people voluntarily? Shall we send troops? In less than 6 weeks the Hungarians would mortally hate the Americans, and the Americans hate the Hungarians. It is always so, and must be so. If the foreigner carries the victory, he is hated, because *he* carries the victory, and because he becomes insolent; if he is not essential to the victory, he is hated as a cumbersome fellow, who wants land, money and often the women.

Throughout, Lieber was sceptical as to the invited international mission of America and the moral feasibility of its eventual intervention.

And is Hungary the only downtrodden country? Does Italy not wail and cry for help? Have the German princes not proved truthless truckles? I can very well imagine a case when the U. S. with other powers would say to Russia: Hands off, you disturb the peace of the world and trample on peoples like an elephant on a rice-field. If you dont stop we poach you at sea. But to help a nation to rise in revolution, by our government—it is absolutely preposterous. I would write—I would—I would—but—I shall not.

The Massachusetts lawyer and author George Stillman Hillard (1808–1879) agreed with what Lieber had to say to him of Kossuth, but was misinformed and consequently doubtful about the political abilities of the Hungarians. “Now on

these questions of Hungary, Kossuth, Austria and Russia, we agree to a hair," he responded to Lieber.

I abhor Russia and Austria and regard them as great rocks in the stream of progress & humanity, too big and heavy to be borne away, and always a retarding and perverting influence. And I admit the eloquence of Kossuth, his patriotism and his devotion to a great idea: but none the less do I deem his projects wild & Quixotic and that his influence upon the public mind has been the reverse of salutary. I don't know much about Hungary but I don't believe in their fitness for Constitutional & independent government. The simple fact that a nation of 13,000,000 was thrown down and muzzled by Russia in a single campaign, seems to prove that there are elements of weakness among them which would make it impossible for foreign intervention to do any good. Compare their feeble struggles with the persevering pluck of the Circassians & with the constancy of the Dutch in the 16th & 17th centuries." (Boston, January 13, 1852)

Lieber repeatedly criticized some of his fellow-Americans for misguiding the Hungarian politician and thought Kossuth had been ill-advised. "Kossuth, for whom I have a high regard," he wrote to the influential abolitionist statesman and longtime Massachusetts Senator (1852-1874) Charles Sumner (1811-1874),

(though by no means as extravagant a one as many pretend to have for him, and, as I fear, he may have for himself) has ended here where he must infallibly have ended—, and whither some very reckless men have led him, little dreaming or caring what deep injury they were inflicting upon that cause which they, in many cases hypocritically, pretend to serve. Kossuth has distinctly forgotten since he came to this country, that to make a great idea pass into a great event, it requires two things—the wide impulse of masses and the clearest possible definiteness in the conception of measures and husbanding of means in the leaders—the Richelieu or Cromwell part of great events as I will call the latter. Nothing so weakening in the sphere of action as cloudiness, or if you will pardon a very low term, highfalutanism [highfalutinism]. I can say all this because my correspondents can testify that from the first I have said that the course pursued by Kossuth must necessarily lead to Congress and that the distinct question *what?* and the higher the path led all the time, in words declaration and indictment aspirations, the greater must be the distance from the ultimate point of that line to the point of factal (may I make the word?) reality.

Lieber emphatically told Sumner: "I have never felt such itching to write a thorough political pamphlet as when Kossuth was coursing on. I should have done it had I lived in a populous place. But I love him." (Columbia, S.C., January 10, 1852)

Lieber never questioned the validity and nobility of Kossuth's cause though he noticed that he "travels fast and makes long bounds..." He could not withstand his urge to write a tract on "Kossuth and his Mission in the United States" (most probably in 1852) where he declared,

...we have a very high opinion of Louis Kossuth, and most deeply detest the Austrian government—more intensely, probably, than most persons in this country, because we know Austria and thoroughly know it. If the distinguished Hungarian has allowed himself to be carried to the very utmost limit of political propriety, on some occasions since he has been among us—if he has stated that which rises to arrogance, we readily pass it over, at least so far as he is concerned, whatever we may think of those men who have done everything in their power to mislead him, partly through their own want of reflexion, partly for selfish purposes without any abiding belief in their own assertions.

Lieber continued to be captivated by Kossuth's cause:

Kossuth has but one idea, and that idea is a great and noble one—the delivery of his country from an odious, faithless, cruel and coarse government. If in the all-absorbing desire of realizing this great idea, he, occasionally travels fast and makes long bounds, who would quarrel with him? Certainly no generous mind. If every one-sidedness or extravagance in the fiery words of a burning heart were to be a noose, without the benefit of clergy, few fervent speakers would remain un-hanged before they come to the intended end of their discourses."



Lajos Kossuth and Ferenc Pulszky
*An 1893 reproduction of a daguerrotype by
J. J. Hawes. Boston, Mass., 1852
Hungarian National Museum*

A close friend of both Lieber and Sumner, George Stillman Hillard felt as if he was torn apart.

In regard to Kossuth I am, as often happens in our intense little community, between two fires. I disprove of his course in America, especially his sort of appeal from the government to the country, and therefore cannot swell the train of his admirers; and on the other hand, there is much in his European career which commands my sympathy and applause, and I do not like to join in any wholesale denunciations of him. The vehement abuse which some people lavish upon him seems to me to flow from a timid conversation, founded on a selfish love of property—a feeling for which I have no

great respect. Have you thought or read about Hungary and his course there? If you have, I pray you tell me what you think about him. (Boston, May 8, 1852)

When Kossuth left the United States he keenly felt the division of public opinion in the country he tried to win over in vain. His prophetic idea that the United States should play a major role in European politics proved to be premature: he was a hundred years ahead of his time. It was far too early to suggest

that the policy of Europe will have a visible effect upon the character, power, and destiny of the American republic. That policy as indicated by Russia and Austria, is the work of centralization, consolidation and absolutism. American policy is the antagonist of this.

Stating that "Russia and the United States are as unlike as any two nations which ever existed," Kossuth went as far as to prophecy that war between the two "will be inevitable". (Kossuth's speech at Faneuil Hall, Boston, April 29, 1852, *Select Speeches of Kossuth*, pp. 320–321)

The man who put Hungary on the map

Lajos Kossuth never accepted the notion that he was a "visionary" and considered himself a "practical man" and an achiever. To the end of his journey he spoke with pride and self-confidence of his own leading role in the Hungarian revolution and war of independence and declared in his last Boston speech on May 14, 1852 at Faneuil Hall:

Some here take me for a visionary. Curious, indeed, if that man who, a poor son of the people, took the lead in abolishing feudal injustices a thousand years old, created a currency of millions in a moneyless nation, and suddenly organized armies out of untrained masses of civilians; directed a revolution so as to fix the attention of the whole world upon Hungary, beat the old, well-provided power of Austria, and crushed its future by his very fall, and forsaken, abandoned, in his very exile is feared by Czars and Emperors, and trusted by foreign nations as well as his own—if that man be a visionary, then for so much pride I may be excused that I would like to look face to face into the eyes of a practical man on earth." (*Select Speeches of Kossuth*, p. 368)

Through the press, his fame spread all over the country, reaching even the Pacific coast, which he never visited. Thanks to regular and surprisingly detailed reports published in *The Los Angeles Star*, *The Daily Union* of Sacramento, *The San Diego Herald*, *The Oregon Spectator* of Oregon City, *The Weekly Oregonian* of Portland and the *Deseret News* of Salt Lake City, readers in the West could follow Kossuth's reception in the eastern states. The press coverage on the western coast was exceedingly favourable towards the Hungarians' plight, with opinions split only on the issue of whether the United States be content to give moral and finan-

cial support or whether it should also issue a political guarantee for non-intervention in Hungary's domestic affairs.

On July 14, 1852 Kossuth left the United States for good. Bitterly disappointed, he took stock of the scant results his journey had produced:

The novelty has long since subsided, and emotion has died away. The spell is broken which distance and misfortune cast around my name. The freshness of my very ideas is worn out. Incessant toils spread a languor upon me, unpleasant to look upon. The skill of intrigues, aspersing me with calumny; wilful misrepresentations, pouring cold water upon generous sympathy." (*Select Speeches of Kossuth*, pp. 373-374)

Although he never again visited the North American continent, Lajos Kossuth has not been forgotten in the United States. He has a statue in New York City and in the Capitol in Washington, D.C. A United States postage stamp secured him a place as a "champion of liberty." On his bicentenary he has been remembered in the U.S., mostly by Hungarian-Americans who have celebrated him throughout the country, from New York to New Orleans. As of 2001, New York Governor George Pataki, himself of Hungarian descent, declared December 5 "Lajos Kossuth Day" in the State of New York. Hungarians, in and out of Hungary, continue to think of him as their hero who was once worshipped by America. Even though his American journey produced no lasting political or financial results, Lajos Kossuth alone did more to explain the Hungarian cause to America and to procure international recognition for Hungary than anybody had done before or after him, or could possibly do in the future. He was the man who put Hungary on the political map of Europe. ■

Lajos Kossuth. An 1893 reproduction of a daguerrotype by J. J. Hawes. Boston, Mass., 1852. The photos are in the Hungarian National Museum and were first published by László Csorba, ed.: *A Kossuth-emigráció fényképkönyve* (*A Photo Album of the Kossuth Exiles*, Budapest, Kossuth, 1994)



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György Litván

The Kossuth Myth and the Széchenyi Cult

National Self-Identification in 20th-Century Hungary

István Széchenyi (1791–1860) and Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) were the most prominent personalities and the most influential statesmen of 19th-century Hungary. Count Széchenyi was a conservative reformer and, from the 1820s, the initiator of cultural, economic and technical modernisation. In the 1840s, Kossuth became the leader of the liberal and national opposition. During their own lives, and even more so in the 20th century, they stood for two different visions of Hungary's renewal. They were opponents: Kossuth called his rival "the greatest Hungarian", but he far surpassed Széchenyi in popularity. Their authority, popularity and personal cults were of quite a different nature, both in their own lifetime and thereafter. Their names were used and misused for different purposes, and their memories symbolised and were used for two different patterns of national self-identification.

Lajos Kossuth, who was born into a family of the petty nobility in Eastern Hungary, became a lawyer, thereafter a county politician, later a journalist and editor in the 1830s, leader of the national opposi-

tion in the 1840s and the forerunner of the Revolution of 1848, Minister of Finance in the first constitutional government, President of the National Defence Committee. He was effectively a dictator during the War of Independence and finally, when the Habsburgs were dethroned in 1849, Regent of Hungary until the end of the War. When he fled the country he was 46 years old and at the peak of his life; he lived for another 46 in exile in Turkey, America, England and Italy, remaining a symbol of national independence and civil liberty for more than a century.

Kossuth had an exceptional talent for politics and for popularity. He was a good-looking man, with a romantic air. He was, without doubt, one of the truly great orators, as the tremendous reception his speeches were accorded in England and the United States shows. His secret, according to critics like his former prime minister Bertalan Szemere or the early-Marxist historian Ervin Szabó, was his vanity and his fantastic sense of how to appeal to the feelings and ideas that his audience held in their souls and minds.

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who headed the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution between 1991–1999, has published widely on modern Hungarian history.

However, this was no passive ability. During the actual fighting, even in hopeless situations, it was he who could move people to join the army or to contribute to armament. Apart from his well-known appearances in the National Assembly or at the Market Place of Cegléd, the poet János Vajda recalls the electrifying effect of his words in the last hours of the fight for freedom, on a group of young peasants who were transformed into soldiers within moments. Vajda cites the popular song about Kossuth's message: his army has shrunk, next time we have to follow him to the last man. He was called Father Kossuth by the people, who identified patriotism, national independence and the end of serfdom with his name.

"The Kossuth cult has never abated", writes István Deák in his outstanding *The Lawful Revolution. Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians*. "A sincere emotion on the part of the poor people and especially peasants, the cult has remained a tool in the hands of politicians."

Indeed, all through the years of Habsburg absolutism and after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the peasantry waited for the return of Kossuth. His portrait was displayed in most taverns and homes (ironically, often placed beside that of the Emperor Francis Joseph). His name entered folkpoetry. Elek Benedek, the great storyteller and writer on folklore, collected songs and poems about him. Streets and squares were named after him in all towns and villages of the country, monuments proclaimed his fame and memory. Every March 15, the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1848 Revolution, was celebrated with his name and portrait, and the ageing exile was often visited in Turin. In 1877 a delegation of a hundred citizens of his beloved town Cegléd offered him the town's parliamentary seat. He refused it, but for decades to come the seat

was held by his political heirs, such as his son Ferenc and Count Mihály Károlyi. On his death, his coffin was taken on a tour of the country, the train stopped at each village to make it possible for the people to take leave of him. His final journey to the central cemetery of Budapest, attended by many thousands, was all the more passionate as members of the government and high state officials were—at the wish of Francis Joseph—ordered not to attend.

In personality and character Kossuth was far from perfect. In his early youth he was involved in a minor embezzlement. His vanity and self-regard were legendary. He was inclined to throw blame upon others, as he did with General Arthur Görgey following the defeat and with others during his long years of exile. All the same, he was the Messiah of independent Hungary, he was the model Hungarian patriot, he embodied and expressed the feelings of most average Hungarians—though not of all. He was, according to János Vajda, the living ideal of the Hungarian nation, with all its faults. István Deák claims that he was a charismatic leader, who strengthened the Hungarians' suicidal notion that theirs was a particularly exalted destiny, and that the Hungarian contribution to humanity was crucial. This was, and remained, an important element of his suggestive effect, just as the country's dependence on Austria before the Compromise, and the Hungarian feeling of dependence all during the period of the Dual Monarchy.

Given these important traits of the myth and of Hungarian nationalism, it was possible and even necessary for them to be used in politics. The Independence Party, a main opposition force during most of the Dualist period (1867–1918), revealingly also called the Kossuth Party, gained the upper hand in the Great Hungarian Plain. The name Kossuth symbolised the people's hatred or mistrust of the central

power and of the state's bureaucracy. At the same time Independence Party politicians frequently misused the name and the popularity of Kossuth, whose European and liberal principles were often reduced by them to pure nationalism and chauvinism, directed against the non-Magyar national minorities of the kingdom. The party was only concerned with the independence and greatness of Hungary. Ironically, says Deák, seated on the far left of parliament, most Kossuth party members were more chauvinist and on social issues even more indifferent than the governing liberals.

As a consequence, the modern left at the turn of the century—social democrats and bourgeois radicals—opposed both the Independence Party's policies and the Kossuth cult. In 1902, on the centenary of Kossuth's birth, Ervin Szabó declared in the socialist daily *Népszava* that Kossuth belongs to the bourgeoisie, the socialist working class does not participate in the celebrations, its heroes are Sándor Petöfi, the poet and Mihály Táncsics, the forerunner of the socialist movement. Later Szabó did his best to destroy the Kossuth cult, presenting his weaknesses and flexible principles. This prompted the young Endre Ady, later the leading light of modernist poetry and radical thought, to warn the socialists that this abstention only harmed them. The sociologist Lajos Leopold also warned Szabó that "The name Kossuth is firmly embedded in the Hungarian heart, in the silent reverie of the poor peasant... Kossuth was the man of his capitalist and liberal age, alien to us, nevertheless he was a republican, who later became an antimilitarist and implanted in our people the enigmatic, unconscious hatred of power. Let us distinguish within his historical figure between those traits which have long been surpassed and rejected by us, and those which belong to our flesh and blood.

This discrimination was made by your party in the case of Petöfi—make it for Kossuth as well!"

The discrimination was made later, and by the end of the First World War, the Kossuth cult passed from the political right to the left. With the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy, the independence side of the myth lost its meaning and importance, at least temporarily. It was the liberal side of Kossuth which came to the fore. The Independence Party was split. The chauvinist right wing became part of the new, racist, extreme right, while the liberal left with Count Mihály Károlyi embraced the great social problems of the country, including radical land reform. It was this 1848 Kossuth Party, together with the social democrats and bourgeois radicals, which became the leading force of the 1918 democratic and national revolution and proclaimed on November 16 the first Hungarian Republic in the spirit of Lajos Kossuth. Again, in the 1920s, the liberal opposition founded a new Kossuth Party in order to defend and restore political rights.

Eventually, in interwar Hungary, the tradition and cult of Kossuth was dropped by the traditional ruling élite. Instead, they embraced the cult of István Széchenyi, whose popularity neither in his life nor later reached that of Kossuth; his unquestionable authority was employed by governing circles from the beginning to our own days against Kossuth's fame and ideas. This was what happened before the 1848 Revolution, during the Dual Monarchy, the Horthy regime, and again in recent years. True, the two cults were different in scope and character. The cult of Kossuth was widespread and popular, originally spontaneous and exploited later for political ends, while the cult of Széchenyi, though meritorious, was artificial and elitist, limited to a relatively narrow stratum of the upper classes and of

the cultivated, and exploited for conservative purposes against rebellion. It could never realise a wider "national self-identification" with the vulgarised ideas of the "greatest Hungarian", while the vulgarised Kossuth remained for many long years a point of orientation for the masses of the people. An additional reason for the difference between the two cults lay in the different origins and social status of their figureheads. Kossuth, although a nobleman, was one of the people, while Széchenyi, the aristocrat, though a friend of the people, was always above them.

In old Austria-Hungary, before the First World War, leading politicians like the Prime Minister Count István Tisza, and political scientists, like Béla Grünwald or Mihály Réz, revived Széchenyi's ideas to counterbalance the anti-Habsburg tendencies towards national independence and the new radical and socialist currents within the intelligentsia. Following the revolutions of 1918-19, the great historian Gyula Szekfű contrasted reform-conservatism with the "dangerous and irresponsible" liberalism of Kossuth. His famous book *Három nemzedék* (Three Generations. History of a Declining Age) is an indictment against 19th-century Hungarian liberalism and an apotheosis of Széchenyi's ideas, which were, by the way, proclaimed but not followed by the Horthy era. Interestingly enough, Széchenyi preferred national self-criticism, while Kossuth inclined to national self-adoration. Ironically, most of those who declared themselves to be followers of Széchenyi turned to being Kossuthists, while among the late followers of Kossuth we can find radical critics of the social and political order of the interwar period.

Such a group was the Hungarian Communists, very small in number, who, in exile or as an underground illegal party in the 1930s, discovered Kossuth as a useful

idol and slogan for their new Popular Front policy. Kossuth's cult was thus voided and his legacy abandoned. The Moscovite Communist ideologist József Révai to become notorious—among other things—for his cultural policy in the dark early 1950s, understood the importance of the national problem and that of Kossuth for the battles the party faced. In contrast to Petőfi or Táncsics, Kossuth was the leader of the nation, his heirs could also be acknowledged as such. He was a model figure of a resolute revolutionary, the historical ideal of all Communists, and—last but not least—his tradition was anti-German. At the time of Hitler's ascension and his expansion in East Central Europe, including Hungary, the cult of Kossuth reappeared as part of the defence of national independence.

In February 1942 a Committee for Historical Remembrance was formed by well-known anti-Fascist intellectuals and artists, and on March 15 an anti-war demonstration was organised by the Communist Party. Around the same time Radio Kossuth began to broadcast its anti-Nazi programme in Hungarian from the Soviet Union. Two years later, for the fiftieth anniversary of Kossuth's death, József Révai published an essay on Kossuth. He found the Kossuth cult had been revived in recent months by the better part of the ruling Hungarian elite who recognised the impending defeat of Nazi Germany and were trying to escape from the war by accepting and employing the truth in Kossuth's ideas. A memorial ceremony was scheduled for 20 March 1944, but on the previous day the German troops had occupied the country to prevent Hungary's exit from the war.

Following the liberation, the Communists employed Kossuth's name and cult from the start. In January 1945 I saw on the walls of Budapest huge posters

with the inscription: 1711: *Rákóczi*—1848: *Kossuth*—1945: *Rákosi*. The Party tried to erase memories of its 1919 dictatorship and to present itself as the follower and implementer of the great historical tradition of national independence and of popular reforms. The peak of this propaganda was reached at the centennial of the revolution in 1948. In addition to many publications, conferences, lectures and school ceremonies, a huge rally was organised, for which the posters announced that: "*The Hungarian Communist Party is the heir of Kossuth, Petőfi, and Táncsics!*" This was when writers, artists, and academics were awarded the Kossuth Prize for the first time, the prize that until recently has been the highest honour in the arts and sciences.

In 1952, for the 150th anniversary of his birth, a new monument was erected on Budapest's Kossuth Square in front of the Hungarian Parliament. The old statue of Kossuth, exuding pessimism, was transferred to the cemetery and replaced by an optimistic one, representing Kossuth accompanied by a group of the common people. It was Révai who delivered the speech on the occasion, vesting Kossuth with all of the traits of a revolutionary character. The longest lasting product of this new Kossuth cult was a commemorative publication—two large volumes—among whose contributors were the leading historians of the era. There were ideological contributions from József Révai and Erzsébet Andics, but most essays were of a scholarly character, such as the essay written by Gyula Szekfü on Kossuth in his old age. The last article was devoted to how Kossuth was represented in the contempo-

rary fine arts. On the whole, the book gave a new, if somewhat biased picture of Kossuth's life and work, it contributed to a fuller portrait of the man. Thereafter his cult declined, although during the first Imre Nagy government (1953–55) the first Budapest club opened for intellectuals was named after Kossuth. It was the place where, during the spring and summer of 1956 the Petőfi Circle held its sessions in the spirit of free speech and paved the way for the Revolution.

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution taught the Communists that they had better refrain from playing with the great ideas of freedom and independence and misusing the Kossuth cult while the nation lived under a one-party dictatorship and Soviet rule. János Kádár and his party returned to the ideology of socialist internationalism, and tried to combine the celebration of March 15 and March 21 (the day of Communist take-over in 1919) under the degrading name of The Revolutionary Days of Youth. Even the watershed change of 1989 failed to bring back the Kossuth cult. Instead of the traditional (and very popular) Kossuth coat of arms which was adopted by the republican Hungary of 1849, 1918, 1946, and 1956, the conservative majority in parliament chose the coat of arms of Royal Hungary, with the crown of Saint Stephen. The conservative government of 1998 to 2002 has been trying to establish a new cult of Széchenyi, while their liberal opposition has taken steps to commemorate the bicentenary of Kossuth's birth. 2002 will show whether or not the roots of an identification with Kossuth's work and ideas still exist. ■

András Nagy

Institutional Barriers to Growth

Institutions and how they evolved during the transition in Central and Eastern Europe has been a neglected subject, both in theoretical discussions and in the practice of economic policy. There was a widely held belief that adopting the institutions of developed market economies would be a relatively simple process and that this would solve the problems of technological backwardness and economic inefficiency within a short time. The past ten years have shown that the problem was not that simple and that development and significant structural changes in the transition countries have had very divergent results. Attention recently has been on the role of institutions and their reforms as a means of accelerating the catching-up process.

There are no breaks in history, especially not in economic development. The

transition from Communist one-party rule to a pluralistic democratic society, and from a non-competitive, planned economy to a market economy, did not start from a blank page. Past, present and future are linked by the evolution of institutions, by their creation and disappearance, by their changing motivations, by their conservative, adaptive or resilient features (strongly influencing the structural and productivity changes) and by the dynamics of economic and social development.

Most people understand institutions to be government agencies, private or civil organisations, courts, and so forth. However, the scope of institutions is much larger. As North (1990, p. 3.) defined it: "Institutions are the rules of the game in a society, or more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction." According to Schotter (1981),

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Heritage of the past

they include not only legal and governmental structures and regulations but the different interest organisations and the regularity in social behaviour that specifies action in recurrent situations.

Institutions can be formal or informal, as laws and regulations, or customs and conventions of behaviour. They include both what citizens are prohibited from doing, as well as what they are permitted or compelled to undertake. These regulations strongly influence the performance of the economy, as they affect the costs of transaction and transformation. The state has an important and necessary role in creating and/or reforming institutions.

While institutions stabilise human interaction in the economic, political and cultural senses, they are not constant: laws, regulations, contracts, codes of conduct, and the organisations, authorities they embody, are evolving, since they all are human creations. Institutional change has widely different forms: laws and regulations can suddenly be modified by judicial decisions, government departments can be created or abolished, while customs and traditions change slowly in an incremental fashion. This is a characteristic that is important when the development of the transition countries is studied. As behavioural patterns are strongly and traditionally imbedded in a society, they change incrementally rather than in a discontinuous way. This is true even in the case of sudden or radical change, such as revolutions or the collapse of political regimes. The continuity of informal constraints links the past to the future, and can explain many features of the development processes.

It was a great surprise how rapidly and relatively peacefully Communist one-party rule and the non-competitive, planned economic systems in Central and Eastern Europe collapsed. At the beginning, this created a widespread feeling of liberation and euphoria, linked to great expectations of political democracy, pluralism and the introduction of an efficient market economy. Equally unexpectedly, the mood of the population significantly deteriorated within a short period—general disillusionment resulting from unrealised expectations. Resistance to change became much stronger, as economic conditions deteriorated considerably. It is probable that the unforeseen character of the developments was closely related to the lack of understanding of the nature, interests and resilience of institutions.

There was a long period of preparation for the collapse of the regimes in East Central Europe, during which nearly all authorities on socialist societies made a great error of judgement: confusing immobility and resistance to change with stability. The stubborn resistance to reforms and the conspicuous immobility of these regimes was viewed as stability, whereas in fact it created a self-destructive instability. The stronger the resistance to change became, the more stability declined. Institutions changed considerably over the years, but even if the reforms introduced in certain countries brought improvements in many fields, much of this change, against the expectations of political leaderships, went in the wrong direction; instead of mending the imperfections of the system, it aggravated them.¹

¹ ■ Evaluating the reforms, see: Chavance (1994), Kornai (1986), Nagy (1989) and (1991).

Very unexpectedly, Soviet-type systems collapsed relatively peacefully, in most cases without the bloodshed, civil wars, or violent revolutions associated with comparable radical changes in the past. The political, economic, military and cultural elite of the old regime for the most part not only abstained from open and violent resistance, but a significant part of the *nomenklatura* actively co-operated in the demolition of the old system. This shows the importance of the changes in institutions and mentality within the Communist leaderships. Without understanding the process of this change, one cannot explain the slowness and difficulties of the transition itself, and much less the likely direction of it.

It seems evident that the Communist organisations and their leaderships, which at the end of the 1980's helplessly and sometimes even willingly surrendered their power to the democratic opposition, bore little resemblance to the Communists who had violently seized power forty years earlier. The Communist elite gradually changed throughout the period of armed resistance against Nazism and occupation during the Second World War, through the short-lived democratic period when they monopolised power and overturned legal parliamentary systems, to the period of Stalinist dictatorship and subjecting their populations to terror. During this time, they nevertheless remained imbued by a revolutionary ideology with hatred against all values and attitudes seen as "bourgeois".

Rise of interest organisations

In the late forties, when the Communists seized total control in Eastern Europe, their economic policy was very flexible, adapting fast to the new conditions of sud-

den and extreme expropriation and nationalisation of private property, rapid industrialisation and forcible modernisation, the confiscation of recently distributed land from peasant farmers and its collectivisation, etc. Later, however, rigidity, conservatism, and resistance to change and adaptation gradually became prevalent. A significant part of this development can be explained by Olson's theory of interest groups.² In the first period after the war, with the destruction of the political structure of the pro-Nazi regimes, most former special-interest organisations were eliminated. Consequently, the new organisations had a strongly encompassing nature, representing a relatively large segment of society. The weak or non-existent interest organisations could not resist the introduction of radical structural changes in the society and economy.

Subsequently, however, a gradual change could be observed: economic and political organisations, state and local bureaucracies and political organisations evolved more and more into special-interest organisations and collusions, losing their encompassing character. Eliminating competition, monopolies were created to an unprecedented degree, as they were the appropriate organisational structure for central planning and direction. Agricultural co-operatives lost their collective and democratic characteristics and merged into large landed estates. A strongly protectionist, autarkic trade policy subsidised both import substitution and exports. To be rid of competition was of course consistent with the interests of industrial, agricultural and service enterprises. The relatively "smooth" transition to the Soviet-type system was, of course, the consequence of brutal intimidation and terror, but the microeconomic interests linked to mono-

2 ■ See: Olson (1965), (1982), and (1991).

polisation and protectionism should not be underestimated.

As the distributional struggle for resources increased, these special-interest organisations became powerful lobbies, and more attention was paid to grabbing a larger slice of the pie (the GDP) than to making the pie larger. By fighting for funds for unprofitable investments, by lobbying for subsidies, favourable prices, higher wages, large bonuses for managers and big Soviet contracts for outdated, low-quality products, they possibly obtained a larger slice—but the cost was the reduction of the size of the pie. As the original hierarchical structure of the socialist economies evolved into a network of interest groups, a distributional struggle developed in which the relative power of these groups was shown. The strongest, the military lobby, usually received first priority on resources, mining and heavy industry came second, followed by the other sectors of the economy—while education, health-care and environmental concerns were in most cases in a much weaker position.

The extreme terrorist period of Stalin's rule ended in the middle fifties, when widespread discontent was expressed by uprisings and revolutions in East Central Europe as a reaction to foreign oppression and to the institutional structure forced upon them. This created a turning point in the evolution of these societies. In different degrees and forms, extreme political rigidity was eased, and to avoid popular uprisings a compromise was sought, both with the population and with the major Western powers. This became manifest in the mid-sixties in the interaction of the changing institutional structure and the mentalities of top administrators and managers. The huge centralised institutions soon started to live by their own rules and interests; they recognised their own strength and their indispensability and be-

came reluctant to accept orders from above. With the gradual strengthening of these monopolies, central planning and management evolved into a bargaining process, aimed at compromise between the central authorities, the monopolies and other (cultural, military, health, regional, etc.) institutions.

Institutional changes strongly affected the attitude and mentality of those representing them: the managers of the large state-owned firms, for example, stopped regarding themselves as obedient executors of central orders, and started to present and defend the interest of their enterprises, both against the central authorities and against each other. Top managers started to seize more and more rights, including certain features of property rights. Changes in mentality and growing consciousness influenced and strengthened the institutional changes, which in turn had repercussions on the attitude of the representatives of the institutions. This interaction between mentality changes and institutional changes was self-reinforcing. The changing attitudes of managerial circles later played an important role in shaping the privatisation processes, economic policies and the regulatory and legal environment to their own advantage.

Privileges and changing mentalities

In the process of decentralisation and monopolisation, it could be observed that a wider acceptance of so-called middle-class values was gradually taking place. The demands to replace dictatorial rule—the hierarchical dependence on the powers “above”—with more independence for the firms and with their mutual interdependence were signs of this. These values were linked to the demand to replace a centrally regulated, egalitarian income

policy with salaries and bonuses based on performance, both for the managers and for the work force. Influential groups of managers used their growing autonomy to extend their power and wealth. Their values and attitudes differed more and more from the revolutionaries fighting for Communist ideas; they paid lip-service to Marxism-Leninism and showed loyalty to the Communist Party, but their motivations were very different. Income differences between the managers and top bureaucrats and other employees were growing fast, and fringe benefits were increasing even faster.³ The privileges of the *nomenklatura* were extended to special import licences, foreign travel, scholarships and work permits in the West, etc.

The top leaders of the Communist regimes always enjoyed large privileges, but at the beginning it was a relatively small circle, which was lavishly favoured. The privileged *nomenklatura* class was gradually significantly extended and the income differences considerably increased. As ideological conviction and commitment diminished, Communist Party leaders realised that loyalty can be bought by money and power. This led to the development of networks of clients, linking managers of large enterprises, collective farms and officials of regional authorities supporting each other in power and career building.

In the last twenty years or so of Communist rule, in several of these countries significant personal wealth could be legally accumulated. In addition to the fast growing salaries and fringe benefits of the *nomenklatura*, the opportunities for enrichment through corruption, speculation and straightforward theft became widespread. Legal persecution of these crimes diminished and mutual indulgence in-

creased among members of the higher echelon of the *nomenklatura*.

Legally and illegally accumulated wealth could be multiplied when and where certain private economic activities were authorised. Licences for private shops, restaurants and other profitable small businesses were obtainable through "good connections", which meant both more or less open corruption and profitable investment possibilities. As these private businesses needed capital, and since there was no financial market, the savings of the *nomenklatura* could be profitably laundered via more or less legal businesses.

Another important aspect of the privileges the Communist rulers and party members enjoyed was that they were beyond the law. While there were extremely severe penalties for ordinary citizens for even minor theft of "state property", party members, and especially higher-ranking officials were not, or very rarely, found guilty of corruption or fraud. Even criminal cases were covered up and the offender not brought to trial if a minister or Politburo member were involved. Police officers, attorneys and judges learned that they had to make a distinction according to party membership, or the rank of officials, both in the process of investigation and judgment. The fact that even after the transition, politicians and higher-ranking civil servants are sometimes treated differently by the police and the courts is an unfortunate heritage of the past. Equality of rights and an undisputed rule of the law are not evident in the East Central European countries—this will have to be learned and enforced.

It should not be forgotten that in most of these countries, pluralistic democratic ways were never able to develop, and there

3 ■ See: Kertesi and Galasi (1987).

was no tradition of equal rights. On the contrary, respect and even submission to authority and servility was widespread, a traditional and rational choice for a large part of the population. While it was expected that citizens respect the law, the wealthy, the powerful and the state could violate the law without consequence long before the Communist regimes came into place. It is no surprise that on the collapse of such unequal and hierarchical systems, unlawful, Mafia-type organisations develop much more easily than democratic organisations and behaviours based on respect for the law.

Corruption and enrichment of a significant part of the *nomenklatura* can be morally condemned, and could have been legally prosecuted, but it did have a positive side that made the system more supportable. The dictatorial rule of fanatic Communists was far worse for everybody than the more liberal rule of those who cared for their own comfort and wealth or who were corrupt. The changes in behaviour were closely related to a generation change within the *nomenklatura*, the new generation avid for power and to replace the "old guard" was pragmatic, regarded themselves as technocrats and reformers, and started to question fundamental dogmas of the socialist system, including those regarding property rights.

Alienation from the state

A paradox could be observed in the first half of the twentieth century: while the role and spending of the state had increased very significantly and the authorities with their regulations pried more and more into the lives of citizens, the state became more alienated from them. This was a general tendency in Europe, and it was even more the case in the East Central European countries, where state owner-

ship and control extended not only to the units of production and services, but also to every other field of life: education, health care, pensions, culture, trade unions, professional, social and even religious activity. It may seem rather peculiar, but the more a state spreads its power and controlling activity, the more alien and remote it becomes for its own citizens and taxpayers.

The peculiarity of the "paternalistic" socialist states of East Central Europe which developed from Stalin's totalitarian party-state is that nothing could restrain or control their power. They could confiscate or nationalise any asset, arrest or execute anyone without explanation, collect as much tax as they want, enact laws and violate them without consequence, regroup investments, control all information, support or ban different scientific or artistic endeavours, etc. As most of these countries were occupied by the Soviet Army, the state authorities were regarded by a great part of the population as the agents of a foreign oppressive power. These despotic regimes could control all aspects of life, all but one: they could not deprive people of their inner freedom; there was no way to force love and devotion toward the totalitarian party-state.

In the last three decades, the development of the East Central European countries can be described as their gradual relinquishing of several characteristics of the totalitarian state. Decentralisation of power, the rise and strengthening of special interest groups, increasing role of the market, granting of some human rights and legal security, acknowledgement of a limited autonomy for consumers, and more liberal cultural politics, all meant the gradual relinquishing of the totalitarian state. In this sense, the state authorities became more tolerable for citizens. Nevertheless, the alienation remained;

most people still did not regard the state as their own. Citizens rejoiced in every little easing of the dictatorial hold, however, even if the state became somewhat less oppressive, it was well known that no liberalisation, decentralisation or law extension was irreversible; the system could easily become unmerciful again, as it did several times.

With free elections and the establishment of democratic political institutions, the disposition toward the state changed significantly. With liberation from Soviet rule, regaining independence and self-government, enthusiastic support for institutional change prevailed. However, the consolidation of the new regimes did not satisfy the expectations of the citizens; on the contrary, it brought previously unknown high levels of unemployment and real-wage decline, and alienation from the state returned. State institutions are still regarded as outside or superior authorities, and they are generally not expected to serve the common interest or the well being of the population.

The ingredients of this process were not only the experiences of the past, the slowness of changes in mentality but, presumably, also the intentions of the political leaders. They do not seem to be in favour of letting voters, taxpayers, civil society, take part in decision-making. In dictatorial regimes not only in the ruling circle, but also among the opposition an "enlightened" view emerges. According to this, they know better what is best for the "masses" than the citizens do themselves.

The vast increase of the share of the state budget in the GDP is a worldwide phenomenon. It increased on average from 8 per cent to 20 per cent between 1870 and 1960—mainly due to the two World Wars.⁴ In the following 34 years, it

grew to 40 per cent. In the ex-Communist countries, the proportion of state redistribution reached an impassable level, taxation could not be increased, and the budget deficit became large and enduring.

The strongly centralised hierarchical system gradually changed into the combination of monopolised special interest groups, but this process did not ease the alienation of the state. However, the only shield the citizens or consumers could count on against the ruthless behaviour of the monopolies were the central authorities. As no interest group represented their rights, only the central authorities could raise barriers to price increases, quality deterioration and pollution. As the state was the proprietor of all assets, it was difficult to be harsh with "its" enterprises; it was difficult to increase their efficiency, or decrease their subsidies. However, if the state were soft with its enterprises, it inevitably needed to be harsh with the consumers, who suffered from shortage, poor quality and inferior services.

The dissatisfaction with the state as proprietor led a great part of the population to accept the idea of privatisation. If they had regarded the state's property to be their own, or the community's, they would have protested against the dispossession of "their" assets. They realised that they had no right to the state's property, and saw how inefficiently and wastefully the state dealt with it. The will to be freed from the rule of the Communist Party therefore became intertwined with the will to be freed from the alienated totalitarian state and its property.

A very important feature of the Soviet-type systems was that the extremely large-scale taxation seemingly didn't exist: it stayed invisible to the population. There was no income tax, invoices did not show

4 ■ See: Tanzi, V. and Schuknecht, L. (1995).

the size of sales tax, contributions to the pension and health care systems were paid by employers and their size was unknown to the beneficiaries. This was a perfectly adequate system for dictatorships as taxes not only remained "invisible" but were not linked to state expenditure and social insurance benefits either. This produced the impression that the employees do not give anything, while they received a lot: education, housing, police protection, health care, pensions, holiday resorts, subsidised consumer goods, etc. Where the state got the money to cover all these expenses remained obscure. This seemed to be a real "provident state", which generously offered many things, and asked little or no payment in return. If citizens did not pay taxes, it is obvious that they had no right to intervene in how the state spends "its" money.

The rule of law

We have no room here to discuss the results of recent research into how institutions help and/or hinder growth in general and the catching-up process in particular.⁵ Here we meant to concentrate on the main finding of our investigation, which is that the major barrier to faster growth in the East Central European economies is the breakdown or weakness of the rule of law.

The transition from centrally-planned dictatorships to democratic market economies in Eastern Europe was historically unique and unprecedented, and it produced many surprises. Most experts and advisers did not foresee, for example, the size of the decline in economic activities and consequent unemployment. Another unexpected concomitant result was the breakdown in the rule of law, with a strong

growth in criminality and all kinds of illegal activities. It was, in a sense, a natural consequence of liberation from the dictatorial rule of the Communist Parties and their police state systems. It was an expression of the measure of alienation of the citizens from the totalitarian state and from its laws and rules, which did not, and could not suddenly change with free elections and the power vacuum which followed it.

The surprise caused by this widespread lawlessness was partly due to the misunderstanding—already mentioned—whereby stability was confused with the self-destructive immobility of the Communist system. Autocratic regimes are more fragile than they seem to be, or they try to lead us to believe them to be. As they are based not on popular consensus or support, but on coercion and intimidation, their stability depends on the incentives of the officials and the forces of repression. If their rewards do not seem sufficient to them, or their fear of punishment is diminished, the dictatorial system can collapse more easily than expected, and a chaotic situation can ensue.⁶

It was surprising for most observers how fast and to what degree lawlessness spread in all transition countries after the collapse of the Communist regimes. It is true, of course, that in a despotic system there is no rule of law, but a rule of lawlessness. The *nomenklatura* were always above the law; they could commit crimes, accept bribes, and enrich themselves by illegal means, as long as they remained in their powerful positions. Nevertheless, for the vast majority of the population, there were an enormous number of laws, regulations and restrictions which had to be obeyed to avoid severe punishment. Dictatorial rule also meant efficient law enforcement agencies, reducing publicly-

5 ■ This can be found in the full report of our project: Nagy (2001 and 2002).

6 ■ This is discussed in detail by Olson (1991).

known criminality below the level of many liberal democracies. The combination of overwhelming regulations on the one hand, and lawlessness on the other, led to a constant feeling of insecurity, fear and distrust of the authorities. Freedom and democratic change meant liberation from the huge number of restrictions and from fear of non-obedience. The double standards of lawlessness above, and severity in expecting law-abiding below, severely corroded public morality.

Spread of the shadow economy

The black or shadow economy usually refers to unregistered (and consequently untaxed) economic activities. It can be found at all times in all societies, and there are strong indications that it is increasing. The shadow economy existed and increased in the Soviet-type economies also; it was mostly the consequence of the acute shortages in socialist economies, and it became a more or less tolerated supplement to the state-owned sector.

It is difficult to gather information and measure the size of the shadow economy, as in most cases it is illegal, and punishable if identified. It is typically a reaction of the economic agents who feel overburdened by the amount or the rise of taxation. According to reliable investigations,⁷ the estimated average share of the shadow economy in percentages of GDP increased in the East Central European countries from 17.6 per cent to 31.6 per cent in the first five years of the transition period. This can be compared to similar calculations in the OECD countries, showing an average of 15.1 per cent for 1990. The unregistered economy is large in the transition countries, about twice as big as in developed market economies, and it increased very

substantially in the first period of the transition process.

This is obviously linked to the decline of production and income, which boosted tax evasion. Many firms preferred to avoid paying taxes and social security contributions to save themselves from losses and bankruptcy, especially when the danger of detection and penalisation diminished. Decentralisation and privatisation of state-owned firms gave birth to many new small enterprises, increased unemployment led to growing self-employment. These developments contributed significantly to the rise of unregistered and untaxed activities.

The choice to go underground was linked to the general decline of the rule of law and of loyalty to public authorities—an expression of the longstanding alienation from the state. People have learned in Soviet-type systems that laws are arbitrary decrees by non-representative governments, not meant to be generally enforced. Consequently they need time and have difficulties in getting used to the idea that universal compliance is a prerequisite for a sustained working of the legal system.

The extension of tax avoidance is linked to the declining efficiency of the administration and to increasing corruption. In many instances entrepreneurs go underground not only to avoid taxes but also to reduce the burden of bureaucracy and corruption. Johnson (1999) pointed out that "Either firms hide their activities in order to reduce the bribes they need to pay, or they pay bribes in order to be able to hide their activities". The increasing frequency of unofficial economic activities in the transition countries was a consequence of the resilience of large-scale regulations, while the enforcement of tax laws declined.

It is questionable how sincere politicians and administrators are when they

7 ■ See: Lackó (1999) and Schneider and Enste (2000).

call for a substantial reduction of the shadow economy. High taxes and complex regulations lead to increased power for the bureaucrats and, for some, more chances for corruption. Both entrepreneurs and administrators know well that in certain cases it is more advantageous to pay bribes than taxes. As many voters gain from unofficial activities and lax taxation legislation, for re-election purposes, politicians may find it preferable to talk only about "law and order" and do little to ensure stricter collection of taxes and social security payments.

East Central European countries inherited welfare systems that were relatively advanced compared to their general level of development, and which needed a high level of public expenditure. A large shadow economy means relatively low tax and social security income, which may lead to a vicious circle: the larger the burden on firms, the more they opt for exit (illegality), increasing pressure on public finance, resulting in higher taxes, and so on.

The effect of the shadow economy on the legal one and on economic growth is ambiguous, according to recent investigations: some concluded that the two move together, and there is a positive relationship between their growth; others found that the activities of the informal sector have a negative impact on economic growth. The reason for the latter is a negative correlation of the shadow economy and public infrastructure, which is a key element in economic growth. Untaxed economic activities reduce the income of the state and are evidently unfair to law-abiding citizens and firms, but from the point of view of general growth of the economy, they are not necessarily harmful. It is not evident that from the general welfare point of view they make worse use of the resources withheld from taxation than the state would allocate them.

There can be little doubt that, in the transition countries, the informal sector of the economy contributed significantly to the muddling through of the difficulties in the transitional crisis. It gave work to many of the unemployed and helped the survival of small and medium size firms. It was in the shadow economy that new businesspersons have learned entrepreneurial spirit and dynamism, contributing to competition and increasing the efficiency of the economy. However, working in the shadow economy is disadvantageous for the work force: usually without any work contract, they are defenceless and, in many cases, have no access to social security services or legal protection.

A great disadvantage of the growth of the hidden economy was the sudden explosion of criminal activities, such as drug and arms trafficking, prostitution, gambling and extortion. This contributed, much more than other unregistered activities, to the breakdown of the rule of law and to a widespread feeling of insecurity, was financed by, and even intertwined with, criminal activities, through which their money is laundered. The increase in criminal activities is extremely damaging to that lawful and secure environment which is necessary for attracting foreign investment and for EU integration, the essential conditions of growth and catching-up.

While the contribution of the shadow economy to the growth of the registered economy is doubtful, it is not questionable that it has a negative effect on the fairness and the equality of sacrifice in society, and consequently on the rule of law. The more society, and the authorities, find the activities in the informal sector acceptable, the more they undermine public morality. It is not enough to focus attention on the loss of tax revenues or resource allocation problems concerning the shadow economy; the corroding impact on the rules, norms

and institutions of economic agents can be even more important. A large and growing shadow economy shows not only that the tax and social security payments and state regulations are high and hardly tolerable, but also that the legitimacy of the social order is endangered.

Corruption and state capture

Spreeding and strengthening corruption is even more damaging than the shadow economy. There are many types of corruption, which is the abuse of public power for private benefit, including bribes paid for licenses, access to publicly-provided goods and services, procurement of public investment contracts, influencing tax regulations, obtaining jobs or promotion in the public sector, etc. "Small" and "grand" corruption must be distinguished, the latter being in most cases politically motivated and often tied to large state investment projects.

It is much more difficult to measure corruption than the shadow economy, as in the first case both parties are interested in hiding the facts. The quantification methods used in research are usually based on estimates by agencies relying on the answers of consultants and experts.⁸ They all have the drawback of being subjective, therefore they contain a serious risk of reverse causation: performance perception may bias the rating of experts. However, as the correlation of corruption indices prepared with different methods by different consultants is very high, with the necessary reservations one can have a certain amount of confidence in their reliability.

For estimating the level of corruption in the transition countries, two kinds of corrupt behaviour are usually distinguished: *administrative corruption*, as present in il-

legitimate payments to public officials, and *state capture*, measured by the percentage of firms directly affected by the "purchase" of laws and regulations. In a recent publication Kaminski (2001) compared different estimation measurements on corruption in the transition countries, and found a relatively high level, a close relationship between the different measures of corruption and great differences by countries. It is remarkable that when both types of corruption are on a high level, it suggests that the system acts deliberately to set the rules of the game in ways that maximise rent-seeking behaviour for those enjoying political power. In such cases corruption feeds on itself by fuelling counterproductive, corruption-generating regulations,

Before corruption could be measured and compared, some researchers assumed that corruption might increase economic growth, as bribes may speed decisions by the authorities, and bureaucrats may work harder if they can expect a bribe. All of the empirical studies done in the field refute this "bribery-as-grease" hypothesis, and agree that corruption tends to lower economic growth. Mauro (1995), for example, found that the indices related to the judiciary system, red tape, and corruption are closely related and can be regarded as a good representation of the bureaucratic efficiency of a country. There is a strong association between bureaucratic efficiency and political stability, and fast-growing countries have a higher bureaucratic efficiency index than slow-growing ones. Legal systems obviously have a strong influence on corruption, but their effectiveness depends on the political and cultural setting in which they work. Triesman (1999) found that a system where the judiciary is not independent and judges have a

8 ■ As Wei (2001) succinctly remarked, "Like pornography, corruption is difficult to quantify, but you know it when you see it".

broad discretion can even stimulate corruption, increasing the toll of bribery.

As far as the effect on growth is concerned, it was found that corruption is very negatively associated with the investment rate, and this is the main channel through which bad institutions lower growth rates. If corruption results in more tax-avoidance, as is the case in transition countries, it reduces public income and expenditures, including public investments. Public procurement contracts influenced by corruption can lead to exaggerated costs of construction,⁹ inferior services, or to the use of cheap and low-quality materials. Consequently, the loss caused by corruption is much higher than the bribe itself. Moreover, for the transition economies, the major loss can be the bad reputation of the country and the loss of confidence by foreign investors.

Corruption directly affects growth performance by leading to misallocation of investment. Corrupt government officials prefer those expenditures where they can collect huge bribes, which is frequent in projects such as the construction of bridges, motorways, hospitals, airfields, the purchase of medical equipment, etc. It is not surprising that corruption leads to high capital expenditure on useless ("white elephant") projects. Strong evidence was found that government expenditure on education and health are negatively correlated with higher levels of corruption, while both are key factors of economic development.

Politically motivated government spending frequently leads to inefficient distortions of their sectoral or local allocations, as politicians frequently steer infrastructure projects towards certain locations.

Alternatively, they may offer "free" infrastructure facilities (roads, electricity, communication, etc.) to attract investors to their preferred districts. Comparative investigations revealed that corruption in the host countries is negatively associated with foreign direct investment. As corruption is inherently secretive and arbitrary, the implicit contract between the briber and the bribed cannot be enforced, this uncertainty deters many potential investors.

Privatisation of trade and industry is relatively fast developing, while it is lagging behind in the infrastructure. The more so, as it is not clear and decided what should remain in the possession of central and municipal governments, and what should be privatised. It is well known also, that during the socialist period, the infrastructure was strongly neglected, and in most cases was of inferior quality.

In East Central European countries the state sector was, and in some cases still is, very large. Consequently, during the transition period there is a need for much new infrastructural investment, especially to serve the protection of the environment, offering lucrative opportunities to private contractors. Such firms are frequently prepared to pay a "commission" to government officials for helping them win a contract, "commission" in many such cases is only a euphemism for what is essentially a bribe.

The exact boundaries of what is considered "corruption" depend on culture: some people regard as permissible what others consider criminal prosecutable. However, in East Central European countries public opinion polls showed that an overwhelming majority is in favour of a substantial

9 ■ Tanzi (1997) is quoting a report of Transparency International on the city of Milan, where after a great corruption scandal broke out, within the space of two years, "the cost of city rail links fell by 52 per cent, the cost of one kilometre of subway fell by 57 per cent, and the budget for the new airport terminal was reduced by 59 per cent."

reduction in corruption and, in many cases, it is regarded as public enemy number one. Societies with longer periods of democratic rule, a free press, and more education, where the separation of "public" and "private" is clearer, have less corruption. Even if corruption is impeding growth for a number of reasons, it does not mean that it prevents it entirely. Other factors may be more conducive to growth, and outweigh the negative effect of corruption.

Several authors regard "state capture" an even greater danger for the rule of the law in the transition societies than the shadow economy and corruption. "Capture of the state" was defined as "shaping the formation of the rules of the game (i.e., laws, rules, decrees and regulations) through illicit and non-transparent private payments to public officials".¹⁰ Firms can use various methods not only to circumvent laws and regulations, but they can exert influence on legislation as such, on the design of economic and political institutions. Powerful firms in certain cases collude with public officials to extract rents through the manipulation of state power, i.e., they "capture the state".

In a survey by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, firms were asked to assess the extent to which activities, such as the sale of parliamentary legislation, decrees, court decisions, financing political parties, etc. had a direct impact on their business. The survey showed that the purchase of such activities is present to varying degrees across all transition countries. State capture in the former Soviet states and in some of the East Central European countries was found to be high, while in the majority of the EEC economies it was relatively low. Captor firms grew much faster than other firms in the economies where the

state capture environment was strong, while this could not be observed where states provide a broader range of public goods for the market and the legislative process is more subject to political competition. When corruption goes beyond the administration and reaches the level of members of parliament, one cannot expect severe anti-corruption legislation (nor its implementation). The efforts made to introduce transparency in the wealth and the changes of wealth of legislators and high-level officials show that this danger is very real. However, to control bribery in this case is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

In this respect the development of the transition countries has shown that the initial introduction of civil liberties and checks on abuses of power were, in a number of cases, insufficient to counterbalance the loss of control following the dismantling of the Communist regime. This situation helped the emergence of state capture, which occurred in several cases of large privatisation deals, such as telecommunications, energy production, or military procurement. The partners in such cases sought to determine the rules of the game to secure monopoly positions, favourable pricing arrangements, state guarantees, etc.

By increasing civil society control, freedom of the press and independence of the judiciary, a certain threshold of democratic reforms have to be reached to channel the strategies of firms away from state capture. Gradual de-monopolisation, support for competition and helping the entry of new enterprises can direct firms to more legitimate means of influencing decisions made by the state. However, in several East Central European countries it can be observed that when the ruling parties felt their grasp on power was being weakened,

10 ■ See: Hellman et al. (2000/b).

they tried to reduce the transparency of the dealings of the state, to attack the freedom of the press and the independent decisions of the judiciary. The danger of a situation when capture of the state may emerge is far from over.

Clientelism and the creation of the "new middle class"

One of the main causes of the weakening and breaking down of the rule of law is strongly linked to the political and social processes of the introduction of democratic pluralism. The transformation of the socialist system to a market economy obviously entailed privatisation, selling state assets to real owners: in sum, the creation or emergence of a new capitalist class, which did not and could not exist in Soviet-type systems. There was general agreement among practically all political parties that privatisation was necessary; the question was how fast and how much to privatise—and who will be the beneficiaries, the new owners of privatised assets. In the election campaigns most political parties proclaimed that a "new middle class" had to be created, which—in this sense—was a euphemism for the capitalist class, even if it meant a larger social strata of entrepreneurs, self-employed professionals and higher level bureaucrats.

The creation of the "new middle class" signified on the one hand the redistribution of assets, land and services by political forces, and on the other the legal and administrative frameworks of this redistribution. In the political power struggles in Eastern Europe, especially at the beginning of the transition, there was much more at

stake than is usual in western democracies. The question was not only which political group or coalition would govern the country in the next period, but also who was going to privatise state assets worth billions of dollars. Clientelistic networks evolved around the political parties eager to participate in the distribution of state-owned firms, in the redistribution of land and in obtaining profitable state contracts.

The eagerness of the client groups of the ruling political forces to get as much as possible of the redistributed wealth may be one of the reasons why there was too much emphasis on privatisation and too little on marketisation when transition was in its early phase. Even if privatisation is a necessary condition of a well functioning market economy, it is not sufficient, as in the absence of adequate institutions a coherent factor and product market cannot develop, and this would flaw the incentive structure.

According to Sajó (1998), clientelism in contemporary political science means "a network of social relations where personal loyalty to the patron prevails against the modern alternatives of market relations, democratic decision making, and professionalism in public bureaucracies". Even if clientelistic corruption pervades all areas of public life, clientelism differs from corruption: it is a form of social organisation, while corruption is an individual social behaviour. Clientelism inherited much from the *nomenklatura* legacy of the socialist period and became a more or less stable form of social organisation in the East Central European societies.¹¹

When the Communist parties lost their grip on power, the only surviving, all-encompassing organised force that remain-

11 ■ In fact clientelism or the patronage system has much longer roots in Eastern Europe, going back to western feudalism and the eastern Ottoman tradition, and meant that the political faction in power controlled all contracts and administration appointments at all levels of government.

ed active was the state, with its huge and, very largely, incompetent bureaucracy. The parties winning the elections first offered high public service positions to their clients and, later, favourable opportunities to participate in privatisation. As the party or coalition in power frequently lost the next election, clients of the different political tendencies had the opportunity to occupy high-level government positions or had their share in privatisation, or both. This is how a great part of the "new middle class" has been created, involving enormous income differences separating them from the impoverished "lower classes", who constitute the majority of the population.

Participation in the privatisation process and in the redistribution of capital, in becoming capitalists was one of the major aims of many clients of the different political parties. Managers of enterprises and agricultural co-operatives, enriched members of the *nomenklatura*, as well as victims of previous injustices and other enterprising persons used their connections and party-loyalty to acquire inside information on the opportunities—and favours—in the privatisation process. As most of them did not have the funds to buy state assets, they used their connections to get loans on favourable conditions from state-owned banks. Many of these loans were never repaid; to consolidate the banks, billions of dollars of taxpayers money was needed.

The moral dilemma created by large-scale restitution and privatisation of state assets goes beyond the problem of the existence or the lack of legality. The various methods of privatisation can be rationally defended, as resources privately owned will be more efficiently used and could be legalised by freely elected parliaments, but they could hardly be accepted as just and fair by the public. The sudden creation of extreme wealth was regarded by a great

part of society as questionably legal and certainly unjust. When it is done on political grounds, avoiding transparency and competitive bidding, favouring not the best offer, then it contributes substantially to the decline of the rule of law and public morality.

As privatisation is almost completed, clientelist networks are concentrating on government procurement and investment contracts, and well-remunerated positions in state institutions or state-sponsored projects. As the state sector is still large, a great number of lucrative leading positions become available with each switch of government. This happens in any democratic society, the difference with the newly emerging democracies is the scale on which these replacements are made, and how much more they are based more on political loyalty rather than professional qualities; consequently, they disrupt the activities of different institutions, reduce their efficiency, and spread a harmful insecurity.

The success of the catching-up process depends on how freely and how rapidly the entry, exit, and restructuring of incumbent firms evolve at the enterprise level. If a government, instead of enhancing these market-friendly processes, intervenes with special subsidies, preferential taxation, advantages in government procurements, credit relief, etc. for the businesses of its clients, it will obviously reduce structural and productivity improvement in the economy.

The clientelist networks are evidently corrupt, where favouritism, political partiality, give-and-take, nepotism abound; much of the morale of democracy and the logic of the market is destroyed. A clientelist regime is more open to state capture by firms supporting the political administration in power and it is alien to the independence of the judiciary and to the freedom of the press. It is powerfully interested in maintaining the lack of transparency in government activities, in the use of pub-

lic funds, in the conditions of privatisation and state contracts, in tax exemptions and other favours given to investors, etc. Consequently, even if scandals are frequent, cases of serious and persistent criminal investigations into corruption, embezzlement, misuse of public funds, or even in Mafia-type activities are rare. If corruption is not penalised, if powerful politicians can avoid or stifle prosecution, this is not only ruinous for the rule of law but it also creates public resignation, which can be even more harmful for the emerging democratic regimes and the development of civic society than the impunity of the crimes themselves.

Ten years' history of the East Central European societies showed that political freedom, pluralism and democratic elections are not sufficient in themselves to evolve a dynamic political equilibrium with the necessary mechanisms of checks and balances. If networks of patronage develop, the adversaries can co-operate in illegal deals, as both of them have enough "dirt" on the other to feel safe. The "dirt collection mechanism"¹² works not only among political parties, but also in the selection of the officers, or the staff of authorities: to trust someone one must

have "dirt" on him or her. Such a political system may have also "checks and balances", but it is based on mutual concealing and leniency on shame and crime. If it is combined with limitation of the freedom of the press and the independence of the judiciary, it can be very damaging for the development of a truly democratic system.

Politically disruptive clientelist regimes are disadvantageous for the extension and empowering of the market forces and for economic growth. If the choice made between privatisation offers, state contracts, tenders, etc. is politically motivated, and clients are offered inside information and are favoured, the best offer will rarely win. In clientelist rule, an impartial and honest professional civil service, which is guided only by the law and the public interest, cannot develop. But it can efficiently exploit the officials, judges, journalists, police officers, etc. inherited from the Communist regime, who have learned to obey politicians and to implement laws that suit their bosses' whims. In such conditions, the administration likes to extend secrecy over the government's dealings beyond all limits, following the tradition of the paranoid non-disclosure of Communist regimes.

12 ■ See: Kaminski (2001).

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Katalin Aknai – Anikó Erdősi

Contemporary Art and the Market

Information on events in the Hungarian art scene can be obtained from at least three sources: two websites (www.exindex.hu and www.ikon.hu) and the widely circulated free guide, *Pesti Est*. These play much the same role as their counterparts elsewhere in Europe, they communicate what is on offer from a background that has spectacularly changed since the political changes of 1989/90. What we propose to try is to give a general rather than exhaustive overview of the various galleries and institutions—especially in the art trade—that have emerged in the last ten years and which deal in contemporary art, a new background which has helped add colour and vigour to the art scene.

Art education was quick to react to the 1989 transition: after a palace revolution at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1990, a new team of instructors were brought in, artists who had been considered dissidents, like Dóra Maurer, György Jovánovics and Zsigmond Károlyi; a new interdisciplinary department, Intermedia, was set up to ex-

plore new forms in the visual arts, with lecturers such as Miklós Peternák, Zoltán Szegedy-Maszák, János Sugár and others. The same year the Master School of Arts began operating in Pécs, under Ilona Keserű and Gyula Konkoly, and the first postgraduate course was started there. A generous donation from the Ludwigs, a German couple who are major collectors of art, became the core of the Ludwig Museum, in the Royal Castle in Buda, which took over the premises of the former Museum of the Workers' Movement, and which later united with the Museum of Contemporary Art. Additionally, a number of new collections came into being in provincial towns. The Paks Gallery collects and specialises in contemporary art from the entire country, and contemporary collections were established in Dunaújváros (The Contemporary Art Institution) and in Győr (City Museum).

The state monopoly in the art trade was abolished when the state-owned Képcsarnok Vállalat (Gallery Company) and its chain of galleries were privatised.

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Following this, a new set of organisations appeared in the 1990s, including a number of private galleries, some of which specialise in contemporary art. As newcomers to the Hungarian art scene, they fulfill an intermediary position in that they aim to make a profit at the same time undertaking to present new art, maintaining links with the non-profit sector for this purpose.

This rebirth of the trade in contemporary art is not completely without precedent—famous collector-traders of the early twentieth century like Lajos Ernst, Marcell Nemes or Henrik Tamás were able to run prosperous galleries, often contracting their own artists. The first period important in the art trade and in art collecting was that between 1867 and 1914, the second between 1919 and 1938. These periods saw the appearance of the type of dealer who cooperated with artists, exercised foresight and entered into contracts and agreements. Private galleries, however, did not really take root. Potential buyers of the pre-war galleries came from among the haute bourgeoisie; this mechanism was of course prevented from developing during the four decades that followed.

The political regime which established itself in Hungary after the Second World War aimed at a systematic liquidation of the private sphere; it did not favour a growth in either art dealing or the collecting of art. In 1949 the private art trade was nationalised. Despite the governmental control of the art market in the Communist era and the official ban on private trade, however, works of art were still bought and sold, even if along informal private channels. Not only large collections bear a witness to this, but also the behaviour of collectors in the nineties. (Older and new or developing private collections are varied indeed: see the Kolozsváry, Vas, Merics and Kieselbach

collections, the MEO museum with Lajos Kováts's collection, or the Irokéz collection.) The new class of collectors is still nascent, the previous generation on the other hand sticks to its old habits and connections, and prefers to buy straight from the artists rather than from galleries. Withholding purchasing power from the latter hinders the growth of private galleries.

Note that there are important differences between galleries trading in older masters and those dealing in contemporary work, in terms of their structure, operation and financial possibilities. Galleries dealing in older works (Nagyházi Galéria, Kieselbach Galéria) have an important role in directing attention to important but forgotten oeuvres. They can do so by relying on the prestige and capital recognised names provide them with. Their earnings are obviously higher, there being no living artists whose claims have to be satisfied, prices being controlled by the market alone.

Galleries trading in contemporary works have to consider the artists as well, and can expect only long-term returns. In their case profits depend not only on an eye for business and professional skills, but also on luck and patience.

To boost the market in contemporary art, the Art Fund, a state-owned company, called GeneralArt, specialising in foreign sales, was established as early as 1983. Képcsarnok Vállalat, another state-run enterprise, with a chain of galleries, became a joint-stock company in 1992, and the chain of 25 galleries were leased out. Some of the contemporary private art galleries today are the successors of these, but the most important were newly established.

The new galleries, thanks also to the absence of established models, initially employed experimental strategies. The majority eventually disappeared and the others had to struggle hard in what was still an unfriendly market.

Hungarian artists and galleries abroad

Imre Bak and Ákos Birkás are two painters who stood for two possible modes of co-operation with professional Western galleries in the seventies. They came in contact with private galleries, especially in the German-speaking countries. (Bak at the time painted geometric abstracts, based on the Hungarian avant-garde tradition and influenced by American hard edge and minimalism. Birkás was just beginning his expressive portrait series—which would return in the nineties in his Head series and hyperrealist pictures.) The network of their contacts and their careers developed exclusively along personal lines, and was seriously jeopardised by Hungary's political isolation. Bak, for instance, refused an offer by the Galerie Müller in Stuttgart in 1968 since they required him to leave the country.

Birkás chose a different strategy. He moved to Cologne and then to Vienna, while maintaining links with Hungary. He worked with several galleries at the same time, among them the Vienna and Budapest-based Knoll Galéria, which provides him with the chance of constant presence on the Hungarian scene. They both think good private galleries are very much needed, but find the Hungarian system poorly developed. Birkás thinks the insularity of the market makes its operation along the Western model problematic. The restrictions are not the results of legal regulations but of the peculiarities of the market's structure and the approach of those present in it. It is difficult to sell works by foreign contemporaries in Budapest because they are little known here. And since they cost more than the market is used to, galleries seldom have them on offer—which does not make them any better known.

The efficient operation of the art market demands that galleries be able to represent

their artists in other countries too. This involves, beside inter-gallery relations and exchanges, presence at what are probably the most important events for the art market, international art fairs. They provide many collectors, critics and gallery directors with a comprehensive overview of current conditions. Being there is the key to being known and to acquiring prestige, both for galleries and artists. Hungarian galleries rarely appear in these fairs, which in itself suggests a sluggish or underdeveloped market. The immediate reasons are financial. Most galleries cannot afford to be present at international fairs, which time and again leads those concerned to consider applying for state subsidies. Gallery owners may think the state should support them in their attempts to introduce Hungarian artists to the world, but they also fear becoming dependant on politics.

The 1980s: From galleries in apartments to a street of galleries

In the international scene, the 1980s were a truly prosperous period, fuelled by economic expansion and the success of new expressionist trends in painting. The art trade in Europe and America experienced a vigorous demand, especially for paintings. Private galleries proliferated and became stronger, and a network came into being which has changed little ever since, albeit its hubs shift from time to time.

No similar process took place in Hungary. International developments nevertheless had an influence in that private galleries started to appear—something that the regime didn't actively discourage. The desire for a Western-type network of galleries emerged in the early eighties. A legally and structurally feasible solution was the co-operation of Creative Communities, which had their own established

system of agents through which to trade. Another model was brokerage, when agencies organised exhibitions in private apartments. Such an agency was Zsuzsa Simon's, which set up the Rabinec Joint Studio in Károly Kelemen's flat in 1982, in what is now Falk Miksa Street. Several artists, like Ákos Birkás, Zsigmond Károlyi, Károly Kelemen, Lóránt Méhes and János Vető, were involved. The gallery was supposed to maintain itself from sales, and promote the artists both in Hungary and abroad. The gallery was also meant to be an intellectual workshop but eventually wound itself up in the spring of 1983, shortly after it was renamed Rabinext.

At the end of the eighties, as soon as the legal framework made it possible, individuals started opening galleries. There were two distinct waves. In the first, between 1989 and 1993, a number of galleries mushroomed, most of which—despite interesting plans—disappeared within a few years, lacking sufficient capital or a sound strategy. The gallery owners and the artists they promoted mostly came from the middle and older generations.

In the second wave, which started in 1998 and is still shaping the market, several important galleries appeared within a short time, and with them a new generation of gallery entrepreneurs and artists. It became a general practice to undertake the introduction of absolute beginners to the scene. As a result, or in a similar vein, older gallery owners also started to sell younger artists.

Hans Knoll came to the Budapest market from Vienna as a seasoned gallery proprietor, at about the same time Lajos Golovics, who edited the short-lived art trade journal, *Belvedere*, started organising contemporary exhibitions in his flat with a view to selling the works. Knoll Gallery was established in the second half of the eighties, in the wake of artistic and social

events on the outskirts of Vienna. Its Budapest counterpart was opened in 1989, with what can be considered a symbolic pan-European action, an exhibition of Joseph Kosuth's works. The gallery employs a multiple strategy, it develops, as it were, in concentric circles. The innermost circle is constituted by artists with close and varied ties with the gallery. In the next are those young artists whom Knoll thinks talented and important. He provides them with one or two exhibitions, which are not necessarily followed by close and lasting co-operation. The outer circle is the gallery's international non-profit profile. The latter is primarily financed by Austrian and Hungarian state subsidies.

Hans Knoll in a deliberate move placed himself on the line dividing East and West. His intention was to establish links between contemporary art in Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The strategy seems to have worked: the Knoll Gallery may well be the only organisation which successfully presents its Hungarian artists to the international scene.

The Knoll Gallery has retained its advantage, foreign capital and a continuous presence on the international market, over Hungarian galleries ever since. Its owner successfully rode the wave of interest in the art of the post-communist countries which surged in the years following the political changes. The gallery, still in an apartment on Liszt Ferenc Square, never suffered from the disadvantages of the home market, since it was anchored on foreign soil.

Basing itself on Hungarian capital, the Várfok 14 Műhelygaléria, which opened in December 1990, faced a bigger challenge. The owner and manager Károly Szalóky, whose background is in the non-profit cultural sphere, was uncertain whether the gallery (in a converted coal cellar) could be used as a profit-oriented enterprise. But once state subsidies became harder to ob-

tain, economic reality pushed the gallery towards trade, though this hardly altered the artistic profile. Szalóky has been closely co-operating with a number of artists from the start: István Bodóczy, András Böröcz, El Kazovszkij, Pál Gerber, János Szirtes, Imre Bukta and László Szotyor. The need for fresh faces of course also arose: new names include Katalin Káldi, András Király and László Gyórfy.

Despite an unfriendly market, the gallery grew slowly but surely in the nineties. In 1997 Szalóky opened the Spiritusz Galéria, then XO Galéria, both in the same street as the first. He wants to establish a street of contemporary galleries much like Falk Miksa Street, with its galleries specialising in Hungarian old masters and the classical avant-garde. It seems that some time will elapse before, if ever, Várfok Street and its environs become anything like the centres of the contemporary art trade in New York, Berlin or Cologne.

Várfok Galéria has not been able to establish trustworthy relations with the art trade abroad. Though it is the Hungarian gallery that has appeared most often at important art fairs, it is still a new and unknown participant on the international scene. Lack of capital and low revenues from a restricted home market have prevented permanent links with the international market. The only foreign gallery Várfok has longstanding relations with is the Hilger Gallery in Vienna. Chances have somewhat improved since 1998, and Várfok has been able to appear abroad on several occasions, as in the Hungarian Institutes of Paris and New York, and in art fairs such as the Paris FIAC, the Madrid ARCO and in Zurich.

Sámuel Havadtöy, who lived in the United States, opened his Galeria 56 in the "antiques zone" of Falk Miksa Street, in 1992. He wished to facilitate communication between the Hungarian and the inter-

national scene by involving European and American artists. Its initially intense activity has fallen off and, though officially still open, it rarely puts on exhibitions.

Dovin Galéria was started in 1993 by Katalin Délceg, in the heart of downtown Budapest in a fashionable street called Haris Close, above a real estate agency. Délceg and her husband, Attila Pogány, both of whom had worked in the state-run art trade, decided on a special strategy to enhance their market position. A complex of enterprises (book publishing, real estate, architectural and interior design and art trade) opened markets for each other. The supplementary activities which the art trade had to rely on in the beginning were eventually dispensed with and the gallery is now self-sustaining.

At the beginning Délceg cooperated with four artists—El Kazovszkij, Kálmán Pollacsek, Márton Barabás, Károly Kelemen—who were joined in 1994 by Tamás Szikora, Péter Gémes, István Mazzag and Gyula Konkoly. A new venue (in Galamb Street) was started in 1996, and a number of young artists became associated with it (the painters Levente Baranyai, Mária Chilf, Katalin Haász, László Révész and the sculptor György Jovánovics). The gallery exhibits its artists every second year and publishes catalogues and albums.

Katalin Délceg had learned how to run a private gallery from Claude Bernard, in whose Paris gallery she spent some months before setting up shop in Budapest. The strategy she wished to employ involved presenting noted foreign artists to the Hungarian scene once a year; however financial considerations allowed only a Luciano Castelli exhibition in 1994 and an Ernesto Tatafiore in 1999. Though Dovin was successfully present for two consecutive years at the Madrid ARCO, the gallery has been unable to extend its influence beyond Budapest.

Éri Galéria, the gallery which has made most changes of location in Budapest, also opened in 1993. It differs from those we have mentioned through having a distinct field of specialisation: it deals exclusively in Hungarian Constructivist and Geometric Abstract artists. Gyöngyi Éri, the proprietor, seeks out living artists and wishes to popularise unknown 20th-century oeuvres. Associated contemporaries include Dóra Maurer, Tibor Gáyor, Imre Bak, István Haraszty, as well as members of the younger generation such as György Varga and András Wolsky. Despite the disadvantage of having to change location several times during the ten years under consideration here, Éri Galéria has survived and its established "family" of artists has little changed.

Not all enterprises have been that fortunate, not even those setting out with a promising programme. The Roczkov Galéria (1990–1995) was established by the three Roczkov sisters, Hermina,

Radmila and Angéla. It tried to push the Serbian artist Milorad Kristi in Budapest. Later a few more artists—among them the painters András Wahorn and Tamás Kopasz, and the sculptor Attila Mata—became associated with it. The gallery originally intended to reach new markets through Yugoslavia, but the Balkan wars frustrated such plans. The venue, home to unusual openings and performances, was on Andrásy Road. Since the leading artist, Kristi turned towards cartoon animation, The Roczkov Galéria in 1995 transformed itself into Roczkov Stúdió, a creative workshop dealing in multimedia projects and contemporary art CD-ROMs.

The second wave of new galleries started in 1998, when a number of important galleries appeared in Budapest. Typically, they are run by a younger generation of proprietors, often in association with artists of the same age group. These new enterprises include The Deák Erika Galéria and Vintage Galéria; the Illárium Galéria,





The MEO. Architect: István Bényei. Photo: György Darabos.

though established in 1996, should also be mentioned as their forerunner.

Founder and director Gábor Kozák started the Illárium Galéria (1996–2001) in his mother's pottery studio on Köztársaság Square to provide young artists with the opportunity to exhibit and sell. He was among the first to present recent Art School graduates, including Attila Szűcs, János Kósa, Ágnes Szépfalvi, Dénes Wächter, József Baksai and Kriszta Nagy. After what was a promising start in artistic terms, financial difficulties forced the gallery to close after five years.

The art historian Erika Deák returned to Budapest from New York in 1997, and started her first apartment gallery that same year. It moved to its present location on Jókai Square in 1998, and seeks to represent those young artists whose paint-

ing and photography make use of the effects and experience of the technical media of the nineties. Works in various technical media are shown, but it seems there is little demand in Hungary for video or computer-based works.

Vintage Galéria is owned and directed by Attila Pócze. It specialises in photography, valuable 20th-century oeuvres as well as young contemporaries and contemporary graphic arts using, or inspired by, photography. The photo collages of Endre Bálint, Júlia Vajda and József Jakovits were presented in a series, and the best photographers of the young generation are regularly exhibited. Associated artists include Ágnes Eperjesi, Tibor Gyenis, Dezső Szabó and Gábor Gerhes. Photographers linked to the gallery are Lajos Csontó, András Bozsó and Antal Yokesz.

The galleries in this second wave seem to make a more deliberate effort to define their own distinct character. Another promising aspect is that Budapest private galleries display an openness towards what have been underrepresented forms (photography and other bolder media) despite the obvious lack of an established attitude on the part of collectors and the fact that painting still provides a more reliable source of income.

Art as trade and investment

The economy in the nineties understandably did not encourage the accumulation of capital, nor did it create a market in art as luxury item. The art trade relies on a special exclusive high-price market. At present in Hungary contemporary art is a buyers' market. There are many sellers: supply exceeds demand and competition is very keen.

But who buys contemporary art? At the beginning of the nineties foreign companies settling in Hungary, especially banks, accounted for the bulk of demand for Hungarian galleries. International corporations brought in what is a common attitude abroad, supporting art as a worthwhile form of investment in public relations. Foreign managers living here for any length of time also bought, for their own homes, contemporary Hungarian work from galleries. The first wave of galleries gathered strength from this sudden surge in demand; but this in time declined, and Hungarian companies were not particularly willing to follow suit.

In the absence of any stable class of collectors worth mentioning, galleries had to cultivate their own collectors. A capital- and energy-intensive process which many galleries could not afford: they were forced, after the initial enthusiasm of the first years, to wind up. Though conditions did not become any more favourable in the second

half of the nineties, newcomers entered with unabated optimism. Contemporary art is more and more often mentioned as a long-term high-yield and secure investment. This seems supported by the appearance of a number of new collections that banks have started in recent years (Raiffeisen Bank, HVB Creditanstalt, Magyar Külkereskedelmi Bank, BNP Paribas).

The Budapest Art Expo Foundation must be mentioned in this short history of private galleries as an attempt in the early nineties to vitalise contemporary art trade. The first Art Expo, a Western-type art fair, was organised in 1991. In time its concept turned out to be more to the advantage of companies providing artistic services than to that of private galleries which, after a few years, abandoned the fair. Other attempts at organising art fairs were also doomed to failure, probably by the immaturity of the contemporary art trade and the absence of powerful galleries.

Lastly, two unusual institutions must be noted, which make up an important segment of the Budapest art scene. It is noteworthy that two galleries opened last autumn in Budapest (in what used to be largely industrial, working-class districts of the city) which pledged themselves to represent contemporary Hungarian art and to promote it domestically and internationally. The founders of MEO and A.P.A. decided to approach what seems an acute condition from the angle of representation.

It would now appear that Budapest galleries and provincial centres (in Szombathely, Székesfehérvár, Győr, Dunaújváros, Paks and, lately, in Pécs) can present young contemporary artists more successfully than the two subsidised museums that can normally be expected to do so. The contemporary collection of the Hungarian National Gallery, of great value



*Csaba Nemes: Heart
1997, watercolour
38 x 28 cm.
Knoll Galéria*



*Ákos Birkás: Without Title
2001, oil on canvas
140 x 114 cm. Knoll Galéria*

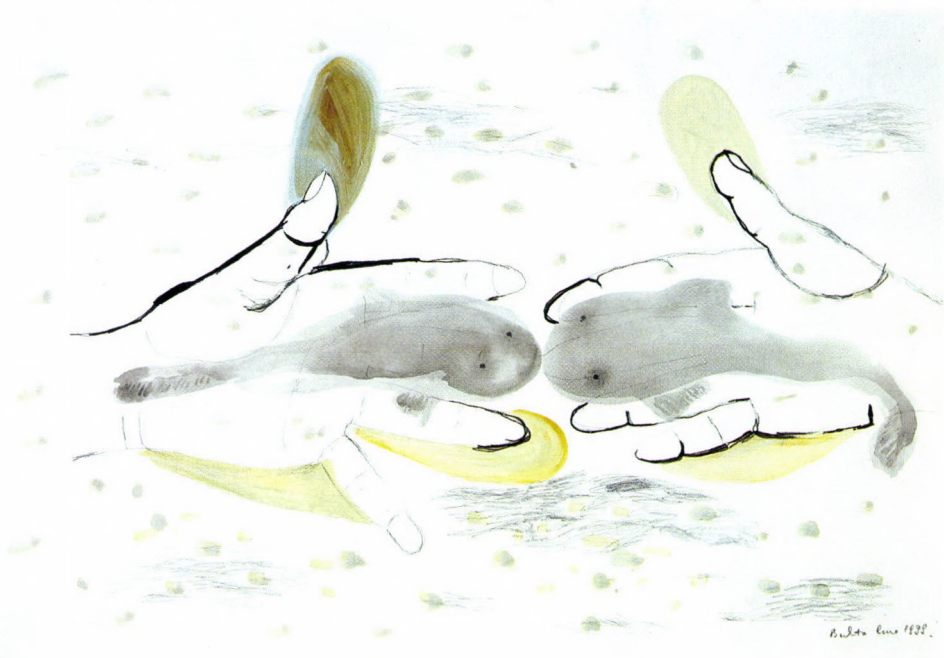


Zsigmond Károlyi: Green-Yellow, at 6 p.m., 2001, oil on canvas, 70 x 70 cm. Knoll Galéria



István Nyári: Kex Evening, 2002, acrylic on canvas, 150 x 200 cm. VárfoK Galéria

Imre Bukta: Undersized, 1998, mixed technique, 34 x 48 cm. VárfoK Galéria





El Kazovszkij: Red Cloud II, 2000, oil on fibre board, 93 x 113 cm. Várfok Galéria

*Katalin Káldi:
Country House
1999, oil on canvas
40 x 80 cm.
Várfok Galéria*





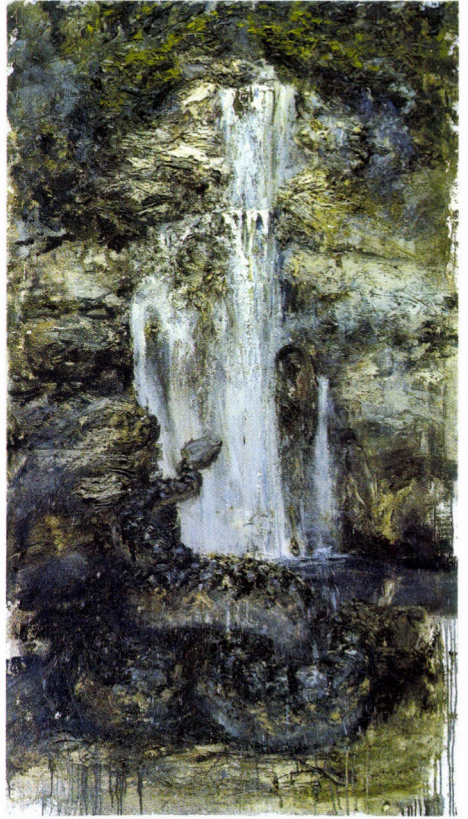
Gergő Kovách: Rabbit, 1999, mixed technique, 45 x 40 x 15 cm.

Dovin Galéria

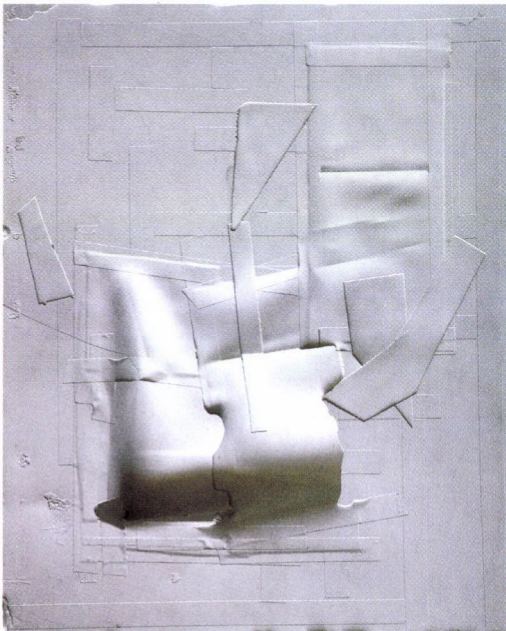
Levente Baranyai: Agricultural Mandala, 2000, oil on canvas, 181 x 241 cm.

Dovin Galéria





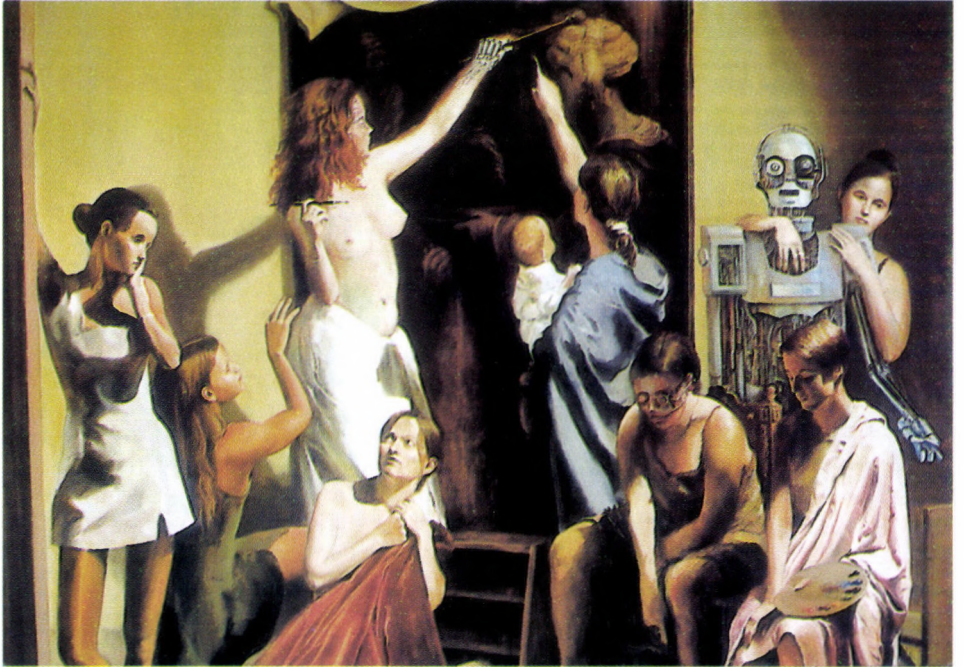
Krisztián Horváth:
Waterfall with Snake, 2001.
Oil-eucaristics, canvas, 225 x 125 cm.
Dovin Galéria



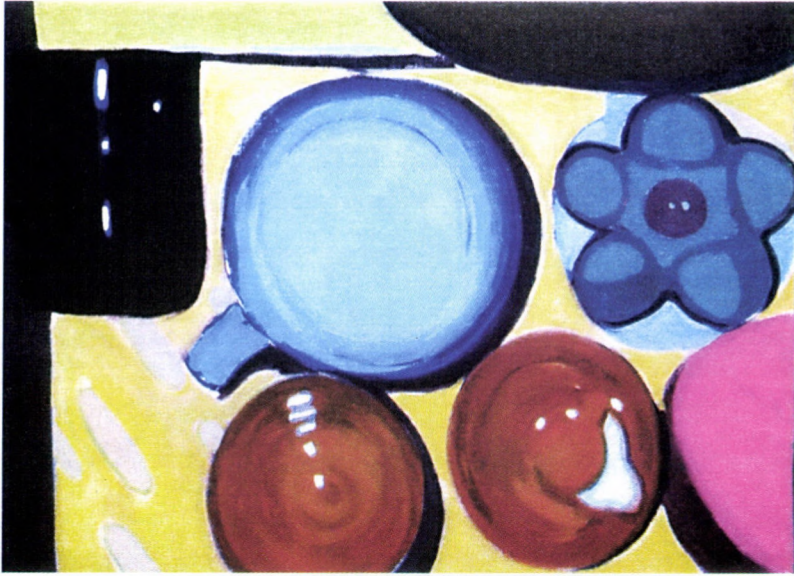
György Jovánovics: Relief, 1983.
Plaster of Paris,
33 x 26 cm. Dovin Galéria



*Attila Szűcs: Stable with Digging Figure, 2000, oil on canvas, 140 x 200 cm.
Deák Erika Galéria*

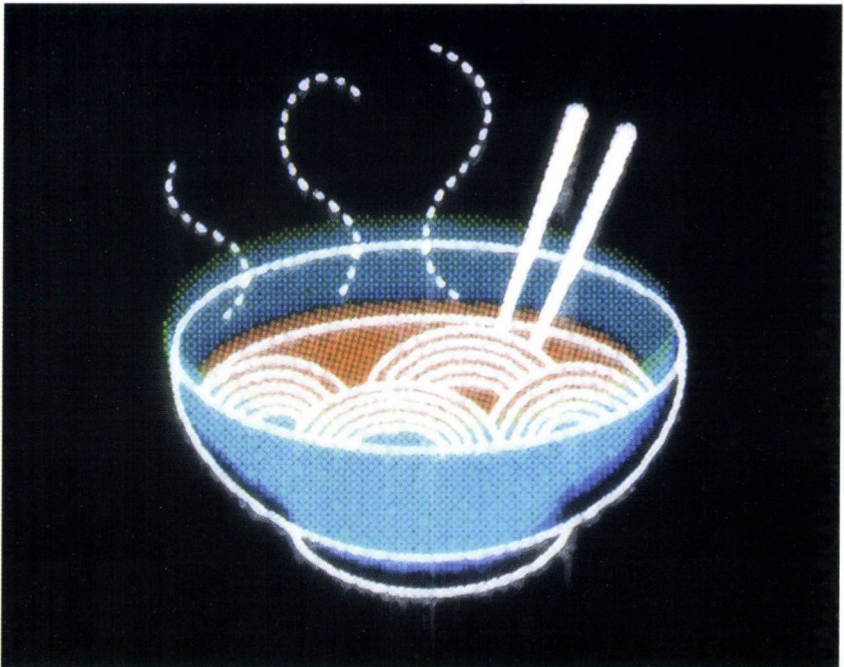


*János Kósa: Paintresses (Detail), 1999/2000, oil on canvas,
195 x 195 cm. Deák Erika Galéria*



Márton Romvári: Dish Rack, 2002, oil on canvas, 100 x 140 cm. A.P.A.

Ágnes Eperjesi: Steaming Soup, 2002, 30 x 35 cm. Vintage Galéria





Gábor Gerhes: Daily Chores—Genesis, 1999, Cprint, 180 x 200 cm. Vintage Galéria

Dezső Szabó: Whirlwind, 2001, Cprint, 120 x 180 cm. Vintage Galéria

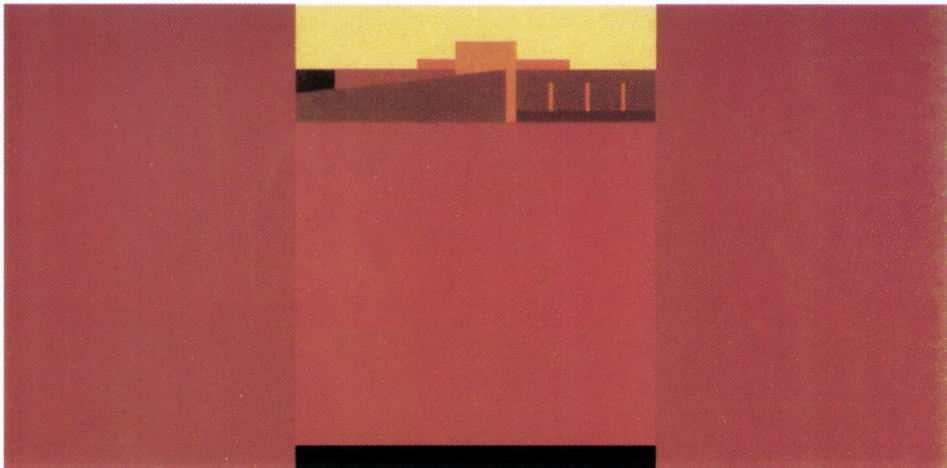




Little Warsaw (Bálint Havas–András Gálig): Characteristics, 2001, 12 life-sized sculptures, painted plaster of Paris, MEO

Pál Gerber: Contaminated Man, 1999, oil on canvas, 70 x 100 cm. MEO





Imre Bak: City, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 200 x 384 cm. MEO



*László Fehér: Music Pavilion, 2000.
Oil on canvas, 250 x 180 cm. MEO*

and interest, remains packed into corridors, awaiting a worthy exhibition space, while the Museum of Contemporary Art—Ludwig Museum has become the holder of a similar phantom collection, what with its busy exhibition schedule, lack of space and constantly changing holdings.

Meanwhile the exhibition and reception of contemporary art have changed, and a new well-to-do generation has appeared which is ready to buy this art. A.P.A. and MEO in this sense fill an existing need.

The American John Warren Gotsch, who has settled in Budapest, started his A.P.A. (Ateliers Pro Art) programme by providing studios for artists. Seven artists can spend a year in the modern studios built in what was a paper mill and a laundry. Real ateliers, they offer a perfect work environment and a chance for the artists to keep all their works in one place, showing them to gallery owners, curators and buyers. In time the artists will be selected on a competition basis. They will be able to exhibit their new works in the A.P.A. gallery, complete with a catalogue. What is now merely a generous move is hoped, in the long run, to initiate profitable relations between patron, artists and collectors, from which the non-profit sector would also benefit eventually.

MEO is something of a Central European equivalent of the cultural reanimation of the dockyards of London, Lisbon or Hamburg. The architect István Bényei brought new life to the scheduled buildings of an old tannery, the contribution of factory owner Márton Winkler, to make a suitable home for the collection of its founder, Lajos Kováts. The interior, which includes a café, a book and gift shop, the planned exhibitions and the PR work may allow the gallery access to a wider public than is usual for contemporary art. MEO in

this respect opens a new dimension for the art market in the country.

The core of the exhibited material is Kováts's collection of hundreds of contemporary pieces, which are accompanied by temporary exhibitions and auctions. The exhibitions reflect the personal preferences of the curator, Barnabás Bencsik, and of Kováts himself, and offer something for the lovers of traditional, as well as of modern, techniques. The core includes mostly works that are well-known from important exhibitions; it is the intention with which they are presented here that is new. The classics of the middle generation, for whom an upswing in the market offers increasing chances, are presented here in the company of those younger artists who are constantly featured at international exhibitions and biennials, and who seem to move in a different context of audiences, expectations and curatorial concepts. Consequently what is seen here is the problematic gap (a heritage of the past) between the opportunities and options of two generations. MEO seems to have decided to bridge this gap and present instead the two sides in an interplay, in the context of a venue which could be in any modern city.

As may be obvious even from this brief overview, it is not the lack of good art or artists, nor the amateurism of gallery entrepreneurs that makes the art trade in Hungary still look somewhat different from that in the West. Even there, only those professional galleries which have access to the international market—and the means of access is capital—do well. Though the isolation of Hungarian art life, in sociological and artistic terms, has not ended yet, there are nevertheless a number of private initiatives which can adapt the ways of Western art trade to local conditions. ■

Miklós Györffy

Saul and Paul

Péter Esterházy: *Javított kiadás* (Revised Edition). Budapest, Magvető, 2002, 281 pp.
 János Térey: *Paulus*. Budapest, Palatinus, 2001, 307 pp.

The interplay of life and literature, text and reality, is rarely conducive to such productive tension as that which sustains the oeuvre of Péter Esterházy. It is hard to think of any other Hungarian writer whose private person and family background as such could have raised expectations and interest in his works to quite the degree that he does. A descendant of one of Hungary's grandest aristocratic families, he entered literary life at a time when the country's aristocracy had vanished from public life for decades, almost without trace, as if at a stroke it had simply ceased to exist in 1945. At the same time, Esterházy measured up to the inordinate expectations, to what could be called an avid curiosity, with prodigious talent and a series of works that played a major part in regenerating Hungarian prose. Though he has never sought to make promotional capital out of his origins, he has not disowned the name either; rather, he has borne it with winning elegance and matter-of-factness whilst creating a literary world and private mythology from the implications of his family's *déclassé* status and the mundanities of life in the Kádár era, as

one who was at once a plebeian and a scion of the European aristocracy. His most recent big novel, *Harmonia caelestis* (see HQ No. 159) was entirely concerned with this family heritage, and more particularly with mapping the history of Hungary as a whole—its dismantling and simultaneous upholding of class distinctions—in certain respects through the personal history of the Esterházy family. The protagonist of that story was the father, for whom the author's own father, Mátyás Esterházy, served as model. This engaging man, a father of four and fluent in four languages, endured all the ordeals of internal exile and poverty with dignity, and unlike most of his aristocratic peers, he stuck by his Hungarian roots. Though he went through a number of severe crises, from which he sought an escape in drink, he nevertheless succeeded in passing on to his children the moral and cultural codes that were the family's heritage in an environment that, when all is said and done, was totally new and alien to him. That, at least, was the message of the literary text of the magnum opus, the fruit of nine years' labour, whose readers had every justification to suppose

Miklós Györffy

reviews new fiction for this journal.

possessed an authenticity and imprimatur bestowed by life, the unvarnished truth.

Except as it now transpires, almost like the latest twist in the novel, that things were not quite what they appeared. As he was reaching the end of his work on the manuscript of *Harmonia caelestis*, in the autumn of 1999, Esterházy submitted a request to the Historical Office, the appointed custodian of the secret-police files of the Kádár era, to be allowed to inspect any documents that might be traceable relating to himself and his family. Several days after finally completing the novel, in late January 2000, four bulky files were set down before him, from which it became clear at a glance that his father had been an informer for the security forces: "on opening one of the folders I instantly recognized my father's handwriting... I could not believe what I was seeing." From 1957 to 1980 Mátyás Esterházy was an informer for the Ministry of the Interior's Section III/III, a time in which he wrote many hundreds of reports on his assignments. So useful did he prove, in fact, that during the Seventies he was promoted to the status of "secret agent" (*titkos megbízott*, or "tmb" in the jargon) for Hungary's counter-intelligence organisation. No one, to the best of the author's knowledge, had the slightest idea of any of this. It is possible that his mother, who died in 1980, and perhaps his father's doctor, who is still alive, had some knowledge of these activities; however, all that the latter was willing to disclose when asked, unaware that Esterházy was by then privy to the truth, was that "your father had a grave guilt weighing on his conscience," and "every family has a skeleton in the cupboard." His father died in 1998, after a long, fairly tranquil and happy widowhood.

We learn all this from *Javított kiadás—Melléklet a Harmonia caelestishez* (Revised Edition—An Appendix to *Harmonia*

caelestis), publication of which towards the end of May 2002 was, for obvious reasons, nothing short of a bombshell. And all the more in that Esterházy, having made the gruesome discovery, chose to let no one else in on the secret except his wife, but instead buckled down to writing this book, fearing all along that the story might become public before he was able to tell his family and friends and his readers in a way that he felt was appropriate. A few fleeting moments of hesitation aside, it is clear that he never seriously entertained the notion that he might attempt to cover it up himself. Quite apart from the barely assimilable personal anguish that the secret of the files undoubtedly occasioned to Esterházy as a son, and that his book in turn will occasion to all those who are personally affected by the matter—members of the family still alive, friends, and all others who were subjects of observation—this development has confounded the ties between life and literature, text and reality, so bewilderingly that it is hard to think of any parallels anywhere, never mind in Esterházy's own career. Make no mistake about it, what Esterházy learned within days of finishing his big novel in certain respects immediately put the validity of that work in question, indeed, put a question mark on his entire oeuvre to date, because his writings have been based in no small measure on the fiction that, for all the stumbles and frailties, the moral right of father and family alike was incorruptible, and that the first person narrator loves his father, mother, grandparents, and their forebears, loves the very idea of being an Esterházy, and, ultimately, loves his native land, the world he regards as his home, not in any nationalistic but in an almost religious sense. The fact that his father was a snitch, no different from those who put him in this dishonourable position, and that this vileness managed to infiltrate

even places where decency had every right to consider it was protected—this shattered the image, undermined the love.

Against that, however, it is fair to object that the novel is, after all, a self-determining fiction; however imbedded it may be in reality, the very fact that it has assumed the form of a novel means that, as fiction, it can only be (or not be) true in a poetic sense. Life is one thing, literature another, and in the post-modern aesthetic that has so often been foisted onto Esterházy, the two have nothing to do with one another or else: quite the reverse, they are indivisible: the one "writes" the other. In that spirit, then, it might even seem that with *Revised Edition* Esterházy is continuing the "writing" of a novel that we had thought was already complete, its two parts now being followed up by a third in which it turns out that everything is different from what it had seemed to be up till then. Since, in the general impression that has been formed about him, Esterházy is no stranger to such ploys, there were many who automatically supposed, when his publisher announced the devastating reason behind and subject-matter of *Revised Edition* at a press conference, that this was going to be another of his artful dodges, on a par with the role-playing of *Tizenhét hatyúk* (Seventeen Swans) back in 1988, when Esterházy put out the work under the pseudonym of an unknown, untutored authoress called Lili Csokonai. "My God, what a relief it would be if I had merely made up!", the author himself writes in his new book. "Everything would be in keeping poetically too, non-fiction as fiction, et cetera." And "I quite understand that there will be some who will be suspicious. I have done a lot to foster that suspicion; I have invested much effort in it."

This "morally questionable notion" would, of course, have devalued the ethical and historical truth of the work,

and that was the sole handhold left to Esterházy in this position. What is now borne in with harrowing force, both for himself and for the reader, is precisely that a true work, however playful and textualised it may be, cannot be detached from a reality lived through with great ethical and intellectual responsibility. That reality was now presenting the bill to the fiction. As Esterházy himself says, the time has arrived when he had to accommodate to reality, just as hitherto he has accommodated to words. This time round it was not he who was fashioning the sentences but sordid, deceptive truth that was dictating the text to him: he was obliged to write what the documents were telling him. One possible consequence might have been that Esterházy could have gone as far as disclaiming himself as a writer. After all, everything that he has written to the present has been predicated on a mistaken or an imperfect knowledge of reality: "being an Esterházy" no more exists than, or is no different from, any other family history. The shock he suffered might have been enough to silence him. At one point in *Revised Edition* he remarks that if he had known from the outset that his father was an informer, he would never have become a writer. It is far from sure that this is so, but the Esterházy oeuvre would in any event have looked very different.

In the end, Esterházy has not made anything up, nor has he retracted anything. Instead he has bowed to the bitter dictate of *Revised Edition*, and in doing so he has laid before us a cathartic document of literary and human crisis. Though his career as a writer may, for the time being, be uncertain (how could a new perspective open up in such a situation, one is tempted to ask), the author portrays and solves the immediate problem in a manner that is fully worthy of him; indeed, one could say both outstripping and "overwriting" him-

self in the process. In closely tracking his attempts to take in and process the unpalatable, unassimilable truth, Esterházy does not disavow for a second, in *Revised Edition*, the self that we have come to know. To put it very simplistically, whilst raging, sobbing and brooding at every step, he also continuously sees and portrays himself, his position, indeed his father and his relation to his father, with an outsider's eye, from an ironic distance. His reason for keeping a lid on the secret—sometimes at the price of awkward, even farcical manoeuvres—is not merely so that it should come to light in his own version but also in order to ensure that the book should have as startling an impact as possible: "everything in the world exists for the purpose of being turned into a book." Even his publisher is only put in the picture when the book is almost finished, and then all he asks is, "And is it any good?... as if I were a writer, he were a publisher, and this a manuscript." He seeks not just to own up to the secret but, insofar as is possible, to mould it into shape. And that Esterházy does in just the way and to the extent that is permissible.

Revised Edition is, in essence, a diary, a set of parallel, interwoven journal-style commentaries on the threefold process of examining the documents, copying from them and cogitating on them. The primary or framing narrative relates the time spent in the Historical Office, reading the files, copying the significant parts, and taking notes. The final text does not preserve the documents in full, merely fragmentary extracts, since the entire material would have run to many hundreds of pages and, being, as such an unwieldy mass, indigestible. In this initial phase what presented one of the most distressing ordeals for the author was being obliged to pick his way through the whole noxious, unseemly pile of betrayal. Cultivated as the agent

may be, with Esterházy himself at times applauding with caustic irony the literary "tricks" that his father employs in his reports, he does ultimately accommodate to the system and stoop to doing what is asked of him, picking up the jargon of his "handlers" as he goes, to say nothing of the linguistically misbegotten operational evaluations that go with the reports. On reading them, Esterházy reflects, in his annotations to the quotations, on the ignominy and betrayal involved and, over and over again, on the schizophrenic situation in which he finds himself: on the one hand, correcting the page-proofs for *Harmonia caelestis* and, later on, signing copies of the published book, basking in its signal success and critical plaudits, whilst on the other hand working on the book that was going to invalidate all this. He subsequently twice reviewed the material that he already had and added further notes and commentaries to mark these two further phases, so in the end the source documents themselves—the petty reports of the informer known by the cover name "Csanádi" on the lives of aristocratic acquaintances that are totally inconsequential from a secret-service standpoint—are presented to the public imbedded in a nesting set of commentaries that bandy the arguments back and forth on this thrice-over reading.

Harmonia caelestis created the illusion that the figure of the father was a person who, along with and in concordance with all the other versions of "my father" who appear in the novel, was telling the reader something important about Hungary's past. That paternal image is demolished in *Revised Edition* as the compromising documentary findings are systematically juxtaposed with passages in the novel. Try as Esterházy might to seek the "real" figure, to understand what might explain his father's double life, what motivated him,

"how one who was servility personified was able to present himself as precisely the opposite," how a spineless man was able to radiate such tenue—in the end he gets no nearer to finding who Mátyás Esterházy was. The nearest he can get to an answer is that fear and suffering can make a person unrecognisable. He was Saul and Paul in one. The son does not try to excuse his father: "one can feel sorry for him, one can hate him, and one can totally cold-shoulder him. Being spat on or having no one give a damn—that will be my father's fate. Above and beyond the aforementioned options (which I too have accepted), I still love him, the man whose first-born son I am."

In post-modernism, proverbially, anything goes. All the same, it had not seemed likely that someone might write a novel in verse in that spirit. If any genre has seemed dead and buried, then a novel in verse is it. True, it was not so long ago in literary historical terms, during the 1950s and '60s, that such eminences of the period as Ferenc Juhász and Sándor Weöres were still cultivating the verse epic. It is a surprise nevertheless that it should gain a new lease of life right now, with János Térey (born 1970), one of the most talented, prolific and in vogue members of the new generation of poets who emerged during the '90s, stepping forward after seven earlier volumes of poems, with *Paulus*, a novel in verse.

Paulus is a paraphrase of that classic verse novel, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. Its nine chapters, each containing 45-50 numbered, 14-line Onegin stanzas, tell the story, first and foremost, of the rise to favour and fall of a modern Hungarian Onegin called Pál. However, it is not just about this particular Paulus but also about two others as well: first, very briefly but all the more significantly, about the biblical St. Paul, the Saul who became Paul; sec-

ond, and a good deal more expansively, about Friedrich von Paulus, the commander of the Wehrmacht Sixth Army that was destroyed at Stalingrad in 1943. It is clearly the author's intention that the three Pauluses be seen to be thematically linked by the idea of a sudden conversion, though neither the 'Pál-Onegin' nor the 'Paulus-Wehrmacht' story convincingly sustains the thesis that these life paths would be hatching a volte-face of the order of that on the road to Damascus.

In any event, the Pál-Onegin plot line is a considerably more effective and original strand of Térey's poem than the other two. Since six of the chapters deal with that, the rest can be put to one side for the moment. This Pál from Budapest is a true hero of our times. One half of his life is set in cyberspace, the other in the social whirl of gilded youth. Pál is a sort of computer double-agent, on the one hand professionally charged with protecting computer programmes and databases from attacks by hackers but, on the other, as a hacker himself, breaking into computer systems and thereby creating a market for his legal activities. He is richly rewarded and spends much of his time out on the town. He has no permanent attachments, merely a constant turnover of girl friends. Ludovika, a lady of more mature years whose acquaintance he makes at the Budapest Opera Ball, promises to be just one more of these casual pick-ups. She is a married woman from the moneyed upper crust, but her marriage is a mere pretence. The unsatisfied woman falls in love with the young Lothario. Just as Tatyana sends Onegin a letter, she sends him an e-mail message, paraphrasing the Pushkin text: "Bypassing company ambushes, / Misappropriating the source codes, / I am posting you some viruses..."

Pál concedes the charm of Ludovika's method, but: "She'd suck the life from me

that's a cinch, / If I gave her so much as an inch..." After a fleeting affair he plunges back into the fast track, becoming immersed with a friend in the drug-taking inferno of the Shipyard Island rock festival, making nocturnal raids on the hang-outs of the Budapest twenty-somethings of today. But then, to his disgust, he starts to miss the woman, and now it is his turn to write her a missive. Ludovika does not respond, but later on, when Pál by chance strays into a New Year's Eve party that the married couple are throwing in their house, it comes to an altercation between them, with blows being exchanged, and their ways part for good. On returning home Pál wreaks frightful havoc on the Internet: "Self-replicating programs sent / To wipe web pages clear of content; / Put whole databases to the sword... Software-policing home terminals / Turned into virus-spreading machines. / Scare the pants off the Firm's libertine!"

In the ninth and final chapter Pál turns up at Kaliningrad, the Königsberg of old. Why here precisely is not disclosed by the poet-narrator, who in some places identifies with his hero only explicitly to avow his separate standing as narrator in others: "Critics can lecture my stanza hard: / 'Cavalcade. P.-modern potpourri. / My lyric roves salvation's circuit, / And you, faithful reader, go for it." Whatever the case, Kaliningrad appears as the infernal setting for a modern-age apocalypse: the once renowned and picturesque East Prussian city, "Rome upon the Pregel", the Königsberg of Immanuel Kant is today a post-Communist site of devastation in a Russian enclave trapped between Poland and Lithuania. "At loggerheads with the status quo, / The Boy, the Budapest turncoat, / Who managed to pass incognito / Through controls at Ferihegy Airport, / Made a bolt to the fabled Wild East" in order to put an end to his own life there, that being, as it

were, the volte-face that befits him. Also there, by chance, is his friend Kemenszky (cf. Lensky in Pushkin's work), a trendy architect who gains masses of commissions from abroad and, in order to make space for a projected shopping mall, is preparing with his crew to blow up a Soviet-era concrete monstrosity. Pál hurls himself out of a life that for him is hollow into the blast of the explosion and dies.

Early on in the poem, in Chapter 2, "Hacker Paulus" has already put in an appearance, again with Kemenszky, at Dresden, another evocative locale of apocalyptic destruction in the Second World War and evidently an important topos for Térey, the title of whose most recent volume of poetry was *Drezda februárban* (Dresden in February). There the two young Hungarians slip into the ruins of a building that resembles the skeleton of some primeval reptile in order to smoke a joint and, under the influence of the "acrid energy bomb," discourse on the role of St. Paul of Tarsus in the history of the Christian church and religion. This is how the Paulus paradigm is introduced into the work, and, alongside the main plot revolving around Pál, the three chapters of the subsidiary plot about the catastrophe that befell the Wehrmacht general at Stalingrad (treated in Chapters 3, 5 and 7) are to be seen as a counterpart to that. Friedrich von Paulus' reliving of the collapse of his Prussian roots and ideals is orchestrated in operatic style (e.g. in a "market-hall aria"), since his bard has likewise conjured up the hell of the battle of Stalingrad in a setting worthy of an opera or a Baroque heroic poem. For the uninitiated these chapters will be barely comprehensible, so copious are the specific details and references that demand a deep knowledge of place and military history.

In the final analysis, Paulus concerns the fall of the hero of our times, with the

ruins of Dresden, Stalingrad and Kalinin-grad-Königsberg as a backdrop, from what amounts to a biblical perspective. A highly ambitious but uneven and not fully thought-through undertaking, it has the undeniable virtue that Térey is a virtuoso versifier and truly erudite poet, whose repertory of teasing allusions and intertextual correspondences, his medley of linguistic registers, quite simply dazzles his readers, at times weaving the sundry layers so densely into the text as to make it all but unanalysable. As he himself says, the work is a veritable "Cavalcade", a

"P(ost)-modern potpourri" of parody and pathos. At the same time, his protagonist is a phantom, a mere paradigm, a nexus of literary, cultural and historical references without autonomous life and personality, and thus his fall triggers no catharsis. Neither in its own right nor in relation to the other two Pauls does his fate enact a volte-face that can be interpreted or empathised with. *Paulus* at best outlines the coordinates of an intellectual field in which Térey is, as yet, still only feeling his way around for the expository and interpretative potentialities of his world. ■

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Anna Fábri

Aunt Julie—A Woman of Her Time

Júlia Hrabovszky: *Ami elmúlt* (That What Has Passed)

Budapest, Helikon, 2001, 510 pp.

"That was the family," commented the novelist Sándor Márai at the end of the chapter devoted to a host of his direct and collateral forbears, in the story of his origins and bringing up (or, if you like, autobiography) *Egy polgár vallomásai* (*Confessions of a Bourgeois*), an account of himself and a social panorama, which vindicates his personal viewpoint and narrative voice with rigorous consistency. Then he added, "but was that really all and was it just like that?" It may well have been this, probably an essential critique of all reminiscence, which years later inspired his great grand aunt (then almost eighty) to write an account of her own family and her own life. She appears in Márai's book under her own name, Aunt Zsüli. Sometimes she writes to Márai personally, on occasion she interrupts the thread of her narrative to address him, more than once referring to their relationship as writers as well as to the family bonds that join them.

Aunt Zsüli, born Júlia Hrabovszky, as Márai established in the very first sentence of his portrait of her, was a writer who "set

down on paper simple and clear stories taken 'from life', which is really not much, but who always delivered her observations with honest intent and entertaining narrative twists". Her memoir confirms Márai's judgement of her style: it is a simple and luminous account of events, with no attempt at self-aggrandisement. In a brief dedication she states that she was not addressing the public at large: "I have written this book for my beloved nephew Sándor Márai, all the dear members of our family and my many good friends, so that something should remain of me when I am no more." This is a private document, intended at the most for family use, in which important details of family history are presented, and light is shed on secrets and obscure interrelationships. Without so much as once openly contradicting Márai's "family book" *Confessions of a Bourgeois*, it overrides and corrects it. Most of all, naturally, she endeavours to rectify her own portrait, to improve a sketch that tends to caricature, with refinements of detail. The memoir was finished in 1941 according to

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the manuscript, which was discovered in a second-hand bookshop decades later and is now published by Helikon with Márai's two "Portraits of Aunt Zsüli" introducing it: the vignette from *Confessions of a Bourgeois* and "Fejfa" (*Grave-marker*), a somewhat delayed obituary, published in 1948. The publishers have drawn attention to the connection between the book and Márai (and his work) by their choice of title: *Confessions of a Bourgeois Woman*. Yet readers, as they make their way through this engagingly and soberly related life-story, pay less and less attention to the kinship and are carried along by the intrinsic worth of the book: the account of a woman's journey through a life stretching from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War; that of a self-made woman.

She was born in 1858, the youngest child of parents of noble origin, and grew up at a time when Hungary was emerging from the total political collapse which followed the suppression of the Revolution of 1848-9 into a period of self-assertive success. This was a time of economic boom and growing prosperity, but some members of the nobility experienced the changes as losers. Zsüli's forebears, the Hrabovszkys and the Grossschmids both preserved in their names their foreign—Slav and Saxon—origins, but added the predicate indicative of their Hungarian nobility: the Hrabovszkys were of Hrabova, the Grossschmids, of Mára (therefore "hrabovai" and "márai") and had become related by marriage to Hungarian noble families. They had almost all held public office and as office holders they were loyal to the Habsburgs. The Hungarian Revolution of 1848, however, brought the Grossschmids over to the national side, where they remained even in the years of repression; János Hrabovszky, Zsüli's father, became (or perhaps remained) a sup-

porter of the hated government; he was Chief Judge of a court in a provincial town, from where he moved to Vienna to "a position of importance", with the title of *Hofrat* or Court Councillor, and later on ending up Judge of the Supreme Court of Appeal in Budapest. Young Zsüli was therefore born into a privileged social position that was the lot of her father and the whole family, because of an office, which was despised by the majority, which was, at the very least, suspicious in their eyes. All this threw a shadow on the whole of Zsüli's life; although, with her father's early death, the prospects of prestige, rank and a brilliant future that would set her apart were lost for ever. Although there is not a single word in the memoir to the effect that her father's past as collaborator ever caused any trouble. Zsüli's upbringing and the major part of the family's social connections dating from that period—in contrast to those generally prevalent in their social circles—could not be called Hungarian in the least. For a long time, for more than fifty years, all her decisions were coloured by that upbringing, so un-Hungarian in nature—so cosmopolitan in her own words. Thus as a young girl she sought her fortune in surroundings of alien languages and cultures—in Transylvanian *Herkulesfürdő* (Băile Herculane), in Paris and, as a young wife, in Bucharest.

The early death of her father brought to an end the family's privileged social position, and time and the political changes that revalued everything most effectively and quickly obscured the dubious features of those privileges, too; it also reduced the widow and her three children from affluence to genteel poverty. Zsüli was six when, after the fleeting moments of funeral pomp, she fell from wealth, and never again in the whole of her long life was she free of financial anxiety.

At first sight, that was a typical fate for a middle-class Hungarian woman in the second half of the 19th century; from the middle of the century on, in the period of great economic change, more and more women were confronted with the nightmare of poverty, and noble families that had lost their estates (and had, for the most part, moved into towns) were no longer able to offer their unmarried daughters a proper circle in which to move. Maintaining them meant an ever greater burden. János Hrabovszky's fatherless-daughters, thrown on the goodwill and financial and moral support of their provincial uncles, themselves sought, as did so many of their generation, independence and the opportunity to earn their own living. Those opportunities, however, though better than before, were still extremely restricted.

From the 1860-70, public discourse, which had previously introduced as questions worthy of attention the upbringing and education of women (and from time to time women's involvement in paid employment), pressed not only for declarations but also for practical measures. At this time the organised secondary education of girls started (at first not run by the state but by various foundations), the training of women teachers received a great impetus, and the state offered employment (in the railways and the post office) to educated middle-class women. It was only as the century came to a close, however, that it became possible for them to obtain university degrees. By that time a small number of highly educated women were at the ready, who had attended universities abroad; their numbers increased rapidly in the first decade of the 20th century. A disciplined force of women teachers with a well-developed work-ethic guaranteed replacements.

Young Júlia Hrabovszky had received a careful upbringing but had no marketable

skills of any kind. She could speak, write and read German and French, play the piano tolerably, dance and skate well, and at first she dreamed of some sort of unusual post; she would have liked to be a lady's maid to the Empress and Queen Elizabeth, then for a little while she flirted with the idea of becoming an actress. Although the thought of a "good, wealthy marriage" was foremost in her mind, at the age of twenty she felt that she was ever farther from that goal. She made quick and easy conquests but was not snowed under with offers of marriage.

Faute de mieux, a governess's post beckoned, but she was found too distinguished in appearance and refined in manners to be acceptable. Her luck changed years later, when she took the only such appointment of her life. The family treated her as a relation, not an employee, and she was thus accepted in society. She succeeded in performing her duties without suffering any of its unpleasant features. This was by no means an unexpected turn of fortune, but the result of a sort of continuous self-modelling and self-depiction. Going her own way was a distinguishing feature of this 19th-century woman's life with its typical beginning: it did not, however, mean a real break with her original social milieu, but rather brought with it the opportunity of an independent position in her own right. Even if Zsüli (or, as a few of those she loved called her, Juliette) had not come into money (indeed, she had acquired debts), she had no small capital of connections: an extensive middle-class family, aristocratic well-wishers (a Countess Brunswick as a godmother) and social acquaintances in Budapest and Vienna, in Upper and in Southern Hungary. As time went by she became a virtuoso in social behaviour, a *grande dame*, as which her nephew Sándor Márai, more than forty years her junior, saw her. He perpetuated

her memory as such. This became her livelihood, and—as long as there was scope for it—such it remained. Her later work as a writer too revealed her as a *dame*, and was a social rather than an artistic accomplishment.

Her stay in Paris, the ten months that she spent there, was her first independent action. She was twenty when she went there, and from then on the image of Paris was surrounded by the gleaming reflection of experiences and knowledge of the wide world. She became one of the few who knew French life from the inside, indeed, had led that life, spoke the language of Parisian society and followed its ways and fashions. She went there in search of employment at the invitation of her cousin Victorine, something of a Bohemian, who kept herself and the three children that she had borne out of wedlock by reigning as housekeeper to an opulent Parisian family. That hard and successful woman became for her not a model but a support in the decades that followed; she went to visit her time and again to restore her spirits, make money as a newspaper correspondent and to breathe a little of the air of Paris. On the first occasion her self-confidence grew; she undertook small jobs (for example, teaching the piano in a convent), reaped social success, and step by step she must have become confident of her feminine charms.

The ten months I spent in Paris had a great effect on me. My eyes were opened. My uncertain fate ceased to worry me. I saw that even abroad I could make good, and that I had only to wish to improve myself and make the effort, and I would stay on my feet wherever fate might cast me. My soul was tempered.

From that moment she took her life into her own hands, lived independently and modestly, and was never a burden on anyone.

The position she took as a governess was to the children of a wealthy spa-owner in Herkulesfürdő; this was then considered one of Europe's leading spas, frequented by a distinguished clientele, primarily the social elite of the Kingdom of Romania. It was here in Băile Herculane, that her writing began; she sent feuilletons and small items to the Budapest papers, many of which were received with great interest by readers—especially, of course, visitors to the spa; it was here too that, at the age of twenty-four, a new phase in her life began with a proposal of marriage from Georges Muntureanu, an elegant, talented and French-educated Romanian architect. She had received proposals before, but this she accepted, taking a decision which was a second step towards true independence. It was a marriage of sympathy and not of interest; and she chose the prospect of a cosmopolitan life in Romania turning her back to the seclusion of the well-to-do middle-class caste in provincial Hungary.

The marriage took place very soon (two months after their meeting), and it was not a society event; this was as much because of the groom's nationality and birth as of the bride's family's straitened circumstances. Nor was there a Catholic ceremony, they married in an Orthodox church (in the groom's faith), together with something quite unusual—the civil ceremony in the consulate as Romanian law required. Júlia Hrabovszky was the first to contract a civil marriage in Budapest, anticipating its introduction in Hungary by twelve years.

The young couple settled in Bucharest, a city in which life combined the provincial and the cosmopolitan, the ancient and the modern. Here one could feel at home, and observe as a bystander oriental ways and customs together with the efforts being made with great determination to adapt to foreign tastes.

The marriage was a success beyond all expectation.

It is rare for two people from two different nations to relate so well to one another, to think so much alike, as we two did. [...] Physically and spiritually we fully complemented each other.

Such was Zsüli's summing up, in the fifth year of her widowhood, of the essence of this relationship. And very probably Georges too was happy, for he had brought home to a distinguished Bucharest charmed by French fashion, language and culture an almost Parisian wife, a woman who, proficient in French, easily acquired a good knowledge of Romanian, used her upbringing to move self-confidently in the most select society, and everywhere—including balls at Court—piled success upon success. Although his dreams of acquiring wealth came to nothing and Muntureanu was disappointed of large state commissions by the incalculable twists and turns of Romanian domestic politics, their financial position was sound and they lived in comfort until his death. After twelve years of marriage, Zsüli was widowed and returned home to Hungary almost as badly off as she had been when, in the first days of her happiness, she had left it.

Back in Hungary, after some vacillation, she hit upon a role the success of which was firmly founded on her life up to then, her social position, inclinations and abilities alike: she became a professional writer. Since the mid-nineteenth century a writing career had offered a way out to a growing number of middle-class Hungarian women who were forced to make a living, and who adjusted their work, very practically, to the demands of the public rather than the power of inspi-

ration. They edited women's journals, disseminated items of useful knowledge, published articles and books on etiquette, deportment, housekeeping and child rearing, gave thoughtful accounts of society events and provided readers seeking light entertainment with colourful and amusing material. Although Zsüli had had some practice in writing, as she had written both in her time as a governess in Băile Herculane, and in her years in Bucharest, she had to struggle with the language—her native language—as she had used German more in her childhood, and later French. The flow of her memoirs impresses the reader not by virtue of ease or polish, nor yet its insights into passion or suffering or philosophical profundity, but, on the contrary, because given her attitudes and reflections, she embodied almost to perfection something unattainable to many: the society lady. It was not the great problems of life that concerned her but its colourful scenes; not the inward events of the soul but its outward relationships. She endeavoured to depict the foreground, the facade, to give the impression of being there.

Her first success came with the publication, four years after her return to Hungary, of *Keleti Párizs* (Paris of the East), in which she described the events of her Bucharest years, allowing them a glimpse of a world that was geographically close but remote, not to say exotic, in terms of mentality, customs and external appearance. The appropriate gestures of empathy are, of course, certainly not absent, and yet it is permeated by the judicious aloofness of a western upper-class lady: that is indeed its most attractive feature. After that she brought out four books in quick succession (volumes of short stories, a novel and a translation of an Italian writer) but it was not these but her reports from Paris that made her well known to a

wide circle. In the popular journals of the day, which attracted a large readership, there appeared (often accompanied by eye-catching illustrations) her knowledgeable and enthusiastic letters on fashion, interesting accounts of the bustle at the World Fair, and based on the impressions gained on visits, two series of articles, one on French women writers, and one on the *châteaux* of the Loire. This was how she gained a firm footing in a literary territory controlled by women and became a respected and active member of its associations. She, however, kept her distance and did not melt into the crowd of increasingly numerous female magazine authors. She lived in modest circumstances and without the hope of a change for the better, but she remained an elegant lady.

In her memoirs she dispassionately relates the events of her life and the story of her work as a writer, without bias or partiality, enlarging neither her successes nor her injuries. She is rarely inclined to self-analysis: she merely wishes to describe the world and herself, not to reshape them.

This is how she remains when she recounts the great changes that began with the years of the First World War, the losses (especially the consequences of the Treaty of Trianon, among them the final disappearance of what had been a natural cosmopolitanism, and a voluntary suppression, dictated by moral conviction, of her deep love of the life of Paris and France), the reduction of opportunities in writing

and society, the growing impossibility of playing the *grande dame*, the tricks to which earning a living compelled her to resort, the hated necessity of giving French lessons, the passing of her loved ones. On one theme, however, she never touches: even at the age of eighty she does not speak about growing old. That may well be because she never did.

As she wrote her reminiscences she was living in the present, not in the past. She was keen on the radio, yearned to try flying and used a typewriter to leave us her portrait as a writer. Not for a moment was her self-confidence disturbed; she knew how she wanted to live. That delight in life, that life-force, that level-headed sense of self, that simple, one might say everyday, heroism attracts and enchants her readers, just as it enchanted her nephew, Sándor Márai. As he was to write in his own memoirs:

I looked at the poor, poor grave, which had received a rich, noble life. I thought to myself, what could have been the secret of that life? She had not been without love, but had never loved anyone with feelings ablaze. She had not lacked feelings, had not been impassive, but had regulated her feelings and moods as one turns down or up the wick of an oil-lamp. She had not blazed, only shone. [...] But all that is not the answer to the secret of a life. I think I know the secret. Zsüli had been, for eighty-six years—tact-fully but unquenchably—inquisitive. ♣

Ágnes Péter

Sándor Fest—A Pioneer in English Studies

Fest Sándor: *Skóciai Szent Margittól a walesi bárdokig. Magyar–angol történeti és irodalmi kapcsolatok* (From Saint Margaret of Scotland to *The Welsh Bards*. Anglo–Hungarian Contacts in History and Literature). Budapest, Universitas, 2000, 725 pp.

The *Oxford History of Hungarian Literature* (1984), the first all-inclusive survey of Hungarian literary history to come out from an English publisher since the 1906 attempt to present a comprehensive history to English readers by Frigyes Riedl, Professor of Hungarian at Budapest University, carries two lines of Dante's *Paradiso* as an epigraph to the enormous undertaking:

*Oh happy Hungary, had she suffered all
Without more griefs ahead! (XIX. 142–43)*

Dante's good wishes probably helped the author, Lóránt Czigány, to accomplish the bold project of writing a survey in English of the history of Hungarian literature from the beginnings up to the 1970s single-handed. Czigány manages not only to tell a long story well, but also to do what he promises in his Preface: he is "as impartial as humanly possible" in his attitude to the great diversity of styles, aesthetic norms, ideologies reflected in the material he treats. He discusses Hungarian literary trends and works while never losing sight of his would-be reader, who has

obviously been brought up on English cultural traditions. He creates a framework of reference in English cultural history to measure Hungarian literary output against; he quotes English examples to make the Hungarian scene easier to understand for readers in English-speaking countries; he points out all the possible points of intersection between the two cultures. At the same time, however, he is able to demonstrate the specific character of the Hungarian traditions in most sensitive analyses of individual writers and works despite the sparsity and, most often unreliable quality, of the translations available. The reception of his image of Hungarian literature must be the easier for his readers to respond to since he employs critical standards and approaches—and one suspects this was a conscious strategy—which emerged in British and American criticism in the 60s and 70s.

My impression is that in spirit, Czigány's *History of Hungarian Literature* is a late fruit of the pioneering critical career of the first English scholar in Hungary, Sándor

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Fest, whose collected writings have been recently collected and which Mr Czigány edited in collaboration with János H. Korompay. Interestingly enough, the epigraph from *Paradiso* is a most appropriate way to introduce Sándor Fest's academic achievement, his scholarly and, what through all his life was an integral part of it, his moral stance. As all his disciples have emphasised in their various memoirs, in which he looms large as a definitive figure of their formative years, his creed as teacher and scholar can be summed up as follows: "Modern life will no longer tolerate intellectual isolation, parochialism, prejudice; we must certainly learn from the world outside, but only in order to become more what we actually are" (cited by one of his students, the later Shakespeare scholar and editor, Sándor Maller in the journal *Irodalomtörténet*, 1984).

The publication of all the essays that have been traced, complemented with a complete bibliography of his work, is the most appropriate tribute a later generation can pay to the memory of an outstanding figure in a legendary generation of Hungarian scholars. It is the generation whose career reached its peak between the two World Wars, and whose members were either ostracized, or made to understand they had no choice but leave the country, or were physically destroyed by measures generated by the savagely unrelenting ideologies of the political élites in control before and after the Second World War. Under totalitarian régimes, just as in periods which are pregnant with forebodings of terror, the career of an intellectual necessarily has a strong ideological commitment. Fest, who was born in 1883, and whose most active years covered the span between the two World Wars, was "a liberal democrat heart and soul", in Sándor Maller's definition (*Irodalomtörténet*, 1984). His intention was

to counterbalance the German orientation of the period by making the Hungarian reading public aware of the intellectual and cultural values accumulated in English tradition. In his scholarly essays, in which he discusses the interest some distinguished English personages or ordinary travellers have shown in Hungary side by side with the intellectual adventures of Hungarians in England, he is careful to avoid all shades of that impotent and dangerous nationalistic nostalgia which was prompted by the sense of loss induced by Trianon, the dominant aspect of the intellectual ambience of his time.

Lóránt Czigány has chosen his former teacher, Jenő Koltay-Kastner, to present Sándor Fest's life and academic career to the readers of the collected edition. Koltay-Kastner's commemorative *laudatio* serves as an introduction to the book; it was meant to be read in 1948 at the Academy. Since from 1948 the Hungarian Academy functioned under state control, and Koltay-Kastner was one of those who lost his membership, the speech was never actually read and this is the first time it has appeared in print. Koltay-Kastner describes Fest's family background and surveys his career as scholar and teacher with a great deal of sympathy. His assessment suggests—and his view is substantiated by the essays in the volume—that the most endearing virtues of Fest's were dedication and discipline; a disinterested respect for the facts and data available, along with a wise resignation in the face of the difficulties that will necessarily block the researcher's clarity of vision again and again. Around the time when, through the good offices of the British Council, a Chair of English was established at the University of Debrecen in 1938 (which he was asked to head), he jotted down a draft for an autobiography in which he defined the philosophy he decided to follow in his

work as an educationist and scholar: "until the field of the English-Hungarian cultural contacts is fully disclosed, no stimulus or encouragement can be gained [from pure English studies] for productive work, since our tools will prove to be most unreliable" (XXXII). It was this very modest programme with which he launched English Studies in this country. The very modest programme, however, as the volume of his collected essays testifies, yielded an amazingly rich crop in his own career.

Fest had visited Great Britain and the United States several times before the First World War, and it was during these visits that he started to collect data on the history of the cultural contacts between England and Hungary. His career reached its climax between 1934 and 1938, when he taught in three distinguished educational institutions, in one of the most prestigious grammar schools in Budapest, the Fasori Lutheran Gymnasium, at the University of Budapest and in Eötvös College. From 1912 he himself had been a student at the Eötvös College; his career, humble in spirit but spectacular in results, reminds us how spectacular had been the work of the leading scholars of English who had been trained there before the Second World War and the stimulating effect of the educational philosophy and intellectual atmosphere of this elite-training institution modelled after the *École Normale Supérieure*. Among the eminent intellects shaped by the spirit of the College there are Sándor Fest, who enrolled in 1902, Miklós Szenczi, László Országh, Sándor Maller, and Kálmán Ruttikay (they enrolled in 1902, 1924, 1927, 1935, 1941 respectively). Their intellectual attitude was defined by the open-minded and tolerant spirit of the College, which must have been an intellectual haven in a period when increasingly intolerant ideological trends

were threatening, and the restricted horizon of vision in most other institutions and in the country was a more and more articulated challenge to freedom of thought. In his memoirs Albert Gyergyai, the translator of Proust and a legendary professor of French, claims that the critical spirit of the College was rooted in an unusual mixture of irony and humility, and "had at least as much kinship with Voltaire as with Thomas à Kempis" (*Irodalomtörténet*, 1958). Gyula Schöpflin defines it as an "island of free thought" in "an increasingly hostile society". He was taken to detention from the College by the police under suspicion of links with the underground Communist movement; according to his memoirs, he could express and discuss his views in the College without inhibition, let alone retribution, of any sort (*Irodalomtörténet*, 1978). It must be this freedom of spirit and toleration of individual idiosyncracies in thought that explains the high moral and intellectual standards the students of Eötvös College displayed in the diversity of careers they pursued later on, which seems to be the dominant aspect of the ethos defining the work and career of Fest too.

The young persons he taught saw in him the manifestation of the very idea of manliness, the ideal of the harmony of body and soul come true. "A stout figure whose body has the suppleness of a man engaged in regular physical labour", this was the impression he made, for instance, on Sándor Maller (*Irodalomtörténet*, 1984). It was probably this harmony of his personality bred by the family he came from and by the schools he attended, primarily the Eötvös College, that made it possible for him later on to serve his goals unswervingly; he never surrendered the autonomy of his spirit yet in ever varying political circumstances he always found a stage or at least a niche to continue his ca-

reer as teacher and scholar, be it a grammar school or a university department, Eötvös College or his family estate near Graz where—this seems to be István Gál's interpretation, who carried on his work in Debrecen after the Second World War—Fest worked in what can be called self-exile (*Angol Filológiai Tanulmányok*, 1963). At the end of his life, when news of the capitulation of Finland and Romania reached him, he immediately left Debrecen, appeared in Budapest with the intention of offering his services, that is, his contacts with Great Britain, to bring about a *rapprochement* between the two countries. In December 1944, however, during an air raid he was killed by a shell in the shelter.

Fest's researches cover the history of English-Hungarian contacts over more than nine centuries, beginning with the reign of St Stephen and ending in the second half of the nineteenth century. From the data he unearthed, it is now well-known that the first important English traveller to come to Hungary was Sir Philip Sidney, one of the most attractive figures of the English Renaissance, a brilliant diplomat and valiant soldier, who embodied the most excellent virtues of humanism and who created a body of verse which is seen now—in its intellectual complexity and emotional intensity—as one of the richest manifestations of the spirit of the Renaissance. He is the author of the first extended theoretical essay on criticism in the English tradition, *A Defence of Poesie*. The tone of the essay is very personal, the language is a brilliant specimen of his fine workmanship and style. Sidney enumerates several arguments to prove that poetry is not only a representation of truth, it is also a means for the refinement of the moral sensibility of the reader. Among the arguments Hungary is mentioned as a country in Europe where the didactic function of po-

etry is still well understood. After a stay in Vienna during one of his extensive journeys in Europe, he left his entourage behind and came over to Hungary where he spent something like a month in 1573. He was impressed by the way poetry was still a public instrument of moral education here: "In Hungary I haue seene it the manner at all Feasts, and other such meetings, to haue songs of their Auncestours valour; which that right Soldier-like Nation thinck the chiefest kindlers of braue courage." (p. 222) It is ironic that Sidney's apology of poetry was written in response to the attacks on art by the Puritan pamphleteers: the contacts between Hungary and England increased most spectacularly in number and in depth precisely in the period when Calvinism appeared in this country.

It was somewhat later, during the time of Gábor Bethlen I and György Rákóczi I, that strong links between Transylvania and England were established as a consequence of these princes' spiritual and political orientation. Later still it was thanks to the policy of the dowager of the Prince of Transylvania, Zsuzsanna Lorántffy, who from her court at Sárospatak exercised an important influence on the cultural life of her time, and again later due to visits by Debrecen students of divinity to England, that the links with English universities, especially with Oxford (to a lesser degree, with Cambridge) had a distinguished part to play in the history of Protestantism in royal Hungary as well. The young men of Transylvania are mentioned by Milton as well in *Æropagitica*: in one passage he brings up arguments to convince his contemporaries that England at the time was God's chosen nation: "Nor is it for nothing that the grave and frugal Transylvanian sends out yearly for as far as the mountainous borders of Russia [...] not their youth, but their staid men, to learn our language and our theologic arts" (p. 304).

János Hunyadi (1576–1650) settled in London and became a teacher at Gresham College; soon enough it became usual for the Transylvanian nobility to extend their Grand Tour in the Netherlands and go over to England “to inhale the air of genuine freedom in England”, as the poet and critic Ferenc Kazinczy would write later about a divine from Sárospatak. Thus the beginning of the history of contacts was motivated by a search for religious identity on the part of the Hungarian travellers.

This was somewhat altered in 1783 when, in the wake of the Treaty of Versailles, the hitherto dominant French orientation in the policy of Vienna was complemented by a search for possible diplomatic initiatives to gain sympathy in England. It is about this time that Fest was able to find the first indications of the emergence of serious interest in English literature, which brought about not only the discovery of great works and authors but also the first translations—most of the time from French or German—of what was considered to be the best. During the reign of the emperor Joseph II, the interest in England was no longer motivated by theological considerations, it was stimulated rather by the enquiring spirit of the Enlightenment and by the search for advanced political, social and cultural patterns. The aristocracy naturally enough led the way, the Széchenyis and Esterházy (one of the latter, Pál Antal, later on served “as emissary to the court of England and remains there in that capacity for thirty years until Metternich decides he is dismissed from his favour”, as one of his late descendants, the novelist Péter Esterházy, describes it in the family chronicle, *Harmonia caelestis*, published in 2000. Incidentally, it is Pál Antal in Fest’s view who served as a model for Thackeray’s Hungarian magnate in *Vanity Fair* (Ch.XLIX, p. 314). Also involved were the Festeticses (in 1815 Prince

György Festetics was described by one of his English visitors in these words: “his knowledge seems to be inexhaustible, and he understands the political institutions of our islands much better than I myself do”, p. 316), and eventually Count István Széchenyi himself, on whose part “it was already a well deliberated ambition to acquaint the Hungarian public with England’s economic set-up” (ibid.). By the Reform Age, the first three decades of the nineteenth century that is, the interest in England had reached such proportions that it was now a craze among the well-to-do to imitate English ways. Soon satirical verses appeared scoffing at the Anglomania of the time. Fest quotes an amusing doggerel (p. 391):

*In rain and mud it's bad enough
To hunt the fleeing hart.
You'd better cover up your ditches
Before you ape the envied British...*

After her visit to Hungary the popular author of the time, Catherine Grace Frances Gore, published a three-volume collection of *Hungarian Tales* in 1829. The Preface states “England’s indifference toward Hungary [...] shows a great deal of ingratitude as there is hardly any other country where Anglomania rages so high as in Hungary” (p. 395). She mentions Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Thomas Moore, Oliver Goldsmith (*The Vicar of Wakefield*) and, of course, Shakespeare, who were well-known to the Hungarian educated reader of the time.

Although Catherine Grace Frances Gore mentions ingratitude, Fest’s own research seems to suggest that both journalism and literature alerted readers’ awareness to Hungary from time to time. For instance, J.A. Blackwell, who was the political agent of the British government in Hungary for a time, published a long article in the London *Athenaeum* in 1837, where he discussed this country with a great deal of sympathy,

and the conclusion of his article was later on integrated in one of his dramas:

*Hungary [...] shall resume her rank
Among the nations, and as erst she was,
Be Europe's proudest bulwark. Then, unfurled
By patriot hands. The Magyar flag shall wave
From the Carpathian's to the Balkan's ridge,
From Adria's shores to where the Danube rolls
Into the Euxine...* (p. 401)

The results of Sándor Fest's research in the history of literary contacts have become useful points of departure for later investigation and analysis; his work is thus part of the knowledge and understanding we possess now on the history of English and Hungarian literature. Thus he explores and presents the question of possible English elements in the legends of Lőrinc Tar, or of Alexander Pope's influence on the work of the poets of the Hungarian Enlightenment, on the thought and poetry of Lőrinc Orczy, of Ábrahám Barcsay, of György Bessenyei (who can already be described as "a resolved follower of Pope's philosophy," p. 277), and, above all, of Csokonai. Fest was the first to explore the origin of the Hungarian characters who appear in the works of the English Romantics. Byron was a cult figure all over Europe in his own time, and critical interest in his work was prompt enough; however, Fest was the first to investigate the background of his Hungarian character, Gabor, in *Werner*; again he was the first to show that Shelley appeared amazingly early in Hungary: a textbook, *A Short Theoretical and Practical English Grammar*, published in 1848, included some pieces by Shelley among the literary excerpts. Fest, however, was most powerfully fascinated by Shakespeare (as Head of the Chair of English in Debrecen he taught a Shakespeare course in every single semester): he has two essays about the Shakespearean motifs in Vörösmarty's poetry, in another essay he discusses the Shakespeare cult in Hungary in the 1830s.

There is also an interesting study entitled "What did the literary mind of England know about Hungary in the age of Shakespeare?", and another paper shows the wealth of data Fest was able to uncover on "Hungarian references in the literature of the age of Shakespeare".

Although as time went on new data have been gathered and it has been possible to arrive at new conclusions concerning the topics that were foremost in Sándor Fest's critical interest, the attraction of his mind and attitude as scholar and teacher has never diminished. Important new research has been based on his findings. His method was used among other scholars by István Gál, in several scholarly publications including his study of Otto in "Keats's drama with references to Hungarian history", or again by Kálmán Ruttkay in his discussion of "Vörösmarty's Shakespeare-translations", and by Péter Dávidházi in his huge definitive book on the history and nature of the Shakespeare cult in Hungary.

Collected in a volume with a complete bibliography and an index of names, the essays will be, I am sure, much cherished by all Hungarian scholars of English literature. For us they represent the heroic past, those pioneering years when our discipline was established. They constitute the source to which we all have to return from time to time, a source that may give us reassurance after all the frustration we inevitably face in our hard, often enough unprofitable work as teachers and academics. And they represent the standard of what the ideal of never faltering research methods is. Last but not least, they also show how a very complicated story, that of English-Hungarian cultural contacts, can be told in an unassuming, simple manner, in a voice that reveals the scholar's personal involvement, but keeps within the bounds of objectivity and never till the last page ceases to sound absorbingly interesting. ■

Paul Griffiths

Master Works, Master Releasings

A Celebration of György Kurtág

MUSIC

What must surely have been the biggest celebration so far of György Kurtág's music was held in London in April 2002. 'Signs, Games and Messages', an abundant three-week festival that included concerts both at the South Bank Centre and at the Royal Academy of Music, where the composer was in residence. Contemporaries important to him were included in the programming: Luigi Nono, Karlheinz Stockhausen and his compatriot and student ally György Ligeti. So were imposing forebears—Schubert, Schumann, Mozart, Beethoven, Bartók—with no need for apologies on behalf of the present. Rather the conjunctions showed how well Kurtág's music does what music has always done: it expresses itself decisively, fascinates, exposes something very private in a public forum, opens a new world.

On one evening of the festival, for example, the two concertos of Kurtág's Op. 27, both with Zoltán Kocsis as piano soloist, were performed after Kocsis had played the two sonatas of Beethoven's Op. 27. The frenzy of speed, with absolute clarity, and the tenderness of slow music, with a beautiful voicing of inner parts,

were the same in both composers. Close connections were discovered, too, with Bartók, for the acute matching of piano with percussion sonorities, especially in the double concerto Op. 27 No. 2 (with Miklós Perényi tightly passionate in the solo cello part), echoed the earlier composer's Sonata for two pianos and percussion, which was heard on the same programme in a lively performance by students for the Royal Academy. Reinbert de Leeuw conducted the London Sinfonietta in the concertos, as well as in two Ligeti scores: *Melodien* and an utterly hilarious account of *Mysteries of the Macabre*, with John Wallace on trumpet.

In another event, Kurtág broke the almost perfect silence he keeps about his music in order to say a few words that would bring his audience inside an unfinished (indeed open-ended) project he has undertaken with a composer of the next generation: to wit, his son, György Kurtág Jr.

Attempts by fathers and sons to work together are often hazardous, but the two Kurtágs' *Zwiegespräch* shows a remarkable willingness to listen—on both sides, but perhaps especially on the son's. Of course,

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children always differ from their parents. One of the problems in this case of father-son collaboration, as the elder Kurtág explained, is that the two of them have different senses of time: he measures in seconds, his son in minutes. He could also have said that they work in contrasting media, traditional and electronic, except that this difference seemed to facilitate and clarify their engagement with each other.

Their joint work is essentially a sequence of proposals for string quartet by György Kurtág Jr, leaving room for preludes and postludes, links and embellishments to be added by György Kurtág Jr on synthesizer. For example, the opening 'Tears'—a two-page sequence of slow quartet cadences with the marking *pppp*—had a synthesizer intrada. Later a string chorale was given caring electronic resonance, while other passages, such as the gorgeous viola melody in the section headed 'Love Story', were allowed to make their own reverberation, in the ear and mind. On the other hand, a shadow dance for quartet at the end left room for the synthesizer to sign off with a flourish.

The performances indicated that the younger Kurtág's contribution is thoroughly prepared, but that he also has the

opportunity to respond immediately to what is coming from the string players (the Arditti Quartet, in most excellent form). It would be wonderful if the means could be found that would let his father also take part spontaneously. As presented here, *Zwiesgespräch* was, very nearly, instant music: some of it was written only a few days before, and little remained from previous performances. Nevertheless, if the quartet Kurtág could provide malleable material for his players, permitting them to respond on the spot to whatever sounds are produced by the synthesizer Kurtág, the dialogue might be so much more engrossing.

A short film, *Men's Doubles*, suggested what might happen. Here father and son were seen pacing around a studio, improvising on an electronic keyboard. One would play a melody, the other would play a melody. They would both think, with the same gesture of fingers cupped around the mouth and chin. This went on for a while until, purposefully, the older Kurtág strode to the keyboard and jabbed one note. His son raced to respond. Suddenly, sparks were flying.

The electricity of that moment is in each of Kurtág's pieces. London was feeling the jolts. ♣

Tamás Koltai

A New National

Imre Madách: *Az ember tragédiája* (The Tragedy of Man)

William Shakespeare: *A vihar* (The Tempest)

This March 15, the new National Theatre in Budapest opened its first season with Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man*. That alone should have made anyone who cares for Hungarian theatre happy. But the construction, the building itself and the formal opening did not meet with unmitigated approval and we have to turn to the past to seek out the reasons for this.

The first National Theatre was completed in 1837. At the time the only permanent theatre in this Hungarian capital within the Habsburg Empire was German-speaking, the Hungarian companies being *ad hoc* and ineffectual. A movement towards a distinct national identity had started at the beginning of the 19th century closely linked with the promotion of the Hungarian language and of an independent Hungarian theatre. Though the National Assembly discussed the issue as early as 1807, it was not until the 1830s, the beginning of the Reform Era, that actual progress was made. The great reform statesman Count István Széchenyi, who worked for modernisation in many areas of life (he wrote economic treatises, built the Chain Bridge, the first permanent

bridge across the Danube, and drafted an industrial and scientific development plan), advocated such a theatre. Intrigue and economic difficulties were the obstacles. Széchenyi wanted a grand building reflecting the importance of the cause to be erected on the elegant Danube bank, even if this should cause delays. But the politics of Pest county favoured the instant solution of a less prestigious site on the "outskirts" (where a bank and office building now stands, in what has become the heart of the city). Construction took two years, the necessary funds—eventually six times the amount forecast—were provided by the counties and individual patriots. The theatre opened its doors in August 1837. After a few decades of vicissitudes, this modest building was declared a fire hazard and pulled down. In 1908 the large and grand Népszínház (People's Theatre), built in 1875, and further down the same main thoroughfare, was rented for the National Theatre company, and remained their home until 1964. That year, for reasons still obscure, cultural policy-makers decided to demolish the building. (It was claimed to be in the way of the new under-

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ground station.) Architecturally the building was in good condition, though it was certainly no longer appropriate for a modern theatre with its size, the galleried baroque-style stage and the huge stalls area. The National company continued to exist, making its home in a number of temporary abodes.

When the National's first home was demolished, a competition was arranged in 1912 for plans for a new theatre on the old site. A winner was declared, then came the First World War to frustrate any action. A second competition was announced after the 1965 demolition, a third in 1989, a fourth in 1997; no building ever followed any of these. (In the last case, construction actually began but was halted.) A total of 228 plans were judged in these four competitions, prizes were awarded and the plans presented in exhibitions—but the theatre was never built. "The political constellation of the country does not need a National Theatre," said Hilda Gobbi, a legendary member of the National Theatre company. In an interview in the late eighties, shortly before her death, she claimed that those in power had deliberately subverted the expressed will of the theatre profession and individual donors to construct a permanent home for the National. She actually initiated a collection of funds from the public for its construction: from the seventies on thousands bought what were called "brick coupons". (This money was supposedly kept in escrow, but there were rumours that an expatriate Hungarian, who years afterwards asked about his donation, was not given a satisfactory response.) The clue to the politicians' procrastination here, according to Gobbi, was "the fright of the vice-apparatchiks." She was convinced that the only thing that interested politicians about the theatre was politics; in this she was certainly close to the truth. (One reason for the fiasco of the

1960's competition was that the site chosen was in the City Park—close to where the huge statue of Stalin used to stand, gleefully pulled down by the revolutionaries of 1956, and right on the route taken by military parades and May 1 processions. Added to this the Theatre was to have a balcony from which party leaders could wave to the marching masses on such occasions. As a result of protests, the authorities cancelled not just this idea but the whole project as well.)

Politicians tried to appropriate the National for their purposes right from the beginning. One of the more attractive examples of this was on March 15, 1848, the day the revolution against the Habsburgs broke out, when the audience came out from a performance of *Bánk bán*, to free the liberal journalist Mihály Táncsics from a prison in Buda Castle. In the first half of the twentieth century what was new in the arts was condemned by both the right-wing governments and by the leftist press. The managers of the National Theatre were favourite targets for attacks of various sorts. Members of parliament considered it their duty to question the minister on matters pertaining to the arts. Conservative papers waged a virulent campaign against stylistic innovation under the slogan of "national tradition"; the most reactionary denunciations could thus be voiced in a patriotic guise. Things changed little during the Communist era, the National Theatre was just as much beset by intrigue as before; despite this, it had some great periods and some important achievements. The golden age in the past quarter of a century lasted from 1978 to 1982 when, thanks to pressure from the profession, two young and talented directors, Gábor Székely and Gábor Zsámbéki, were appointed to run the theatre. Currently the former is rector of the University of Theatre and Film Arts; the latter manages the Katona József

Theatre, which has an international reputation, and he is also the president of the European Theatre Union. They were, of course, forced to resign, after which the quality of the National Theatre steadily declined. This decline did not stop with the 1989 transition. The first new democratic government appointed a dilettante as manager—the entire artistic council, made up of theatre professionals and critics, resigned—then forced through an extension of his mandate. (This happened shortly before the 1994 elections.) The National Theatre sank into artistic irrelevance.

In the wake of the 1994 elections, a liberal minister took over the cultural portfolio. A year later he was replaced by another Free Democrat, Bálint Magyar. For him the theatre was in the blood, his father having once been director of the famous Budapest Vígszínház in the middle of the fifties and his mother a dramaturge. A new competition for designing the National Theatre's building was held in 1997. (The delay later proved to be fatal: if the arrangements had been made two years earlier, the history of the new National Theatre would be completely different.) Only Hungarian architects were eligible; politicians took to heart Széchenyi's failure: an over-ambitious, over-expensive and too international project would jeopardise a quick success. Seventy-three designs were entered, of which the international jury adjudged—with only one dissent—Ferenc Bán's design as by far the best. (He had earned second prize in the previous, 1989, competition.) The site was designated after a preliminary competition, and was to be in the heart of the city, in Erzsébet Square. The plan was for a modern, airy, transparent building, with an adjustable main and a studio stage. An open house, with all kinds of activities going on in it and ready to receive visitors throughout the day.

The minister appointed the winner of another competition, the actor-manager of the Radnóti Theatre, András Bálint, to the post of manager of the National Theatre; he was charged with organising the company and carrying out, with his colleagues, professional supervision over necessary changes in the plan. Work started, the foundation stone was laid in the presence of the then President Árpád Göncz, the Prime Minister and notables from the theatre world. It was to be opened on October 23, 2000, the anniversary of the 1956 Revolution.

After the 1998 general elections, bringing a change of government, the National Theatre again became a political issue. The manager had been appointed amid recriminations from the opposition, which claimed the government wanted to present its successor with a *fait accompli*. In vain did those in the profession assert that managing the National was a professional, not a political, issue and that construction should be supervised by those who were going to work in the building: the plea went unheeded. The elections were won by the Young Democrats (FIDESZ), and their especial dislike of the liberal Free Democrats accounted for much of what was to happen. Hungary is not Great Britain, where none of several changes of government interfered with the prolonged work on the National Theatre on London's South Bank. The new Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, ordered work on the site to be halted in the early autumn of 1998, by which time 1,500 million forints had already been spent. (The underground parking lot, conference centre and park, of which only the park has been completed yet, are possibly the most perfectly and expensively sound-proofed facility of their kind in the whole world; the sound-proofing would have been necessary for the theatre since the site is above

the city's main underground interchange station.)

The official explanation was that the plan sanctioned by the Socialist-Liberal coalition of 1994–1998 would have been far too expensive. The argument in fact concerned no more than 2,000 million forints; during its four-year term in office the new government devoted several times as much to e.g. Hungarian football, the young prime minister being a registered and active player. Legitimation for the termination of construction was provided by the playwright György Schwajda, manager of the Szigligeti Theatre in Szolnok, who had already aggressively submitted his plans for the National Theatre to the previous government. He immediately (even before the decision) offered his services. (András Bálint, the appointee of the previous government, had by then of course resigned.) With the backing of politician friends—one of whom, the former mayor of Szolnok, had meanwhile become the Political Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture—he was soon appointed ministerial and then governmental commissioner, and CEO of the future National Theatre Ltd. Operation New Building started. Political battles made even its location problematical. Budapest had reelected its liberal Free Democrat mayor in the 1998 municipal elections, and the governing Young Democrats started a punitive campaign by withholding subsidies; thus the new site could not possibly be metropolitan property. The solution came with the selling of a large undeveloped area on the left bank of the Danube, in south Pest, which had been designated to house the ill-fated Budapest World Expo and was consequently in state ownership. The buyer was TriGránit Ltd., Canadian owned, whose president is Sándor Demján, a Hungarian. Although their offer had been rejected twice, once

the idea of the new National Theatre being built there had come up, the price went down by 1,000 million forints. The government envisioned a cultural centre on what had been an industrial wasteland (the immediate surroundings consist of century-old factory buildings) with museums, concert halls, residential housing, a conference centre. This whole concept is still on the drawing boards, except for the National Theatre, which had to be finished in a rush. The public procurement tender for the construction of the theatre was won—obviously by chance—by Arcadom Ltd., another of Demján's interests. They offered to finance the construction, and the state was to pay only after the building was finished. The actual sum has not been made public the deal being between a private company and a state-owned court-registered organisation (National Theatre Ltd.), so it is designated a business secret in Hungarian law.

At first no design competition was announced, then eventually one was, only to be declared void by György Schwajda, who himself had been a member of the jury which declared György Vadász to be the winner; he had designed the very successful and popular Hungarian pavilion at the Hanover World Fair. Schwajda then commissioned Mária Siklós to prepare plans, although she had not taken part in the competition and had never designed a new theatre before, her only relevant experience being the reconstruction of theatres (with questionable success)—and Commissioner Schwajda's home. The extra-legal, incompetent and arrogant nature of the proceedings brought protests from several professional organisations. The Chamber of Architects eventually expelled Mária Siklós, which means that if her appeal is turned down by the court (a judgement expected in October) she will never again be able to put her own name on designs.

Meanwhile, the theatre was finished (judgement would, even in law, not be retroactive). The opening took place on March 15, 2002, the national holiday, with the first round of the 2002 general elections on April 7. There is little doubt that all this had been timed as part of the election campaign from the start but the Young Democrats were defeated. The building, however, now stands, rather remote in that wasteland, and without adequate public transport at that.

From the perspective of the law, the issue is a disgrace. It is undemocratic and unprecedented to build a national theatre without a national consensus. Nothing can mitigate this, even if the building were perfect. But it isn't. Chaotically mixing various architectural styles and allusions under the aegis of eclecticism, both the interior and the exterior are over-ornate and tasteless. It tries to mingle elements ranging from the Roman Colosseum to a shopping mall. More problematically, it fails to meet the requirements of a 21st-century theatre, which include the need for stage and auditorium to form a single space. Instead an old-fashioned proscenium stage with an inflexible frame was built, which seeks to resemble baroque galleried theatres. The stage is inflexible to the point of motionlessness. The acoustics are poor and the stage cannot be seen properly from a quarter of its 600 seats. The public interiors feature a jarring mixture of colours and shapes, resembling hotel foyers and corridors. (These were designed by a British company specialising in such interiors.) All in all: whatever should be modest, simple and functional is ostentatiously raucous, reflects the snobbery of the nouveau riches, and is of poor quality from a functional point of view. The only exception is the all-electronic stage machinery, which is state-of-the-art.

The election campaign also required a production to open the theatre with. The two noted directors approached by the commissioner in 2001, Gábor Zsámbéki and Tamás Ascher, turned down the invitation. (Both are well-known internationally; Ascher's latest production came onto the stage of the Akademietheater in Vienna in May.) It was now the cultural ministry's turn to find a director. János Szikora eventually agreed to produce *The Tragedy of Man*.

Imre Madách's play (1861), the most frequently played Hungarian classic, has been mentioned several times in this column and has recently been put on by several companies, though none of these productions offered something special. Long held an epigonic relative of *Faust*, the play has always puzzled directors as to which facet to highlight, the philosophy or the vision? Lucifer, who demands his share in Creation, struggles with the Lord for the souls of our first parents. He becomes Adam and Eve's guide after they have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and have been banished from Eden. Lucifer sends them a dream and takes them through the history of mankind, from ancient Egypt to contemporary (i.e. early capitalist) London, and even into a utopian future, a near-Orwellian phalanstery, and a Beckettian endgame of vanishing sunlight and a cooling Earth. The romantic loftiness of the poetic text is in sharp contrast with the main idea, the question whether it is worth engaging in struggle when ideologies are dishonest and the end is destruction. On awakening, Adam prepares to kill himself, when the Lord lets him know—through Eve—that he is about to be a father, which makes him abandon his plan.

The most conspicuous element in János Szikora's direction is money, the huge sum spent on the production. For its first, partial, season the National Theatre received

a subsidy of 2,300 million forints, almost five times as much as the entire budget of the Vígsház last year, which mounts its productions in two buildings, on three stages. (Its main auditorium alone sits twice the number that the National accommodates.) This could of course cover the spectacular sets and fees ten times higher than customary in Budapest. (This has led to some tension in the profession since a dresser in the National makes more than the best actors in the best Hungarian theatres.) The expensive and ultramodern stage equipment does its job: a colourful hurly-burly is built, using scenery, light and projections. The stage is dominated by a montage of light and sound. Adam and Eve roll on stage in a jellylike amnion (the license had to be bought from a French circus). In ancient Athens tourists get off a Jumbo to visit the ruins and the amphitheatre. The Roman bacchanalia takes place on a table the size of half the stage, held up on the shoulders of slaves, which, when tilted, throws the principals and cholera victims (looking like Auschwitz inmates) into the hell of a crematorium. The Constantinople of the Crusades has a metro, and the Muslim warriors are fired on by an Osama bin Laden-lookalike patriarch who totes a machine gun. Kepler's disciple arrives in medieval Prague astride a rhinoceros, the London fair is a shopping mall, the last Eskimo on the cooling Earth watches Walt Disney's Bambi on a large-screen television, in the company of a giant dead seal,

while his wife is in the solarium. Anachronistic, sometimes splendidly spectacular ideas seek topicality at every moment, but are as eclectic as the building. Anachronism, as such, is not the problem; trouble is the production offers very little in the way of exploiting the philosophical dilemmas treated in this great work. Perhaps all this would be less disturbing if the spectacle were backed by the actors. But actors are not really needed in this production: they are just slaves of the machinery, lifeless extras, servants of the visual effects. It is only Lucifer, played by Róbert Alföldi, who is able to suggest the philosophical depth of Madách's vision of mankind's ongoing struggle with its own nature.

Tickets for the first performances could be booked from January on, at the very place in the city where the building, demolished in 1965, had stood. They were sold from the kind of covered cart which 19th-century strolling players used to travel in. People stood in line for hours on end in the freezing cold to get their tickets. By now, however, public interest in the production has dropped. Then came the second production, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, directed this time by the untrained commissioner of the theatre himself, and the ceaseless motion of the fantastic stage machinery was again to "perform"—without any apparent organising idea or competent acting—something only distantly resembling this other enigmatic masterpiece of poetic drama. ■

Erzsébet Bori

Costume and Custom

Géza Bereményi: *Hídember* (Bridge Man)

The costume film is coeval with motion pictures themselves, and now has its own sub-genres, the comic cloak-and-sword type and the nationalistic-pathetic. (Adaptations of literary classics are a different story altogether.) Declared dead from time to time, the genre always rises from its ashes, for if there is a constant demand for entertainment and the exoticism of the past, so there is for national self-knowledge. Not surprisingly, relatively few period films are made and they are typically from a limited group of countries: film is no cheap hobby, and period films are markedly intensive in money, time and labour; only those countries can afford them which have a large domestic market, and even then they cannot ignore the requirements of international distribution.

Understandably, few costume films have been made in Hungary, and almost all of them were made to the order, and from the money, of the state. This need not necessarily be a drawback: from the Goldberg Variations to the Pompidou Centre a number of great works of art have been made to order; problems start when the customer has firm ideas about the

ideology the film is supposed to represent and what the ideal form should be. The only saving grace in such cases is the contractor—if he be an Eisenstein or Riefenstahl, and not always even then.

When the Hungarian film industry went all but bankrupt after the transition, fewer and fewer films were made using less and less money. Fine costumes, charging horses, flashing swords and grand castle halls were out of the question. Later a public foundation was set up, which held competitions for film projects and scripts; film makers had to acquire the skills of finding co-production partners and sponsors, of applying to European cultural funds. Amidst this long and strenuous process of adaptation the Millennium came, with a two-year festive season lavishly celebrating the 1000th anniversary of the Christian Hungarian state. The "millennium fund" financed more period films than in the 80s and 90s put together. Furthermore, any one of these films was given a larger subsidy than the entire annual budget for all other films. What the powers that be implied was that there was no need to struggle or to work hard when there is also a

Erzsébet Bori

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"royal road" to making films. It is hardly that surprising these films were accompanied, before they were shown or even shot, by inflamed political and other controversy.

The 2001/2002 season was characterised by two new developments: the profession seems to have found its bearings and to have become emancipated, and there appeared what could be called the king's filmmakers. Films from the latter include *Sacra Corona*, whose story takes place in the 11th century; a feature animated cartoon, *Ének a csodaszarvasról* (Song about the Magic Stag), drawing upon the origin myth of the Magyars and the conquest of the Carpathian basin; Ferenc Erkel's opera, *Bánk bán*, based on a classic national drama. And *Bridge Man*, the most expensive and largest scale Hungarian film ever made. *Sacra Corona* was released in 2001; a popular success, it mostly garnered brickbats from the critics. The other films had their premiers during the election campaign of spring 2002, and it is not too much to say that their reception was strongly influenced by politics.

Of them, *Bridge Man* was the most awaited, its stakes the highest. It came into being under different circumstances than the rest. It was to be an independent film, based on the idea of a producer. Géza Bereményi was asked to take part in the script writing only some time after its commencement. A writer of short fiction and a playwright, as well as the author of some cult song lyrics, Bereményi directed his first film in the 1980s. *A tanítványok* (The Disciples) and *Eldorádó* (The Midas Touch)—his own script in both cases—were based on contemporary Hungary and are fine pieces. This said, I wouldn't call him a director of historical subjects—in Hungary there was simply no chance to learn its tricks—rather a director with a sense of history. After the transition he didn't get the chance to realise his large historical

project on the Khazars, all he could prepare was a low-budget satire and a television feature on the 1956 Revolution. The dearth of domestic resources and the unlikely possibility of finding foreign co-producers (the subject being specifically Hungarian) would have doomed the *Bridge Man* script to the desk drawer as well, had not the idea found favour with the government.

Count István Széchenyi was a leading figure in the Reform Era which began in the 1820s, and earned the epithet "the greatest Hungarian" while still alive—and from his political adversary, Lajos Kossuth at that. After his suicide in 1860 he became a cult figure. A cult operates with roughly outlined and hazy figures, leaving ample room for the imagination. Széchenyi is commonly remembered as the man who nurtured and realised the idea of the Chain Bridge between Buda and Pest which now bears his name, and as a moderate reformer, in contrast with the radical Kossuth, who led the 1848 Revolution. Among his other feats are establishing the Academy of Science, the Officers' Casino, introducing horse racing into Hungary, as well as waterway regulation, steam mills and steam boats; he also wrote several works on economics, finance, trade and public law. He became minister of transport in the first Hungarian government set up after the 1848 Revolution. He spoke, as well as read and wrote in, several languages, scarcely a rarity among the aristocracy, as the language of the Austrian empire was German, debates in the Hungarian parliament were held in Latin, and French was the language of educated conversation. Széchenyi also spoke English and Italian, and travelled widely in both countries. He was a monarchist who envisioned the social economic transformation of the country as taking place under the Habsburg crown. His model was the British constitutional monarchy, his thinking greatly

influenced by the English pragmatists. He was fascinated by England's system of common law, industrial development, the widespread use of machines and such achievements of civilisation as gas lighting or the water closet (called ever since "the English toilet" in Hungarian). He made five major journeys to England, where he bought machinery and racehorses.

Széchenyi's was a controversial personality, which included wide extremes, as we know from the German-language journals which he kept almost every day from his youth till his death, as well as from descriptions by contemporaries. Genteel society saw an idle, unreliable and extremely amorous young man in him—which image is contradicted or at least mitigated by his journals—though these wild years seem in hindsight to have been the preparation for a meaningful career. He was looking for a vocation, which he found in raising his nation. It was the cusp of his life when he offered a full year's income from his estates for the establishment of a learned society for the study and refinement of the vernacular. He managed a staggering work load, and remained a sportsman beside his engagement in public affairs: he swam and walked miles, fenced, hunted and sailed. He fell in and out of love all the time, until he met Crescence Seilern, a married woman; after ten years of platonic devotion Crescence was widowed, they soon married, and lived a happy married life, raising the children of both her marriages.

Once Széchenyi had grown into a man, he became obsessed with responsibility; the first months of the 1848 Revolution he spent in fervent activity, optimism and deadly depression, fearing that excessive radicalism and misjudged political decisions would lead the country to destruction. As the journals testify, all through his life hyperactive, enthused states alternated with fits of melancholy and suicidal drives.

In the autumn of 1848, he had a breakdown and attempted suicide; he was taken to an asylum in Döbling, near Vienna. For years he refused to meet anyone, his family included. By the mid-1850s he had regained his stability, and started reading and writing again. He published political pamphlets under pseudonyms and tried to organise the opposition to the Habsburgs. In 1860 the police searched his rooms, the Minister of the Interior threatened him with severe penalties. During the night of April 7, he shot himself. Tens of thousands appeared at his funeral held on his country estate; memorial services were held throughout the country, eighty thousand took part at the one in Pest.

These turning points are the building blocks of Bereményi's film. They cover forty of the sixty years the count lived, highlighting and dramatising the development of his personality and career. The script makes enjoyable reading, in a sense more complete and self-sufficient than the film. Bereményi has made a near-heroic attempt to reconcile historical authenticity and the requirements of a film, but the result is uneven: it is sometimes a series of tableaux of unconnected episodes, it speeds up, it slows down, becomes downright flat. Great moments, like the accident of a link snapping during the inauguration of the Chain Bridge (in fact this happened during its construction) and the chain sweeping the hero and his son into the water, are few and far between. This particular scene is a text-book example of its kind: it has dramatic tension, and beside the excitement it can convey the emblematic role of the bridge and the narrowly escaped tragedy in Széchenyi's own life.

Critics of the film attribute its faults to its genesis, which is certainly true in that the director took great pains to avoid topical political references, or even the slightest chance of using the film for political

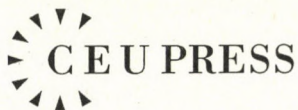
purposes. He was completely successful in this respect, but his victory has its price: if we give up our right to read our present into the past, the period film loses much of its individuality, authenticity and evocative power. Political correctness or an apolitical character are not aesthetic categories.

And this is only a minor flaw in *Hídember*. More blatant is Bereményi's failure to put to film those forty eventful years in the life of such a controversial and complex person, one of such great stature, indicating meanwhile those forty momentous years in the history of his country—an impossible task. The heroes of costume films are black-and-white sketches (more rarely, archetypes), whose personality can be outlined in minutes and the rest of the time can be devoted to adventures, swordplay and lovemaking. Or they concentrate on a certain period in a great man's life—Wajda's film on Danton seems a pertinent example—and attempt in-depth characterisation rather than superficial excitement. What Bereményi attempted is halfway between, not so much a synthesis of the opposites as a mismatch. The components are off balance: compared to other activities and events, Széchenyi's relation with Crescence is over-represented, yet not emphatically enough to give a finely executed rendering of the stages in their love, from the flare-up through the long yearning to consummation and the routine of their marriage, her becoming his spiritual partner. *Hídember* is neither action-packed nor moving, but crammed and hard to follow. The script reveals impressive research; the film is hard on its viewers. The two scriptwriters (co-author: Can Togay) spent months studying Széchenyi's life and times, and came to know their hero so thoroughly that a sentence or a gesture represents an entire story; such erudition is hardly to be expected from the average viewer, who will miss subtle and important

references, will be at a loss as to who's who and what their role in Széchenyi's life was. Many took Bereményi to task for omitting the March 15, 1848 revolution, forgetting that the hero, who provides the perspective of the film, was in Vienna at the time, negotiating at court. Though there are captions which mark out the historical circumstances, they most often provide only the most basic, well-known facts.

The last third of *Hídember* takes place in the Döbling mental asylum. This part of Széchenyi's life is naturally ignored in the cult, demented minds can hardly feature in the national pantheon. The asylum is out of this world, famous people do not call in quick succession, life here is left out of the history books. Bereményi had to reconstruct and imagine Széchenyi's life here, the mental and spiritual conditions of his last years, to find an answer to the questions what he was preparing for, what moved him and why he eventually gave up on his plans, on his life even. This most revealing part of the film shows the old Széchenyi preparing for his last game of chess. Bereményi is at his best here. It should be noted that Károly Eperjesi, the actor playing Széchenyi's part, refused, as a practising Catholic, to have Széchenyi kill himself. Going against established fact, the film leaves us in doubt as to whether Széchenyi committed suicide; it implies that he was the victim of a plot. Bereményi's history consultant, the greatly respected doyen of Hungarian historians, resigned in protest and had his name removed from the credits.

Hídember is neither a slipshod work, nor one made to comply with a certain ideology; its director does not need to feel ashamed. But the wonder so eagerly expected failed to materialize: this is not the model for Hungarian period films of the future. All is left to hope is we don't have to wait for a new attempt till the next Millennium. ♣



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If one has a past like mine, it is easy to be a poet or a writer. My father was from the upper middle class; a Catholic convert; an officer in the Hungarian army at the time of the Second World War; still, according to laws applied to countries occupied by Nazi Germany, he was considered a Jew. My mother was gentile, from the lowest level of Hungarian society. Their marriage had caused a scandal. During the War he was stripped of his rank and sent to a temporary camp in Hungary, and later marched to a German concentration camp. He never reached the second camp because he was killed on the way—not by Germans. He was killed by Hungarian guards who came from the same part of society my mother came from. In a sense, my father was killed by my mother's relatives. And I remain here with questions, Who am I? What is my background? What is my heritage? What can I do with this damn thing?

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