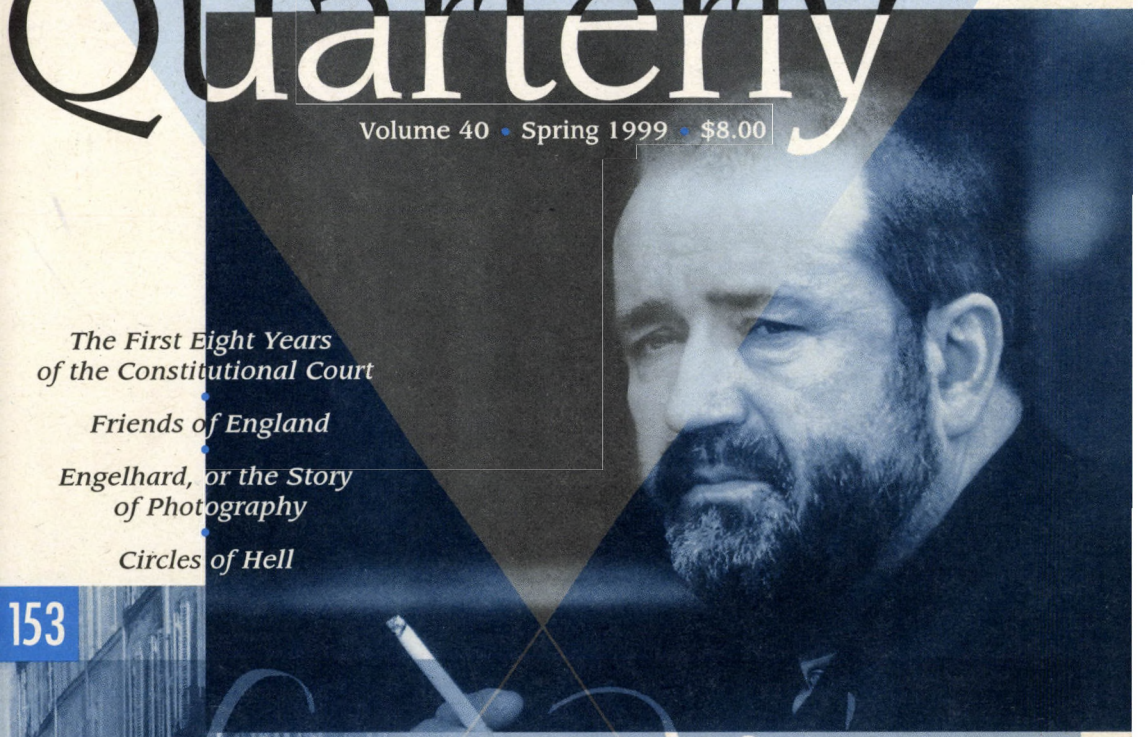
1999 -05- 17

The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 40 • Spring 1999 • $8.00



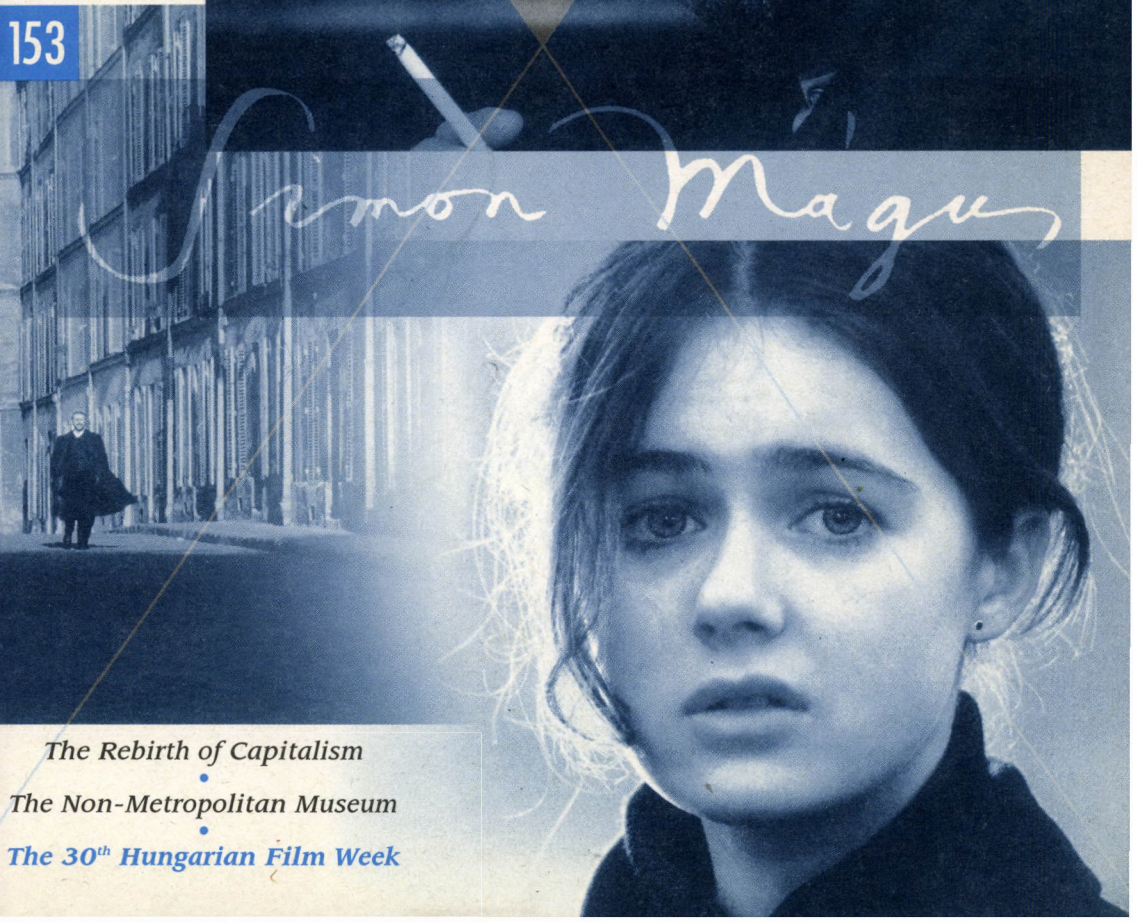
The First Eight Years of the Constitutional Court

Friends of England

Engelhard, or the Story of Photography

Circles of Hell

153



Simon Magus

The Rebirth of Capitalism

The Non-Metropolitan Museum

The 30th Hungarian Film Week

The Hungarian Quarterly

Miklós Vajda, Editor
Zsófia Zachár, Deputy Editor

Rudolf Fischer & Peter Doherty,
Language Editors

Kati Könczöl, Editorial Secretary

The Hungarian Quarterly
formerly *The New Hungarian Quarterly*
8 Naphegy tér, Budapest H-1016, Hungary
Telephone: (361) 375-6722 Fax: (361) 318-8297
e-mail: quarterly@mail.datanet.hu
homepage: http://www.hungary.com/hungq/
Published by The Society of the Hungarian Quarterly
Printed in Hungary by AduPRINT, Budapest,
on recycled paper
The Hungarian Quarterly, © Copyright 1999
HU ISSN 1217-2545 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: PART (György Kara and Péter Nagy)

Annual subscriptions:
$35 ($50 for institutions).
Add $8 postage per year for Europe,
$12 for USA and Canada,
$14 to other destinations and $25 by air
to anywhere in the world.
Sample copies or individual copies of back numbers $10,
postage included.
Payment in $ or equivalent.
Annual subscriptions in Hungary Ft 3,200
Single copy Ft 800
Send orders to *The Hungarian Quarterly*
P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

Articles appearing in this journal are indexed in
HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS;
INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE ABSTRACTS;
AMERICA, HISTORY & LIFE;
THE MUSIC INDEX;
ARTS & HUMANITIES CITATIONS INDEX;
IBZ (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PERIODICAL LITERATURE);
IBR (INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOK REVIEWS)

The Hungarian Quarterly • Vol. XL • No. 153 • Spring 1999

Endre Babus

The Superego of the Transformation

The First Eight Years of the Constitutional Court

When, in October 1990, the Hungarian Constitutional Court, established less than a year earlier, was bold enough to abolish capital punishment at the stroke of a pen, even some of the abolitionists who had initiated the plea before the Court were worried. Many members of the Death Penalty Opposition League assumed that the Hungarian legal system would remove the gallows by a legislative act, after the matter had been debated in Parliament.[1] The velvet-robed judges of the Constitutional Court, however, found two related passages in the Constitution, one which would deny the use of the death penalty, and one which would allow it; notwithstanding the remonstrations of Judge Péter Schmidt, the Court's doyen, the Court voted 8 to 1 to decree the first the "more constitutional". That is, the Constitutional Court wasted no time in removing the legal system's most serious punishment in war and peace alike, without allowing the Parliament the option (as Judge Schmidt tried to urge) to choose between the contradictory clauses.

The decision was both reckless and provocative. Only the argument of László Sólyom, the President of the Court, which could serve as an *ars poetica* of a constitutional judge, was more astonishing than the implementing clauses themselves. "Parliament can maintain, abolish or restore the death penalty as it pleases, until the Constitutional Court says the final word on the constitutionality of this penalty," declared the former professor of civil law in his parallel opinion (an opinion in agreement with the decision but adducing a different argument). Indeed, in order to avoid all possible misunderstandings, the President also declared that through its decisions the Constitutional Court in practice wishes to formulate an "invisible constitution", superior to the Constitution in force, which would in due course serve as a benchmark for the codification of the new constitution.[2] The message was crystal clear. At that time and place the Constitutional Court, or more precisely the President, stated its intention to replace its role of guarding and interpreting the Constitution by the role of drafting it.

Endre Babus
is on the staff of Heti Világgazdaság, *an economic weekly.*

In the eight years that followed, the body made a number of decisions of historic legal significance. Inter alia, the judges abolished the right of the state prosecution service to ban books and journals, established an archive for the collection of documents from the communist dictatorship, and abolished the need for official permission for the marriage of professional soldiers. They made it possible for those responsible for shots to be fired into crowds in 1956 to be brought to trial, although their crimes appeared to be covered by the statute of limitations; they provided a legal status for cohabitating homosexuals; and declared the state responsible for upholding the environmental status quo. These are just a few examples from the many thousand decisions of the tenure of the "first Constitutional Court". The last of the above decisions, made in 1994 and creating an international stir, held that the state could not diminish the size of nature reserves without having pressing reasons to do so.[3] The fate of this decision was also indicative of the Court's efforts to ensure that its judgments do not remain empty declarations. In 1997, the judges took little time to nullify a decree of the Minister for the Environment, which declared a part of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve close to Budapest a construction area, as "not inevitably necessary" and citing the responsibility of the state for preserving the environmental status quo.[4]

"The Hungarian Constitutional Court judges wear the replicas of the 'Golden Bull' around their necks, signifying the existence of legal restraints on the power of the crown," President Sólyom said recently, with some tendentiousness.[5] The Court, made up mostly of legal scholars and proud of its aristocratic principles, strove from the first day to represent a counterweight to the parliamentary power of the majority. At a conference at the start of the nineties, no less a figure than the President of the German Constitutional Court, Roman Herzog, urged his Hungarian colleagues to self-restraint, arguing that constitutional judges must resist the temptation to turn the process of enforcing norms into that of creating them. From 1990 to 1998, however, their judgments have consistently suggested that the Constitution is not in practice to be found in its 78 paragraphs, but—to paraphrase Louis XIV's maxim—"the Constitution is us". Critics have been quick to point out that the activism of the Constitutional Court challenges the foundations of the parliamentary system, as a proportion of the most important decisions are taken by the Judges instead of Parliament.[6] There are also those who say that, in the long term, a Constitutional Court which, as it were, codifies a constitution, poses a threat to all of the parliamentary parties.

Yet one must remember that the Budapest-based Constitutional Court has special legitimacy for its much-criticized and much-applauded uncurbed activities (which many analysts see as outstripping even those of the German Constitutional Court). At the time of the 1989 changes, in order to counterbalance the expected dominance of the successor party to the former state party, it was the opposition parties themselves which urged the formation of the Court, together with its extremely wide scope. Thanks to this, the Court became one of

The First President of the Court

Tendo-synovitis was all it took for Hungary to lose a pianist and gain a legal theorist who established a school of legal thinking. Although the first President of the Hungarian Constitutional Court did indeed attend a conservatoire, his tendo-synovitis forced him to end any thought of becoming a professional musician, and he chose to study law instead. On one occasion László Sólyom reported that "in my first book, there were numerous musical composition tricks, which no one else knows of." Indeed, in the last nine years, as the head of the body guarding the Constitution and the fourth in precedence amongst Hungarian dignitaries, he had continued to show one or two "composition tricks". When he retired in November last year, the 57-year-old judge had left an exceptional legacy on the constitutional structure of the new Hungarian state. Even at the helm of the Constitutional Court he remained the intellectual radical he was as a professor of law, and even the mistakes he made are worthy of the attention of students of constitutional law and political science.

Sólyom's was not exactly a conventional university career. Trained in librarianship as well as in law, he was about to make his way at the foreign-language Gorkij Library in Budapest when an unexpected opportunity arose to teach civil law at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. In the following fifteen years, hidden from the outside world, Sólyom studied and worked with the tenacity of a scholar monk. Whatever importance his years of study in Germany would later take, they were against a background of straitened family circumstances. "It was there that we began our life together, and that is where our son was born. We were housed in wooden barracks left over from the war. The only room with running water was an unheated shared bathroom, we had to heat the baby's bath-water and to wash his nappies on the iron stove. In the corridors Arab scholarship students grilled meat on embers in buckets." This is how Sólyom later described his time in Jena, where he was the only non-Party member of the staff.[17] After being examined on his dissertation in 1969, he took a train out of the German Democratic Republic that same night.

the most powerful constitutional courts in history. "Of the world's currently operative constitutional courts, or normal courts entrusted with guarding a constitution, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Hungary has the widest-ranging brief and related legal armory for putting the Constitution into practice," noted one of the judges as early as autumn 1991.[7] The Court has meanwhile begun to develop a kind of mythical reputation: President Sólyom, for example, fondly described the Court as entrusted with the inheritance of the Opposition Round Table, and as the first-born institution of the new Hungary. In one of its decisions, the Court painted a picture of itself as the "official" trustee of the constitutional revolution, and almost as the conscience of the change of regime itself.

Without question, the Constitutional Court has done much to keep the Third Hungarian Republic true to its founding principles of 1989–90. In the development of this new political order—amidst demonstrations, campaigns and politi-

Before being appointed to a full professorship at the relatively early age of 41 (in 1983), Sólyom was a living-breathing *Stubengelehrter:* he worked at the Political and Legal Studies Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and also at the Parliamentary Library. His specialist fields were the law of compensation, human rights and environmental law. It was only with this full academic weaponry at his disposal, with a professor's chair to sit on, and after publishing a number of monographs, that he began to apply his theories in practice. In 1984 he became the legal adviser to the Danube Circle, which was battling against the construction of the dam at Nagymaros; he stood for the legalist side of the movement, all those who sought to keep its activities within the law. In 1985, in a test case, he appeared for a man who wanted to undergo a vasectomy. They lost the case, but it was a turning-point in Hungarian legal practice. In an article published in the journal *Valóság* he first set out his position that everything was lawful that was not prohibited by law. "The article was talked about even at the Party Committee of Budapest's First District, and at the Legal Studies Institute they held a Party meeting, where they debated the ideas raised by me. The Institute's Party establishment supported my position. Today it seems comic that Party approval was given to the severance of the spermatic duct, but this was fairly characteristic of the situation in 1985." This was how, in 1990, he described one of the more interesting moments of the "sloppy dictatorship".[18] From the middle of the eighties, he received an increasing number of invitations to various university clubs, student residences and student summer camps. He lectured on many occasions at the Lawyers' College on Ménesi út, now considered the nursery for FIDESZ, today the leading party in the government coalition.

From February 1989 he participated, first as an observer and later as an adviser, in the work of the Opposition Round Table (EKA), under the colours of the Independent Lawyers' Forum. (The Opposition Round Table negotiated the conditions of the transition to free elections under a multi-party system.) From April to November he was a member of the executive council of the strongest opposition body, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF). On 24 November 1989, at the sug-

cal tempests—the Court took on a kind of "superego" role. Thanks to this, a number of key political debates were turned into constitutional questions, and on these issues it was not the outcome of raw parliamentary power relations that decided. On many occasions the Court made significant decisions that widened or defended citizens' fundamental constitutional rights. That concerning freedom of opinion, for example, decreed exceptionally wide-ranging criteria for the practice of free speech (independent of the nature of the opinions in question).[8] On other occasions, in the interests of preventing the state bureaucracy from becoming over powerful, the Court limited opportunities for the "computerized screening" of private individuals, banning the compilation of centralized data collected from various separate sources.[9]

At the same time, the Constitutional Court would sometimes take its licence to interpret the Constitution very liberally. In their binding decisions the judges

gestion of the MDF, Sólyom was appointed to the Constitutional Court by the last session of the party-state's "feudal parliament", as the nominee of the EKA. He headed the Court for nine consecutive years, being elected to the position by his fellow judges.

The Sólyom Court played a not inconsiderable role in making sure that the character of Hungary's transformation over the last decade be that of a "forward flight" (defending by attacking) rather than restoration. The constitutional judges used their decisions to help create a modern, *Rechtsstaat* along Western lines, that is a political order based on the rule of law; this is why they decided against the restoration of the property relations of 1946–7, that is, reprivatization. "We have ensured a level of freedom of speech higher than the European average, and on questions of environmental and data protection we have gone further than the law in the United States," was how the President described some other fields of the Court's activities .

László Sólyom's father was the first in the family to receive a higher education. Despite his degrees in Law and French, he was forced in the fifties to support his family as a forestry worker. In his youth Sólyom was not particularly interested in appearances, as President of the Constitutional Court, however, he was conspicuous in attributing great significance to status symbols. A residence to fit the office, bodyguards, elegant Rover cars, an impressive office building in the area below the Castle District in Budapest, a state security patrol—step by step Sólyom brought to the Constitutional Court the trappings of power, which would help raise the profile of this brand-new legal institution in the state hierarchy. In actual fact, however, the Court has attracted genuine respect because of its rulings. "We are professional idealists in a pragmatic world. We represent the abstract values of the Constitution, and one of our most important functions is reestablishing the law's tarnished reputation. I think this is the fulcrum which will allow us to lever the old world out of its place." This is how Sólyom once described the mission of the body defending the Constitution, in his accustomed prophetic tone.[19]

would often of their own accord "insert" passages into a statute, while at other times they would give themselves new spheres of jurisdiction. Indeed, in addition to transferring competency on certain questions away from Parliament, they also experimented with the acquisition of control over the judicial process, even though this is expressly prohibited by Act 23 of 1989.

Particularly controversial was a 1991 decision of the Court that overthrew a legally binding judgment made six years earlier. The Constitutional Court's judgment—described as "simply frightening in its recklessness" by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court[10]—denied a 12-year-old boy the further use of his biological father's name, reregistering him under the name of a man (his mother's first husband), of whom there was already clear evidence at the time of the trial that he could not be the boy's father.[11] The decision to rename the boy was not only shocking in that it overturned the life of his family, but because it was the

vehicle with which the Court made it clear that, from that point on, it would not just examine the constitutionality of statutory law, but, on occasion, that of how it is applied in practice. (It is true, however, that the Court has not yet tried to use this "new sphere of jurisdiction", probably thanks to the resistance of the courts.)

Severe criticism of the decisions made by the Constitutional Court between 1990 and 1998 was not limited to the world of politics and jurisprudence. The Court was itself strongly divided on many questions. The two camps within the Court, formed around the President of the Court and Judge Géza Kilényi respectively,[12] were already established in 1991–2, and are opposed on precisely the issue of what the right limits to its role in interpreting the Constitution are. Yet the Court's direction was for the most part dictated by the activist Sólyom camp, which enjoyed a slight superiority in numbers (and whose members includeed Deputy President Tamás Lábady), and which ambitiously chose to undertake to provide answers to those questions not mentioned in the Constitution. The Kilényi wing, that is those judges who urged self-restraint (Géza Kilényi, Péter Schmidt, Imre Vörös and, on occasion, András Szabó), was happy to support such activism in as far as statutes and other legislation was concerned, but regarded this behaviour as unacceptable in the case of the Constitution. "However good its intentions in doing so, the Constitutional Court's efforts to provide remedies for particular ailments at any price, without paying respect to the limits of its jurisdiction, are unacceptable," states Kilényi in his aforementioned dissenting opinion. The dissenting opinions of the "textualists" on certain decisions, who insisted on sticking to the letter of the Constitution, were in no small part to be thanked to the fact that the Sólyom Court became the object of criticism from the start. These legislative methods without precedent in the Hungarian legal system, served to increase rather than weaken the reputation of those guarding the Constitution and the legitimacy of their decisions.

In moments of self-deprecation the Constitutional Court would itself accept that exaggerated activism on its part could lead to serious confusion in public administration. As the Court established in the first year of its operation: "The jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court must be construed narrowly. For if the Constitutional Court interprets its brief[13] (as concerning its interpretation of the stipulations of the Constitution) in a wider sense, this would inevitably mean the Constitutional Court taking on the responsibilities of legislating and even of implementing that legislation, and would—in opposition to the principles on administrative structure laid down in the Constitution itself—lead to the formation of a kind of Constitutional Court government".[14] This realization was precipitated by the Parliament's insurrection against the Judges at the end of 1990, when the deputies were not willing to postpone the final vote on a legislative proposal, despite the Constitutional Court's request for them to do so.

From Rugby to Soccer

The first five members of Hungary's Constitutional Court were appointed in November 1989, by the last Communist Parliament. Of these initial judges, who were elected by a two-thirds majority vote, two (László Sólyom and János Zlinszky) were proposed by the Opposition, and two (Géza Kilényi and Antal Ádám) by the old Communist Party, which was then already breaking up. The fifth judge (Pál Solt) was neutral in the political sense. In line with the agreement hammered out at the "national round-table discussions", the multi-party Parliament returned in the free elections of 1990 appointed another five judges to the Court. Its eventual quota of fifteen members was to have been achieved four years after this, with the 1994 Parliament filling the remaining vacancies on the bench. Like much else concerning the Court in its barely ten years of existence, the initial plans with regard to its size underwent modification. The number of judges was reduced from fifteen to just eleven, a move requiring an amendment to the Constitution, which was effected by Parliament in 1995. This reduction in size was initiated by the President of the Court, László Sólyom, who took the view that a court of fifteen judges was too large to operate in a unitary way and that, like Germany's Constitutional Court, it would split into black (right-wing) and red (left-wing) blocks.

The selection of new members of the Constitutional Court, which is accorded considerable importance in Hungarian constitutional law, has repeatedly run into serious difficulties, and for two years the opposing forces in Parliament were unable to reach agreement on who the new members should be. Ahead of the expiry of the Court's mandate a total of two justices have so far left: Pál Solt in 1990, when he became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and Géza Herczeg in 1993, when he was elected a member of the International Court of Justice at The Hague.

On the basis of the above examples it is no exaggeration to say that in recent years the Hungarian Constitutional Court has appeared, in some respects, to be enjoying a position above the law. It is characteristic that the Court continues to work in Budapest rather than in Esztergom, the official seat chosen for it in 1989. For the tenth year running, it has failed to publish the procedural rules on the basis of which it protects the constitutional order, an omission which obscures the coordinates and parameters of a legal body attributed such special importance in the reliability of the rule of law. This circumstance probably served as an encouragement for the Court to dare—just about every year—widen its competence. To start with, the judges made decisions on an "all or nothing" basis (either rendering debated statutory provisions ineffective or leaving them in force), but after a time they introduced the concept of Constitutional Conformity, which, for particular issues, determined the scope of legislative power for the government and the legislature. It is a further sign of the exten-

sion of its sphere of influence that the Court has mandated itself with the drawing up of what are called temporary measures: on such occasions the judges can suspend the implementation of a statute until they reach a decision.[15]

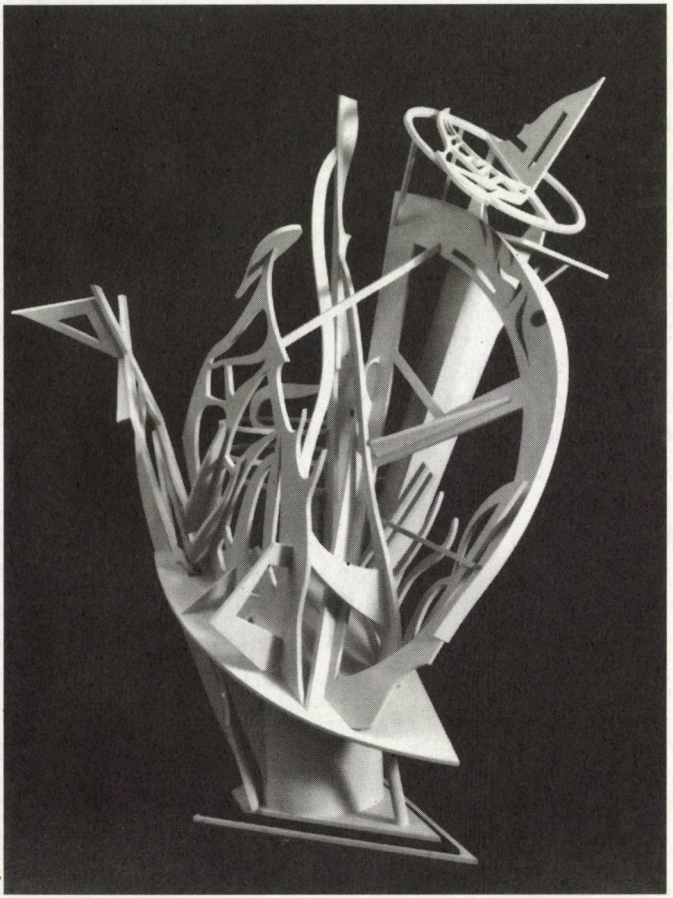
The interpretation of its role, its activism, and the provocative programme of its President (read: invisible constitution) have all necessarily pitted the Constitutional Court against the prevailing government. Between 1990 and 1994 a major confrontation with the centre-right Antall government concerned its veto of the laws on compensation, restitution and legal redress. Nothing is more characteristic of those embittered debates than the fact that in 1993 one of the leading constitutional lawyers of the largest government party, László Salamon (who in 1989 fought on the same side as László Sólyom as an MDF politician at the National Round Table), publicized proposals for the abolition of the Court.

In the parliament it was the "running over" of the Bokros economic shock therapy package of 1995, and an electoral decision in 1997 that favoured the right-wing opposition, that produced serious tension between the centre-left Horn administration and the Court. In these two cases the Court contradicted not only the interests of the government but its own previous judgments.[16] This partly explains why many began to see political bias in their operation from the mid-nineties onwards. This presumption was only strengthened in the spring of 1995 by the (albeit unsuccessful) wishes of the centre-right opposition to nominate President Sólyom as a candidate for the Presidency of the Hungarian Republic. In the light of all this, there was no chance of László Sólyom receiving the two-thirds majority required for him to grant a further nine-year mandate. The 23rd of November 1998, the end of the President's term of office, also signalled the end of this heroic period in the history of the Constitutional Court.

Over the last five years, the first institution of the new Hungarian state has in the vast majority of cases come to decisions that have been liberal and progressive. With judgments worthy of jurisprudential tracts it has done much to help the adoption of Western European human rights standards (Strasbourg legislation) and to retain the conventions of the Hungarian justice administration system that have been shown to stand the test of time. The new conceptual and dogmatic system worked out by the Court has already been seen to exert considerable influence on Hungarian jurisprudence. In the course of the Court's operation it has also become clear that the fears, expressed at the beginning of the nineties, that the Constitutional Court might carry too much weight within the political system and grow into an institution with too few checks on its activities, were not totally unfounded. The Constitutional Court of the young Hungarian Republic has from time to time seemed to act like an enlightened absolute monarch, with all the negative and positive consequences that may bring. Yet without the judgments of the Sólyom Court, which sidestepped so many of the democratic institutions in the new system, there is no question that Hungary would now be a more provincial state. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ *HVG,* 3 September 1990.
2 ■ CC decision 23/1990 (Oct 31).
3 ■ CC decision 28/1994 (May 20).
4 ■ CC decision 48/1997 (Oct 6).
5 ■ Interview with László Sólyom, *Magyar Nemzet,* 9 August 1998.
6 ■ Béla Pokol: *A magyar parlamentarizmus* (Hungarian Parliamentarism,) Budapest, Cserépfalvi, 1994. p. 108.
7 ■ Géza Kilényi's dissenting opinion on CC judgement 58/1991 (Nov 8).
8 ■ CC judgement 11/1992 (March 5).
9 ■ CC judgement 30/1992 (May 26).
10 ■ CC judgement 15/1991 (Apr 13).
11 ■ Interview with Pál Solt, HVG, 18 January 1992.
12 ■ CC judgement 57/1991 (Nov 8).
13 ■ "Two-player game", *HVG,* 18 February 1996.
14 ■ CC judgement 31/1990 (Dec 18).
15 ■ Gábor Halmai: "Where should the Constitutional Court go from here?", *Beszélő,* February 1996.
16 ■ HVG, 8 July 1995; 25 October 1997.
17 ■ Anna Richter: *Ellenzéki kerekasztal-portrévázlatok* (The Opposition Round Table—Sketches for Portraits), Budapest, Ötlet Kft, 1990, p. 145.
18 ■ Anna Richter: *op.cit.* p. 136.
19 ■ Interview with László Sólyom, *HVG,* 1 February 1992.



Tibor Szalai: Composition, *1995. Painted plywood, height: 225 cm.*

Attila Bartis

Engelhard, or the Story of Photography

(Short story)

In the spring of nineteen seventy-three, a shepherd named Ágoston Szöcske sheared precisely one hundred kilos of black wool off the backs of the Sáromberke famous sheep belonging to the parish priest. In the days following, the raw wool was washed, combed, and stuffed into five sacks, then taken up to the presbitery loft. Naphthalene (against moths), and nails from a dead horse's hoof (against thieves) were placed at the bottom of all five sacks, so no one could seriously think that the wool could come to harm.

After morning mass Father Ignác Vass got up on his bicycle, rode to the end of the village, and told the Gypsies who made adobe bricks that they could set to work the next day: the hundred kilos of wool were ready and waiting for them. Beautiful and black, as they had asked.

"Moths got last year's wool, and the year before's was stolen. There'll be no church fence out of this year's either, Father, you'll see," said the Gypsies, though it was barely drizzling at the time.

And by six o'clock that evening the river Maros had swept away all nine piles of bricks, the tents, the cart, the copper cauldron with the supper; at half past six it had added the stage of the culture centre and a hundred and fifty Thonet chairs, the public people's library, the complete works of Lenin were floating on the water, and the Maros was just warming to the job, it took the Electrolux radios, the Opera and Diamant television sets with the Sunday night music programme, it took the glass fishes off the tops of the television sets, and the henhouses, the agricultural engineer's Dacia car, the apple-trees, the combine harvester, the road, the postmistress with the undelivered Easter greeting-cards, the reports off the policeman's desk, then it took the policeman as well, and it did not stop there, though the people of Sáromberke would have been content with less, but the Maros decided

Attila Bartis,
a native of Transylvania, has lived in Budapest since 1984. His publications include the novel A séta *(The Stroll) and a volume of short stories* A kéklő pára *(Blue Mist), reviewed in* THQ *152. He is also a noted photographer.*

that it would take the seven o'clock mass as well, and the thirty-three black sheep, and Ottokár Prohászka's admonitions to youth together with Father Ignác Vass' Ukraine-brand bicycle, it was carrying all of these things but would have those five dratted sacks as well, so it started out from the presbytery kitchen up to the attic. The priest was sitting up in the attic beside the trap-door, and when the water reached the seventh stair he burst into tears, took hold of the sacks and threw all hundred kilos of wool down into the kitchen for the Maros to take away.

Early next morning in Meggyesfalva, an old woman named Aranka Vájár peeped out of the window in her loft and decided it would be worth her while to risk her life. First she threw down the nutting stick with the hook at the tip, then, hising up her skirts, she too slipped down the ladder to the yard where the water was only knee-high. She gathered in the spoils so nimbly and deftly as if this had been her occupation since she was a child. First she pulled the postmistress' bag off the cherry tree, for that seemed the most promising catch, then she harvested two blankets off the pear-tree, a potted plant (artificial) and a volume of Lenin from the roof of the lean-to kitchen, a set of underwear from the currant bush, three perfectly well-preserved devotional pictures from the stations of the Cross series, and she was beginning to think her luck was running out when she caught sight of five large sacks floating past the hydrangeas, all in a row.

While the wool was drying Aranka considered the subsequent fate of the spoils. In the end she decided that the wisest thing to do would be to go to Vásárhely and make it up with my Grandmother, whose house she cleaned and with whom she had recently had a disagreement about a set of silver cutlery which had inexplicably got lost; in a word, they would have a cup of coffee together—she'd bring the coffee, just so Grandmother would see she meant to be taken seriously—and then this business of the wool would be solved as well.

There was not much left of the roads, they were using tracked armoured vehicles to get bread to the villages, and Aranka could not have imagined a better time to make peace with my Grandmother. She pleaded with the Romanian soldiers so insistently that they finally sat her up on one of the tanks and took her into Vásárhely.

While the coffee was brewing Grandmother lent credence to Aranka's tale concerning the set of silver cutlery and involving a cast of thirteen people; she begged her pardon for defaming her character, then disclosed her most recent secret: the remedy for malignant tumours. One part oats, two parts black radishes, two parts aloe, two parts toasted apple-seeds, and three parts acacia honey, but for anyone who did not like oats rye would do just as well.

"There's money to be made out of this, Mrs Gheraszim, you mark my words. A great deal of money," said Aranka, wishing to worm her way into my Grandmother's heart . And when she was half-way there, in other words had one

foot securely planted in the goldmine, she made mention of a certain black lamb, whose fleece was known to reduce high blood pressure. By the time they had drunk the coffee, all hundred kilos of wool had come into the possession of my family in exchange for four Maria Theresa guilders.

"Get rid of this filth this instant," Grandmother commanded Mother as soon as she realized that the deal she had made was no better than the last one, when she had exchanged a string of genuine pearls for ivory-looking plastic. So the wool stayed in our bed-linen drawer and the moths feasted on it, as Aranka had skimped on the naphthalene.

For some reason no one wanted to buy the wherewithal to make woven material from us in those days. Then, a year later, a rag-and-bone man appeared in our street, he did not even have a horse, but pulled his cart himself, shouting, "Old clo! Rag and bone! Any ole' irons!", and he rang our bell too, three times, because Mother did not dare open the door.

We feared rag-and-bone merchants like hell-fire. At the first ring of the bell we already knew that we would let them in at the third, and if everything went well, they would not swindle us, just give us a good price for something beyond price. Give us, say, five hundred for the small mirror, a fair price that, you had to admit, but then they'd be taking all that was left over from the Christmas of nineteen forty-four along with the mirror, and that of course came to more than five hundred, didn't it?

Well, there he stood, yet another rag-and-bone man in the middle of the room, but this one was not interested in the antique furniture, nor in the silver plates, nor the paintings, he did not even take a proper look at them, but suddenly closed his eyes so he could concentrate better, then softly said:

"Something smells of the Maros here."

We were startled. He did not at all look like a rag-and-bone man.

"My wife's hair smelled the same, when her body was washed up, poor soul," he said, and then we weren't so frightened any more, but my mother opened the chest into which we had stuffed the wool of the thirty-three accursed lambs, which would have covered the entire costs of a church fence. At first the rag-and-bone man just ran his hand over the coal-black wool, then he took a handful, buried his face into it, and burst into tears. He cried like a child.

"Take it. Take it all," my mother said, and she took out all five sacks from the bottom of the chest, then sat down beside him to help him pack away the wool. I stood in the doorway and watched my mother and the strange man sitting side by side silently, their eyes wet with tears, filling huge sacks with the scent of a dead woman's hair.

I too helped carry down the sacks to the cart. The rag-and-bone man wanted to give us ten metres of Bohemian upholstery fabric in exchange, but my mother would not accept anything.

"Then let me at least give the little boy something, madam," said the man, and from a huge pile of junk pulled out a peculiar-shaped pigskin case containing a Pioneer-brand Soviet camera.

The viewfinder of the Pioneer camera was like an inverted telescope. So for years I looked at everything that was too close through this lens. Mr Csipkés chasing after the pig with an axe and catching up with it, Mrs Müller, who took a chair to sit before her door every morning and rubbed at the KZ number tattooed on her forearm until noon, the postman who, being playful by nature, sometimes brought Mrs Müller a new Koh-I-Noor rubber, in other words, whatever there was to see in the yard of that house I looked at through the viewfinder of that camera, just to be on the safe side.

I only forgot about the camera once, and that was when four men dressed in black came to take away a muddled tale from nineteen-ten to seventy-seven without paying for it; true, they were not rag-and-bone men. They were in a great hurry to reach the cold room with my Grandmother, though they could at least have waited until my mother had a proper cry after it turned out that aloe with oats was as much use against cancer of the larynx as black wool against high blood pressure.

But the working hours of the undertakers allowed exactly three minutes of waiting during the removal of a body. Placing the body in the coffin: one and a half minutes, crying of the next of kin: three minutes, receipt of tip, conveyance of the body to the hearse: one minute each, six and a half minutes altogether, plus saying goodbye brings it up to seven minutes, almost.

If I had had the courage to bring out the camera during those seven minutes, then the undertakers would have believed that I really did want to photograph them, and they would have smiled at me, from the heart, as only an undertaker can smile at a child, and I would have thrown my camera into their faces, which of course is an empty dream, a vain hope because that is not the way it happened, but at least then the story of photography would have ended as beautifully as it had begun.

Envoi:

Prince! There never was an Engelhard. Or if there was, he was not a photographer. Or if he was, we never knew each other. Or if we did, he did not leave me anything. Or if he did, then it was nothing but these seven minutes. ❧

Oszkár, or the Story of Physics

(Short story)

Originally they had decided that little Oszkár would not go to school at all on Wednesday, they would take him to the doctor instead, but on Tuesday evening the doctor telephoned to say that Wednesday would have to be cancelled as something had come up, Friday would be better if it was convenient for the father, Friday at ten, perfect, and then we'll check and see why Oszkár is still no bigger than a kindergarden child.

So on Wednesday morning the child went to school after all, and there during the physics lesson he suddenly thought of something, and then he began to count, and he counted and counted, and Friday came, and the doctor said that little Oszkár would in all probability remain kindergarden size to the end of his days, though there was a chance that he will grow another ten centimetres, or twenty at the most, but what does it matter, he's still worth as much as the next man, and he should pay no attention to those who call him Owlcast instead of Oszkár Dóczy, because those who call people names are uncivilized, and God will punish them.

But little Dóczy was no longer very interested in what the doctor had to say, he just carried on counting, and he counted through secondary school, then through university and the Second World War, then, with the exception of a typical house search, he counted through the fifties, though to be more precise that house search wasn't so typical after all, as the officer was still standing in the doorway when he asked whether Dóczy had any gold or subversive literature on the premises, to which Dóczy replied that he had, but that he never lent books to anyone, and closed the door, and those three just stood out in the corridor and laughed their heads off, because it was simply unbelievable, too absurd for words, too good to be true, so they decided not to spoil it and rang the bell of the next-door flat instead, from where they soon took away Mr Szilágyi together with his gold-nibbed Parker pen. In short, that is all that happened in the fifties, at least to little Dóczy, and in the sixties even less, those should have been the best years for counting, being the quietest, but they too were fruitless. By then he had been teaching the physics lessons himself for a long time, first in secondary school, then at the medical university, but still the result would not come out.

Then one night he started up from his sleep with six point nine running in his mind, and for a moment he thought that it was his sixty-years of bachelorhood playing a dirty trick on him, for what is six point nine, there is no such number in physics, only elsewhere, in quite different fields, fields he knew nothing about, as they were no concern of a hundred and forty-centimetre physicist, so he took a sip from the glass of mineral water set on the night-table to still his heaving chest, and then he would have gone back to sleep but those two numbers rutting with the shamelessness of animals would not let him rest. So he set his pyjamas straight and sat down at his desk, for at such times counting is worth infinitely more than all the mineral water in the world, and then suddenly there it was, in black and white, p equals six point nine, and then instead of being overjoyed, he burst into tears, because there was not a soul in the flat whom he could have dragged out of bed to show them Dóczy's invariable.

In the morning the professor addressed a large envelope to the proper department, put in it the invariable together with the deduction, and posted it on the way to the university, by registered post, express delivery, just to be on the safe side. He had been waiting for a reply for three months when, during a coffee-break, one of the fifth-year students asked the comrade professor's opinion about Voinic's invariable, which had been written up in that day's *Red Flag* directly after the editorial, to which Dóczy replied that unfortunately he did not read the papers, but Comrade Academician Voinic was an excellent authority, both as a physicist and as the nephew of the Comrade Secretary-General, and if he had discovered an invariable, then it would surely hold its own anywhere around the world. Then he glanced through the paper and there it was, in black and white, six point nine, which for a couple of moments did not even surprise him, for what else could p equal but six point nine, and it was only then that a hand seemed to seize his lungs and his heart and his stomach and began to twist and tear them, not so that he'd die, which may perhaps have been better, just so that he'd scream with the pain. And when he was no longer raving like a lunatic, but you could clearly make out that what he was shouting was thieves, communist thieves, give me back my invariable, then the front man of the class went to fetch help from the reception desk, and the professor was secluded.

Physicists came under the jurisdiction of Captain Frunza, so it was to him that Dr Dóczy was taken, and the Captain professed to be very happy to meet the professor in person, then asked him what his grievance was, what this bitter outburst in the university corridor was all about.

"They stole my invariable, they just went ahead and stole my invariable," said Oszkár Dóczy, upon which the Captain asked him who had been responsible for such a dastardly deed. But the moment the professor told him, he found himself gasping, as the Captain slapped him so hard that he bounced back off the wall.

Captain Frunza asked little Oszkár to sit back down in his seat and not cry like a baby, it wasn't seemly, then said that the professor had said something

very foolish just a moment ago, and he'd much rather pretend he hadn't even heard it.

"Oszkár, Oszkár, what shall we do with you," he asked, not of the physicist, but of the file lying before him on the table. He flicked through the file as though that were the real Dóczy, and the other, the one sitting on the chair, in effect some sort of supplement to it, a sort of flesh-and-blood illustration which, with its cut lips and teary eyes, only makes the proper interpretation of the text more difficult.

Captain Frunza perplexedly counted the invitations, honorary diplomas and foreign *honoris causae* which made the situation so delicate, for what was he going to say if those foreigners happened to ask him where he had mislaid the professor, then he picked up the phone, dialled, and asked what was to be done about this dwarf.

"He must be given treatment," said someone very far away, perhaps in Bucharest. So Professor Dóczy was treated at the neurological clinic by a former student of his called Árpád Bréda, and after the treatment he had not only forgotten Voinic's invariable, but even Newton's laws.

Then one night Dr Valeriu Ghinda walked up and down Bolyai Street a couple of times with his medical bag under his arm, and when he had assured himself that the street sweeper was really a street sweeper, and the roast chestnut-man was really a roast chestnut-man, he slipped in through the door of Professor Dóczy's house. In the course of that week he went back twice, and he can't have been carrying ordinary pharmaceutical products in that bag, for upon his third visit the professor remembered not only his own name but that of Doctor Ghinda as well, and he did not struggle and kick and shout let me go, leave me alone, I don't know anything, I'm just a physicist, but said thank you, Valeriu. He even cracked a joke, saying, you've been concocting on the sly again, haven't you, to which Dr Ghinda replied that it didn't need much concocting, because that Árpád Bréda bungled things again, you can tell he was your student.

So Dr Ghinda succeeded in bringing Dr Dóczy up from the depths to the level of a perfectly run-of-the-mill nervous wreck, but they thought it would be better if the professor did not yet flaunt his improved state of health, but told the social and health committee to hurry as he had a rendezvous with UFOs at three o'clock under the bronze owl guarding the entrance of the Teleki Library.

"That's just fine," said the chairman of the committee with satisfaction, and approved Professor Dóczy's disability pension.

Just to be safe, the old man went to the library and walked up and down before the entrance anxiously until closing time, exactly as someone waiting for UFOs would do, for what if they were keeping an eye on him, and found out that he was bluffing, and hadn't really had a meeting lined up, he would lose the disability pension, and the Bréda treatment would begin all over again. So when the library closed, and the man who had been reading a newspaper for hours with his back against the statue of Bolyai had disappeared as well, the professor

rang our bell; the trouble was that we did not want to open the door, for though he was a hundred and forty centimetres tall, and wearing his grey raincoat, we still did not recognize him. He stood there in front of the glass door like a kindergarden child struck by lightning, his finger clumsily stuck to the bell.

"Good evening, it's only me," he said, pressing his face up against the glass.

"Good grief, whatever happened to you, Oszkár?" asked my mother, taking the old man by the arm and pulling him inside, then she sat him down in the kitchen on a stool and quickly gave him a slice of bread and butter sprinkled with sugar, just like in the old days when Professor Dóczy was still recognizable at first sight.

My father switched on the radio and the television, so the voices of the broadcaster and Captain Onedin would mingle with ours, because at that time he still believed that there was no bugging device in the world that could filter the essence out of so much noise. Then The Onedin Line was over and the running commentaries on harvesting began, in Ilfov county the harvest was much better than last year's, the reporter said, especially the wheat crop, upon which Professor Dóczy asked whether we thought he would be killed, and my father said that they probably would not dare go that far.

Mother spread another two slices of bread and butter, sprinkled them with sugar, made a sandwich of them and wrapped them in a napkin, the professor was long past the point of finding something like this humiliating.

"Should I go to the library tomorrow as well, do you think?" he asked as he put the sandwich in the pocket of his raincoat, beside the papers attesting his entitlement to a disabilty pension.

"I don't know," said my father.

"Or should I leave town?"

"Absolutely not. I think you'd better go to the library after all."

"Alright," said Oszkár.

"But just keep looking up at the sky, like today. If you overplay your part, you know, that can look suspicious too."

My mother made the beds, and for a while my father tried to tune in to the short-wave band. I packed my school-bag so I wouldn't have to hurry in the morning, Hungarian, Romanian, PE, physics cancelled, there'll be history and music instead.

We do not speak about it, because one ought not speak of such things, but we are in actual fact grateful to Captain Frunza, Voinic and the others. Because before, when Oszkár came to see us, he always spoke of black holes, and antibodies, and condensation of time and the like, things that are much closer to God than to us, so all we could do was nod or look incredulous. Now Father could at least express his opinion on the subject, which of course made a difference, at least one didn't feel a total fool. ❧

Translated by Eszter Molnár

Imre Oravecz

Poems

Translated by Jascha Kessler

Grief

Gyász

It happened after the long noon recess, I think.
The sixth, seventh, and eighth graders were all busy
working at some assignments.
We fifth graders were taking a lesson.
Teach was rattling on, a young, lipsticky woman
they said put out evenings for officers from the Lángos barracks.
She also directed our school's troop of Young Pioneers,
and discussed our stuff with them too on those occasions,
since the Guards Company was the troop's patron.
But we knew what was going on,
and kept an eye on her belly
to check, was it getting any bigger.

The door opened all of a sudden—Principal.
His hand went up to keep us in our seats,
as he crossed the room, whispered in her ear and went out.

Stunned, Teach dropped to her chair, and stared vacantly.
Then she got up slowly and announced in a shaky voice:
Dear Pioneers, today Comrade Stalin died.
Let us stand at attention for five minutes of silence
in tribute to his memory.

Imre Oravecz
is a poet and translator, who has published five volumes of verse. These poems are from Halászóember *(Fishing Man, 1998), a poetic autobiography. On several occasions he has spent time in the United States.*

With the others, I rose,
and rested my weight on my left foot
my left hand set slyly on my bench,
my gaze fixed on a spot on the oiled floor
next to Jani Králik's shoe
so as not really to stand at attention.

Mahalcsik, Brother-in-Law

Mahalcsik sógor

My grandmother's cousin, Auntie Mari, was married to him,
so that was how we were related,
but my parents called him that, and so did I,
and so did my kid sister,
and that's what he was to us all, brother-in-law,

his piece of land wasn't that big,
but it wasn't that small either,
but he sure could farm it,
because he liked what he did,
and did it well,
and knew how to,
and found time to,
so whatever he had was better than his neighbour's
his vegetables, his horse, his bull,

and whatever he put his hand to went,
plants, animals, people, tools,
and he knew the what, the when, the why, the how,
and helped out with the hardest calving,
and if something broke at his place,
he never took it away to be mended,
but set to and fixed it,

he liked wood best to work with,
and had a little workshop in one corner of his summer kitchen,
and would light up the little pot-bellied stove in winter-time
with shavings, and cut fantastic forms

on his lathe, and was handy with a chisel,
and even cut a washtub out of a block,
and carved a shuttle for the loom,

he took to heart the village's welfare,
and held parish office,
speaking gently always to everyone,
never put anyone down,
even the lowliest Gypsy had a good word from him,
and he said what he thought, straight out and regular,
everyone looked up to him,
his opinion mattered,
and so respected he was
not even the worst characters dared a foul word in his presence,
even the authorities regarded him,
even when he was denounced as a kulak,
and not even the Council President, Franci Baji,
bore him a grudge,
even if he did weep when Stalin died,

he helped the needy,
we would ask him to lend a hand with the ploughing,
or cart this or that home for us,
we always used to ask him to stick our pig for us,
but the main thing he did for us
was drop in for a nice warm jaw winter nights,
and when I heard him outside
stamping the snow off his boots on the steps
I'd get all excited,
and in he'd come,
say something funny
to cheer us up,
help himself to popcorn,
listen to Radio Free Europe with us,
and start in talking,

what I liked to hear most was his stories about the Russian front,
how he'd outwitted the Germans
that were our allies,
and who sacrificed us,

and when we'd ask him about the kolkhozes,
his face turned miserable
and he shook his head sadly,
as though he knew what was coming for him,
and to us,

and he wouldn't break,
no matter the blows he took,
when his wife died young,
he kept on, faithful to himself,
to doing a job right,
even later, made head of a work-battalion,
he tried to salvage whatever he could,
but the cooperative got to him anyway,
took him under, and the wound to his pride
sickened him so badly
he was dead even before he could retire

Alács, Brother-in-Law

Alács sógor

My Auntie Rozi, my father's grandmother's sister, treated me
like her own family,
and gave me something to eat
any time I wandered in,
but brother-in-law Alács, her husband, was even more important,
a fabulous farter and practical joker,
blowing that obbligato wind with his gags and stories, to make me
laugh, or consoling me, if that was what I needed,

but something went wrong
between my folks and them,
the families quarreled
and never talked again,
and so I had to choose,
and took our part, naturally,

so from then on I wasn't to listen to him
and saw him only when his cart
passed me on the road,

but he'd wink down from the driver's seat
and I didn't get a chance to say goodbye
when he went back to America to be a sexton,
and when he came home sick
I didn't live there anymore,

so I've no idea
if he'd found the right audience for him over there,
and when our relations improved
I forgot to ask Auntie Rozi
how he died,
but I had to think
that when the last hour had come
he said something hilarious
as they sat around his bed,
and with that impish smile
farted, and passed away.

My Grandfather Talks To Him, the Almighty

Nagyapám beszéde a Mindenhatóhoz

Lord,
today's Sunday,
your day,
and I'm here in Dullard Street,
boarding at Mrs Lahay's,
past my prime and going gray,
I've got gout,
my hands shake,
jumping around in front of me
at meals sometimes so the spoon
misses my mouth,
my days pass by alone
and I hardly sleep at all,
joys, sorrows, I've had my portion,
whatever can happen to any mortal
has happened to this one,
no surprises left for me,

not counting the death that's waiting,
the one thing I don't know
because here I am,
with some strength still,
though not what it once was,
when I bet I could lift a mine-car, and I did,
in Saskatchewan,
and then, I've got work still,
not easy
but paying good,
I keep myself neat and clean,
I eat hot meals,
read the papers,
take care of my clothes,
might even say I'm content,
but I'm not,
which is why I turn to You,
what to do,
what to do,
I won't bother You with particulars,
let's just say that
till now my dreams kept me going,
I dreamt of love
but my sweetheart left me,
I dreamt of a better life
but never made it, even in Canada,
I dreamt of a family
but couldn't get on with the wife,
I dreamt about my kids
but showed them a bad example,
so now I'm out of dreams, Lord,
nothing comes,
I'm ashamed
to talk like this
but truth's truth,
and You love truth,
unlike us,
we're scared of it,
which is why I tell no one
but You,
because You'll understand,
and that's the only reason
I drink, really,

there's no way out,
it seems
I've had it,
so I don't ask You for a thing, I don't,
—what was I thinking,
there's something
I meant to ask—
Look—
I must be out of it,
I almost forgot,—
there's one single, solitary wish,
just one,
so please listen,
if You think I'm worth it —
Please,
get me over that Pond,
take me home, to the country
I came from,
that's all I ask,
will you do that?
let my eyes be closed there,
not now,
later on will be just fine,
better later, in fact,
since I'm still working,
later, when my pension's set,
and collectable over there,
because I don't want
to be a load on anyone's back
when I get home.

Future Imperfect

Befejezetlen jövő

A private house in some Cleveland, or Chicago, or Barstow suburb,
four bedrooms, two baths, living room, a den on the ground floor,
two-car garage, and a big basement with a ping-pong table,
neat lawn all around,
ornamental hedges lining the driveway, no fence,
wife, four kids, two grandchildren,
good job, secure income,

bank account, credit cards,
two cars, an RV,
dog, cat,
big dinner at night all together and great talk,
nice neighbours, good friends, relatives,
golfing, baseball games, following the play-offs,
travel abroad (one to Yucatan),
hiking (Adirondacks, Wisconsin woods, Sierra Nevada),
winter vacations in Florida, Hawaii,
Sunday barbecues in the backyard in summer,
steaks or chicken drumsticks, lots of salad,
tortilla chips for the hot cheddar dip, jalapeños, bourbon,
hickory charcoal smoke rising refulgent,
flowers, bugs, butterflies,
clear skies, sunny days
calm and peace, far and near,
now and then laughter hooting from somewhere,
and the ice-cream truck's cheery bells sounding nearer

that's my life, had I decided to live it there
or been born there, or stayed on there,
I wonder, would it have been better,
or wouldn't I have had to confront what was coming to me anyway,
and been a burden moreover to my family?

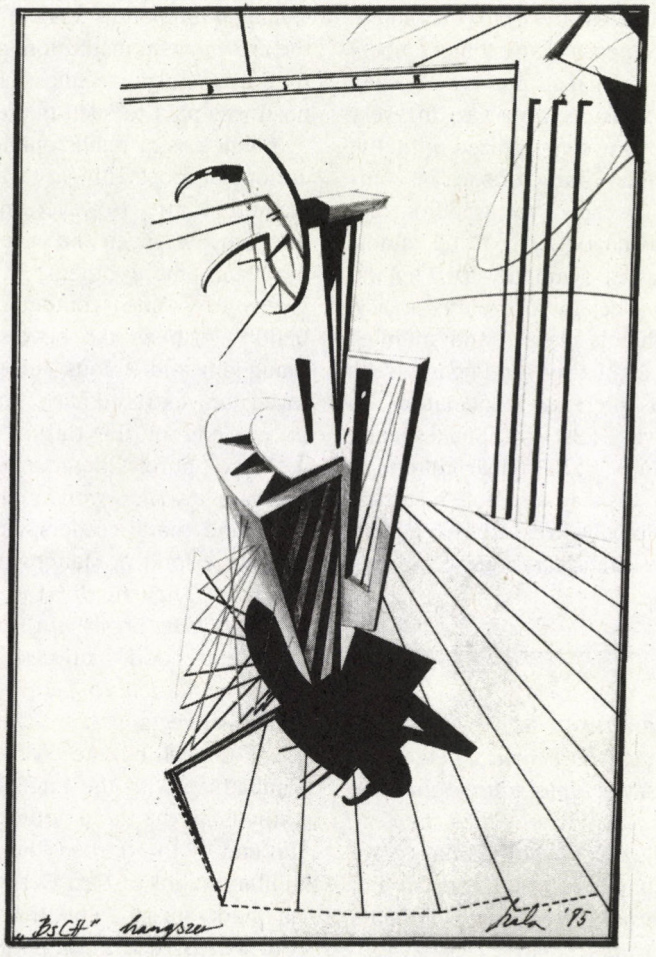
Testimonial

Vallomás

Here I stand,
my dear brothers and sisters
and, oh, here are you,
those merely unskilled workers,
all laid out in neat rows
above the meadow
on the cool north slope
of this graveyard, packed
solid side by side,
one marked, another not,
you're everywhere I turn,
right, left, up, down,
in the center, on top of the hill next to the road,

all over the place,
hidden by earth,
so many, a whole congregation,
that even if you rose to return now
you wouldn't go to the village,
though when you were here
you tried hard enough—
to have something more,
to do better,
not that you murmur, or argue,
you don't make a sound,
even to complain when your bones are dug up
and thrown away,
I knew a lot of you once,
and really loved some of the old folks
because they were gentle with me
when I was a kid,
they gave me prunes in the threshing days,
or showed me how to braid a whip to crack,
but not all of you were known to me,
all those centuries when you were brought out here,
and by the time I came most of your graves had sunk down
and were lost forever beneath the grass,
and yet you're never strangers to me,
and it seems I've met you all once and often,
as though together we'd done or wanted so much,
I'm tied to you,
I'm your kin,
I come out of you,
my hands, my chest, my back, my legs
I had from you and maybe even
the writing of poems,
I'm just like you when
you lived here desiring and hoping,
the same obstinate pride,
same defects, same virtues,
inclined to melancholy and despair,
and yet full of dreams, and courage,
strong, steady, and persistent
in whatever I take a notion to try,
happy when it goes,
and looking at the world the way you did
before your souls departed,

I may not understand
its laws, though I regard them closely
and with respect,
remembering what you do,
the wheat field in July at harvest time,
the flash of a girl's thigh as she beats the flax,
we're alike in everything,
and what I hope for
is to be with you,
carried out here when my time comes,
allotted a place here with you,
and granted my silence in chorus with yours.



Tibor Szalai: BSCH Architecture (BSCH Musical Instrument), *1985*

András D. Bán

Friends of England

Cultural and Political Sympathies on the Eve of the War

In a Hungary on the threshold of war, committed to Hitler's side, "Pro-English: by 1939, at the latest by 1940, this adjective would encompass many things: liberal, democratic, humanist, pro-Jewish, even Catholic on occcasion, anti-Nazi in every case."[1] Those who sympathized with the English had other characteristics in common, such as a respect for tradition and disdain for demagoguery of all kinds. Between the wars, sympathy for England was palpable especially in the aristocracy, in the upper middle classes and amongst the educated. Sympathy for English traits and behaviour offers an explanation, as does what was felt for Shakespeare, English literature and English culture in general. There was also a remote historical parallel, occasionally stressed by the post-1919 counter-revolutionary regime: the near contemporaneity of Hungary's Golden Bull (1222), the East European document resembling England's Magna Carta (1215), the crown as an institution, and the role of the aristocracy. Needless to say, scant heed was paid to such matters in England by politicians or public opinion. They were curious at most. Hungary was a small and distant country. However, in Hungary this sympathy was deep and widespread, showing itself, among others, in the reception given to some contemporary English fiction, such as the novels of Somerset Maugham and Aldous Huxley, which enjoyed an extraordinary popularity here at the end of the thirties. The reasons were not purely literary, though. Sándor Hunyadi, a writer, wondered why in an article, and many readers wrote in to say they were fond of Maugham because they liked the English. Not the writer, or his works, but the English. In Hunyadi's words: "Surely a good many British passports could be issued to people who are not British subjects, perhaps they cannot even speak English but, deep down inside, they sympathize with the English."[2] This sympathy is all the more noteworthy since, by the end of the thirties, the economic and military might of Nazi Germany had made its mark abroad, and the openly fascist Arrow Cross had made its presence felt in Hungarian politics. Against this, Great

---

András D. Bán
is a historian whose special field is Anglo-Hungarian diplomatic relations. The above is a somewhat edited chapter from Illúziók és csalódások. Nagy-Britannia és Magyarország 1938–1941 *(Illusions and Disappointments. Great Britain and Hungary. 1938–1941) Budapest, Osiris, 1998.*

Britain was seen as the paradigm of parliamentary democracy, liberal and masonic ideals, and the City of London was believed to embody the power of partially Jewish capital. Centuries old institutions, along with British traditions, stood for the past, for all that which was said not to be modern or "of our time."

Nevertheless, numerous intellectuals and politicians, in Hungary and all over Europe, saw British parliamentary democracy, the slowness and complexity of its operation, as proof positive of decadence. This included some who had, once, been friendly to England. Pierre Drieu la Rochelle said in February 1938: "Why do you think that this people who are falling back before Mussolini and before the Japanese, would help us stop Hitler?"[3] In August 1940, Pierre Laval, at that time Minister of State and Deputy Prime Minister under Pétain, met the writer-diplomatist Paul Morand. Morand told him that Britain would hold out to the bitter end, that there would be no invasion. Laval answered: "It's possible, but this doesn't mean that the English haven't missed their chance."[4]

English ways of thinking looked equally illogical and incomprehensible to a fair number of Hungarians. "Impermeable," as László Cs. Szabó, the Anglophile essayist, who lived in England from 1951 to his death in 1984, aptly put it in his *Doveri átkelés* Dover Crossing) published in 1937. The obvious reasons were well-established German cultural traditions in Hungary, Germany's proximity, an educational system on the German pattern, and growing German economic and intellectual influence east of the River Leitha in the thirties. There were others too, such as the memory of the Great War, of the German-Austro-Hungarian alliance. English ways of thinking differed considerably from the Prussian, which enjoyed great currency in Hungary. It was typical not only of Churchill and other British statesmen like the Earl of Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, but of the English in general that they sought to adjust their ideas to circumstances and never vice versa. Abroad, they called this hypocrisy, and spoke of *perfide Albion.*

Those, however, who felt sympathy for England respected tradition, gentlemanly conduct and fair play, currencies common enough in the value system of the Hungarian aristocracy. "Gossip, cigar-smoke and Anglophilia floated in the air." This is how Patrick Leigh Fermor sums up the mood of the nobility in the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[5] Magnates frequently passed through England on their travels and were enchanted by the life they found there. They appreciated that the sports they enjoyed—tennis, racing, sailing—had their origins there. This had been in their blood for generations. The overwhelming majority of Hungarian peers despised the brutality of National Socialism. They honestly believed that an England that seemed weak in several respects could effectively counterbalance German discipline, efficiency and tremendous military power, and not only because of the seemingly inexhaustible resources of the Empire. This conviction was expressed by Count Antal Sigray, who supported a Habsburg restoration in Hungary, in a letter to Churchill. He assured Churchill that Hungarians believed in the victory of Great Britain and the Allies, and claimed that it was only a British victory that could assure peace and freedom to Europe and the world, an eventuality which would allow Hungarians a say in the shaping of their own future.[6] Sigray wrote this in October 1940, in England's darkest hour, when, without allies, she faced a Germany which had conquered wherever she had attacked. The aristocracy's Anglophilia was helped by their mastery of English, which they read and wrote in addition to French and German. They subscribed to English jour-

nals and bought English books, in wartime they listened to the BBC. Their tailors followed English fashions, and they modelled their manners on those of an English gentleman.

When Count Kuno Klebelsberg was Minister of Education (1922–31), English was compulsory in the upper classes of thirty secondary schools, most of them Protestant. English history has been taught at the University in Pest since 1777 and the English language since 1806. An English department was established at the University of Budapest in 1886, and a second, at the University of Debrecen, in 1938.

The upper middle-classes' feelings about England were the same as much as the aristocracy's. Among this group of Anglophiles were outstanding Hungarian diplomatists, such as György Barcza, Hungarian Minister in London between 1938 and 1941, who had been trained at the Konsularakademie in Vienna in Austro-Hungarian times, and who came into senior posts after the First World War. They were conservative liberals, who would have no truck with extremism of either the Left or the Right. Amongst them were Barcza's predecessor, Szilárd Masirevich and János Pelényi, *en poste* in Washington between 1933 and 1940. Aristocrats too were to be found in diplomacy and politics, like Baron Iván Rubido-Zichy, Baron Gábor Apor, Baron György Bakách-Bessenyei, and Count Sándor Khuen-Héderváry.[7] It was amongst men like those that Counts István Bethlen and Miklós Kállay, both former Prime Ministers, recruited negotiators for a separate peace with the Western Allies, later in the Second World War. It was they who had confronted the semi-educated, nationalist, narrow-minded creatures of thirties' Hungary, they who believed in a British victory at a time when British politicians were amongst the doubters.[8]

Writers, newspapermen and artists also had their importance in Anglo-Hungarian relations. Generally it was penpushers of a liberal inclination, with democratic ideals which they propagated, frequently but not exclusively of Jewish parentage, who stood closest to all that England meant, that is a functioning parliamentary democracy, minority rights versus majority domination, and especially an unfettered spirit and the dignity of the individual. But Germanophile did not necessarily mean identification with National Socialism, and there were democrats who cared little for England. Nevertheless, the dominant trend was that England appeared as the paradigm of social progress to liberal writers, journalists, scholars, economists and financial wizards. English-mindedness was represented by the writers and poets grouped around the journal *Nyugat* (1908–1941, continued under another name until 1944).

In 1927 the poet and novelist Dezső Kosztolányi reported on a journey to London in a series of eight articles. A special article was devoted to Shakespeare, whose *Romeo & Juliet, King Lear* and *A Winter's Tale* he had translated.

> Walking these streets, it is he who I am looking for everywhere. Why otherwise should I wander restlessly in this alien land? Its politics, institutions and organizations are of moderate interest to me. [...] Whatever I see or hear, I refer to him. This is the language in which he thought and wrote. The Black Man who passed in front of me reminded me that Juliet "hangs upon the cheek of night like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear." His vision changed the world, me too. Every one of his metaphors and his figures is alive still. I kept on hoping that I would run into him.[9]

Kosztolányi met John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, Norman Angel, and Lord Haldane,

the first Labour Lord Chancellor. As well as Shakespeare, he also translated poems by Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Oscar Wilde and Yeats. He returned to London at the end of 1931 and, as President of the Hungarian PEN Club, he met the press baron Lord Rothermere. In the summer of 1927 Rothermere had started the campaign, *Justice for Hungary,* supporting a revision of the Treaty of Trianon. Rothermere offered an annual prize of £1000 for the best Hungarian literary work published that year. Gyula Krúdy and Zsigmond Móricz shared it early in 1932. To quote Kosztolányi's letter to his wife: "Rothermere gave me an hour-long informal and very surprising audience in his house. I gave him my *Nero,* "with my humblest tributes" (Kosztolányi's own English). As soon as I spoke about the sorry state of our writers, he jumped up, struck the table, and offered £500 to reward the best work published in 1931. Then he changed his mind and offered £1000. My eyes were filled with tears."[10] Two editions of Kosztolányi's *Nero* appeared, in 1927 and 1928, with a preface by Thomas Mann.

Shakespeare, of course, had been popular in Hungary, with the three greatest 19th-century poets, Petőfi, Arany and Vörösmarty, producing translations used to this day. The *Nyugat* poets, however, launched a veritable renaissance of translations, poets such as Mihály Babits, Milán Füst, Lőrinc Szabó, Miklós Radnóti, István Vas, Lajos Áprily and György Rónay produced new versions.

Eight Shakespeare cycles were arranged at the Budapest National Theatre while Sándor Hevesi was the director (1922–32). There were times when nineteen productions of Shakespeare plays were in the repertory.[11] Hevesi regularly wrote on Shakespeare in *Nyugat* and *Pesti Napló* and also published a book, *Az igazi Shakespeare* (The True Shakespeare) in 1920.

G.B. Shaw had a mixed press in Hungary. In 1926, on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, he received both plaudits and brickbats. Shaw's reception reflects the divisions of the Hungarian intelligentsia between friends of England and Germany. There was an unfortunate intermezzo, Shaw's letter to Karel Čapek on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic, which was published by *Lidové noviny* of Prague. Shaw also compared the politics of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and put it on record that he would prefer to be a Hungarian subject in the Czechoslovak Republic than a Czech or Slovak living under Hungarian rule. As a result, he was banished from Hungarian stages for two years, the National Theatre in Szeged being the only exception.[12] *The Daily Mail,* owned by Lord Rothermere of the Justice for Hungary campaign, used its Letters to the Editor page to attack Shaw. Ferenc Kiss, the London correspondent of the Budapest daily *Az Est,* wrote to Shaw asking for an explanation. Shaw pointed out that he too objected to the Trianon arrangements but that the Hungarian political system of the time was the most reactionary feudalism in the whole of Europe. He expressed his astonishment that in Hungary they reacted to the truths he expressed about the Horthy regime by presenting him as the enemy of treaty revision and of Hungarians, in this way willy-nillly serving the interests of the opponents of any revision of the treaty.[13]

Just as *Nyugat* was the mouthpiece of Anglophile writers and poets, so the radical bourgeois journal *Századunk* was that of like-minded social scientists. In just about every issue, particularly from the mid-thirties, British democracy was contrasted with National Socialism and Bolshevism. *Századunk* paid close attention to the image of Hungary which prevailed in Britain. When the Hungarophile

Scotch historian C.A. Macartney's *Hungary* appeared in 1934, the editor, Imre Csécsy, welcomed it as an objective picture as, "at long last, after all the Rothermere chatter, serious speech from Britain addressed to European Hungarians."[14]

In 1938 a government decree suspended publication of *Századunk* together with that of a number of leftist publications. Csécsy then established a publishing firm under the same name. In 1939 he brought out a collection of lectures and adresses by Stanley Baldwin, in his own translation, under the title *Mi angolok* (This Torch of Freedom). In his preface the bourgeois radical Csécsy wrote:

> Conservativism—at least in England—means above all tolerance, understanding even of the point of view of the opponent, the avoidance of violence, if possible, whether it presents itself as revolution, arbitrary rule or war. The Conservative Party which, with brief interruptions, has been in power in the U.K. since the early twenties, has tried at all costs to apply this principle not only at home but also in international relations. How successful it has been—particularly in foreign affairs, is of course another question.[15]

Toleration, understanding, the rejection of violence—not only Csécsy and his fellow bourgeois radicals but many intellectuals of different hues adhered to these principles. They looked to England which, for them, embodied these principles, with respect and uncertain expectations.

As was to be expected, English literary works were more widely read in Hungary than the speeches of politicians. Of contemporary writers Shaw, Maugham, H.G. Wells and Aldous Huxley were the best known. Wells was translated by Frigyes Karinthy, Huxley by László Cs. Szabó and later by Antal Szerb, who was to be a young victim of the Holocaust. *Brave New World* appeared in Hungarian within two years of its English publication in 1932, to great public acclaim.The critics, at least at first, turned up their noses: Andor Németh, in Nyugat, called it "cheap-skate and pretty vulgar mental gymnastics." In *Válasz* Ferenc (the later François) Fejtő accused Huxley of "emotional poverty". Only Cs. Szabó in *Nyugat,* in 1937, was truly appreciative. He wrote an enthusiastic preface to *Eyeless in Gaza,* which appeared in Hungarian in 1936. Wells and Huxley, along with Maugham, D.H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield, figured in *Mai angol dekameron* (New English Decameron) selected and edited by Vernon Duckworth Barker and issued by the Nyugat Publishing House in 1935.

Cs. Szabó returned to England, when the prestigious 3000 pengő Baumgarten Prize footed the bill. *Dover Crossing* (1937), referred to above, is an account of the journey. London enchanted him. He went as far as Richmond, crossed the river to Battersea, visited Broadcasting House and even went to see the ballet. He pencilled his conversation with someone on the *Economist* who, speaking of the 1919–1920 peace treaties and the impotence of the democracies and the League of Nations, suddenly burst out: "The hour will strike when England will no longer beat a retreat before Rome, Berlin and Tokyo."[16] He took his emotional leave of England at Westminster Abbey. Some forty years later, in a 1978 interview, Cs. Szabó, by then resident in London since 1951, looked back on his book with a critical eye. Cs. Szabó and those close to him, like the poets Mihály Babits, Lőrinc Szabó and István Vas and the writers Gábor Halász and Antal Szerb with their essays did a great deal to popularize English verse, albeit the outstanding anthology of English metaphysical poetry, selected, translated and introduced by

István Vas only appeared in a bilingual edition in 1946. The poet Lőrinc Szabó produced a brilliant version of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1921) that remains standard in spite of numerous new translations. Besides five of Shakespeare's plays, including *Macbeth, As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night,* he also translated *The Ancient Mariner* and a huge number of English lyrical poems from medieval to modern, which were included in his two-volume *Örök barátaink* (Our Eternal Friends, 1941), which has run many editions since. Babits once quipped to someone that the most beautiful Hungarian poem was "Ode to the West Wind" in Árpád Tóth's translation. István Vas recalls in his memoirs and articles on T.S. Eliot, that it was Babits who, in the early thirties, called his attention to the poet and also gave him a copy of *Criterion.* In 1942, when Britain and Hungary were already at war, Cs. Szabó published *Három költő* (Three Poets), an anthology of Hungarian translations of poems by Byron, Shelley and Keats, with a major introductory essay. It could be described as a gesture of protest and it enjoyed a deserved success. English children's classics were also translated, *Alice in Wonderland* by Kosztolányi, *Mary Poppins* and *A Christmas Carrol* by the literary historian Marcell Benedek. Many English-speaking readers of Karinthy's versions of *Winnie the Pooh* would swear that they even surpass the original in the charm of their puns and the effortless clumsiness of the verses, which every child would happily recite by heart.

Az angol irodalom kis tükre (A Brief Account of English Literature) by Antal Szerb (1901–1945) was published in 1929, something of a sketch for his three-volume major work, *A világirodalom története* (History of World Literature), which was published and followed by a history of Hungarian literature twelve years later. Antal Szerb produced an outstanding translation of Maugham's *Theatre* (he translated extensively from French and Italian, too). Szerb compared the two master prosodists, the "intellectual poets" Babits and Swinburne and wrote on Babits's Swinburne translations.[17] In 1928 he wrote an essay on Blake, still an authoritative work. Szerb spent some time in Great Britain in 1920, financed by a scholarship, when he was still very young, and who knows, he may well have passed through the bizarre scenes of his *Pendragon legenda* (The Pendragon Legend), a novel, which is part detective story and part cultural history and of a kindred inspiration to that of Umberto Eco.[18] His English sympathies are also evident in his extraordinarily successful anthology *Száz vers* (A Hundred Poems).

László Németh (1901–1975), the most high-powered and erudite among the essayists in the interwar period, whose messianistic and utopian nationalism had a wide following among the younger intellectuals, published a brilliant essay on Keats in his famous 1940 collection, *The Revolution of Quality,* under the title, "Keats' 'Hyperion' and the Revolution of Quality".

"When I close my eyes and utter the word: 'poet'—I think of Keats," he writes.

> Have there been greater poets than he? He is the only one I can use as an idea though he was a person. All other poets were different: they were freedom fighters, actors, philosophers, eccentrics, mystics, men of letters; Keats was a poet and nothing else but a poet, his greatness was fed by a single source: his poetry.

He then goes on to discuss the plot of "Hyperion" in detail, and concludes by envisaging the missing parts of the fragment, in which the Titans of Saturn and Hyperion are about to reconquer the sky, while Quality and the muse Mnemosyne are in quiet conversation somewhere on an unin-

habited island. A revolution of quality was Németh's utopian didactic concept, explained in a dozen books, in which he thought to revitalize every aspect of the truncated nation's life in the aftermath of the Trianon treaty and in the face of dominating foreign influence.

Not only classics and contemporary authors were discussed. So were the barely known and now long forgotten, if they seemed interesting for some reason. Thus *The Source* by Charles Morgan, theatre critic of *The Times* and *The New York Times.* Aladár Schöpflin, the respected *Nyugat* editor and critic, wrote the preface to it in which he praised it as an outstanding work. Antal Szerb, by not even mentioning it in the *History of World Literature,* proved closer to English critical opinion. Morgan's early high reputation on the Continent still puzzles elderly gentlemen in England. The young have never heard of him.

There was nothing in England to compare with the reception of English literature in Hungary, for obvious linguistic reasons. The publication now and then of an outstanding work, such as Kosztolányi's *Nero,* Imre Madách's play *The Tragedy of Man* in 1933, or Frigyes Karinthy's autobiographical *Journey Around my Skull* in 1939, were flashes in a pan. The success of Ferenc Molnár's plays is the exception.

The Hungarian Quarterly, the predecessor of this journal—corresponding in English to the *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*—was founded in 1936 by The Hungarian Quarterly Society, headed by Count István Bethlen, a former Prime Minister. The money was provided by the government and industrialists and financiers of Anglo-American orientation, who were Bethlen's friends, including Ferenc Chorin, Móric Kornfeld, Róbert Szurday and Jenő Weiss. József Balogh, a classical scholar, was appointed editor, assisted by Owen Rutter in England. A segment from Mihály Babits's novel *Halálfiai* (The Sons of Death) was published in the 1938 Autumn issue (pp. 546–48), followed by a forgettable short story by Countess Margit Bethlen in the Winter of 1938/39. The emphasis was on history, Hungarian, British or American. The political aim was to persuade men of influence in Britain and America of the necessity of a peaceful revision of the provisions of the Treaty of Trianon, and also to send implicit signals that there were men who counted in Hungarian society, politics and intellectual life and who did not support the German line.[19]

Memoirs, principally by Britons who had been *en poste* in Hungary, or who had visited the country, were a prominent feature. Contributors included Lord Davies, President of the New Commonwealth Society, Sir Thomas Hohler, lately British Minister in Budapest, the historians C.A. Macartney and G.P. Gooch (editor of the *Contemporary Review,* Sir Thomas Cunningham, British Military Attaché in Vienna and in Prague in the early twenties, and Admiral Usborne, lately Chief Intelligence Officer at the Admiralty, Vernon Duckworth Barker, István Gál, a noted student of Anglo-Hungarian relations and also a frequent contributor, up to his death, to *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* Antal Szerb, mentioned earlier, and the poet Gyula Illyés. András Frey, the foreign editor of the daily *Magyarság* and later of *Magyar Nemzet,* another daily, had a column headed *Danube Chronicle,* in which he reported on current political and economic issues in the Danubian states. An English edition of the authoritative history of Hungary by Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű was a major project, which, how-ever, came to nought, chiefly because of personal differences between Balogh and Szekfű, and because of growing political differences between the two authors after 1938. Hóman

moved to the far Right and Szekfű stayed staunchly conservative. A book did appear in London in 1939, however, with the support of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *The History of Hungary,* a translation of Otto Zarek's *Die Geschichte Ungarns,* was a far cry from the standard of the Hóman–Szekfű history.

Informal, personal contacts played a far from insignificant role. As the interest of British skiers extended beyond Switzerland to Austria in the twenties, so interest in neighbouring Hungary grew too. Budapest and the puszta all had their exotic charm. As the diplomat György Barcza, Hungarian Minister in London, wrote: "I won't deny it, those who know our history appreciate us and especially those who had been to Budapest and had been enchanted by Budapest life, Margaret Island nights, the waves in the Gellért Bath, the beautiful Hungarian women, all that romantic Hungarian business, they even like us."[20] The two trips to Hungary in 1935 by the then Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VIII, made a big difference both as regards personal English attitudes to Hungary and vice versa.

In December 1933, the eighteen-year old Patrick Leigh Fermor set off on foot for Constantinople, via Hungary. Forty years later he started to set down what he remembered, and now, another twenty-five later, he is still at it. Two volumes, *A Time of Gifts* (1977) and *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986)[21] have appeared so far. He met Hungarians north of the Danube, crossed the bridge at Esztergom, walked to Budapest, and rode a horse, lent to him by a Hungarian aristocrat, across the Great Plain, the *Alföld,* to the border, moving on into Transylvania. After Budapest he was armed by letters of introduction given by Count Pál Teleki, geographer, Foreign Minister, and Prime Minister between 1939 and 1941, "whose alert pointed face behind horn-rimmed spectacles, lit by a quick, witty and enthusiastic manner, had an almost Chinese look."[22]

Lady Listowel (née Judit Márffy-Mantuano), a kinswoman of Teleki's, was well connected in England through her politician husband. Barcza, who knew her well, described her as an "intelligent creature keen to play a role." From time to time Teleki entrusted his kinswoman with various semiofficial or unofficial messages, Barcza was only informed after the event, if at all.[23]

As Lady Listowel did with the Hungarian legation in London, so Princess Károly Odescalchi (née Comptesse Klára Andrássy), maintained contacts with the British legation in Budapest. An elegant, clever woman, the writer and editor Balázs Lengyel, the husband of the poet Ágnes Nemes Nagy, remembered her decades later. Radical writers, journalists and populist writers of the left, including Imre Kovács, Péter Veres, József Darvas, Ferenc Erdei, Zoltán Szabó, István Bibó, Dezső Keresztury, and Iván Boldizsár were regular guests in her beautiful townhouse on the Buda Embankment facing the Danube and the Chain Bridge. "She gave a soirée which was attended not only by the minister but by practically the entire English colony, including several young men of my age or thereabouts." (This was towards the end of 1940 or the beginning of 1941, after the Hitler–Stalin pact, the partitioning of Poland, the invasion of Holland, Belgium and Denmark, the defeat of France; England alone was at war with Germany.)[24] Princess Odescalchi and her friend, Countess Erzsébet Szapáry, were both active in aid for Polish refugees in Hungary. She was killed in an Italian air-raid on Dubrovnik in April 1941. The British officer, in whose company she was, found letters of introduction to the British authorities in her luggage.

The unshakeably Hungarophile Sir William Goode was a one-man istitution rather than a defining personality in Hungaro–British relations. The Hungarian government paid him £8000 in April 1941, for services rendered as unofficial adviser. The fee was meant as a friendly gesture towards Britain precisely at this time, but it did not affect essentials, as diplomatic relations were broken off.[25] No British declaration of war followed, among other factors, due to Churchill's understanding and goodwill for Hungary. He stood for a delay of the declaration of war, which was hold up until December 1941. From that time on the political and social weight of Anglophile Hungarian politicians, writers, public faces gradually declined.

By 1942 many of the writers who did so much to mediate between English literature and Hungarian were called up for periods of compulsory labour service with increasing frequency.

In that fatal year Vas started to take a serious interest in translating English metaphysical poetry. This produced a change in his own poems too. Vas's first major study on the subject appeared in 1943.

> The first clear impetus grasped by my mind came from Gábor Halász. Five years earlier he had published an outstanding essay on John Donne—until then practically unknown in Hungary—in *Argonaták*. Szentkuthy too spoke to me about the metaphysical poets. In his own way he featured both Donne and Andrew Marvell in his *Orpheus* cahiers, which started publication at that time. I managed to get a copy of Donne's and Marvell's works, reading the other metaphysicals in anthologies. I need not add, I am sure, how the union of passion and intellect which I found in them, engaged my interest and ambition. As Eliot put it, they felt their thoughts as immediately as the odour of a rose.[26]

For Radnóti, Szerb and Halász, 1945 was the year of death marches and mass graves. After the war, Németh had to recant. Though opposed to fascism and German domination, and not a racist or overt anti-Semite, his concept of Hungary as "a nation that is a minority in its own homeland" had been used by the far right.

During the three years following the war, while formally democracy reigned, English cultural influence continued unabated. The public, eager to make up for the later war years when English and American films were scant, flocked to see whatever was shown. *Waterloo Bridge,* one of the classic tear-jerker war films, was such a hit that "Auld Lang Syne", its theme song, could be heard as the "Candle-light Waltz" all over Budapest, in cafés, espressos, bars, pubs and restaurants. It was a strange and enlightening experience for Hungarians to get a glimpse of the other, the victorious side of the war. The same was also true of the theatre. Publishing houses, still private, brought out much of the latest fiction in hasty translations, and some work by modern English poets, like Eliot, Auden, Spender, et al., caught the eye of Hungarian poets, ever on the lookout for what is new and exciting abroad, poets like Lőrinc Szabó, István Vas, Géza Képes and many others, who translated and published it in magazines and their own books, also reflecting on it in essays and reviews. Business as usual, one could say, up to the point when, in 1948, "the Year of Change" in Communist parlance, another dark epoch of the country's history suddenly and cruelly began.

But that is another story. ❧

NOTES

1 ■ John Lukacs: The *Last European War, September 1939–December 1941.* London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 386.

2 ■ Quoted by Miklós Hornyik: "English Lawn." in *Angol pázsit. Balkáni néprajzi kalauz* (English Lawn: An ethnographic guide to the Balkans). Budapest, Kortárs, 1996, p. 530.

3 ■ Pierre Drieu la Rochelle: *Chronique politique.* Paris, p. 109. Quoted by John Lukacs, *op cit.*, p. 407.

4 ■ *France During the German Occupation, 1940– 1944: A Collection of 292 Statements on the Government of Maréchal Pétain and Pierre Laval.* Vols. 1–3. Transl. from the French by Philip W. Whitcomb. Stanford, 1958–1959. Quoted by Lukacs, *op.cit.* p. 407.

5 ■ Foreword by Patrick Leigh Fermor, in: Miklós Bánffy: *They Were Counted,* London, Arcadia Books, 1998, p. VI.

6 ■ Letter from Count Antal Sigray to Winston Churchill, dated October 12th, 1940. Public Record Office. London. FO 371/24. 428.

7 ■ Personal Communication from Jenő Thassy, who was told by Bakách-Bessenyei.

8 ■ What I have in mind is differences of opinion between Churchill and Halifax, in the summer of 1940, following Dunkirk.

9 ■ Dezső Kosztolányi: "London Letters: Shakespeare." *Pesti Hirlap.* September 28th 1927.

10 ■ Dezső Kosztolányi's letter to his wife, dated Nov. 4th 1931 in: Dezső Kosztolányi: *Levelek–Naplók* (Letters–Journals). Collected, edited and annotated by Pál Réz. The 1933–1934 journal ed. by Ágnes Kelevéz and Ida Kovács. Budapest, Osiris, 1996.

11 ■ Jolán Kádár-Pukánszky: *A Nemzeti Színház százéves története* (The Hundred Years of the National Theatre). Budapest, 1940, Vol. 1, pp. 468–469.

12 ■ See István Pálffy: *George Bernard Shaw Magyarországon (1904–1956)* (George Bernard Shaw in Hungary [1904–1952]), Budapest, 1987, Akadémiai.

13 ■ *Az Est.* Dec. 2nd 1928. Quoted by Pálffy, op. cit., pp. 149–150.

14 ■ Imre Csécsy: "Magyarország angol szemmel" (Hungary—through English Eyes), *Századunk,* No. 10, 1934, p. 398.

15 ■ Imre Csécsy: Preface to Stanley Baldwin: *Mi angolok* (This Torch of Freedom), Budapest, *Századunk,* 1939, p. 6.

16 ■ László Cs. Szabó: *Doveri átkelés. Nyugat-európai helyzetkép* (Dover Crossing. The Situation in Western Europe), p. 110.

17 ■ Antal Szerb: "Az intellektuális költő" (The Intellectual Poet), in: *Esszépanoráma 1900–1944* (Essay Panorama, 1900–1944) Selected, edited and annotated by Zoltán Kenyeres. Budapest, Szépirodalmi, 1978, pp. 504–527.

18 ■ English edition: Antal Szerb: *The Pendragon Legend,* Budapest, Corvina Books, 1963.

19 ■ Tibor Frank: "Editing as Politics: József Balogh and *The Hungarian Quarterly*". *The HQ,* Spring 1993, No. 129, pp. 5–13.

20 ■ György Barcza: *Fragments from a Journal.* Entry for June 27th 1938, introduced and edited by András D. Bán in: *2000,* March 1996, p. 38.

21 ■ Patrick Leigh Fermor: *A Time of Gifts* (1977), *Between the Woods and the Water* (1986). Both London, John Murray. *Between the Woods and the Water* is still recommended by *The Times* to all those travelling to Hungary. See "Cosmopolitan Cocktail". *The Times,* July 5th 1997.

22 ■ Patrick Leigh Fermor: *Between the Woods and the Water,* London, John Murray, 1986, p. 40.

23 ■ Barcza: op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 265.

24 ■ Balázs Lengyel: "Angol tanú" (The English Witness), in *Újhold-Évkönyv* 1987/2 (Újhold Yearbook 1987) and published as "Stranger in a Strange Land" in *The NHQ* 121, pp. 83–98.

25 ■ See Barcza's letter to Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Undersecretary in the Foreign Office.

26 ■ idem., p. 385.

László Cs. Szabó

from Dover Crossing (1937)*

In a few years time this nation will have reached the peak of its economical, territorial and demographic development: its territory will not be capable of further expansion, its population will hover round the current level for some time, then, in the second half of the century, it will decline. The changing character of the country will adapt itself to this civilized saturation point. (It is of course possible that rather than adapt it might crack under the strain). The English will have rid themselves of all their harmful passions, all their terrible furies, all their instincts for murder and rapine, in other words of all those elements that comprise the daemon of a nation: they will no longer want to kill, they will recoil from acts of violence and have no wish to conquer. All the barbarism will have been "analysed" out of them; they will have become peaceful, perceptive and wise. English civilization will stand at the acme of human civilization: its degree of embourgeoisement will, I believe, exceed what we commonly understand by the term, just as physics after Planck, or chemistry after Curie exceeded what came before it. While Europe was regressing into two centuries of peasant-decimating feudalism, the English Puritan revolution, their first great change in character, counter to the European trend, was enabling bourgeois materialism to progress, and now that Europe is collapsing into a state of militarism sanctioned by law, this latest development of the English character, purged of its bestial energies, will offer an image of perfect human civilization. The island is not one with the mainland.

This process of evolution has marooned our own contemporaries on opposite sides of an intellectual chasm. The reader is not yet aware that what Galsworthy or Kipling are really talking about is the *prelude* to revolution, or that Huxley, Hughes or Virginia Woolf are in fact always writing about that revolution's *aftermath.* The chasm widens, the years erode the rock; after a couple of decades the two parties are hardly audible to each other, just as, with a modern ear, it is difficult to hear the voice of George Herbert, only some thirty years younger than Shakespeare, as part of the voluptuous hubbub of Renaissance England in the Age of Shakespeare.

* László Cs. Szabó: *Doveri átkelés,* Budapest, Cserépfalvi, 1937, pp. 77–79.

Let's wait to see the end of this revolution; the shock alone will be worth living a long time for. No more merciful fate awaits strait-laced, bourgeois, Victorian, unemotional, uneroticized England than awaited the debaucheries of Old Merry England: the insular nation will vanish much as the expansive one did and the English will start from scratch: sooner or later their love lives will change, as will their temperament, and, who knows, even their language. They have the courage and, above all, they possess the poetic imagination. They will exemplify a nation at the acme of civilization, untroubled by the greed for money, avoiding the fires of lust, in other words without a trace of *Herrenmoral.* It is possible that Huxley is not a great writer—there may be too much glittering contemporaneity or brilliant trash in him—nevertheless he is the indicator of that character reversal, it is by following in his footsteps we may most accurately measure the intellectual development of England, a development that will civilize it unrecognizably while probably rendering it more vulnerable. Traveller, gird your loins: you are standing on the threshold of *neurotic* England! ❧

New English Titles from

Corvina Books

THE STORY OF HUNGARIAN
A Guide to the Language
by Géza Balázs

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF BUDAPEST
by Géza Buzinkay
English translation by Christina Rozsnyai

Available at all major bookshops in Hungary

Direct orders to:
Corvina, Vörösmarty tér 1, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary
Phone: 361-318 4148 Fax: 361-318 4410

Antal Szerb

History of World Literature

(Excerpt, 1941)

Aldous Huxley*

Aldous Huxley bears much the same relation to his one-time friend, Lawrence, as Voltaire did to Rousseau. The anti-intellectual revolutionary confronts the ultimate intellectual, the prophet of the instincts meets the last great representative of the mind as creator. Someone who is so much an intellectual that he is fully aware of the dangers of the temptations his own type is subject to. The chief of these is the loss of contact with life as it is lived, of being trapped under a belljar with no means of escape from the unproductive and egotistic hold of the intellect. Philip Quarles, the novelist in *Point Counter Point,* and Anthony, the hero of *Eyeless in Gaza,* are people with such problems. Belljar Man tries to break out, wears a false beard in order to deny his own identity, attempts to begin a proper "life", but is incapable of doing so. This is the theme of *Antic Hay.*

Around these more or less autobiographical heroes the entire intellectual zoo of the age is gathered. Their forms are drawn with terrifying Swiftian irony: intellectual snobs, conceited fools, the old with their *idées fixes,* lecherous pseudo-mystics, women who cultivate their souls, petty bourgeois folk lost in the bohemian underworld, and the vast unhappy hordes that jostle round these monuments of science and culture as supporters, admirers, pseudo-artists, or regular audience.

In his first novels (*Chrome Yellow*, 1921, *Those Barren Leaves,* 1925, *Antic Hay, Point Counter Point,* 1928 and novellas (*The Gioconda Smile, Brief Candles,* etc.) he wanted no more than to make inventory of these characters, to photograph them on their weekends as they dined in some bohemian pub, while ordering his own playful thoughts. Perhaps it is this high insignificance that makes Huxley's early writings so attractive. He has nothing to say to the world. Nor does he give himself over to the world. He accepts his role as a hermetic writer who is "incapable of depicting life". Because, in order to depict life in a realistic manner, we have to take stupidity and vulgarity seriously, even to go some way to becoming stupid and vulgar ourselves.

* Antal Szerb: *A világirodalom története.* Vol. 3, Budapest, Révai, 1941, pp. 303–307.

His other great appeal lies in his wonderful style. He is the greatest master of modern English prose, possibly the wittiest writer in contemporary literature. His wit too is as reserved and refined as his entire creative conduct. He is wholly without passion, not a muscle moves on his face, he never betrays what he feels about his characters. He avoids jokes and punch lines: his best one-liners are delivered for him by his characters. His wit is expressed through predicaments, in the coincidence of character and situation, in the sudden startling illumination of character.

His early attitude made him the most outstanding exponent of traits that best represented the twenties, traits which, without being frivolous ourselves, we might say, added up to The New Frivolity. (In France the same attitude was articulated by Giraudoux and Morand.) The elite of the twenties feared seriousness: the Great War, they felt, was caused by seriousness. They enjoyed the brief moment of peace following the apocalyptic atmosphere of the immediate end-of-war years, when Europe had all but recovered and when, if you didn't listen too carefully, you could console yourself with the illusion that now, in the age of Briand and Stresemann, there would be peace on earth. People took a quick look round and decided that a lot of nice things remained: Italy, women, science, painting, the art of refined speech, and the superior heights of irony. And indeed, if we confine our gaze to the playful surfaces, we need not take note of the "alarming blind depths" beneath them. This is how superficiality passed itself off as worldly wisdom, the modern form of stoicism. The attitude was not entirely without its moral aspect: it was an unspoken protest against vainglorious-ness, against loud and solemn lies, against false puffed-up notions of duty which only served to set people against each other. It is better to be superficial than evil, they said.

But you couldn't maintain such a position for long. The illusion of Briand-Stresemannism was soon dispelled and the chief issue for Thirties Man was how best to prepare for the war to come. The first response of Huxley, the rationalist, is terror that the world of pure intellect should once more be wrecked by the instinctive forces of destruction, but then he begins to feel a new unfamiliar sense of responsibility and becomes a disseminator of ideas, like most great English writers who wrote because they wanted to broadcast their ideas about politics and society.

The transition is represented by Huxley's amusing Utopian novel, *Brave New World.* In fact, like the phalanster scene in Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man,* it presents an Anti-Utopia or Dystopia, because it shows us not how good but how terrible the future state would be. It shows us the implicit direction of the march of all-conquering technology, what happens when the one is made subservient to the many or when happiness is held to be the supreme human value, and where the tendencies of our period—as characterized in Ortega y Gasset's phrase as "The Revolt of the Masses"—is leading us.

His message to the world is summarized in *Ends and Means* (1937). The book deals with the ultimate goal of mankind and the means required to reach it. He seeks to discover what it is that the great religious teachers and sages teach us.

The wisest minds have always proclaimed that the supreme wisdom lay in submission, in the relinquishing of wealth, of delight, of power, of every selfish instinct. In the withdrawal into an inner sanctum where fate can no longer touch us. Modern civilization has entirely forgotten this lesson: our economic system, our politics, our individual lives are all founded on cynically self-confessed greed and lust for power. Humankind is not naturally good as the Enlightenment and the Romantic Period assumed it was: the anthropological studies that Huxley was so well acquainted with demonstrated that people were just like animals, aggressive from the start, ruthless by nature, and if civilization forced them to suppress their ruthlessness, then individual aggression would seek outlets in the community: on a local scale this might be through football matches or bull-fights, but the general instinct could only be properly satisfied by mutual hatred and war. Anyone who surveys the whole of history will see no sign of progress. Civilized man is not a whit less aggressive that his caveman ancestor, it was only the forms that changed. "And yet we must try, again and again." However hopeless the struggle, we must strive toward some future Golden Age. Man must educate himself first, rid himself of hatred, abide ill-treatment without batting an eyelid and realize the words of the One who preached, "Resist not Evil". Having achieved this, people should organize themselves into groups of five to ten individuals and support each other.

It was these ideas he explored in *Eyeless in Gaza*. Its hero is a cold intellectual who has no real relationship with anything or anyone, who because of the world situation, because he is violently gripped by love and is under the spell of some miracle worker, finds a purpose in life through the proclamation of the doctrine of non-resistance: in the last scene we see him preparing for a public meeting, knowing he will be assaulted, practising the principle of non-retaliation.

His last novel, *After Many a Summer,* returns in some ways to the ideas of *Brave New World* and deals with the soul-destroying effects of mechanical civilization.

Huxley's later writings are infinitely sad. They weigh heavily upon us even by virtue of their tone which is permeated by despair and an utter lack of confidence in the future. It is depressing too that the wisest novelist of the age could find no better principle than Gandhi's passive, late-Hindu doctrine of non-resistance. In the Spenglerian system doctrines propounding inner detachment, such as Stoicism and Buddhism, some particular diet, the raising of physical lifestyle onto a moral plane—vegetarianism and other similar notions, for instance—ideas that Huxley embraced, appear at the exhausted end of a civilization, in its final phase. It is possible that Huxley was ahead of his time in arriving at the railway terminus of western culture. ❧

Gábor Halász

Preface to The Treasury of English Literature

(1943)*

We are reminded of those flowers that spring, bud and blow before our very eyes in short films. This is the way the progress of literature strikes us as reflected in the leaves of an anthology, the demonstration a little artificial in its methods perhaps but edifying all the same, the movement rapid from seedtime through to flowering. We watch it assume its characteristic shapes, note how it selects some specific form only to abandon it through sheer boredom a few pages later, see it obey the dictates of passing fashions and ideologies while jealously maintaining one or two essential traits, and observe it learning from other literatures even as it takes on its final unique identity. We register all its whims, how one era favours drama while another prefers lyrical poetry or the novel, how old popular forms disappear for long periods. We feel successive waves pass over us, the strong tidal flood of talent that appears at certain intervals alternating with unruffled, predictable stretches of flat water. We can follow the emergence of latent ideologies and the decline of old ones, the gradual growth of a style, its absolute dominance and its first failures. We observe the mysterious laws by which it functions, how the balance between instinct and intellect, authority and liberty, form-making and form-breaking alters over time. Within a few pages the taste for unfettered decorativeness yields to pious asceticism, puritanism becomes a laughing stock; religious faith gains new life or withers away, people prefer to laugh or to cry: we, at our ease meanwhile, leaf through the dramatic scenes of centuries. We could end up thoroughly sceptical about these powerful countercurrents did we not feel their desire and energy, sensing each new enthusiasm and the way the notion of eternal beauty haunts them all. Now and then masterworks serve as compensation for paths long abandoned.

English literature is particularly rich in revivals. The mystical flame of inspired medieval Catholicism dies only to flicker into life again in the nostalgic desires of the late nineteenth century. The pragmatic philosophers who turn experience into law are always complemented by one or two poets whose eyes, in a fine

* Gábor Halász: "Az angol irodalom kincsesháza elé" in: *Tiltakozó nemzedék* (A Protesting Generation), Budapest, Magvető, 1981, pp. 507–514

frenzy rolling, glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven and give airy nothing an earthly habitation and a name. The energetic Elizabethans, so hungry for money, blood and sway, so greedily expansive, are replaced by an introverted generation following conventional virtues just as the rigours of puritanism are succeeded by the excesses of the restoration, only so that, with the passing of centuries, the two battalions might once again confront each other in Georgian, and in Victorian costume. Baroque enthusiasm and tension settle down at the beginning of the eighteenth century only so that they might vex the poets of our own day. Realism survives the cult of abstract beauty, persists through the Renaissance, gains strength in the Age of Reason, and eventually triumphs only to be challenged by the aestheticism of another cult of beauty. Shakespeare is truly reborn in the work of the Romantics, so that he might return and conquer ever since in newer forms, newer interpretations. The sweetness of Spenser returns in Keats, the high-spirits of Fielding reappear in Dickens; every century has seen a new edition of Bacon with his pragmatic precepts. Hypocrisy raises its head from time to time, alternating with self-critical periods, Little Englandism is succeeded by the imperialist dream: there has never been a literature more exotic and more insular, more commonsense and more poetical, more mature and more juvenile or unfinished.

There was never a classical era, as the term is understood in France. The Elizabethan age burned with the fevers of puberty: adolescents of titanic dimensions stormed heaven with one masterpiece after another, the whole country could barely contain itself, the notion of adventure established itself as part of the instinctive godhead. Beneath their veneer of respectability and high-seriousness the Victorians trembled with a sense of undischarged debt, with anxiety and terrible inner schisms. Their Romanticism was closer to its source than their Classicism was. Keats was more Greek than Poe, here the Racinean model went unheeded. The greatest of them fell short of perfection; their enormous achievements were crowned by enormous defects: the most abject idolizers of form failed to get form quite right, the language, even in the hands of true artists, was never quite mature. The grotesque and the poetical prospered equally in this rich eternal mulch, their orchestration contained both the harsh trumpet and the emollient flute. Clowns cavorted, fairies sang. The poet was not afraid to adapt the most colloquial of voices but was capable of the most abstract; the dramatist was farcical one minute and funereal the next; the novelist could chatter and still engage in sombre discourse. Poets wrote nonsense verses with a straight face, essayists occupied themselves with trivialities; yet enormous visionary poems appeared and brilliant perceptions flooded from the pens of thinkers.

The greatest English poetry is a marvellous tapestry of visions and images. From its very beginnings Anglo Saxon poetry is characterized by the range of its metaphors. From Langland's medieval dream-vision through the works of Milton and the Romantics, the art of the seer was kept alive, though it required

ever more artificial ways of keeping it fresh. The difference between Langland's vision and Coleridge's opium dream is merely a matter of nervous stimulation: the vision itself is equally bold, equally modern; Blake's extraordinary imagery was inspired by Milton: the difference in styles is insignificant compared to the eternal urgency of seeing and making see. Milton's courage helped us envisage creation; he populated earth, sea and air with seething images of life and showed us angels falling dizzy and headlong through space; vast frescoes were generated by his almighty words. Dramatists shook earth and heaven with their outpourings in order to provide a fitting arena for the passions, the characters of even comic writers such as Ben Jonson let loose a torrent of metaphors and similes when they speak, mobilizing whole legions of images to animate their burlesques. Their rich circumlocutions entirely lack the dry sting of Molière's repartee; everyone is an orator of Falstaffian proportions, full of low-wit or high-sentence. Shakespeare's tirades and Donne's verse work at the limits of swaggering rhetoric, replete with ingenious comparisons, their images crawling with detail; the complex visions of Browning and Swinburne will differ from theirs only in external form not essence. After Shelley's clouds of immaterial imagery the Preraphaelites' language seems the almost tangible product of arts and crafts decorativeness, but there is the same hallucinatory quality in both. Comparing certain passages of Jonson's *Volpone* with some of Wilde's *Herodias* and putting aside the immeasurable differences of time and taste, we sense their shared passion for displaying vast swathes of precious, multi-patterned silk, their mutual desire to strew words about as if they were dispensing jewels.

Naturally, the scenery too glows with miraculous colours: their poetry is a feast for the eyes. The blue Italian sky, the wild ocean, the sparkling Swiss snows haunt them in their dreams of flight: the foggy shores, lakes and hills of home soothe their restlessness; they embark on voyages with Childe Harold, they hide with Ossian among the valleys. Milton shows us the underworld, Blake opens up the deserts of nightmare, Wordsworth and Tennyson resonate with the melancholy of familiar landscapes; the near and the distant, that which might be and that which never was are equally soaked through with atavistic experience, with the Celtic adoration of trees, stones, hills and waters, with the almost animalistic closeness of nature that even today remains unbroken and full of mystical power in Lawrence's poetic prose. Progress and technology, those things they swore by, did no harm to their dreams: no more than the smoke of factories their silky lawns. During the last century, at the very height of the industrial revolution, there flourished the most fairy-tale kind of romanticism: poets at the centre of an immense empire were captivated by images of frail beauty.

The poets' unworldliness was more than balanced by the realism of the novelists. Even during the Renaissance with its courtly masques, their predecessors, the pamphleteers, were preoccupied by what lay directly before them, the cares, obsessions and delights of city life as it effected both the poor and the bour-

geoisie. Diarists in the seventeenth century dedicate themselves to recording everyday life; in the next century it is the journalists who populate their articles with memorable characters. From here it is one short step to the creation of convoluted plots and personalities in the novel. This realism resembles poetry in that it is applied to matters both far off and close at hand: there are those who seek adventures on the high seas, on distant shores: shipwreck and travel retain their fascination over centuries. Heroes wander into inns, down roads, through urban alleys, are entertained on country estates, find their devotion put to various tests, overcome their enemies and have their own steadfastness rewarded. The novel serves as a catalogue of vices and a school of virtues at least in its English manifestations; it shows the struggle of the pure-hearted with the dark treacherous forces of life. However perilous the world may be it is full of amusement, and, above all, it swarms with fascinating people: no one will ever meet as many as the hero of an English novel does on his complicated adventures! The inn at Canterbury where an entire company of pilgrims meet together by chance provides the model: such meetings recur on countless occasions. The English novel, unlike the French or the Russian, is unfamiliar with the story of the soul in isolation; its characters are chiefly social creatures, surrounded by a gaggle of families, friends, acquaintances and strangers. Even Robinson Crusoe has company, he is so preoccupied by various domestic arrangements. The miser comprises a multitude: the English like their privacy but prefer it in the confines of the crowded club drawing room.

It is rare for an English writer to attempt a full, in-the-round depiction of voyages to the extreme tropics of the soul. If Balzac and Flaubert are painters, Dickens and Thackeray are caricaturists, sketching in unforgettable outline, presenting us time and again with a gesture here, a speech there, each repetition rendering a larger than life existence. Dickens's style has sometimes been explained by reference to the tradition of wandering comedians, and it is true, there is something in him, as in his rather more naive predecessors and his more carefully refined descendants, of the puppeteer or the Commedia dell'Arte in that his characters appear improvized: they leap into being only to deliver some witty riposte or pull a wry face, the rest of the time they are supernumeraries, motley foot-soldiers. Their patchwork garments and endless jostling lend colour and mood to the novel, they point up the illusion of po-faced reality and supply their own community of human warmth.

Even when talking of the tragedy of the individual soul, as in the works of Emily Brontë or Thomas Hardy, it is the embodying of a single twisted passion or dumb failed ambition that takes the eye, its sharp contrasts obviating all intervening tones in the desire to pitch up the sense of tension or give us a premonition of eventual doom. Amusers and dispiriters have equal recourse to ancient well-worn devices: they amuse us with the follies of chance and horrify us with the fickleness of blind fate. The true heroes of the English novel—whether this

be comic or tragic—are always circumstances, those unforeseen twists and turns of fortune, the ambuscades of destiny. The most characteristic English ordeal is to be tempest-tossed and yet survive. The novel's ups and downs reveal the miraculous staying power of the type.

The type speaks to us, directly, without poetic disguise, in the centuries-old tradition of the English essay. This does not moralize in the strict sense of the word, but arranges its ideas around tiny details, the peculiarities of life. One English anthology presents its largest selection under the heading: "dreams, fancies, curiosities" and its smallest under the heading: "wisdom". And, indeed, it would be hard to include Thomas Browne's hyperactive, baroque language and arguments, Addison and Steele's Enlightenment raillery and Lamb's romantic playfulness under any other heading but "curiosities". But when dealing with the English we must take the most extreme notions as seriously as we take Swift's Irish panacea, the *Modest Proposal:* under the apparently nonsensical grotesquerie there lurks a highly comprehensible critique, an intellectual predisposition that not only bears but actively seeks self-criticism. They are as happy to point out their national vices as others are their virtues: criticism enjoys unlimited freedom even in the face of public authority to the extent that it brags of its liberties. Hume himself expresses astonishment at the freedom of the press, wondering how it was possible to achieve it in such perfect form when all commonsense was against it and no power can tolerate its excesses. Leader and led engage in a war of words, one impressing with the vehemence of its onslaught, the other with the patience it shows in its own defence, each respecting the role of the other. Those famous letters of Junius in which he hectors and lectures the king are imaginable only in a country where the institution of monarchy is held in religious awe. The person is nothing, the office is everything: both critic and criticized agree on this.

Certain features of this cult of self-knowledge are handed down from generation to generation in almost dogmatic fashion. Pragmatism above all. Bacon constructs his philosophy, Burke a political theory out of the antipathy to abstruse ideas. Matthew Arnold uses it as a critical yardstick. Hatred of hypocrisy follows: Samuel Butler rails as furiously against the "cant" of the seventeenth century puritans, as Byron does against the vulgar bourgois of his time or Galsworthy the polite society of our own. And so it goes with arrogance, with snobbism, with money-grubbing: all provide fertile themes for successive generations of satirists.

The tradition of self-knowledge determines not only the values but the very style of didactic prose. The French essay, even in its most dogmatic form, contains an element of self-portrait; the English, for all its eccentricity and idiosyncratic flavour, always balances this with the impersonal. Not even the most intimate of essays deal with the person of the author, at most they treat of his hobbies. They are rarely confessional, preferring to disseminate opinion, they find

self-revelation alien but are nevertheless outspoken; they avoid the rhapsodic but are clearly fired by their convictions. Even the voices of those who chatter are darkened by something deeper: the easy pose of the dandy wears a lead lining. De Quincey constructs a tract from capricious material, Wilde erects a theory of art based on ideas of paradox; both of them, indeed all the "strange" crew, employ the entire arsenal of style to defend their essential perceptions. And when pathos takes the stage, as in Burke and Macaulay, its momentum is unstoppable; arguments and images crowd on each other's heels with an unparalleled force and clarity; one enormous breath carries those complex clauses forward towards their target. They never degenerate into mere rant: you can trust every part of them, they are compounded of firm, noble material. Miraculously enough, this feeling of confidence does not desert us in the twists and turns of courtly prose or baroque circumlocution. The contemplative voice of every period has a vaguely Victorian tone: serious, authoritative. The artificial tropes of Donne's sermons refer to the age; their high moral intent is timelessly English.

This feeling of confidence has drawn foreigners too to its literature. Enchanted by Shakespeare and the great poets, the foreign reader was grateful for the long burning fevers of Shakespeare's genius, for the Byronic sense of destiny, for Wilde's intoxicating notion of beauty, for the romantics' purest ecstasy, but there was something about the entire literature which demanded his attention and commanded his loyalty; he trusted it as he trusted English cloth and knew he could only benefit from it. The ethical values of the Enlightenment, the economic values of liberalism and the political values of the Victorians were conveyed to the continent by enthusiastic intermediaries like essential industrial products, the preconditions of civilization. People read English authors not just because they wanted to be amused but because they felt they had to; a visit to England was not merely an excursion but an education. In the Renaissance and the Baroque period it was the English that learned from the continent, but from Locke onwards the balance of debt shifted; the island-nation's list of pupils was headed by no less a man than that prince among writers, Voltaire. In the nineteenth century it was European pilgrims that gathered at the Canterbury hostelry.

Naturally Hungarians too were to be found among them. Bessenyei followed Voltaire, his hero, to England in spirit, and set his course by Pope; Kazinczy grew merry on Sterne's comic invention and wept to the delicate sensibility of Young. The reform generation hastened to take lessons from Macaulay, and faithfully broadcast his message. The romantics waxed wroth on Shakespeare and grew bold on Byron; the mid-century realists nurtured their self-confidence on the English novelists. Vörösmarty, Petőfi and Arany tried their teeth on Shakespeare's immortal dramas; the cohort of translators headed by Károly Szász absorbed the humble scholarly spirit. Popular feeling sought its inspiration in Burns; the longing for liberty found it in the Irish poet, Moore. The *fin-de-siècle* woke from Byronism to conquer Byron himself in the brilliant transla-

tions of Emil Ábrányi, confirmed the universality of Burns through the splendid mediation of József Lévay, garnered the rich crop of the novelists, paid due attention to the political and economic masters, paid due homage to contemporary science through Darwin and Spencer, neglecting only the poetry of the period. That discovery awaited a new crop of artists, the *Nyugat* generation.

These revived the practice of Shakespeare translation, explored the deeper lyrical reaches of Milton, brought to a perfect musical pitch the ethereal voices of Shelley and Keats, presented the major Victorians, Tennyson and Swinburne, in the full pomp of their golden maturity and caught the languid autumnal light of the great decadent, Wilde. As if independent in spirit and content, these foreign poems were reborn in the hands of Babits, Kosztolányi and Árpád Tóth, who admired them for what they were, for their thousand miraculous shades of tone, for the sparkling firework display of their metaphors, and their never quite attainable beauty. And this was why their taste remained indifferent to the more intellectually abstruse, more tortuously wrought verse of other periods that required other qualities. The hidden treasures of the baroque had to wait for Lőrinc Szabó and his younger contemporaries to bring them to notice.

Our selections are intended to highlight two processes: the development of the literature received, its changes of style, its vanishing and recurring motifs, its favourite subjects and outstanding practitioners and their various states of consciousness; and, at the same time, to demonstrate the nature of their reception and show how Hungarian taste reacted to the influences exerted on it. Where the energy of the text allowed we have reproduced older translations, contemporary experiments; in other words this anthology is not just a collection of original works but a survey of Hungarian translation. Rather than provide lexicographical entries, our short notes are intended to provide a commentary on overall developments, like subtitles to a wonderful, exciting, fast moving film.

It was the example of Mihály Babits's history of literature and his launching upon a reader of world literature that emboldened us, providing us with an exemplary model. Of course, his programme was different from ours. He was concerned with an alternative history: he wanted to complement his own major work with his experience of style in a unified account, in which the quotations served primarily as illustration. He was an artist speaking of the secrets of his studio, of the ever new devices of his ancient fellow practititoners. The critic cannot adopt his method: he can only be infected by his enthusiasm and observe the hidden inner currents of literature. ❧

Max Gutmann

Speaking Hungarian

This tattered robe embarrasses my wife.
"My morning peep show's here," she smiles. Her joke
exaggerates, but maybe not by much:
the rips, the cloth itself worn sheer in places,
the whole thing sagging open as the belt
slips down. She has a point, but, like a child,
I cling to my familiar, cosy favourite.

That's how it is to speak Hungarian:
a shabby suit of clothes worn comfortable.
I circle round the holes in my vocabulary,
my accent and blithe errors freely showing
these aren't my best clothes, asking for the same
sort of indulgence one is given by
a neighbour who drops over unannounced.

The childishness that tags along, at times
annoys, a baby brother making me
a fool in front of girls; more often though,
this soft, loose language sits on me more nicely
than my smooth, native English, which does flatter
my subtleties but feels, here, overdressing,
as if I'm always glancing in a mirror.

Of course, I ought to speak Hungarian better,
use more words, tighten up my flabby grammar,
and teach my vowels to sit up straight—and will,
just as I'll someday buy another robe;
its even weight will hold more of my warmth
and please my wife, but the best thing about it,
it sometimes will remind me of this old one.

Max Gutmann
is an American with Hungarian roots, now living in Budapest.
His verse has appeared most recently in The Lyric, LIGHT Quarterly *and* Tundra.

Katalin Raỳman

Circles of Hell

According to his death certificate, my father-in-law, Dr Miklós B., professor and senior consultant at the White Cross Hospital, was shot dead by two communist guards on the Danube embankment in Pest on July 6, 1919. His son, also Miklós, who also became a doctor (and my husband in 1943), was eleven years old at the time. He had loved his father very much, and would never talk about his death. I had to rely on all sorts of gossip. A mutual acquaintance had this to say about what had happened: "That mad professor, he went down to the Danube in a good winter coat, so they shot him." Of course, this is not how it happened, people don't go around in winter coats in July. A second version was that Dr B. was on his way to visit a patient in Buda via the Chain Bridge, when those Danube Flottilla monitors arrived on the river to bombard the Soviet House, the then headquarters of the Communist Party; Dr B. wanted to let the boats know that he was not on the bridge as an armed belligerent and took out a white handkerchief to wave to them. The communist guards took this as a counter-revolutionary provocation, dragged Dr B. off the bridge, shot him, and threw his body into the Danube. The third variant was presented by the guards themselves before the tribunal when they were arrested after the fall of the Soviet Republic: a man was walking along the street towards the Party headquarters, they called on him to stop, he broke into a run, so they shot him. That, I couldn't believe. No way. A war veteran will not break into a run when a gun is trained on him. Dr Miklós B. had spent several years in the fighting line as senior surgeon of a field hospital, his war diaries have even been published. (They included the story of the Russians who, in my father-in-law's absence, occupied the dressing station filled with the sick and wounded.

Katalin Raỳman
was Deputy Editor of Nagyvilág, *a journal which publishes foreign literature in translation, after a long career as a teacher of French and German, and working in radio and publishing. She has translated works by Simone de Beauvoir, Heinrich Böll, Marguerite Duras, Eugène Ionesco, Thomas Mann, Nathalie Sarraute, Jorge Semprun, and Marguerite Yourcenar.*

When my father-in-law returned and saw what was happening, he jumped on his horse, drew his sword, and sent the Russian soldiers packing. A few tired infantrymen, no doubt, who were taken by surprise at the unexpected apparition of a horsed St George with sword in hand. In any event, it must have been quite a scene, and true, too. Dr B. did not exaggerate, and he did not prevaricate, at most he tended to be "a bit exuberant", as my husband said with condoning love.)

Only some considerable time later, many years later did I hear a family version of the story, which explained almost everything. Dr B.'s marriage was not harmonious, and on that day a more serious dispute than any before broke out between himself and his wife, a loud altercation, in the course of which he grabbed whatever money was on hand, shoving it into his pocket, and stormed off. The family was living on the former Eskü tér, somewhere near the Mátyás Cellar restaurant. Dr B. rushed along the Danube embankment, perhaps meaning to stay the night in a hotel. In his agitated state he probably did not hear the guards' shouts, who rightly thought that the man, rushing along, was behaving suspiciously. He most probably did not "break into a run" when they called to him, but was in a great hurry to begin with. It was the lawyer friends of the family who later gave the story a political colouring.

The story has another interesting aspect as well, one I heard from the poet István Vas at a much later date. For some reason, during the last days of the Soviet Republic, the philosopher György Lukács was put in charge of security at the Soviet House. Lukács issued an order that anyone approaching Party headquarters with aggressive intent should be shot on the spot. The two guards reported what happened to Dr B.; after all, they knew his name, because they had searched him. My father-in-law and György Lukács belonged to the same social class, the well-to-do *haute bourgeoisie* of Budapest, and they knew each other. According to Vas, Lukács was saddened by Dr B.'s death. "I did not issue that order," he said, "so as to have the doctors of Pest shot."

Something else happened as well, but this time it happened to me. In 1944 I worked with a Social Democrat working man by the name of Kálmán Matkovics, who devoted all his time and energy to saving the persecuted. I met him in Balázs Lengyel's home. (Lengyel was a literary critic, later editor of an important journal and the husband of Ágnes Nemes Nagy, the poet. The Lengyel family had transformed their large apartment on the Belgrád Embankment into a hideout.) There they pampered an absent-minded English art historian who was wandering around the Acropolis when he realized that the Germans had occupied Greece, and managed to get as far as Budapest somehow, where with the help of the Lengyel family he hid out until the Russians came. The bathroom was the domain of Balázs's twin sister Piroska, an industrial chemist, who was able to remove any kind of ink from paper without trace, and in this way produced an abundance of documents for the benefit of those in hiding. Kálmán Matkovics, whose name deserves recording, would accept just enough payment to allow

him to survive. He was engaged to a woman with a slight limp. The fact that Kálmán chose a woman with a slight physical defect for his mate and the fact that he devoted his life to helping those in trouble was somehow connected in his soul, as the aura of love for his fellows, which radiated around him, and which made people feel as if he had just stepped out of the Holy Writ.

One day in November, 1944, Kálmán Matkovics went to see my husband in the hospital, saying that a working man's family had to leave their home urgently, but they had no money. My husband pressed some notes in his hand, and a couple of hours later Kálmán returned with a look of astonishment on his face. Apparently, he had given the money to the family, telling them who it was from. "Dr Miklós B.?" one of them exclaimed, "That's the same name. He must be the son of the doctor we shot on the Danube bank!" Then they showed Kálmán Matkovics Professor B's silver fob watch. After twenty-one years, they still had it. But the point is that this working class family, who had a communist past in which the shooting of Dr Miklós B. played a major role, had to flee their home now that the Arrow Cross had taken over. For a moment my husband stood mute, wrestling with his anger, then turned on Kálmán saying, "I did not give you permission to tell who the money came from." And with that he stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

The Regent, Miklós Horthy, gathered those who had fought the communists into an anti-communist fraternity and awarded them the National Defence Cross. Since my father-in-law had been shot by the communists, he was also awarded the Cross, posthumously, and the right to wear it was passed on to his son. This fraternity was represented at the Rókus Hospital by the gyneacologist Imre Király. He was not employed by the hospital, but he was associated with it, keeping contact with its gyneacology and maternity wards for the sake of his own patients. After the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, the anti-communist fraternity quickly became polarized: some of its members sided with the Germans, others against them. By winter the situation had come to a head. Anyone known to be against the Germans was forced into hiding, and my husband admitted some of those needing a hide-out to his ward. Imre Király, however, who came to the hospital regularly, soon found out about these goings on, and reported my husband at the 14th District Arrow Cross headquarters, for hiding communists and Jews. The typist at Arrow Cross headquarters told us who had denounced my husband.

In November, 1944, I was staying in my husband's night-duty room at the Rókus Hospital; because of the precarious political situation and the air raids it did not make sense for me to stay home alone. I was sure that my husband, because of the help he had given to many of the persecuted, would not survive the Arrow Cross regime, and neither would I. On Katalin Day, my name day, on the 25th of November, I received a bunch of flowers from him. I put them in a vase,

and they promptly withered. I watched them sadly. The vision of those withered flowers as it were confirmed my dark forebodings.

Miklós was often on night duty, and being the second in charge of the ward, people would come knocking on his door anyway. At such times I would start to pray. On the evening of November 28, he stretched out on the couch and turned on the BBC. Somebody knocked and, as usual, I started: "Our Father, Which art in Heaven..." I went to the door and opened it. The corridor was dark because of the air raids, there was no light except in the rooms. Then one of the boys from casualty came in out of the dark, followed by two armed Arrow Cross men with armbands. They made us stand facing the wall on which hung a kelim rug from the South Sea Islands, with the god of domestic hearths on it. It made me think that this god was not doing a very good job. One of the Arrow Cross men trained his gun on us, the other took a suitcase from the wardrobe, with several kilos of walnuts clattering in it. I had bought them bit by bit, thinking of the siege. ("They'll do, once we're not even able to cook, they're nutritious, and they won't go bad.") "What're you, squirrels?" one of the Arrow Cross asked, then swept the pharmaceutical brochures and patients' records onto the walnuts along with the mountain of papers on my husband's desk. The young man, from casualty, wore an Árpád-striped armband, and the other two called him "brother". He stood around looking uncomfortable; he must have felt sorry for us and was surely unaware of the connection between his armband and what was happening to "Mr Doctor" and his wife. When he heard the knock at the door, Miklós had turned down the volume on the radio. The young man, embarrassed by the search, kept fumbling with the knobs on the radio, and suddenly the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth came through crystal clear—the BBC signal. (At times like this I felt as if I was in some overly theatrical film or play.)

Needless to say, the London signal did not improve the situation any; it was, after all, prohibited to listen to "enemy broadcasts". Later we had to sign a statement at the local Arrow Cross headquarters to the effect that "we were arrested for listening to the English radio, but were immediately released." I was hesitant to sign it at first. Why should I sign it when I didn't really know if they were going to release us? But then I thought that if I don't sign, they will certainly not release us. (What I should have liked to know was why the Arrow Cross needed to cover themselves with such a statement and against whom?)

Nobody bothered to turn off the radio, not even when we left the room, and when I returned four days later—on my own--the dial display was still lit up, though the sound was blurred and unintelligible. I was later told that the staff would go up to listen at the locked door of our room. The Arrow Cross men had taken the key, and no one dared order that the lock be broken open. They tried to make out the words coming from the radio, some thought our corpses were lying there in the room.

Later someone made the connection between the casualty chap's Árpád-stripe armband and the fact that it was he who led the Arrow Cross men to my husband's room. They accused him of denouncing us, which wasn't true. The truth is that he happened to be on duty that night, and the porter asked him to take the Arrow Cross men to my husband's room because they wouldn't have found their way in the dark, not to mention the fact that it was against the rules to have outsiders wander around unaccompanied. Of course, letting armed men enter the hospital was an even greater breach of regulations, it was the porter's duty to prevent this, but there wasn't much he could have done against armed men unless he wanted to die a hero's death.

In 1945 both the young man and the porter were put on trial. As far as I know, the porter got off scot free. His lawyer argued that "absence of heroism is not in itself a crime", and he was right. I don't know what the boy was accused of, because I was sitting out in the hall with the other witnesses and so did not hear what was being said inside. When I was called, I told them that it wasn't the boy who had denounced my husband; I even said that it was my impression that he felt sorry for us. When the hearing was in recess, the public prosecutor looked for me in the corridor and reminded me that my husband had been killed and I had been seriously assaulted. He was very stern with me ("I expected your evidence to be tough") so I was reduced to mumbling something to the effect that I can't very well say something I don't mean, and that people should only be punished for what they had done.

When we came out of the hospital we were forced into the back seat of the car, one Arrow Cross man was driving, the other turned around and held a gun on us. "Is it loaded?" the man at the wheel asked, I think to scare us. They took us to the 14th District's Arrow Cross headquarters on the corner of Thököly út and Stefánia út, down into the basement. There was a small greengrocer's shop near the cellar window, up on street level. Every morning and every evening we heard the greengrocer pull up or let down the shutters. God, how close yet how far the outside world appeared, the world in which people shopped, the greengrocer pulled down the shutters, went home, ate his dinner, and went to bed! In 1945, I once went there to have a look at the building. It was a café (in 1944 the Arrow Cross had settled into the office premises and the basement), there was music, American soldiers were dancing on the terrace, and they were still selling vegetables in the small shop, the sound of whose shutter still rang in my ears.

The building on Thököly út was the headquarters of the 14th District Arrow Cross. They kept their prisoners in the basement, at night they got drunk and took the prisoners to the rooms upstairs. During the day, one of the rooms was used for administrative purposes; the adjacent room they called the interroga-

tion room. Their actions were anything but systematic. In different stages of drunkenness different people act in different ways. At a given moment there's no knowing what they will do. There was no consensus about me since I was not mentioned in the denunciation. One was more hostile, the other less so. Though I was kept downstairs with the other prisoners, from time to time one or the other of them would feel sorry for me and take me up to the office on the ground floor. November 28 to December 2, I spent standing around in various rooms of the building. Once I saw a thin, poorly dressed man—I took him to be a working man—he had joined the Arrow Cross party because he got a pair of shoes for his small son. I also saw a teacher with his wife, scared half to death and pale as a ghost; God only knows what peril prompted them to ask to be admitted to the party. When they signed the enrollment form, their hands were trembling.

Down in the basement, there was a star-shaped mark on the wall. "The brains of a Jew," the Arrow Cross men said. "This is where we shot him in the head." Once we heard whining and repeated thuds from the staircase. "An old woman groaning," I thought, "and they're rolling furniture down the stairs." But it was not an old woman, it was a middle-aged man, and they weren't rolling furniture down the stairs, they were beating the man's skull with a riffle butt. When he was brought down to the basement, his head was covered in blood. "Where am I?" he asked. "What's the time?" And then, "This is Hell." We answered his questions and sat him down on a chair. But he just kept repeating, "Where am I? What's the time? This is Hell."

One morning a young man brought a very young Jewish girl of about fifteen or sixteen down to the basement. I had not seen him before and have not seen him since. It seemed she only needed a room for the night. The girl sobbed, indignant and in despair. The man stayed on the threshold for a while, looking at the girl. Triumph and mockery alternated in his countenance, and yet there was something else, too, as if he were feeling sorry for her. Or was it sympathy? I don't know. Then he left.

She was a nubile, plump little girl with strikingly full breasts. She stood in the middle of the basement, sobbing to break your heart, her head lowered and covered with her hand, no, not with her hand, with her lower arm. I would have liked to do something for her, I called to her, and touched her arm. She didn't look up, just continued to sob, and she warded off my hand with her arm. It was not a rough gesture, but it was assertive. It was clear from her gesture that she knew I wanted to help, but she'd have none of it. She did not wish to be consoled.

They led us into the office first and dumped the contents of the suitcase out on the desk. For a while they rummaged through the papers, then swept them on the floor. I was horrified when I realized that we were walking on sheets of paper we had used to try out counterfeit stamps. The Arrow Cross people didn't

look on the floor, they were more interested in the names of the "sick" people my husband had admitted to his ward.

One "brother" took and searched my handbag. Because of the frequent demands to inspect papers, I had the documents with me to prove my racial descent. "I see you're pure Aryan." "Yes," I said, "but as you can see in his papers, my husband is only a quarter Jew." "Scribbles make no difference to us," the man said, "we will decide who is a Jew and who is not."

The District leader was called László Szelepcsényi. He was standing in the middle of the room when the two of us were ushered into the "office", and he crooked his finger at my husband like a facetious teacher at a naughty schoolboy, all the while with a frightening and sneering smile. He acted like a very bad actor overplaying the sadist. An evil man is naturally and unconsciously evil, as the river flows, as the rain falls. Why should he play a role other than himself? No director would allow anyone, on stage or on the screen, to portray evil so ridiculously, so cheaply.

László Szelepcsényi was a big, heavily built man, and he slammed his fist into Miklós's face, who reeled and fell against a typewriter. He had ulcers and was very thin at the time. When he got to his feet, Szelepcsényi took aim and punched him again with such force that Miklós was sent clear into the adjacent room, where he fell flat on the floor. Somebody closed the door. "The interrogation room," the second in command said jovially. "The Jews have kicked everything apart during interrogations, the coat hangers and stove door included."

Szelepcsényi wanted my husband to give him the names of all those Jews and communists who were patients in his ward. His yelling could be heard from next door. "The names! I want the names!" A hit, a crash. "Get up!" A hit, a crash. Not once did I hear Miklós's voice.

Szelepcsényi came back from the interrogation room with a slip of paper. "I only managed to get one name out of him," he raged, and showed me the slip. "You know this man?" I said I didn't. But I did. It was the name of the leader of the hospital's Arrow Cross organization.

It is typical of those times that when Miklós and I first discussed our future together, I felt I had to tell him of my fear that should they beat me, I would give them the names of my friends. "It's not a question of morals," Miklós said. "A man who is beaten half senseless is not the same man any more." Well, to the end he remained the man he was.

One night Szelepcsényi flew into a temper and started screaming, "Down in that basement, they are all doctors!" But it wasn't true. They were not medical doctors, not even intellectuals, and his outrage told less about the professions of those down in the basement than about Szelepcsényi's own mentality: he expressed the impotent rage of the common man against everyone who had made it, the bitterness of a man who had failed. Now the time had come to get his own back. But on whom? On anyone and everyone whom fate put into his

hands. Then he turned to me. "We will now bring him in here, and you will tell him to his face you don't love him!" I was horribly frightened. What would I see? I felt as if the light of my eyes were riveted to the floor. A scream, "Tell him to his face you don't love him!" After a while I had to look up, and when I did, I thought the strangest thing. "They will never let this man out of here alive." Just like this, in the third person. Miklós stood in front of me, and he had no face. Just a horribly, unevenly swollen mass of bleeding flesh. He held his hat up to his face to catch the blood tricking down into it. I don't know whether his right eye was intact or not, but he still had his left eye. He looked at me and smiled. I know it sounds incredible, but I swear he was smiling; what's more, he was smiling to encourage me.

Sometimes I still get annoyed when a character in a play or a film doesn't act rationally in a crisis. The hero knows perfectly well that he's been reported to the police, the black automobile has already turned the corner (of course, he doesn't see this), he knows that they will come for him sooner or later, and what does he do? Instead of grabbing his coat and dashing down the back stairs, he sits down to write a letter and looks at old photographs. Yet now I know that one's soul has depths which have precious little do with the rational. In this extreme situation, what should I have been thinking of? Of the consequences for both of us of saying I loved my husband, or of saying I did not. And I should have considered what, if anything, Miklós could make of all this in his terrible condition, and how he would react if I said no. The expression in his left eye seemed to indicate that he understood what was happening around him, but he could not have understood the complexity of the situation. For the sake of one's safety it would have been ill-advised of me to say yes, while for Miklós's sake, it would have been equally ill-advised for me to say no. But none of this entered my mind. Needless to say, I never, for a moment, felt obliged to give this man screaming at me an honest answer, I even forgot he was there. I loved my husband deeply and sincerely. Whenever he received the least insult during his work at the hospital, I thought my heart would break. Had I now reacted to his beaten face in proportion to the horror, my heart should have been broken for good. Instead, there I sat, thinking about how we had met. Before he was given his position at the Rókus, Miklós worked with a friend of mine at a research institute, whose staff went on outings together. My friend talked to me about Miklós many times. She said that Miklós had a brilliant mind. What a shame he was so ugly! I imagined him as short and squat, with a protruding beer belly. Once I went to collect my friend at the institute and I rang the bell. Miklós came to the door. He introduced himself, and I was surprised to see that he was not the least bit squat, in fact he was rather thin. He had thick, wavy hair, a pair of sparkling black eyes, and a prominent nose. "Is this what she calls ugly?" I thought, and my fate was sealed. Szelepcsényi was still shouting "Tell him to his face you don't love him!" It was only later that I thought, what did that madman want?

He probably felt that Miklós hadn't been worked over sufficiently. He was probably right; Miklós was not broken in spirit. "I love him," I said and felt a sense of relief that I was over the hard part. Later I reflected again and again on my strange train of thought, and I tend to believe that some subconscious strength made me ignore László Szelepcsényi's mad screaming and saved me from having to wrestle with a problem that had no solution.

He slapped me so hard, I fell over with my chair. When I got to my feet and sat down again, he grabbed my shoulder and pressed his knee into me. "We can talk differently!" he said, hinting that up till then they had been civil with me. Then he kept slapping me, and after a while I thought, it's no good that I'm so passive, I'm not defending myself, I'm not giving any indication that he's hurting me, which is probably making him more angry, so I began raising my hand to my face, feeling all the while how awkwardly and without conviction I was acting. The truth is that the slaps didn't hurt at all. Nothing that they did to my body in the Arrow Cross house hurt. Several weeks after my release, an acquaintance stopped me in the street and asked what the blue and yellow blotches were on my face. I had hardly noticed. Then weeks later I suddenly realized that there were smells and odours in the world. That's when the effect of the shock must have worn off. Inside the Arrow Cross house, my nervous system must have put itself on hold: it would take only so much, and no more. Perhaps it was this lucky biological condition that helped me survive the most gruelling periods of my life. I saw, I heard and I registered what was happening, but I understood it only on the most superficial level, and kept myself removed from what was happening to me.

I don't know how the slapping stopped. It is a black hole in my memory. But when I consider everything, every little thing, all the circumstances, I feel I had made the right choice after all. "I love him." These were the last words exchanged between us.

Me, they released on December 2. I never saw my husband again. "We took him away to do a bit of work," one of the Arrow Cross men said sarcastically, as if he really believed that doctors have an easy time of it. "You're not going to see him for a while. Better get used to it." It was perfectly clear what he meant. But perhaps he is alive after all, perhaps he is sitting or standing in some dark basement with his battered face, waiting for me to get him out. "You need not worry about him," one of the Arrow Cross doctors in the Rókus told me, "he's safe and sound." If he says he's safe and sound, he either doesn't know anything, or else he's lying, I thought. I opted for the latter.

A sort of human stock exchange was operating in one of the Danube bank cafés. Crafty lawyers, or other go-betweens and money-hungry Arrow Cross men not to mention those who wanted to insure themselves against a turn in events—(Russian artillery was already booming away in Pesterzsébet)—sold information for hefty sums, even helped to free some people. I was introduced to

one of these lawyers. He had me go to his apartment, and for thirty thousand pengős, if my memory serves me right, he told me that they had transferred Miklós from the 14th District Headquarters to the Arrow Cross Court of Accounts in Naphegy Street, but they would not admit him. "What can we do with such a wreck?" "My god, they must've beaten him again!" I heard myself saying. "Yes," the lawyer said, "but he was barely alive when they shot him in the nape of his neck, and on the way back, they dumped him in the Danube from the Chain Bridge." "The Chain Bridge again," I thought. Could it be that a mythical image of this bridge subsists in the subconscious of the people of Budapest? Does it carry a special meaning? For it later turned out that the Chain Bridge had almost nothing to do with the story, except for the fact that Miklós was taken to Naphegy street over it, and from there —over the Chain Bridge once again —to an inn in Újpest. He was shot on the bank of the Danube by Elemér Komlós, a giant of a man in ammunition boots, who used to go to the 14th District Arrow Cross house dressed in some sort of airport staff uniform. I remember a face out of Lombroso. Possibly my memory distorts things in cliché terms, but that man certainly had to be extremely stupid. He joined the Party in late November, and presumably that is why he got a job at the airport, where he could not have been of much use, because his activities were centred on Arrow Cross headquarters. One morning he and the notorious three Vígh brothers returned to headquarters brandishing their guns, and clearly very pleased with themselves. They were bragging that they had hauled the occupants of a Swedish protected house to the Danube, shot and dumped them into the river. "Safe conduct passes indeed!" one of them said. And they even said that the 14th District Arrow Cross centre was the toughest and most active in the city.

My husband was shot dead by Elemér Komlós, who threw him into the river with the help of his mates. Komlós said so himself in 1945, when he testified in court. I was sitting in a dark corner with other witnesses, and Elemér Komlós's mother paced in the corridor in front of the well-lit windows. She was an extremely thin woman in clean but very poor clothes. That was the first time I saw what it means when someone wrings their hands in desperation. "Child, child, what have you done!" she kept saying in her country accent, which made the scene even more heart rending. I later told a friend of mine that Elemér Komlós's father was killed in the First World War, and his mother brought him up on her own. "She brought him up well, all right," my friend commented bitterly. We don't know what the father was like, and we don't know what a mother was like whose son ended up like that.

"Will you stay for the execution?" someone later asked. I said no. But as I was walking home, I felt that now that his murderer was dead too, Miklós's own death seemed all the more final. I felt no satisfaction, I felt only that some merciless and unsympathetic current was unrestrainedly surging ahead in an unfamiliar direction, breaking up, annihilating, sweeping away everything in its way.

In September, 1950 I married again. That is another story, here I will only tell as much as links up with my first husband's story. One Tuesday evening, in the spring of 1951, my second husband, György K., said to me, "I will never admit to crimes I did not commit, nor will I implicate others. If they should force me to do such things, by way of appeal (his odd and accurate expression) I will always find an open window." He was arrested the next Friday afternoon, and on Saturday morning he jumped out of a sixth-floor window of the Deák Square police headquarters. They rang me at 3 a.m. late Saturday night (call it Sunday morning), and ordered me to be at Deák Square at 9 a.m. They told me that my husband had taken his own life. "If you hurry, you can make it to the funeral." I took a cab. A clerk from the cemetery office was waiting at the gate. "The henchmen are gone," he said, then told me where to go. The road was horribly long, all the way through the cemetery, indeed beyond it. Near the edge of a small plot two men with spades and hoes were waiting for me. I gave them some money, and next thing I knew, I was standing there alone by the fresh mound of earth. Some time later something stirred inside my brain. Where am I? What's going on? I started wandering among the graves. On a grey marble cross by a brick wall I spotted a name, Elemér Komlós. The name of my first husband's murderer. I think this was the worst moment of my life. I must have made a scene, because a woman came over to see what was wrong. Later on, I found two other familiar names—of the three Vígh brothers, two were buried here. So this was the plot for the executed, including Arrow Cross and war criminals. But there came another surprise. The newly placed crosses had no names on them. I did not think of checking when they stopped putting names on the crosses, but stop they did. It wasn't that one grave had a name and another didn't. It wasn't done gradually; for a while the names were there, then suddenly they were not. Not a single one. Period. I found just one small sign. It was hanging askew on a cross, and it said in tiny letters, "Lacikánk"—our Laci. Perhaps it is László Rajk's grave, I thought, but later I learnt that he was buried elsewhere. The Arrow Cross mass murderers were named, but those executed on trumped up charges had no name. It seemed like a chart mapping a bad conscience. ❧

Translated by Judith Sollosy

György Kocsis

Ten Years of Hard Labour

The Rebirth of Capitalism

"The burdens and ties generated over the past fifteen years, during which time economic activity has lagged behind the development of the world economy, have proved to be more grave than the government's policies had anticipated." So went a communiqué concerning the very last of the so called "People's Economic Plans" for 1989 as it diplomatically recognized the failure of the socialist economic system. The Hungarian economy, incapable of adapting in the period that followed the Oil Crisis of the 1970s, had effectively begun to stagnate many years earlier; by 1988 inflation had reached double figures, and the national debt was mounting.

A "creeping economic transformation" took place well before the first major event of the transformation, the June 1989 round table negotiations. From 1982 onwards, it was more or less possible to establish small enterprises, in 1986 the foundations were laid for a two-tier banking system, and in 1987–88 the two key pillars of the future market economy were created: tax reforms and a new Company Act.

György Kocsis
is on the staff of Heti Világgazdaság,
an economic weekly.

In 1989 the transitional government of Miklós Németh tried, unevenly, to pull the country further out of the dead end street of socialism. This became the *liberó* year (after the first appearance of disposable nappies), when prices of almost half of imports, and the majority of prices for products and consumables, were liberalized. The introduction of proper passports (to replace the old two-passport system, one for socialist countries, the other for the "West") was accompanied by measures easing the purchase of foreign currency. This famously resulted in a mass Hungarian shopping spree in Austria that year. Meanwhile, no measures were taken to stop the large state corporations from delivering goods to their (mostly Soviet) partners in a collapsing Comecon without receiving payment in money or in kind. It was in the interests of these firms, which had major political influence and which received enormous state subsidies, to maintain the rouble-denominated exports that accounted for almost half of all Hungarian exports at the time. The combination of measures taken and measures not taken took the country to the brink of financial catastrophe: the convertible currency current account closed with a deficit of 1.4 billion dollars, while the rouble-denominated currency account jumped to a surplus of 550 million roubles, four times

the figure for the previous year. By the end of 1989 it became clear that the Hungarian economy had fallen into recession; the resources required to maintain full employment and the existing levels of investment and consumption had to be financed via an increasing budget deficit, foreign debt and inflationary monetary expansion.

The political change of direction demonstrated by the first free elections made it clear that this decline could only be stopped through the introduction of a free market economy. In the next few years large-scale spontaneous transformation of the various economic sectors took place in conjunction with the reform of the legal and institutional system.

The Antall government (1990) inherited the Securities Act and the Law on Individual Enterprise, but this first freely-elected government took further steps towards the creation of a market economy: a Law on Financial Institutions, a Competition Act, a Bankruptcy Act, an Accounting Act and a Company Registration Court.

This was the framework in which property relations began to undergo transformation. This process had already started with the so-called spontaneous privatization spree of 1988–89, in the course of which a number of state corporations established smaller companies with the participation of partner companies, management and sometimes foreign investors, transferring resources to these new companies while leaving the corporations' debts in the thus depleted state hands. The 1990 law, concentrating control of privatization in government hands, put an end to all this—a not negligible factor was that the process was accompanied by public disapproval and some major scandals. Although state control has continued to characterize privatization over the last eight years, its intensity and focus has varied.

At the start of the nineties the plan to sell the largest state firms quickly failed, thanks to the poor condition of the majority of the companies in question and the excessive bureaucracy involved in the procedures. This did not stop the so-called preprivatization from being completed, the special way for transferring small retail shops into private hands. The Hungarian method differed from the form general in other Eastern European countries in that it placed the emphasis not on "voucher" privatization—effectively a free sale that gives preference to natives—but on privatization based on individual and normally money-based sale decisions. As a result, privatization of any substance progressed only slowly, but with the lion's share of firms sold falling into the hands of capital-rich buyers with the necessary management skills, albeit mostly from abroad.

The social policy considerations emphasized by the Antall government led it to try to support the possibility of accumulating capital, denied to a middle-class under socialism, and to help participation in privatization, through two measures that had a noticeable effect on the transformation of property relations. The first was the state-subsidized "Existence-loan", whose conditions were very generous, but which, whatever the government's initial intentions, principally helped the managerial class of the socialist era to purchase shares in privatized state firms.

The second measure was that of "compensation". Unlike in numerous other former socialist countries, Hungarian parliament decided not to compensate citizens whose property was nationalized under the communist system directly by reprivatization or in cash, but to award them tradeable securities, called compensation coupons, under the 1991 Compensation Act up to a maximum nominal value of 5 million forints per person. These coupons

rapidly became the target of speculation and were introduced on the Budapest Stock Exchange. Within the limits of laborious regulations, their owners could use them to participate in the privatization programme, to purchase land specially set aside for this purpose by the agricultural cooperatives, to purchase council flats, or to exchange them for perpetual annuities.

During the process of compensation, which is still not completely finished—and which was later extended to those whose human rights were violated under the communist and fascist regimes as well as to just those who suffered property losses—more than one and a half million people received coupons to a total nominal value of nearly 250 billion forints. Of these about seven hundred thousand bought land, usually less than ten hectares; most of these new owners are short of capital or are elderly. Thus the compensation process itself significantly contributed to the continuing crisis in the anyway muddled Hungarian agricultural system.

Beginning with commerce and continuing with telecommunications and manufacturing companies, privatization reached the banking sector in 1994, and in the record year of 1995 most of the energy sector fell into private hands. As a result of unprecedentedly rapid privatization—this despite the fact that the programme was accompanied throughout by partly politically-motivated debates on the optimal extent of state ownership—by the end of 1998, of 2000 state firms, there were only 135 left with majority state control.

Today 80% of Hungary's GDP is produced by the private sector. In this two key factors other than privatization played a part: the growth of the small and medium-sized business sector, and the inflow of foreign capital. The SME sector made its biggest gains at the start of the decade: in 1990 there was an enterprise explosion with the number of limited liability companies *(Kft)* increasing from four and a half thousand to eighteen thousand in the space of half a year, and to a hundred thousand by the middle of the decade. It is true, however, that the breaking up of former state corporations into smaller firms was almost inseparable from the creation of new companies. By 1991 there were 500,000 registered individual enterprises. However, in this last decade the small business class, going back to the socialist period, has not managed to "fuse" with the world of big corporations. There is little mobility between the capital-rich group of large corporations, primarily producing goods for export, and mostly in foreign hands, and the small and medium-sized businesses, whose goods are principally intended for the home market, which are usually in Hungarian hands and suffering from a lack of capital, but which currently provide almost half of the country's GDP and offer employment to almost half of its workforce.

The inflow of foreign working capital was undoubtedly a key motor in Hungary's transformation to a market economy: since 1990 this has arrived on a relatively steady rate of around $1.5 billion per year, with the exception of 1995, when the figure was $4.5 billion. This means that up to the middle of the decade about half, and looking at the period as a whole a good third, of all the working capital invested in Eastern Europe came to Hungary, which offered the advantages of a market economy tradition, political stability, a trained workforce and an advantageous geographical position. Only about a half of this foreign capital came into the country for privatization purchases, a similar amount was spent on green-field investments. A number of car manufacturers, and multinationals making electronic goods, telecommunications equipment and

The 25 largest foreign investors in Hungary

Investor	Industrial sector in Hungary	Investment to 1997 ($m)
Ameritech International Inc. – Deutsche Telecom	Telecommunications	2230
GE Lighting	Lighting	730
RWE Energie AG – Energie Baden Württemberg AG	Energy	628
Eridania Béghin-Say SA	Sugar	540
Allianz	Insurance	540
Aegon	Insurance	500
General Motors (Opel AG)	Automobiles	450
Audi AG	Automobiles	414
PTT Telecom, Telenor, Telecom Finland, Teledenmark	Telecommunications	400
Bayernwerk AG	Energy	370
US West International	Telecommunications	330
Coca-Cola Amatil	Foods/drinks	280
Suzuki Motor Corp.	Automobiles	260
Electricité de France	Energy	254
VEW Energie AG/Ruhrgas AG	Energy	252
Magyar Telecom B.V.	Telecommunications	250
United Telecom Investment	Telecommunications	216
Gaz de France	Energy	202
Sanofi SA	Pharmaceuticals	200
Tractebel SA	Energy	180
Ford Motor Co.	Automobiles	165
Prinzhorn Group	Paper Manufacturing	160
Aluminium Company of America	Aluminium	150
IBM Corp.	Electronics	150
Pepsi Co. Inc.	Foods/drinks	150

other machinery moved part of their production here, and this is currently the primary factor in economic growth and in exports.

With the change of regime, the Hungarian economy—traditionally open to foreign trade—underwent radical changes, more through necessity than through choice. Hungarian–Soviet trade, which used to be decisive, diminished by about a third in 1990, and following the switch to dollar-denominated trade in 1991, the proportion of Hungary's trade conducted with the CIS dropped to 12%, to slip further in the following years to the 1998 level of 6%. This geographical change was helped partly by a boom in the Western hemisphere—thanks to which Hungarian exports to the European Union grew by about 40% in 1991—and partly by the association agreement with the EU signed on 16 December 1991, which led to the rapid abolition of tariffs that had damaged trade in manufactured goods. Nevertheless, exports as a whole dropped dramatically, not least because between 1991 and 1993 the Antall government's exchange rate policy overvalued the forint so as to reduce inflation and stimulate the domestic economy. The situation became grave in 1993, when this policy resulted in a drop in exports of more than 10%, while imports increased by more than 20%, increasing the current account deficit sixfold in the space of just one year.

After the centre-left Horn government came to power in 1994, one of its first measures was an 8% devaluation, which was followed by a further 9% devaluation in 1995, and the introduction of a crawling-peg devaluation, which has remained in place to this day. Between 1994 and 1998 the economy conducted an exceptionally high profile export offensive, especially in machinery, with almost three-quarters of exports going to the European Union. These results came about through the combination of foreign investments in the first half of the decade, the completion of the privatization programme, and the effects of the export-stimulating policy of the second half. However, the change in direction and structure of trade took place in the context of a dwindling GDP, dramatically deteriorating incomes and an unstable macroeconomic balance. The collapse of trade with the East had, by 1990, already reduced sales by industry by 20%. Owing to the knock-on effects on the economy as a whole, in that year GDP fell by 3.5%. The real catastrophe took place in the following year, when GDP dropped by almost 12%.

Change in GDP relative to previous year (per cent)

1989	0.7
1990	–3.05
1991	–11.9
1992	–3.1
1993	–0.6
1994	2.9
1995	1.5
1996	1.3
1997	4.6
1998*	5.0

*estimate

Year	Industrial production (1980=100)	Purchase of agricultural goods (1980=100)
1987	115.4	102.8
1988	114.1	102.4
1989	108.4	96.1
1990	98.3	87.3
1991	80.3	73.6
1992	72.6	63.7
1993	75.5	44.6
199	82.7	42.6
1995	86.5	48.7
1996	89.4	51.2
1997	99.4	50.0

The shrinking of the economy was, however, accompanied by significant structural changes, as a result of which, between 1989 and 1993, the structural conditions emerged that are still in place today. The agricultural sector was the one most affected by the transformation, with its share of GDP sliding from 14% to 6%. Industry's share slipped slightly from its original level of 31%, while the sector benefitting most was services, whose share soared from 36% to more than 55%. As a side-effect of economic restructuring, what was called "queueing" began to become more marked at the start of the decade; here firms would be forced to give each other loans, while the artificially increased liquidity created by the central bank allowed state banks to dole out further loans to firms that had lost their markets and would not be in a position to make repayments.

Some of these unviable companies were wiped out by strict accounting and banking legislation, and this resulted in the number of the registered unemployed jumping from 1.9% in 1990 to a record level of over 12% in just two years. Others of these companies fell victim to the so-called bank consolidation programme conducted between 1993 and 1995. This used long-term treasury bonds to recapitalize a dozen banks that were being prepared for privatization, making up for almost 400 billion forints of bad debt that had accumulated from both the socialist period and afterwards. A later player in this process was Postabank, which had previously had the appearance of a private

bank, and was then formally nationalized and consolidated in 1998.

Output fell by almost 20% between 1990 and 1993, with 1994 being the first year after 1989 to see economic growth, when the 0.8% GDP decline of the previous year turned to a 2.9% growth. This growth was slowed, but not halted, by the financial stabilization programme introduced in 1995 (called the Bokros package after the then Finance Minister), for the sharp reduction in domestic demand caused by the austerity measures was balanced by a rapid increase in exports. The rate of growth also fell slightly in 1996, but in 1997 the figure was 4.6%, the highest for a decade. In 1998, beginning as an extremely promising year, and despite the latest blow to exports to the East arising from the financial crisis in Russia, the Hungarian GDP grew by 5%, impressive by any standard. Yet the export-driven character of the period of growth from 1994 onwards, despite the ongoing fast growth in exports, is in decline—largely because of the declining stimulative effect of the crawling-peg exchange rate regime. The second growth motor, domestic demand, and especially consumer demand, was kick-started in 1997, with a concomitant damaging effect on the macroeconomic balance, which continued into 1998, but which has not yet reached dangerous proportions.

The economic transformation in Hungary has, after all, been effected among extremely vulnerable financial conditions. By 1989, socialist governments maintaining living standards at the cost of foreign debt (which was kept secret) ran up loans of almost $20 billion gross and $19 billion net. Between 1990 and 1992, the rate of decline in production, exports and imports was roughly equal, which meant smaller fluctuations in the balance of payments and small current account surpluses. As a result of an economic policy of expansion started in 1993, however (in this year public consumption grew by 25%, accumulation by 35%, both to a large part covered by state-financed investments and other expenditures), the decline in exports and the sudden jump in imports saw the balance of payments deficit leap to $3.3 billion and the current account deficit to 9.1% of GDP, which, in the absence of adequate capital inflows, led to a growth in external debt. In the following year, despite growth in output and con-tinuing export strength, the current account deficit reached 10% of GDP, and Hungary's gross foreign debt was at $28.5 billion.

Volume of foreign trade (previous year = 100)

Year	Exports	Imports
1990	95.9	94.8
1991	95.1	105.5
1992	101.0	92.4
1993	86.9	120.9
1994	116.6	114.5
1995	108.4	96.1
1996	104.6	105.5
1997	129.9	126.4

The structure of foreign trade by regional groups, July 1998 (per cent)

	Exports	Imports
Developed countries	79.0	75.0
of which: EU	72.0	64.0
EFTA	1.3	2.0
Central-East Europe	17.3	15.7
of which: CEFTA	8.9	6.9
CIS	6.1	8.3
Developing countries	3.1	7.5
Other countries	0.6	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0

The March 1995 stabilization programme, whose merits have continued to be debated ever since, attempted to avoid the dangers of insolvency and of the debt spiral getting out of control by cutting budget

expenditures, introducing centralized price increases, and by using a two-year customs allowance and devaluation to narrow domestic demand and attract funds to enterprises capable of export. These measures were helped by a speeding-up of privatization: the exceptional $4.5 billion privatization revenues of that year went to foreign debt repayments, thus freeing the National Bank of substantial future interest payments. As a result of the Bokros package and this drastic privatization programme, the current account deficit fell from 5.6% of GDP in 1995 to 2.2% of GDP in 1997, with gross foreign debt dropping from a peak of $31.7 billion to $22.5 billion in the same period, and net debt from $16.3 billion to $11.2 billion. In 1998 the current account deficit again grew to a level of almost 5% of GDP—$2.3 billion—thanks partly to a deterioration of the balance of payments, and partly to the sudden outflow of "hot money" following the Russian financial crisis.

The stabilization programme reduced the level of state redistribution, as a proportion of GDP, from 80% at the start of the decade to below 50%. This change has taken place without any real systematic budget reform in the ten years following the change of regime: the budget deficit—which between 1991 and 1998 fluctuated between 4% and 6% of GDP, with the exception of the 8.1% figure for 1994—has come to be decided by a game played out between political bargains and the budget "scythe". The new, three-pillar pension scheme came into effect on 1 January 1998, but neither operational and financial reforms of the health and education system, which both remain more or less as inherited from socialism, nor the modernizing of local government financing, have been put on the agenda.

This all contributed greatly to an insecurity of state finances for the Orbán government that came to power in 1998, in which the tax-collecting institutions, accommodating to the number and nature of economic agents, cannot guarantee the amount or certainty of tax revenue. On the expenditure side, however, there is no social consensus as to the extent and distribution of state intervention. Critics of the Bokros package accuse it of overheating the economy, in particular by damaging domestic purchasing power through revving up inflation. There is no denying that the Hungarian public has made exceptional sacrifices on the altar of economic transformation. In the period between 1990 and 1994, in which GDP fell by 20%, net real wages fell by only 7.2%—in 1994 they even grew by 0.2%—while private consumption decreased by only half this value. As a result of the stabilization measures, however, net real wages fell by a further 17% in 1995–6, with consumption down by 9%. It was only in 1997 that these indicators turned positive

Hungary's foreign debt in convertible currency ($m)

	Gross debt	Net debt
1990	21.270	15.938
1991	22.658	14.555
1992	21.438	13.052
1993	24.560	14.927
1994	28.521	18.935
1995	31.651	16.817
1996	27.552	14.184
1997	23.747	11.157

Current account balance ($m)

1988	–807
1989	–1437
1990	127
1991	267
1992	324
1993	–3455
1994	–3911
1995	–2480
1996	–1678
1997	–981

again, although to a significant degree: in the last two years real wages have risen by almost 9%, and consumption by around 6%.

The development of real wages is a pretty reliable guide to changes in inflation. The transformation, of course, began against a background of high inflation: in 1989 consumer goods prices were rising at an annual 17%; this in 1990, thanks to import and price liberalization, the gradual elimination of state subsidies for consumer goods, and the price-raising policies of inefficient firms, rose to a level higher than 28%. In 1991 inflation reached its peak for the decade at 35%. Between 1992 and 1997 inflation stayed within the 18–23% band, with the exception of the Bokros year, when it again rose above 28%. Not including the changes in price relationships that would go hand-in-hand with the restructuring of the economy, experts have put about a half of the Hungarian rate of inflation down to the pent-up inflationary expectations accumulated over the previous decades. Hopes for a reversal of the trend are backed by the fact that the annual average rate of inflation fell to 14.3% in 1998—thanks, it is true, to exceptionally low world prices for raw materials. Single-figure inflation, last seen in 1987, has become reality by early 1999.

A similarly "stubborn" element is the rate of unemployment. The peak value of 12.3% of registered unemployed in 1992, after the artificially maintained full employment of the socialist system was discarded, reached a level below 10% in 1998, after a very slow period of decline. This is partly because incoming foreign enterprises tended to invest in capital-intensive industrial sectors, and did not take up the work force with obsolete skills made redundant by collapsed state corporations that had lost their markets . Developments in services and commercial infrastructure, especially the fast spread of new shopping malls, will, however, create a perceptible growth in the number of jobs, especially for the young, and foreign capital has now begun to move into the eastern regions worst hit by the transformation.

Consumer price index (previous year = 100)

1987	108.6
1988	115.5
1989	117.0
1990	128.9
1991	139.0
1992	123.0
1993	122.5
1994	118.8
1995	128.8
1996	123.6
1997	118.3
1998	114.5

Number of registered unemployed (December)

1990	79,521
1991	406,124
1992	663,027
1993	632,050
1994	519,592
1995	495,893
1996	477,459
1997	463,962

There is every evidence to suggest that the politically peaceful restructuring of the economy was greatly helped by the maintenance, and indeed the gaining of ground, of the "second economy", as it was called in Kádár's time, or the black economy, as it is called today. Some estimates suggest that this sector continues to generate output equivalent to a third of Hungary's GDP. This state of affairs is, however, incompatible with the criteria for economic transparency, fair competition and efficient state administration, criteria that Hungary, which began accession negotiations in 1998, has to satisfy if it is to join the European Union. ❧

Ildikó Nagy

The Non-Metropolitan Museum

The Székesfehérvár Exhibitions: Thirty Triumphant Years

The István Király Museum of Székesfehérvár, an ancient royal seat seventy kilometres south-west of Budapest, has documented its exhibitions from 1963 to 1993 in this lavishly illustrated volume.* Thirty years are an entire generation. For thirty years we have been making the pilgrimage to see good exhibitions, or to pay homage to Hungarian artists, or to congratulate those of our contemporaries who had become great artists before our very eyes.

A young couple, Péter Kovács and Márta Kovalovszky, came straight out of university to work in a little-known provincial museum and then proceeded to turn it into the most important collection of contemporary Hungarian art. Their taste and expertise in their selection of works have been truly remarkable; any artist presented by them has invariably gone on to achieve a place in the history of Hungarian art. To have an exhibition in Székesfehérvár has come to mean an honour—and a guarantee of status. The vernissages were important social events, where the like-minded had the opportunity to gather. Kovalovszky and Kovács took equal pains over their selection of speakers; these opening addresses, if still available, have been included in the present volume. To open a vernissage in Székesfehérvár, or to be invited to assist in organizing one, was also looked on as an honour.

The poets and writers who have opened exhibitions there have included such major figures in Hungary's literary life as Ágnes Nemes Nagy, Miklós Szentkuthy, Géza Féja, László Nagy, Lajos Kassák and—more than once—János Pilinszky. On one extraordinary occasion, the opening of Erzsébet Schaár's exhibition "Street", Pilinszky recited one of his poems in front of each of the sculptures. Out of this came their 1975 joint book *Tér és kapcsolat*

Ildikó Nagy
is a critic specializing in twentieth-century Hungarian art.

* *Fehérvári kiállítások 1963–1993* (The Székesfehérvár Exhibitions 1963–1993). Székesfehérvár, Bulletin of the St Stephen Museum. Series B, no. 44, 1994, 208 pp. For financial reasons, the catalogue was not published until 1997.

(Space and Connection). "All that has passed is immortal," Pilinszky had said in front of one of the works. The exhibitions of that time were, indeed, characterized by that kind of sublimity. As the artists began to be chosen from the younger generations, so too was there a change of generation among the writers invited to appraise their art: they included Péter Nádas, Péter Esterházy, László Krasznahorkai and the poet Endre Kukorelly.

Accompanying them was a new and sympathetic generation of critics, most notably Katalin Néray, Júlia Szabó, László Beke and Ernő Marosi. The museum also hosted programmes which included performances by representatives of the new music, readings by writers, lecture series by art historians, cinema screenings and happenings. The photographs that here document these thirty years present not just the passing of time through changing fashions and changing hair-styles, but also the art scene in the making.

The history of these thirty years provides ample evidence of the two curators' courage and insistence on quality, which led to a growing appreciation of their achievements on the part of the art world. Turning to the catalogues of the individual exhibitions, we find that what we hold in our hands is a comprehensive documentation of twentieth-century Hungarian art. If not in written form, then at least in images. And this is quite something, considering that, of these thirty years, twenty-six passed under the Kádár regime, a period when "just keeping sane was a job well done", as Péter Esterházy succinctly put it. Márta Kovalovszky and Péter Kovács would have arranged more or less the same exhibitions under any political regime, although they would probably have done it at a much faster rate and with much less of a hassle. Politics had no influence on what went into the Székesfehérvár exhibitions, the organizers' commitments were purely to art. I think that this was the most irritating factor in the eyes of the authorities: it revealed the responsibility of personal opinion, along with the kind of freedom of thought that can annoy a dictatorial regime beyond measure. Without actually meaning to, the exhibitions did make a political statement. Where there is no freedom, where the expression of opinion is curtailed, everything, including art and the discourse on art will have political overtones.

A gathering of Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka's** paintings in 1963 was their first show. It was followed in 1965 by the exhibition series "Twentieth-Century Hungarian Art", which, so far, has produced a further fourteen exhibitions. Here is an itemized list:

- The Art of the Turn of the Century
- The Eight and the Activists
- Hungarian Sculpture 1920–1945
- The Great Plain Painting

** All the fifty-two artists and almost all their exhibitions discussed here have been covered in *The New Hungarian Quarterly* passim, which until 1989 included colour plates. The Székesfehérvár exhibitions were highlighted in feature articles. A bibliography would fill pages.

- The Gresham Café Group and their Associated Artists
- Gyula Derkovits and the "Socialist" Trend
- The Szentendre Artist Colony
- The European School
- Hungarian Art 1945–1949
- The Fifties
- The Years of Dénouement Around 1960
- Modernity, Old and New 1967–1975
- The End of Modernism 1975–1980
- We, the "Eastern French"—Hungarian Art 1981–1989
- Works and Attitudes 1990–1996

Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka *(1853–1919): painter, the great original in the Hungarian painting of his time. His colours and distinctive symbols form part of a coherent private mythology. His works could not be shown during the Stalinist era. The Székesfehérvár exhibition broke this taboo.*

Lajos Gulácsy *(1882–1932): painter. He created a dream world in his works, somewhat similar to that of the Pre-Raphaelites. His schizophrenic visions brought him close to Surrealism.*

Noémi Ferenczy *(1890–1957): the founder of modern Hungarian gobelin design.*

István Nagy *(1873–1937): painter. He depicted the sombre and majestic hills of Transylvania, the villages of the Great Plain, and the*

What should immediately become clear from the list is that twentieth-century Hungarian art cannot be classified in periods in keeping with European stylistic categories, nor in fact in any other, unitary, set of categories. The organizers strove for openness. They have managed to steer clear of the negative avant-garde approach, which tends to classify the past selectively; equally they have avoided any other form of partiality. They have concentrated solely on artistic quality.

The comprehensive exhibitions covering entire periods or artists' groups were complemented by individual shows featuring major pre-war painters who did not fit into any school or category. Csontváry was followed by the painter Lajos Gulácsy and by a show of the tapestries of Noémi Ferenczy. István Nagy's one-man show was a complement to the Great Plains School exhibition, just as István Farkas's complemented that devoted to the Gresham Circle, or Lajos Vajda's did the European School's. These artists were individually more important than the groups to which they belonged, or which claimed them as distinguished members (as happened in Vajda's case who was posthumously declared a member of the European School.) A similar occasion was the epochal exhibition of László Moholy-Nagy (1969), around

whose pivotal figure the organizers also presented a number of other Hungarian artists, painters and architects of Modernism.

A project to present contemporary art ran parallel with the historical series. Artists barely tolerated by the political commissars of culture and unable to exhibit in Budapest were shown in Székesfehérvár. The first of these was the painter and graphic artist Béla Kondor, shown as far back as 1964; his was followed by exhibitions centred on some members of the older generation. The Székesfehérvár exhibitions were intended to lessen the humiliations they had been subjected to. The museum demonstrated the real values of contemporary art to members of the art world and to the public—in vivid contrast with the set of values officially manipulated. The exhibitions of the sculptor Tibor Vilt (1965), the painter Dezső Korniss (1965), the sculptor Erzsébet Schaár (1966) and the painter Lili Ország, settled old debts. Vilt, for example, had not had—had not been allowed—a one-man show for the previous thirty years. While on the subject of settling old debts, let me also mention the memorial exhibitions, such as that of Dezső Bokros Birman (1968), and of Lajos Kassák (1968), held immediately after the death of this important poet and painter, who had been relegated to obscurity for decades.

The introduction of contemporary art, in the proper sense, began a little later than the curators would have wished. In reaction to the events of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the previous slight thaw in Hungarian culture froze up. Modern movements could not, at first, be presented at all, and later could only be smuggled into exhibitions. This was the intention behind the "Contemporary Art in Private Collections" (1975) and "Serial Works" (1976) exhibitions. Both events were of enormous significance. These were the first occasions when the public could view, side by side within a single exhibition, Hungarian and foreign representatives of what was

weather-beaten faces of peasants in paintings which were realistic but emphasized the compositional.

***István Farkas** (1887–1944): painter. Lived in Paris between 1925 and 1932. His paintings convey strange and foreboding moods and magical underwater worlds. His art is akin to Surrealism.*

***Lajos Vajda** (1908–1941): painter, one of the leading figures between the two world wars. His compositions are powerful examples of Hungarian Surrealism. His art is intimately linked to Szentendre, a small town once inhabited by Serbs on the Danube north of Budapest; he combined Szentendre's architectural motifs and traditions with elements of Hungarian folklore.*

***László Moholy-Nagy** (1895–1946): painter, photographer, teacher, art theoretician and founding father of European Constructivism. Until 1919 he lived in Hungary, after that in Germany (1920–1935), England (1935–37) and then, finally, the United States. Between 1923 and 1928 he taught at the Bauhaus.*

***Béla Kondor** (1931–1972): painter and graphic artist. His pictures conjured up an*

agitated and disharmonious world, which he filled with deeply moral messages. He invested Christian symbols with new, ambivalent meanings, which is also how he treated the topics of classical literature and art. He painted visionary self-portraits all his life.

***Tibor Vilt** (1905–1983):*
sculptor. Relentlessly in pursuit of the new, he was influenced first by Egyptian art, and later by Neo-Classicism. He developed a passionate expressionistic style during the Second World War, to which he later added elements of Constructivism, and even of Pop Art.

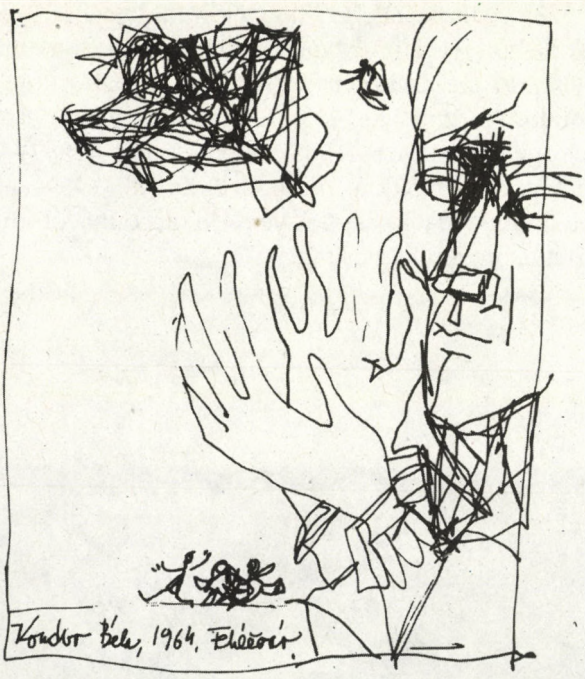
***Dezső Korniss** (1908–1984):*
painter. In his younger years he worked with Lajos Vajda in Szentendre. His paintings display a playful surrealism and a decorative, encoded transcription of his motifs. In the 1960s he turned to calligraphic pictures; later he produced geometrical and non-figurative work.

***Erzsébet Schaár** (1908–1975):*
sculptor. She executed sensitive portraits and figures set against their environment. Her work focused on the relationship between man and space, the place of finite forms in an infinite space.

then contemporary art, mostly works by the new abstract geometric school. Another first was the demonstration of the fact that, despite all the disadvantages of isolation and censorship, Hungarian art was an organic part of everything that was then taking place in the wider world. The painter Dóra

FERENC GELENCSÉR

János Pilinszky reading one of his poems in front of a statue by Erzsébet Schaár.



Béla Kondor: Catalogue cover, Székesfehérvár, 1964.

Maurer had a major role in the organization of both these events; in 1976, she had a joint exhibition with her husband Tibor Gáyor. It was with this that a presentation of the middle generation of contemporary artists—possibly the most interesting series—began, with a one-man show each year.

Although Kovalovszky and Kovács probably have many stories to tell about all those who would have liked to have been included in this series, they have maintained a discreet silence. All I can confirm here is that there was always reverence mixed with pride in an artist's voice when saying "Márta and Péter approached me about an exhibition in their museum." Among contemporary major artists who exhibited there were István Haraszty and Tamás Hencze (1977), Ilona Keserü

Lili Ország *(1926–1978): painter. After an early surrealist phase, she worked on abstract paintings which referred to the ancient artefacts of human culture. The chief motif in her work was time and recollection, that is man's place in time.*

Dezső Bokros Birman *(1889–1965): master of Hungarian expressionist sculpture. His compositions present both the fallibility and the moral position of sorrowing man.*

Lajos Kassák *(1887–1967): writer, poet, painter, editor, the leading figure and founding father of Hungarian Modernism. His constructivist paintings and graphical works (he called them "picture architectures") are powerful and in the mainstream of the East European modernist movement.*

Dóra Maurer *(b. 1937): painter, graphic artist. First she produced surrealistic graphical works, then became one of the leading lights in Concept Art; she also produced Neo-Constructivist, systematic works and series. She was of paramount importance during the 1970s and 1980s, as an organizer of exhibitions and as a representative of anti-establishment art.*

Tibor Gáyor *(b. 1929): painter. He started out as an architect, and has worked as an artist since 1963. He produces geometrical structures by folding paper. His art is stubbornly systemic and unambiguous.*

István Haraszty *(b. 1934): sculptor, constructor. His cleverly designed machines and contrivances carry messages both ironic and political.*

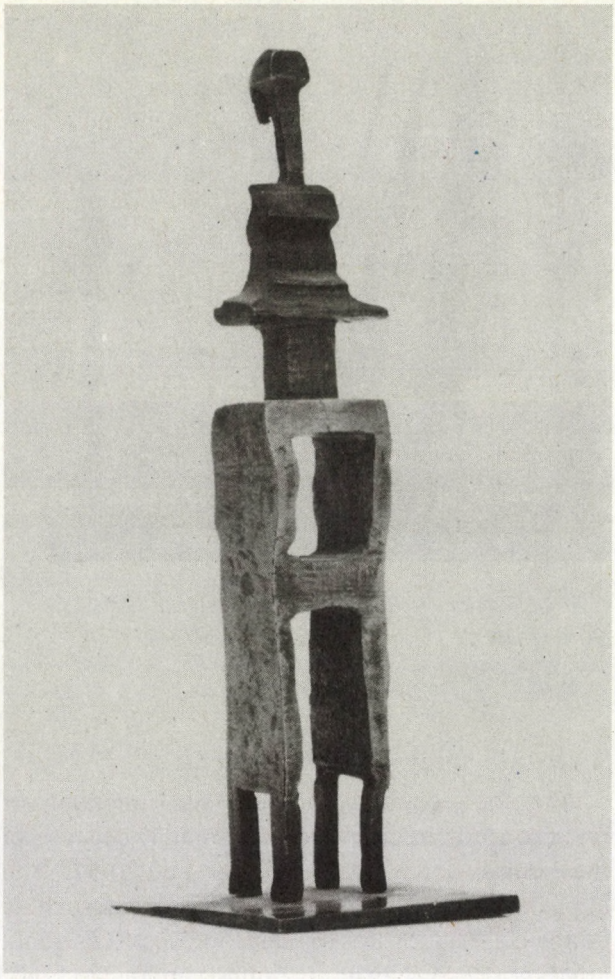
Tamás Hencze *(b. 1938): painter. A typical Op-Art painter until 1982, when he began to develop his new, calligraphic style, retaining, however, the old illusionistic spatial effects.*

Ilona Keserü *(b. 1933): painter, one of the most original figures in modern Hungarian painting. Her non-figurative pictures employ sign-like motifs of intense colours.*

Pál Deim *(b. 1932): painter. Austerity and abstract spatial structure characterize his non-figurative paintings, in which human forms are reduced to puppet shapes, thus embodying bare existence within the universe.*

(1978), Pál Deim (1979), followed by the Pécs Workshop (1980); István Nádler's turn came in 1981, to be followed by Károly Halász (1982), Sándor Pinczehelyi (1983), András Mengyán (1984), György Jovánovics (1985), Tibor Hajas (1987—a memorial exhibition), András Baranyai (1989—an exhibition that was delayed on account of the artist's proverbial hesitancy).

Sándor Pincehelyi: Hammer and Sickle, *1973.*



Tibor Vilt: Easel and Statue, *1967. Bronze, height: 17 cm.*

In 1986 the new art of the new times was introduced. The show "Between Quotation Marks" brought together members of different generations (from Géza Perneczky, 50 years old at the time, to László Révész, a mere 29) who shared the same attitude. This was an ironic, grotesque perspective, a gentle, or sometimes not so gentle, recording of a crisis of values, and the "drifting ambiguity" that was a feature of Hungary during the 1980s.

The Pécs Workshop:
the most important avant-garde school outside Budapest. Founded in 1970 by artists who have staged happenings and produced experimental films.

István Nádler *(b. 1938):*
painter. His "hard-edge" paintings of the 1960s moved him straight to the front ranks of young artists. In the 1970s his paintings and small plastics were executed in the geometrical abstract style, then he went on to produce works influenced by music in the spirit of the New Painting. His latest pictures were inspired by a trip to Italy.

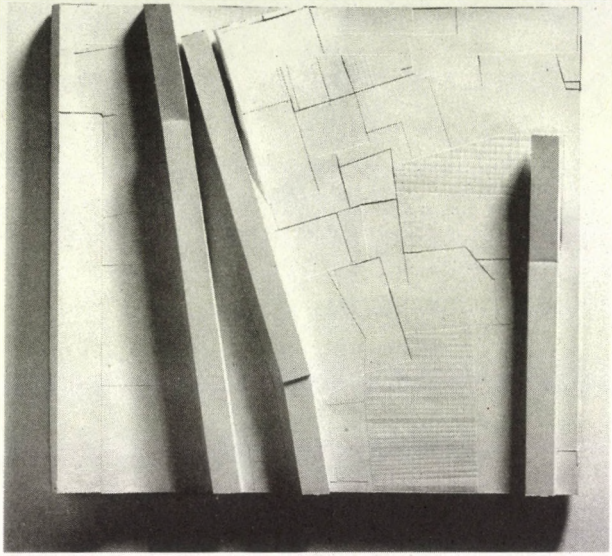
Károly Halász *(b. 1946):*
painter and graphic artist. A member of the Pécs Workshop, he produced Op-Art and Minimal Art works. Although basically of a geometrical character, he employs elements of Pop Art as well and Concept Art. He has also arranged happenings.

Sándor Pinczehelyi
(b. 1946):
painter, graphic artist, a member of the Pécs Workshop. He was inspired by Pop-Art to develop an emblematic and ironic art of a marked political content. In 1988 a large collection of his work was displayed at the Venice Biennale.

András Mengyán *(b. 1945): painter, graphic artist, designer. He is the most consistent of the Structuralists in Hungary. After the mid-1980s, he created huge environments combining light and sound effects with video installations. He is a Professor at the School of Applied Arts in Bergen (Norway).*

György Jovánovits *(b. 1939): sculptor, the most inventive of contemporary Hungarian sculptors. His reliefs and spatial forms, made in plaster of Paris, have extremely sensitive surfaces, carrying painterly values and effects regardless of their plastic properties. His latest compositions engage pieces from the canon of art history (e.g. Giorgione's* Tempest*) in a dialogue in the spirit of the postmodern search for identity. He designed the monumental memorial sculpture for the martyrs of the 1956 Revolution. In 1995 some of his works with a Venetian theme were shown at the Biennale.*

Tibor Hajas *(1946–1980): painter, performance artist. His deeply philosophical art explored such contrasts as the personal and the impersonal, hiding and revealing, freedom and determination, crime and reprobation, sacrifice and mercy through*



György Jovánovics: Relief I, 1994. Plaster of Paris, 80 x 97 cm.

After the second half of the 1970s Hungarian art had changed direction radically, mainly because of the artists born between 1950 and 1957. The appearance of painters and graphic artists such as Viktor Lois, Gábor Roskó, László Révész, László fe. Lugossy (1947), István ef. Zámbó, András Wahorn, András Böröcz and the Substitute Thirsters group ("Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness", Matthew 5:6) marked a drastic departure.

Although the works shown at the 1986 exhibition had been, with one or two exceptions, created in the 1980s, the attitude and the change in thinking behind them can be traced back to the mid-1970s. Most of those showing belonged to two important groups, the Vajda Lajos Studio in Szentendre and the INDIGO group (INterDIszciplináris GOndolkozás, i.e. "interdisciplinary thinking"), who were students of the painter, writer and film director Miklós Erdély.

The novelty of the Vajda Lajos Studio was to elevate Hungarian counter-culture to the status of high art. Its members drew important stimuli from Dadaism, and from rock and pop music, in which they actively engaged; they also drew inspiration from the sub-culture milieu in which they lived, and which they deliberately tried to shape. The art and esoteric character of elite culture—which in this case also included the tradition of classical Modernism—was in sharp contrast with their profane, banal and deliberately "non-beautiful" works reflecting everyday events and phenomena, works which raised banality, trash and kitsch to the status of art. Humour (and specifically black humour) was an important component, along with powerful social and cultural criticism, linguistic frolics and an open depiction of sexuality—all combined with a bizarre transcendence. The startling philosophical texts, also characteristic, might equally have been inspired by Schopenhauer or the philosopher guru (and excellent novelist) Béla Hamvas, or even by *The Life and Views of Zacharias Lichter* by the Romanian writer Matei Calinescu.

Taking a different path and under different influences, members of the INDIGO group, Erdély's former pupils (Böröcz, Révész, Roskó, Sugár), reached essentially similar artistic conclusions. Erdély's thinking was greatly influenced by his layman's understanding of science and by the philosophy of Wittgenstein. Rather than attributing aesthetic values to art, Erdély attributed a cognitive function to it, which—naturally—should differ from the forms of scientific reasoning. Visual and linguistic absurdity are part and parcel of this art, as are irony and a strong critical attitude towards all aspects of society; so too are the discovery and presentation of the ambivalences inherent in every assertion. In contrast with the self-taught instinctiveness of the artists in the Vajda Studio, the INDIGO artists were artfully cerebral and skilled in philosophical and scientific paradoxes, even if *his performances and films, series of photographs and texts resembling free verse.*

András Baranyai *(b. 1939): painter, graphic artist. His central theme is the fragment, the relationship between part and whole. His self-portraits stand out in his oeuvre, conjuring up the Kierkegaardian incognito, "reflected suffering" as the mode of existence of modern man.*

Viktor Lois *(b. 1950): sculptor. With their purposeless functionality, his absurd "furniture", "vehicles" and "musical instruments" assembled from machine parts and wrecked cars form a grotesque and ironic counterpart to a production-oriented mechanized culture.*

Gábor Roskó *(b. 1956): painter, rock musician. With surreal visions and an emotionless overtone, his drawings and paintings present scenes of alienation and solitude.*

László Révész *(b. 1957): painter, performance artist. Jointly with András Böröcz, he staged numerous happenings between 1978 and 1988. Ambivalent figures and characters from the border zone between dream and reality figure in his pri-*

vate mythology, displaying a suppressed sentimentality and a flagrant indifference.

***László fe Lugossy** (b. 1947): painter, rock musician, performance artist, a founder of the Vajda Lajos Studio. His world, composed of elements taken from popular and underground culture, is both a monument to and a criticism of the world he has received his inspiration from.*

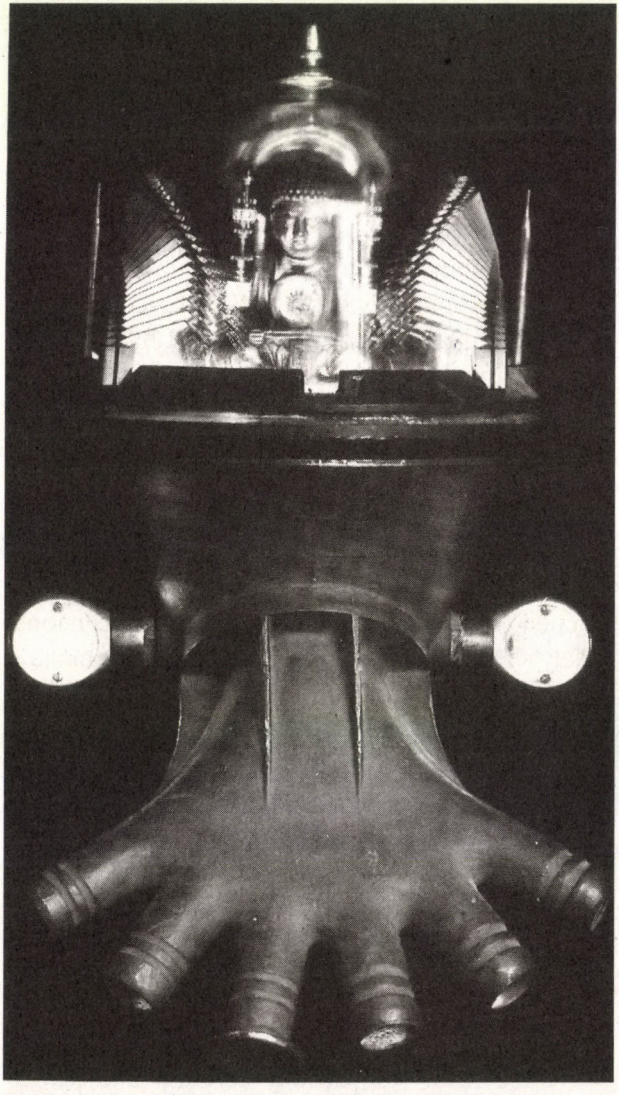
***István ef. Zámbó** (b. 1950): painter, rock musician, performance artist, a founder of the Vajda Lajos Studio. Generalized idiocy is presented in his paintings through banal and frivolous scenes executed with meticulous thoroughness. He has borrowed a great deal from the frolics of Dadaism. Naivety, charming humour and ironic bitterness are present simultaneously in his work.*

***András Wahorn** (1953–): painter, rock musician, performance artist, a founder of the Vajda Lajos Studio. The visual and the verbal elements in his paintings and drawings are of equal importance. The colouration of his paintings is influenced by pop culture, and his drawings are inspired by graffiti.*

***András Böröcz** (1956–): sculptor, performance artist. Between 1978 and 1988 he*

their way of expressing this may have sometimes seemed naive or even clumsy.

The *tour de force* of the exhibition "Between Quotation Marks" was the fact that it presented these two schools of diametrically opposite origins side by side, precisely to display the shift of attitude and *Weltanschaung* they shared. In the historical context of Hungarian art this is nothing less



Victor Lois: Domestic Altar, *1982.*

but a farewell to the utopian faith inherited from Modernism. It has visibly and obviously evaporated, along with a switch to a gentle (or not so gentle) disillusionment.

The exhibition was followed by individual shows for László fe Lugossy, Viktor Lois, István Wahorn (Vajda Lajos Studio), and Gábor Roskó, László Révész, András Böröcz (INDIGO). The Substitute Thirsters, founded in 1984, also had an exhibition devoted to them here in 1990. Their work combined the instinctiveness of the Vajda Studio's artists and the thoughtfulness and ingenious use of materials of the INDIGO artists. Their larger collective works were installations, furnished spaces marked by the formal traits of *arte povera.* The materials—apart from the traditional paper and paint—could have been anything: iron, straw, rubber, glass; socks, handkerchiefs; clothes drier, stool, pulley, rope, mirror (for the work *The Executioner Is Hanged*). The works were three-dimensional paraphrases of famous paintings by Grünewald, Munkácsy and Szinyei-Merse or reconstructions of historical situations (e.g. Count Széchenyi in the lunatic asylum at Döbling); in other words, these works substitute for the originals. Neither copies nor imitations, they evoke their originals, with the difference and the experimental factor that time has added to them. The central composition, *Econo-Misery* (1989) can stand as emblematic for Hungarian art in the 1980's. It is an adaptation of a board-game "Manage Prudently!". The board-game itself is an experience shared by everyone who grew up under "socialism" and was a socialist version of Monopoly (whose original pre-war version was called *Capitaly* in Hungary). A game usually lasted a whole afternoon, and a player who was both lucky and skilfully frugal throughout, acquired the ultimate that could be aspired to under socialism: the ownership of a two-bedroom pre-fab flat with a television set and a refrigerator, and a vacation in a trade-union holiday home. This board-game was re-created in a single room by the Substitute Thirsters with ingenuity.

staged happenings jointly with László Révész. His works give us the strange metamorphosis of objects and people, their identity of essence. He makes his sculptures using pencils, sharpening and gluing together several thousands of them on occasion. Since 1989 he has divided his time between New York and Budapest.

Tibor Szalai *(1958–1998): architect, sculptor, musician. His absurd paper constructions are the outcome of his imaginative use of space and form, often complete with political messages. His surrealistic drawings and photographs recall Hieronymus Bosch.*

Lujza Gecser *(1943–1988): textile artist. She created huge textile environments combined with mirrors and foils. Her drawings, photographs and collages faithfully reflect an extremely sensitive and vibrant personality.*

Sándor Altorjai *(1933–1979): painter. His abstract paintings, enriched with elements from Dadaism and Pop-Art, were intense reflections on his own tragic life.*

Miklós Erdély *(1928–1986): architect, poet, painter, performance artist, film director, art theoretician. His art reflected on the current trends of the natural sciences and philosophy and, along with his own personality, exerted a crucial influence on Hungarian art in this last third of the twentieth century.*

Vilmos Fémes Beck *(1885–1918): sculptor, the most promising talent in Hungarian Art Nouveau sculpture.*

Alongside the presentation of strands in the counterculture of the 1980's, in another memorable exhibition, the architect Tibor Szalai showed his "constructed sculptures". These large paper constructions, rational and chaotic at the same time, crossed fantasy with rigorous design, and the spirit behind them was deconstructivism. The broken forms envelop labyrinthine spaces; maze-like silhouettes cast long shades on walls that do not separate anything; railings and cones, cylindrical and ring-shaped objects are about to take off, like strange satellites, as messengers from a visionary world. All this is carried off with breathtaking precision and balance and, above else, with magical beauty. The adjective can rarely be applied to modern Hungarian art, but it fell easily from the lips of those who saw Szalai's works.

One sombre obligation of the museum's is to hold memorial exhibitions—not only for artists who lived to a ripe old age such as Lajos Kassák or Tibor Vilt—but also for young artists or artists, who died young, still in full possession of their creative powers—thus for Tibor Hajas, Lujza Gecser, Sándor Altorjai and Miklós Erdély—the central role and influence of the latter was first demonstrated by his memorial exhibition.

Márta Kovalovszky and Péter Kovács are also noted for their research into the history of sculpture. It is only natural, therefore, that sculpture received special attention, both in the collection and in the exhibitions. They re-discovered a number of long-forgotten sculptors such as Vilmos Fémes Beck or Elza Kövesházi Kalmár; they acquired for the museum the bequest of Lajos Barta and András Beck, two sculptors who died abroad; they also organized exhibitions presenting Hungarian sculptors living abroad: András Medve, Gabriella Fekete, János Megyik.

There have been curiosities as well. Special treats, such as "Surprise for Our Readers!", an art books exhibition, or the discovery of "The Missing

László fe Lugossy: International Dying Man, *1984.*

Hungarian Expressionism", or "Symbols, Myths" in which the early works of István Csók were shown, allowing a glimpse of an entirely unknown aspect of his art. These Vampires, Venuses, Salomes and Buddhas, these idols, and beautiful women flirting with peacocks—here a symbol of vanity and conceit, rather than of eternal life—revealed a mixture of mystical adoration and decadence in the oeuvre of a painter whose fame was due to his virtuoso still-lifes, portraits of young peasant women, and cheerful bourgeois interiors.

Everything that I have written so far should make it clear that the two curators have done much

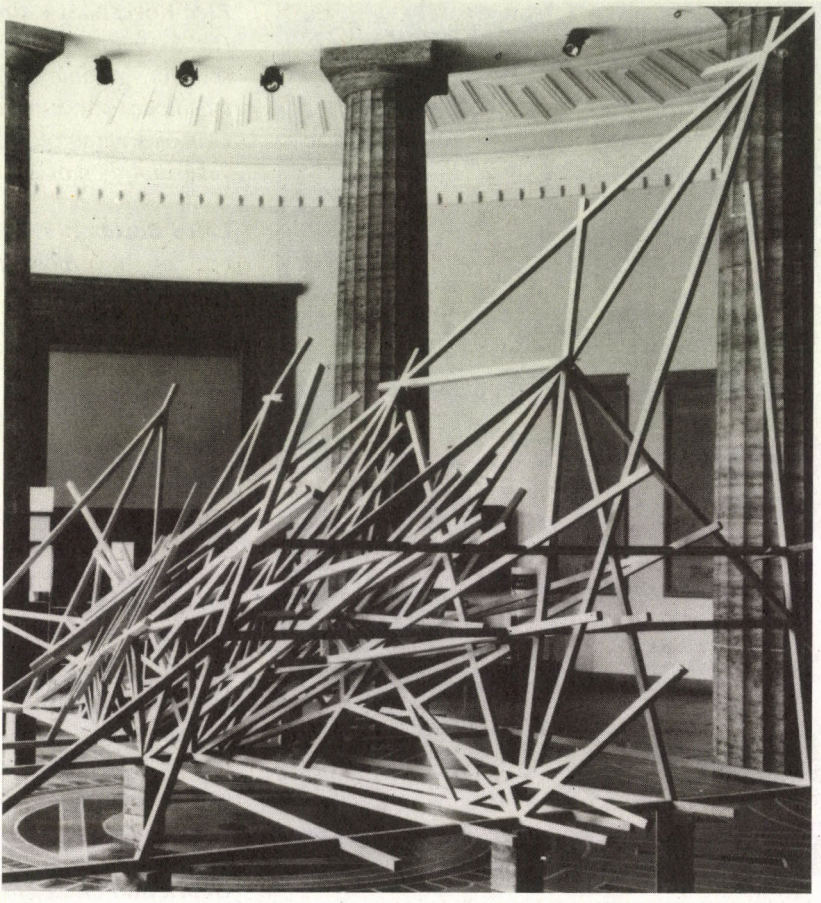
Elza Kövesházi Kalmár *(1876–1956):*
sculptor, graphic artist. Her small plastics were exquisite examples, first of Art Nouveau, and then of Art Deco.

Lajos Barta *(1899–1986):*
one of the most famous Hungarian abstract sculptors. He lived in Germany after 1965.

András Beck *(1911–1985):*
sculptor. He lived in Paris after 1957, creating both figurative and abstract compositions.

András Medve *(?–):*
sculptor, painter. He lives in Germany. His compositions based on opposites (man–woman, dog–cat, cheap–expensive) simultaneously convey intimacy and monumentality, elementary power.

Gabriella Fekete *(1944–):*
sculptor, she lives in Germany. Her sculptures, reduced to closed and elementary forms, show a similarity to the objects of archaic cultures.



János Megyik: Corpus, *1988.*

János Megyik *(1938–): sculptor, lived in Vienna between 1956 and 1998. His spatial constructions based on descriptive geometry have a philosophical content.*

István Csók *(1865–1961): painter. A master of Hungarian Naturalism and plein-air painting; his early, symbolic period was first documented by the exhibition at the Szent István Király Museum.*

more than steer clear of the peril that threatens all small-town museums, namely that of provincialism.

Their exhibitions have been of national importance and the local artists included are those who came up to this standard (Péter Ujházy, Frigyes Kőnig). To these artists, however, they gave full support and promoted their art wholeheartedly. They watched over young artists just starting out on their careers with special care. János Smohay, a local hatter, set up a fund to support talented young artists. The board of trustees, under the patronage of the István Király Museum, has been awarding the Smohay Prize and its accompanying grant since 1981 to artists under 35. At the end

of their one-year scholarship, the prize-winners' works are shown.

The historical series, started in 1965, eventually reached the present in 1996; in other words, it caught up with the contemporary series. The process that the two series jointly covered spanned from around 1900 to around 2000; the series effectively merged in the exhibition "Works and Attitudes 1990–1996." Both the opening and the closing exhibition provided a cross-section of modern Hungarian art through a historical occasion. The first presented the golden age when bourgeois society emerged through paintings and sculptures, and through a significant collection of arts and crafts. The last exhibition reflected on the period between 1990 and 1996, the years that followed the changes, revealing the conduct, dilemmas and choices of artists once again living in the security of civil rights and working in a rapidly changing society.

In Western Europe, any survey of the century's art within a particular country would require entirely different demarcations; for example, from post-Impressionism to post-modernism, or from Art Nouveau to deconstructivism, etc. Here in Hungary, even in the first half of the century, the divisions were defined less by art movements and more by art groups. As to the postwar picture, here history strongly intervened: the exhibitions "The Fifties", "The Years of Dénouement Around 1960", and even "We 'Eastern French'", which presented the art of the 1980s, testify to that. It was within this development, essentially marked by historical changes, that the organizers presented the art groups and works that they viewed as progressive —with the exception of the Years of Social Realism (1949–1957), in which they contrasted the pseudo-art of the Stalinist Rákosi regime with that of the suppressed and marginalized modern movements.

This incorporates the view that art has a goal and a direction, and the value system which guarantees the attainment of that goal provides the

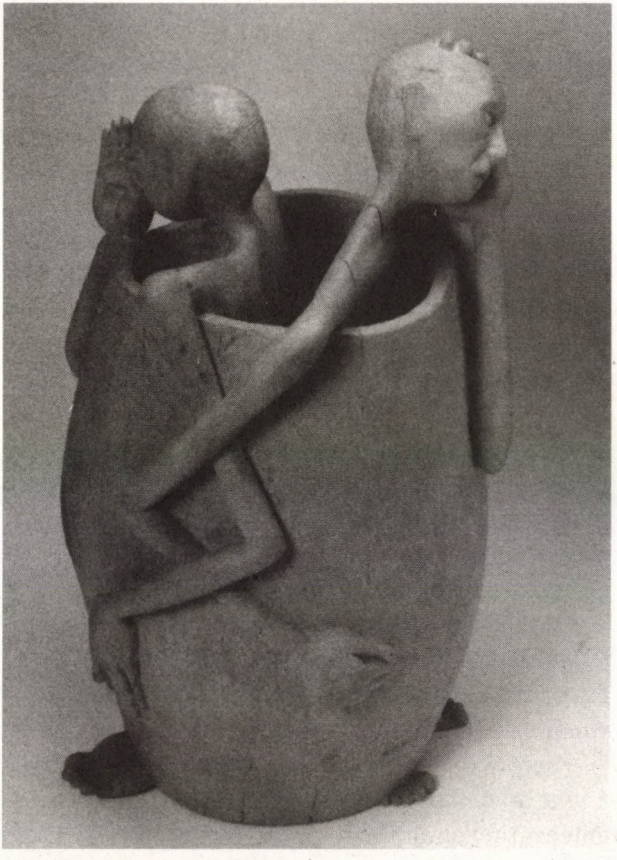
Péter Ujházy *(1940–): painter. His paintings and assemblages, resembling the world of children's drawings, constitute a unique style in Hungarian art.*

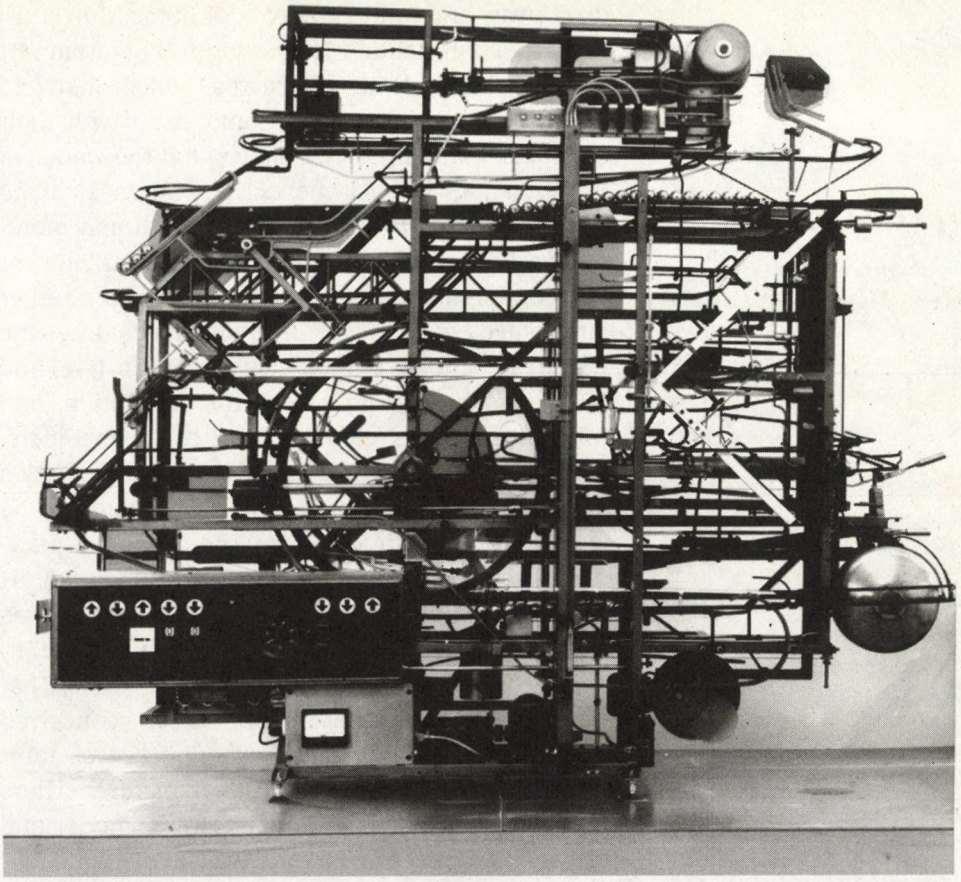
Frigyes Kőnig *(1955–): graphic artist. He has a scientific interest in the spatial and optical aspects of representation, in optical distortion, and in computer art.*

basis for selection. Accordingly, the values of universal art, both in content and form, provide the norm that Hungarian art should follow, and the best Hungarian critics of twentieth-century art have used this as their yardstick.

Consequently, these thirty years of exhibitions at Székesfehérvár and the canon they outlined were the first summary of a knowledge based on the traditional concept. The exhibitions courageously used the judgement of our day to add to the canon, and their truly great achievement is that the verdicts have stood the test of time. Art criticism in the past few years has refined the picture with several new factual discoveries, but any sub-

András Böröcz: Sculpture. *1990, Sycamore, 74 x 45 x 45 cm.*



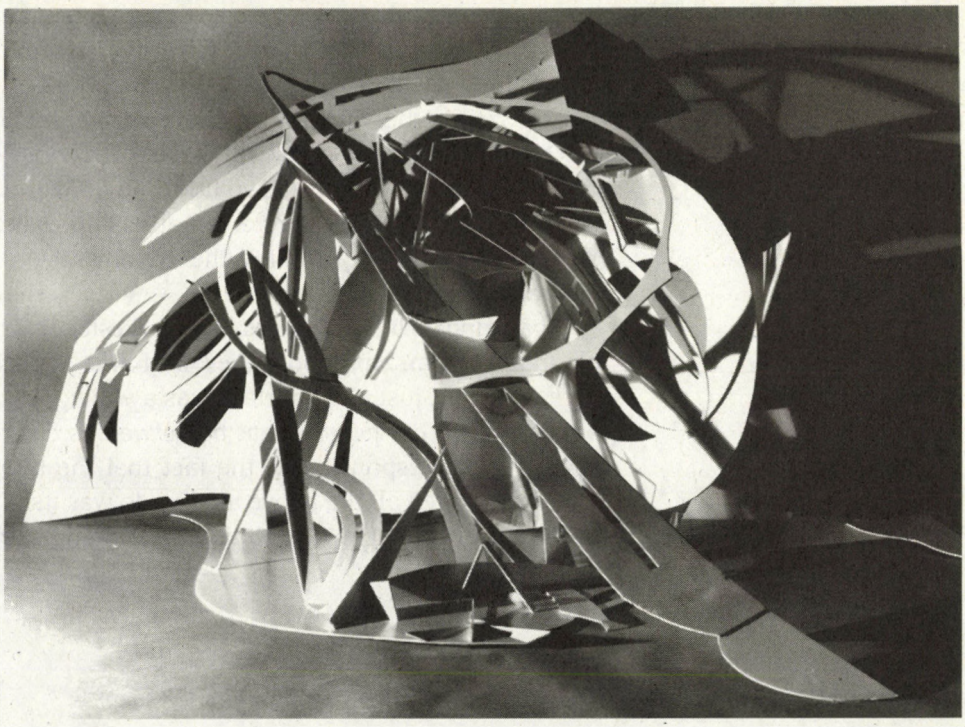


István Haraszty: Brain Gun. *1980–81. Steel, bronze, copper and plexiglass, 230 x 250 x 70 cm.*

stantial change in the paradigm is in the realm of speculation rather than in that of convincing analysis.

Taken together the exhibitions have much to tell us about the development of art. After the boom at the turn of the century (Art Nouveau and the birth of Modernism), in the decades between the two world wars, art turned inwards in a Hungary that had been on the losing side in the Great War and been deprived of much of its territory. The attempts to break out of isolation, made by some artists at the beginning of their career—usually as a consequence of visiting Paris—quickly

died away, and in the greyness of home, European colours soon faded. There were Hungarian art groups and individual oeuvres, which had no equivalents in the West; a comparison with their European contemporaries shows that the values of Hungarian art lay elsewhere. The difference can be traced primarily to an interest in social and moral issues; to the various European *-isms* striving for self-containment, this would have seemed a rather far-fetched goal. Even through its name, the European School, a group active between 1945 and 1948, was expressing a need for orientation, and this, indeed, was characteristic of its members. However, the slide into dictatorship in the 1950s meant that no such programme was going to be feasible for many a long year. The change of paradigm, transforming the character of Hungarian art from the basically sensual to the intellectual, was effected by those young artists who started to emerge in the gradual thaw of the mid-1960s. That was when a pictorial idiom, which conceived modern art as an aesthetic experience, was integrated. As against the traditional picture, where the relationship was between painter, model and canvas, the modern picture was a dialogue between painter and canvas. The non-mimetic elements of art create the picture, the subject of art is art. The classical picture is one of a hierarchic composition, the modern picture establishes parallel relationships. And if every pictorial element is equal, then anything can be associated with anything else, with different material worlds blending into—or clashing with—one another in the painting. This self-contained art comes to maturity under MacLuhan's dictum of the late 60s, "The medium is the message". However, the exhibitions "Between Quotation Marks", "The End of Modernism", "We, the Eastern French" were already registering the post-modern, in which art once again turns to life, while being both philosophical and down-to-earth—as is usually the case in periods of crisis.



A. Mária Szenczi

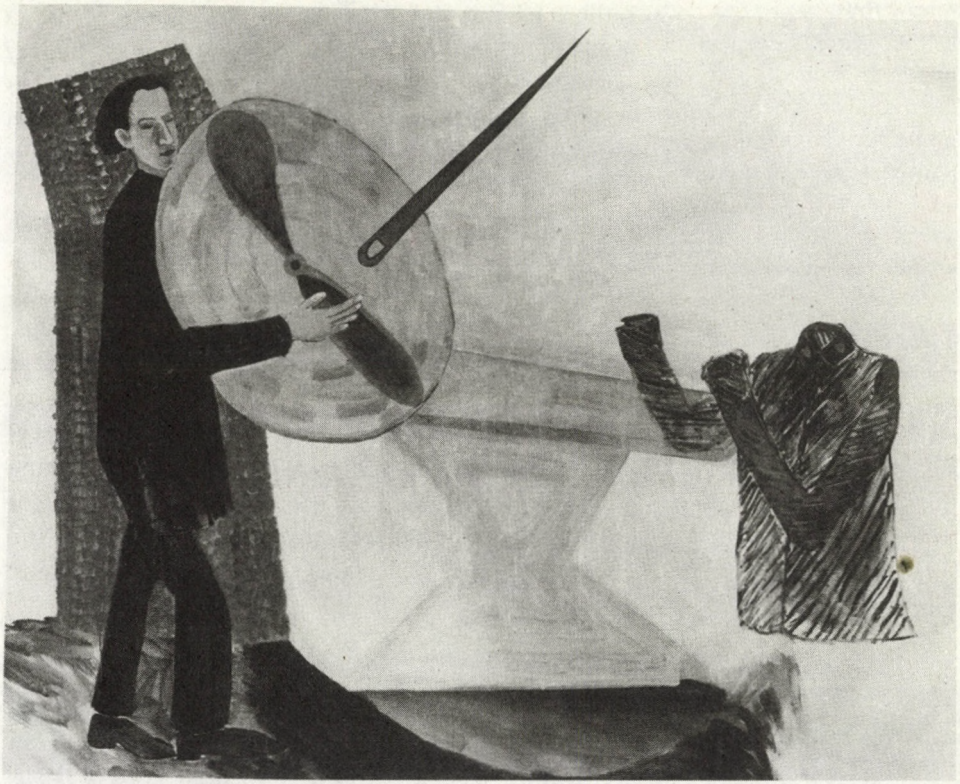
Tibor Szalai: BSCH Architecture (detail). Installation.

To present all this, the two curators had to overcome a great many obstacles, exercizing supreme diplomatic skills. Initially the museum's own collection was very modest. In conjunction with the exhibitions, however, the collections grew apace, with the result that the Székesfehérvár museum's modern collection is by far the best in the country—not surprisingly since a clear and cohesive concept is behind it. Naturally, the historical material could only be arranged with the help of loans, and leading museums and private collectors are reluctant to lend major works. However, the curators made discoveries in the store-rooms, and those discoveries have proved enduring. They were the first to call attention to the painting *Golden Age* by János Vaszary (1867–1939), which has since

then been regarded as one of the emblematic pieces of Hungarian Art Nouveau, recurring again and again in exhibitions, essays and art books. It was in Székesfehérvár that we were first able to see József Jakovits's graphical series *Drawings,* with allusions to the 1956 Revolution (in 1969!); it was also here that the works of artists in exile were shown—further irritating the commissars of cultural politics.

Organizing exhibition series in Székesfehérvár required scholarship, good eyes and fine taste. More risky, but just as important was a willingness to stand up to the powers that be as well as clear judgment and responsibility; the fact that the two of them accepted all the above as a credo was itself made clear in the 1993 exhibition concluding the period.

András Wahorn: Cat with Fire, *1983. Oil on canvas, mixed technique, 140 x 250 cm.*



László László Révész: Farewell to Dreams, *1987, 300 x 250 cm.*

With the Kádár regime gone, what has also gone is that "dreadful togetherness—a togetherness of dread" (as Márta Kovalovszky puts it) which bonded people of similar views and feelings in opposition to the regime. Today groups organize themselves around new interests and sentiments, and art is in search of new points of orientation. In the name of an openly admitted subjectivity, the three organizers of the closing exhibition (Works and Attitudes 1990–1996) (Katalin Néray, then curator of the Budapest Műcsarnok, now director of the Ludwig Museum, joined Kovalovszky and Kovács) presented a tableau that assigned key importance to the whole range of new sensibilities. Of the diverging trends in contemporary Hungarian art, two were given prominence. One reflected on

Ilona Lovas *(1948–): she started out as a textile designer, but switched to making installations in the 1980s. By incorporating rarely used materials (animal guts, wafers, etc.) in her sculptures, and by arranging them in a spatial process, she evokes the reverence of ancient cults and rituals.*

Péter Türk *(1943–): painter, graphic artist. After his earlier geometrical works based on arithmetical and geometrical progressions, he now tries to express transcendent concepts through a system of symbols resembling hieroglyphs.*

Mária Chilf *(1966–): painter, installation artist. She uses simple materials, and quite often waste products, to create installations which conjure up the functioning of the human body and other organisms, the situations of life and death*

the past, on the great accomplishments of art (a distinguished representative of this was György Jovánovics's show of sculptures of the 1990s), inspired by the postmodern belief that people can discover their true identity in culture. The other trend focuses on transcendence, which is a surprising development for Hungarian art. An abstract mysticism—which often conceals a deeply felt Catholicism—transfigures even the simplest materials and the most ordinary gestures (Ilona Lovas, Péter Türk, Mária Chilf, etc.). In addition to these two, there are, of course, numerous individual paths running parallel, all trying to cover the present without illusions. Whether they combine clear-sightedness with sternness, bitterness or irony, their message is always the same: with the Kádár regime gone, we still need our common sense. ❧

LEVENTE SZEPSI SZŰCS

Erzsébet Schaár: The Street *(view and detail).*
Length 24 m. Plaster, polystyrene, glass, wire, textile, plants.

Péter Esterházy

J'Accuse

Setting it Straight

From time to time I set the world straight. In German newspapers, for instance, I routinely reverse one of world history's great scandals—the defeat suffered at the 1954 Soccer World Cup—by pointing out that it was we Hungarians who had won that fateful final, three to two, against the poor Germans. First they thought I'd made a slip, then they thought I was joking, finally they decided I must be crazy. But Petőfi's people, I reminded them, do not stand for any nonsense. That settled it.

The trial of Alfred Dreyfus took place a little over a hundred years ago, and in this trial the part played by a Captain Esterházy can only be called lamentable. Many people associate this name almost exclusively with the Dreyfus affair. As the family's watchdog and succour, I looked into the matter and in a piece called "J'accuse" (might as well go all the way), I told Paris exactly what I thought. Set things straight once again.

Well, maybe "J'Accuse" it wasn't, but I just had to get it off my chest. The French nation—from this far, from Bucharest almost—appears as a lover of truth. Here's a good dose then. When I take a look at my family, I see it's big; big and rich, and its members come in all varieties to suit every taste—extra large, double-hung, triple-ply, royalist, democrat, patriot, traitor. And that is as it should be, I always thought.

But I was wrong. It's clear to me now that the Esterházys are all outstanding men, from top to toe, every last one of them (sometimes they are ladies, though the real *esterházy europaeus* is eminently male or, at worst, hermaphroditic); and if they are not outstanding, they sooner or later turn out to be not Esterházy at all.

The devil, they say—or E. in this case—is in the details, so let's take a look at those details. My grandfather's grandfather's grandfather's grandfather's grandson's younger sister, Marianne (according to sources

---

***Péter Esterházy**'s works that have appeared in English translation include* Down the Danube, *New York, Grove Weidenfeld, 1993,* Helping Verbs of the Heart, *London, Quartet Books, 1993* A Little Hungarian Pornography *1992, Evanston, Ill. Northwestern University Press, 1995 and* she loves me, *London, Quartet Books, 1997.*

cited by Professor László Berényi) was born on October 9, 1741, which in itself is no cause for alarm. Neither is the fact that twenty-five years later, a no longer young uncle of hers, a certain Marquis de Ginestous, out of boredom, it would appear, began an affair with his fatherless relative, which led to tangible results.

"*Mon Dieu,* what a swelling!" exclaimed Marianne's mother, though the more worldly uncle (a cousin, actually) calmed her down and summoned his own physician, who said it was an oedema and (prompted by his master) immediately proposed to take the patient to a spa for a quickie cure , after which she would surely improve. Just what kind of improvement he meant we have no way of knowing; in any case, a few months later Marianne gave birth to a boy, and returned in good health to her mother, who was very happy to see that the unsightly swelling was gone. Not long thereafter, the family physician, Doctor Valsin, introduced his adopted son, Jean-Marie August. It was this pseudo-Valsin's grandson who became the discredited major or captain or whatever in the Dreyfus affair.

Nothing terrible had happened up to this point, nothing that's not part of life. And the French Revolution, which had broken out in the meantime, was not only not terrible—it was a dazzling peak of world history. As a result, the royal family was, alas, beheaded, and my aunt Marianne—for being on fairly good terms with said family—was locked up in the Temple. Still not a tragedy, though certainly unpleasant.

The trouble began in prison, after dark, when things quieted down and one of the guards not yet imbued with the proper revolutionary spirit slipped a piece of paper into the still soft hand of the woman prisoner, who had been languishing there for several months. The note said: "Madame, do not fear, I will deliver you from captivity." This became the root of the problem, this act of kindness. For who was the liberator? None other than her own illegitimate son, the bastard whom we thought we had luckily gotten rid of. The mother was so moved by the man's kindness that on September 22, 1795, in Nimes, before the notary public M. Fouquet, she acknowledged him as her natural son and promptly adopted him, and he just as promptly assumed the name Valsin (Walsin)-Esterházy.

And that's how we got involved in this mess. Of course, when the Dreyfus scandal broke, we promptly sued, demanding that he desist from using the E. name—he obviously couldn't be allowed to drag it through the mud; besides, a real gentleman is never anti-Semitic. But the French courts only forbade him to use the title count (a start, don't knock it); citing something from the Code Napoleon, they permitted him to keep the name. They were dedicated now to the rule of law.

In sum, the ignoble colonel is an Esterházy, though barely. *Un peu,* to put it more fittingly. But if that's the case, everybody can be an Esterházy: you, me, the whole world. That is: a Walsin. So remember: Walsin is the name, never mind Esterházy. Practice it at home: Walsin, Walsin, Walsin. In another hundred years I'm giving a quiz. ❧

Translated by Ivan Sanders

Ádám Nádasdy

Flora in Favour and Disfavour

I probably like her because she turns her back on me. She does not care for me, she just carries on with her job. As long as I can remember, this picture has been hanging in one of the houses, one of the rooms, above the bed, next to the upright piano, or between the tile stove and the double door. It comes from Stabiae, near Pompeii, dug out from the ashes of Vesuvius. The art historians call her "Flora", goddess of flowers, plants, all vegetation. My father, from whom I inherited the picture, said her name was "Ver", the Latin for "spring", and I, as a child, connected this word with the identically sounding Hungarian "vér" ("blood"), which lent unusual gravity to this light and fluffy picture. I was born in 1947, and soon became accustomed to the fact that many things possessed an invisible gravity, especially those that came "from peacetime", that is, from before the Siege. ("The Siege", in the usage of our family and that of many others, meant the Russian siege of Budapest in the winter of 1944/45, later referred to in official Communist parlance as "the Liberation".) It seemed to me that there were few such things around—but obviously, at the beginning of the fifties practically everything (and everybody) had to be survivors from before the Siege: the furniture, the clothes, the plates, the lift, the paving stones, the rubbish-collecting horse-and-cart. Where else would all these things have come from? Obviously, we ate with the same knives and used the same lift ("No smoking in the elevating chair"). And yet everything was different. The beautiful objects produced by modern designers right before the siege had also become old, like the Bakelite table telephone set with the elegant tall neck ("Standard" brand), or the brilliant art déco metal-and-glass doors of the "Newsreel" Cinema, built in concentric circles around the box-office. Such things—though just a few years old then—were not referred to in the family as "new"; occasionally people would touch them or rest their eyes on them with a moment of quiet. The collapse of 1945, and the ensuing Communist takeover of

Ádám Nádasdy
has published several volumes of poetry and teaches linguistics at the School of English & American Studies of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

1948, carved such a deep trench in people's thinking, completely overturning the relationship of the possible and the impossible, that in this light even physical objects seemed different. Like someone putting on a black arm-band on his ordinary daytime suit: he will appear to be wearing mourning attire, even though his clothes are the same, from his tie down to his socks. One decisive new sign will push into the background many other, familiar signs bearing no new information. In this sense, then, we were indeed eating with different forks and knives, and using a different lift to go up to a different floor. (In the lift, I was fascinated by the incredibly archaic Hungarian of the notice, wondering what an "elevating chair" was, until my brother explained that it was nothing but the old official term for the lift itself. I was surprised: I had assumed that this "elevating chair" had disappeared, like the cable-car on the slope of Castle Hill, or like Elizabeth Bridge, or like the word "Royal" from the façade of the post office.) But the woman with the green flowers and the blood-like name was the same.

My father, who directed at the State Opera, bought the picture in Pompeii sometime in the twenties, when he travelled in Italy as a young man. It is a good print, plastered on thin plywood. I remember when Grandfather (a retired First World War naval officer from the Austrian imperial navy and a real jack-of-all-trades) pieced together a frame for it. At first, the ugly green paint and the harsh new material were in painful disharmony with the picture, but as time went on, they mysteriously ripened to suit it, until the frame came to bear the same greenish-pale mellowness and timeless peace as the fresco itself. My father liked the picture, he would tell us about Pompeii, about sunken worlds, the continents of Gondwana and Mu, all on a strictly scientific basis.

Then, for some reason, the picture fell into disfavour. Perhaps it was the rudimentary frame, or that it began to fade and lose colour, or that it looked very *fin-de-siècle,* which was definitely out in the 1950s. It was relegated to the family bungalow in the countryside, near Lake Velence, another place where everything was new and old at the same time, like an embalmed corpse. This holiday resort had begun to be developed right before the war in 1940, and my grandparents were among the first to buy a plot and build a summer house. Nothing worked. There was a Bauhaus-style beach with an unused restaurant where goats were kept, and a roof terrace where you couldn't go up because it was damaged by a bomb. A gentleman with no legs and a straw hat was selling lollipops from his wheelchair, and grass-snakes lived in the marshy water. Behind our house my parents had a second, smaller house built in 1955 to accommodate the whole extended family (my mother had two older sons). This building was finished in a rustic simple style, to avoid damaging comment on the part of envious neighbours and the local police. It was crammed with old jumble no longer needed in Budapest. Thieves would occasionally break in during the winter months, let them have it. The picture was in the attic bedroom now, under the thatched roof,

where the two camp beds met head to head. The frame gradually became more and more warped in the humid evenings. If the woman did not turn her back to the room, she would have seen my first embrace, unexpected, agile, desperate, on a pouring summer night; as it is, she must only have sensed with her nape that she was crossing a field of force that night, and felt with her naked soles the gentle shuddering of the earth.

Flora. *Stabiae. Courtesy of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts.*

How small her hands and feet are. This may explain the painting's gracefulness—mind you, the whole thing is only about 15 by 10 inches—though if you look at the woman more carefully, you'll see she is of an imposing physique: tall, straight, big-bottomed, long-legged. A Nordic, stately type. She could be a dancer, except that dancers cannot communicate motion and stillness simultaneously with such skill. Flora displays a different behaviour above and below her waist. Her feet are stepping, she is in a position from which she has to move on immediately. But her hand only seemingly stretches for the flower. On the contrary: she holds it in position, with eternal calm, fastening it rather than picking it. Perhaps she is a dancer—but then of the Isadora Duncan kind, who didn't do anything, but did it with enormous strength and intensity. To be body yet air. To be *recherché,* yet to be plain natural. Does this woman have anything to do with nature? Or are we faced with a sophisticated fashion photograph from one of Pompeii's *haute couture* firms? ❧

HISTORY

Lee Congdon

The Evolution of a Conservative

Béla Menczer (1902–1983)

There are men of whom it must be said that their lives are of interest primarily because they illuminate the inner history of an epoch. In the course of a long life, Béla Menczer built no more than a modest reputation as an international journalist, popular historian, and would-be adventurer, but his evolution from a revolutionary socialist to a counterrevolutionary conservative sheds considerable light on the spiritual crisis of the century now coming to a close—one that has witnessed war, revolution, and mass murder on an unprecedented scale. Moreover, that evolution reflects Menczer's unusual ability to discern what he believed to be the supramundane significance of worldly events.

Born in Budapest during the twilight years of the Habsburg Monarchy, Menczer was too young to serve in the Great War, but old enough to respond to the initial promptings of his rebellious nature. During the time that the Monarchy was fighting for its life, he began to attend meetings of the Galileo Circle, a gathering of radical left-wing university students and intellectuals, and when, after the war and the quick collapse of a democratic and a Soviet Republic, the government of Admiral Miklós Horthy failed to curb a White Terror that targeted leftists and Jews, he proclaimed his conversion to "revolutionary socialism".[1]

Menczer's hatred of the Horthy counterrevolution was all the more intense because, although born to a prosperous Calvinist family, his father was at least partially of Jewish origin. The senior Béla Menczer was in fact first cousin to the mother of Oszkár Jászi; the famous editor of *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century), an assimilated Jew, visited the Menczer home often and exerted a lasting, though not a decisive, influence on Menczer's intellectual evolution. We know, for example, that the younger man admired the first book Jászi wrote in Vienna after leaving Hungary in 1919: a memoir/history of the Hungarian postwar that included a bitter denunciation of the Horthy regime and all its works.[2] Itching to do something subversive, Menczer and three friends arranged a

---

Lee Congdon,
a historian, teaches at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, and is the author of The Young Lukács, *and* Exile and Social Thought—Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria, 1919–1933. *His essay on Béla Menczer is a chapter from the forthcoming* Final Destination—Hungarian Intellectuals in England, 1933–1983.

series of lectures for fellow law students on incendiary topics such as the democratic/socialist evolution of modern Europe.[3]

At the time, Hungarian law required that those who organized any meeting at which more than five people were to be present obtain prior permission from the police. When, early in 1922, the headstrong Menczer refused to comply with the law, the police took him into custody. A court quickly sentenced him to prison for 18 months, ten of which he served before being released with the proviso that he report regularly to the authorities. Soon tiring of such a restricted life, he obtained a forged passport and made his way to Vienna, then the centre of the Hungarian emigration. Finding work in the once proud imperial capital proved to be difficult, however, and in 1924 he moved on to Paris, a natural choice for someone so in love with all things French.

For the next five years, Menczer eked out a living in Paris by commenting on Central European affairs for Léon Blum's *Le Populaire* and such other publications as *Le Soir* and *Le Quotidien*.[4] He obtained those impressive journalistic assignments as a result of his association with József Diner-Dénes, a Blum confidant and leader of the Paris *Világosság* (Light) group of Hungarian socialists. Menczer admired Diner-Dénes as a *"curious sort of Socialist —too fond of humanistic culture to be a revolutionary and at heart... even a 'great-Austrian'."*[5] The older man possessed a religious and prophetic understanding of socialism that fascinated Menczer, who had always been attracted by the prophetic genius of the Jews.[6] From the mid-1920s on, certainly, he began to focus his attention on those prophets of the past who seemed to have been the most clairvoyant.

When he was not writing for French journals, Menczer spent most of his time in the cosmopolitan circle that had gathered around Mihály Károlyi, the aristocrat-turned-democrat who led the short-lived Hungarian Democratic Republic of 1918–19. It was largely as a result of that connection that he came into contact with other exile circles—Russian, Bulgarian, Italian, and Spanish. Having met members of the latter group, including the writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, he formed the opinion that Spaniards and Hungarians shared much in common.[7] But he did not, then, give the matter further thought, for he was too busy helping Károlyi and Diner-Dénes do everything possible to discredit the Horthy government.

In that effort Menczer worked closely with Gyula Illyés, a former Budapest comrade and fellow exile. In fact, he shared a room with Illyés, later to become one of twentieth-century Hungary's finest poets and men of letters, on the Ile St Louis in 1925–26. In the latter year the two young "Huns"[8] even convinced themselves that they could be instrumental in bringing the counterrevolutionary regime down, in the aftermath of a bizarre attempt on the part of Hungarian civilian and military leaders to disrupt the French economy by circulating 1.5 billion forged francs.

In the event, nothing much came of the affair, in part it seems because the French did not wish to take any action that might dampen the spirit of Locarno. Disappointed, Menczer stayed on in Paris until 1929, when the police, increasingly worried about a possible communist threat, expelled him for *"subversive activity"*. Knowing German almost as well as he did French, he moved to Berlin, *"which was becoming increasingly important and about which [he] wanted to have some experience."*[9] There, in the city of Isherwood's famous stories, Menczer earned his keep as a correspondent for a Vienna press agency, a lecturer (chiefly on Proudhon and

Georges Sorel) at the *Volkshochschule* and *Hochschule für Politik*, and a specialist on Central European affairs for *Die Welt am Montag* and *Die Weltbühne*, the principal organ of the *linke Intellektuelle*.

It did not take Menczer long to discover that Germany would never replace France in his affections. In fact, he despised the country, as anyone who read his inexpert *Weltbühne* ruminations on Hegel could plainly see. It was from Hegel's philosophy, he insisted, that Prussian-German imperialism drew its inspiration. Worse, *"Hegelianism did not stop at the German linguistic frontier;"* it was the source of communism and fascism as well. *"All three asserted their claim to power in the name of 'objective necessity'."*[10] Such historical fatalism, he surmised, was deeply rooted in Protestant notions of predestination.

It must have come as a relief when, shortly after Hitler's accession to power, Menczer retreated to Paris. Much had changed since the 1920s, however, and, always eager for new experiences, he pushed on to London in the summer of 1934—fully intending to return to the French capital. He took lodgings in Bloomsbury and remained there for the next six years. Thanks to his Hungarian contacts, the internationally-known Károlyi above all, he managed to wangle an invitation to the Saturday gatherings at Lansdowne House presided over by Henry Wickham Steed, former foreign editor of *The Times* and notorious enemy of the Habsburg Monarchy. No doubt he hoped to ingratiate himself with Steed and other members of the salon by publishing in *The Contemporary Review* an article opposing a Habsburg restoration.[11]

Not that Menczer wrote solely as an opportunist. He still considered himself to be a socialist, albeit of a fiercely independent sort. Thus he fell in with the Labour Party, working as an advisor and translator for its International Department. From 1936 to 1938 he also lectured for the Workers' Educational Association.[12] Some of the material for his lectures he drew from the research that he had begun for a book on the London exile of Kossuth, Mazzini, and Ledru-Rollin. Menczer never wrote the book because his studies disillusioned him with the 1848–49 revolutions, and hence with Kossuth and Hungarian nationalism. *"Had Kossuth's party prevailed,"* he observed in later years, *"the dissolution of Austria might have led to the same results in the 1850s which we saw almost a century later: the clash between Pan-German and Pan-Slav ambitions."*[13]

As his enthusiasm for Kossuth's left liberalism waned, Menczer developed a new interest in the right liberalism of József Eötvös. Unlike Kossuth, who came from an impoverished and Lutheran noble family, Eötvös was a Baron and a Catholic. Thus, although he loved liberty every bit as much, if not more, than Kossuth did, he did not share the latter's nationalism and hostility to the Habsburgs. He served as Minister of Education, Arts and Public Worship in the short-lived 1848 government of Lajos Batthyány, but left Hungary for Munich when war erupted with Austria. It was in the Bavarian capital that he wrote *The Ruling Ideas of the Nineteenth Century and Their Influence on the State.*

Having re-read Eötvös's masterly study of liberty, equality, and nationality with fresh eyes, Menczer was pleased to note that the Baron's terminology was "definitely un-Hegelian". Just as definitely, it was not borrowed from the French Revolution but from English constitutional history. To Eötvös, *"English Liberty means mainly personal freedom; the accent lies on the word 'person'—the Christian medieval notion of the human person."*[14] Like Tocqueville, whom he much admired, Eötvös recognized that equality conflicted

with liberty; ultimately, he believed, egalitarian demands would lead to a strong and coercive central power and to the extinguishing of liberty.

In time, Eötvös reasoned, the central power would turn to nationalism as a legitimizing idea, for nationalism was the mightiest of the three ruling ideas of the nineteenth century. Writing about Eötvös in 1939, Menczer was struck by the accuracy of his subject's prophecies, by the uses communists made of egalitarianism and Nazis of nationalism. Just as important, he was taken with Eötvös's proposed remedy, namely a reaffirmation of the ideas of liberty and human oneness as they were embodied in Christian civilization. *"The creative policy of the future,"* Menczer wrote, *"should aim at the protection of personality against the arbitrary interference of national and equalitarian collectivisms. Such a policy must necessarily be Christian."*[15]

Menczer did not mean by that that a theocracy should be established, for he recognized the irreversibility of secularization. But precisely because the state had become secularized, he believed that human personality and individual conscience depended upon a Christian society; both were Christianity in its secular—moral and political—aspect. *"It is characteristic of the Christian and Western medium,"* he wrote in the 1930s, *"that men, in their reasoning and moral feeling, should behave as members of universal mankind rather than as subjects of a particular king or particles of a special community."*[16]

That, certainly, was the way that Menczer, as a cultural Christian of partially Jewish origin, wished to behave. And with good reason. *"When Israel was dispersed,"* he wrote in the 1950s, *"mankind itself became a spiritual Israel."*[17] Of course the idea of Judeo-Christian universality ran counter to the Protestantism into which he had been born; increasingly drawn to the faith of Eötvös, he was not able to take Catholic instruction before Hitler unleashed war on Poland—and on his beloved France.

Badly shaken, Menczer could scarcely speak of the fall of Paris. *"As to the events,"* he wrote to Oszkár Jászi in a long and anguished letter of August 10, 1940, *"I do not know how I did to survive to them* [sic]. *On the 17th of June I had really no wish and no desire to do so. I thought the fall of Paris and of France was definitely more than I could bear and still to-day, I beg you to forgive me, if I do not attempt to give my version and my 'explanation' of the French tragedy."* He had, indeed, discovered an explanation in the writings of the nineteenth-century Spanish conservative Juan Donoso Cortés. *"Europe fell exactly as the strange genius of Donoso Cortés has foretold that it will: sophistry was followed by demagogy, demagogy by despotism, despotism by barbaric invasion in a moment when all better spiritual and moral energies were paralysed by fear..."*[18]

In his late 30s, Menczer could not endure the thought of remaining on the sidelines while the war against barbarism was being waged.

> I am in close touch with the French organization of General de Gaulle [he confided to Jászi]. I hope to be of some use to them, last not least on account of my knowledge of some Arabic. The Free French Forces are already in action as you have probably read it in the British communiqués. Some of the General's collaborators were known to me already in France. As to the General himself, he is a most brilliant intelligence with a very considerable knowledge not only of military matters, but also of history, politics and of all things in Europe and the Middle-East, where he served throughout the greater part of his career... De Gaulle is to-day the man who after Joan of Arc and Henry IV may become the third liberator of France from dissolution and disaster.

Just as presciently, and revealingly, he shared with Jászi his hopes and fears with respect to the future.

> I look with confidence at the military side of the picture. Germany has achieved victories by 10,000 tanks and 10,000 aircraft. She will be defeated by 20,000 tanks and 20,000 aircraft. This is rather simple and only a question of time. Much less simple is the deeply rooted spiritual, social and moral evil of Europe and of the century of which Hitlerism is but a passing and superficial expression and symptom. Nazism will come to an end, the "age of the masses", of brute instincts, of pseudo-religions and pseudo-sciences will, or at least may, last. All what we, men with an intellectual, moral and religious conscience, can do is very little. We can fight the battle up to the bitter end (the end will be "bitter" even in case of victory) and we can save our souls.[19]

Before the end of August, Menczer had obtained permission to join the Free French Forces and soon found himself with 2000 other men, including de Gaulle himself, en route to French West Africa. On arrival, he participated in the abortive Free French-British attempt to secure Dakar, as part of de Gaulle's plan to establish a foothold in France's colonial empire. For almost three years subsequent to that he served as an infantry NCO in French Equatorial Africa, accompanying patrols on the road from Chad to Libya and trying to ward off repeated attacks of malaria. In April of 1941, while convalescing after one such attack and reflecting on his experience of war, he made the spiritual decision toward which he had been leaning for years—he requested and received baptism as a Catholic.[20] Finally, in 1943, he was declared unfit for further service and sent back to England, where, for the next three years, he manned the German and East European press desk for General de Gaulle.

That work came to an end in May 1946 and Menczer returned to civilian life, where he made his way as a free-lance writer and a correspondent for French newspapers before landing an editorial job with the BBC. Only then did he decide to make England his permanent home, and that despite the fact that he was in the midst of a personal crisis. His Catholic faith had led to growing tension in his relationship with his companion and sometime lover Ruth von Schulze-Gaevernitz, a highly intelligent woman whom he had met in Berlin in 1930. Seeing no hope of overcoming their ever deepening alienation, the two decided to go their separate ways, and in July 1947 Menczer married Marjorie Ries, a secondary school teacher of French nine years his junior. A Catholic who shared his deep commitment to the Church, Ries had served during the war in General de Gaulle's Red Cross.

Not long after Menczer's marriage, Jászi, who was on his way to or from a last visit to Hungary, stopped off in London. According to Menczer, they attended Mass together and discussed Catholicism at length. Although his old friend and relative had no intention of converting, Menczer concluded that Jászi had Catholic inclinations and conservative sympathies.[21] This came as no surprise, for already, in an address given at a London gathering in 1945, Menczer had linked Jászi's name to that of Eötvös.[22] Like the Catholic Baron, Jászi recognized the danger of nationalism and championed a more universal community of persons. He saw too the need for a religious, or at least a natural law, foundation for ethics.

And yet, despite his genuine admiration for Jászi, Menczer had already begun to move beyond a vaguely Catholic right liberalism to an assertively Catholic reform conservatism. In large part that was be-

cause the war and Nazi atrocities—especially the mass murder of the Jews—had brought home to him as never before the reality of evil. Anyone like him, he considered, who continued to believe in the necessity and importance of reform had to make certain that he never lost sight of that reality. The nineteenth century, Menczer now concluded, had prepared the way for the catastrophic twentieth by its optimism and its belief in the curative effects of revolution. Only a few prophets had correctly diagnosed the times and foreseen the disasters that the spirit of revolution would produce.

Chief among those prophets was Donoso Cortés, whom Menczer had begun to read before the war, perhaps when preparing his Berlin lectures on Proudhon, the Spaniard's *bête noire.*[23] Unlike the intellectuals who welcomed the European Revolution of 1848–49, Donoso viewed it as an effort to uproot Christian civilization and to plant a new order inspired by the secular religions of nationalism and socialism. The result would be nothing short of calamitous. *"You,"* Donoso told members of the Spanish Cortes in the midst of the revolutionary turmoil, *"believe that civilization and the world are advancing, when civilization and the world are regressing. The world is taking great strides towards the constitution of the most gigantic and destructive despotism which men have ever known."*[24]

Shortly after delivering that speech, Donoso assumed his responsibilities as Minister Plenipotentiary to Prussia. But like Menczer after him, he found the political and intellectual atmosphere in Berlin to be stifling; in particular, *"the 'nebulous rationalism' of Hegelian philosophy filled him with horror."*[25] Gazing into the future, he foresaw the rise of a nationalistic, and despotic, Prussia. More importantly and more strikingly, he revised his once favourable opinion of Russia. No longer did he view the eastern colossus as the bulwark of European conservatism, but as a future and terrifying enemy of Christian civilization. Having witnessed the chaos caused by the revolutions of 1848–49, he foresaw a time when an even greater European anarchy would open the continent to invasion from the East, to a Russian autocracy wedded to revolutionary socialism.[26] Such a prophecy could not but impress Menczer, whose native land had fallen victim to Russian communist occupation as a result of the Second World War.

It was that same prophecy that had once caught the attention of Metternich, the political leader for whom Menczer had gained a new appreciation. Metternich *"was fully aware of the dangerous tendencies existing in Russia,"* the Hungarian observed, *"and attributed them, again not so wrongly, to circles which propagated innovations from the West."*[27] Just as important, Metternich understood that nineteenth-century liberals, even those on the political right, like Eötvös, had erred in their excessive optimism regarding human nature and in their identification of the guiding principle of politics and social life.

For Metternich and all genuine conservatives, that guiding principle was not Liberty, but Order. In French, the language he preferred to use, the Austrian leader once wrote that *"the word 'liberty' has no value for me as a point of departure, but as a point of real arrival. It is the word 'order' that designates the point of departure. The idea of liberty can only be based upon the idea of order."*[28] Menczer therefore concluded that Metternich was not opposed to true—disciplined rather than anarchic—liberty, and within the context of a stable order he wished to extend its frontiers. That was particularly true in Hungary, which he viewed as crucial to the preservation of Austria's status as a great power.

Naturally Metternich had little use for Kossuth's brand of liberal nationalism, and though he—the Austrian—admired the more conservative István Széchenyi, he thought him too much the Romantic.[29] He did, however, recognize men of like mind among the few conservative members of the Reform Generation (1825–48), chief among whom was Count József Dessewffy, a Catholic loyal to the Habsburg dynasty. Dessewffy passed the torch of reform conservatism on to his sons, especially the gifted Aurél, but they were not able to wrest the reform movement from Kossuth and the radical nationalists. That was a great misfortune, Menczer maintained, because it meant that Hungary conspired in its own undoing. *"It adopted a revolutionary nationalism as its ideology... and deserted the spirit of conservative reform which could only reside in a strong Monarchy."*[30]

Menczer had clearly changed his tune since 1934, when, as we have seen, he still leaned to the left and opposed a Habsburg restoration. *"Landscapes change,"* he wrote in the early 1950s, *"with every move of the sun and with every step the spectator takes, and the history of an era provides just such a landscape. The light changes with the passing of time."*[31] In the changed light of the post-war era he had come to believe that the Austrian Royal House had presided over a Christian Monarchy of Order and Liberty. In its opposition to Revolutionary France it had therefore fought a religious even more than a secular war, for as Donoso had pointed out, modern political struggles were properly understood as the continuations of theological controversies by other means. Thus he had identified monarchy with Catholicism, liberalism with Deism, democracy with Pantheism, and socialism with open rebellion against God.[32]

This secularization of theology meant that the battle for the soul of Western Civilization—more properly, Western Christendom—would be won or lost in the arena of secular history and political thought. Donoso recognized that and he therefore took his rightful place alongside Joseph de Maistre and the Vicomte de Bonald among *"the lay Fathers of the Church"*, a dignity bestowed upon them by a Menczer favourite, the novelist, dandy, and sometime ultra-Catholic Jules Amadée Barbey d'Aurevilly.

Although he never quite made an explicit claim, Menczer saw himself, if not as a lay Father of the Church, at least as a minor actor in the historical drama of *"secular spirituality"*, a crusader engaged in a life or death struggle against the Enemy who in his primal rebellion against God had inspired the human rebellion against God's Order, the progressive stages of which were the French Revolution of 1789, the European Revolution of 1848–49, and the World Revolution of 1914–18 and beyond. Its aim, he believed, was not liberty and reform, but tyranny and the deification of Man. True rebellion was in his view always on the side of authority.

> I will never believe the world perfect enough [he wrote towards the end of his life] to be able to live without revolutionaries, and only a solid conservative order can produce true, genuine revolutionaries. When the Pope and the Emperor divided power over Europe between them, there was room for St Francis of Assisi. When the Church was safe, when Empires and dynasties were solidly established, there were statesmen, sometimes Bishops and sometimes rulers, who could dare to make radical reform and audacious innovations, which had a chance of success because the authority which introduced them was unchallenged and universally recognized. A weak and tottering government never dares to do anything, and if the Monarch and the Church in modern

> times were reactionary, it was because the progressive Radicals, so-called free-thinkers and agnostics made them weak and tottering, because this was their aim, rather than to make social improvements and genuine reforms prevail.[33]

To be sure, the restoration of Christian and monarchical authority was not a likelihood in the second half of the twentieth century, and Menczer knew it. There was, however, one country in which he could witness a successful holding action, a last stand of Christian civilization. *"For a generation,"* he told Jászi in 1948, *"only Spain, among* all *of Europe's nations, has displayed real intellectual and cultural life in the midst of the decadence, the dissolution, or, in the best case, the stagnation in the rest of Europe."*[34]

In the postwar years, Menczer improved his Spanish, travelled in Spain, and lectured at *El Ateneo,* the free university of Madrid where the young Donoso Cortés had once professed Constitutional Political Law. It was, of course, Donoso who had first inspired in Menczer a love of Spanish culture, but as he began to acquaint himself with other Spanish thinkers, men such as Pastor Díaz, Menéndez y Pelayo, Ortega y Gasset, and Unamuno, he noticed that they were all unconventional, unorthodox, difficult to categorize intellectually—rather as he imagined himself to be. Almost all, too, were reformers and defenders of freedom, but champions of order; men who eschewed pagan (stoic) resignation while at the same time possessing a tragic sense of life.[35]

Nor were these apparent contradictions an accident, but the direct result of modern Spanish history. Once closely tied to France, Spaniards had taken up arms against Napoleon and the French Revolution in 1808. France's *"revolution of the rights of Man,"* Menczer argued, *"evoked a revolution of historical rights, a 'conservative revolution' as Ernst Jünger and others said later,* a renewal with the goal of preservation."[36] That was the key to understanding the Spanish mind, a mind that Menczer found more congenial than any he had previously known.

Menczer recorded these reflections on Spain in the early 1970s, at a time when an aging General Franco was still at the Spanish helm. He was, however, unperturbed, for he recognized that at the time Franco had taken up arms against the republican government, Spain had been divided into two irreconcilable camps, the one revolutionary and anti-Christian, the other counterrevolutionary and Christian. One side or the other was going to prevail and Menczer was *"totally convinced that Franco* [by his victory] *rendered service to the whole of Europe and Europe was most ungrateful to Spain and to him."*[37] He recalled what Donoso had said in the famous speech on dictatorship he delivered before the Spanish Cortes on January 4, 1849, namely that as men's internal (religious) control weakens, liberty invites tyranny, and so external (political) control must be established.

> Thus, as I have said, Gentlemen, the choice does not lie between liberty and dictatorship; if that were so, I would vote for liberty, just as all of us here would do. The problem, and my conclusion, are as follows: we have to choose between the dictatorship of insurrection and the dictatorship of government; of these two alternatives I choose dictatorship on the part of the government, as being less onerous and less shameful.[38]

Menczer agreed. Early in 1950 he wrote to tell Jászi about a rewarding four-week trip he had recently made to Franco's Spain. *"The Spanish atmosphere,"* he reported, *"is alive and exciting, full of far-reaching visions, ideas, and plans."* The Franco government, he conceded, was a

military—and, he might have added, a Donosian—dictatorship, but it was far removed from either Fascism or Nazism. There was in Spain no extolling of instinct, no cult of physical strength, and no mass movement ideology. *"The key to Italian Fascism,"* he rightly observed, *"was Mussolini's former Marxism... Franco was never a Marxist."* Nor was the Generalissimo a tyrant or a demagogue. Conversations in public places, even among critics of the regime, were frank and unguarded, and though there were limits to criticism, they were notably broad.[39]

Menczer was greatly pleased, but not surprised when, during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Franco spoke publicly of the duty that Christian nations had to stand by the rebels.[40] For like the Spanish in 1808—and in 1936—Hungarians had confronted a revolutionary and imperialist power with *"a conservative revolution", "a revolution of historical rights."*

Spain represented for Menczer a last flicker of hope for Catholic monarchy, a last reminder that order and liberty could be brought into proper balance. The latter goal requires emphasis, for what Carl Schmitt once wrote of Donoso Cortés could also be said of Menczer: *"In his personal being* [he] *was liberal in the best sense of the word, even more essentially liberal than his humanist and moralizing enemies, for the true home of all liberal qualities is, after all, in the sphere of the individual and the personal, not in that of government and politics."*[41]

And yet, as a Christian, Menczer did not feel obliged to place all of his hope in earthly events; indeed, he believed it necessary to live without *"practical remedies"*, with the hope of final salvation alone. That salvation and final justice had not yet arrived; *"the dead,"* he wrote on the eve of the Hungarian Revolution, *"are not yet resurrected and they do not yet walk. But there is no doubt that they will."* A prophetic utterance, that. But even if he were to die before that day arrived, it would matter little, for he had come to believe that true life began only when earthly existence ended.[42] ❧

NOTES

1 ■ Béla Menczer, *Bread Far From My Cradle,* unpublished manuscript, I, p. 32. Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, Budapest. I am grateful to Mr Csaba Nagy for permission to quote from Menczer's memoirs.

2 ■ See Oszkár Jászi, *Magyar Kálvária—Magyar Föltámadás* (Budapest: Magyar Hírlap Könyvek, 1989 [1920]).

3 ■ Menczer, *Bread,* I, pp. 36-38.

4 ■ "Menczer Béla Párizsban," *Valóság,* XVIII, 10 (1975), 46.

5 ■ Menczer, *Bread,* II, p. 29.

6 ■ See for example, Béla Menczer, "Karl Kraus and the Struggle Against the Modern Gnostics," *Dublin Review,* CCXXIV, 450 (1950), 48, and *A Commentary on Hungarian Literature* (Castrop-Rauxel: Amerikai Magyar Kiadó, 1956), p. 131.

7 ■ Menczer, *Bread,* II, p. 5.

8 ■ See Illyés's famous book, *Hunok Párisban* (Budapest: Révai, 1946).

9 ■ "Menczer Béla Párizsban," 49; Menczer, *Bread,* II, p. 53.

10 ■ Béla Menczer, "Hegel," *Die Weltbühne,* XXVIII, 5 (1932), 162.

11 ■ See Béla Menczer, "Should the Habsburgs Be Restored?," *The Contemporary Review,* CXLVI, 823 (1934), 44-48.

12 ■ Menczer, *Bread,* II, p. 68.

13 ■ Menczer, *A Commentary,* p. 126.

14 ■ Béla Menczer, "Joseph Eötvös and Hungarian Liberalism," *The Slavonic and East European Review,* XVII, 51 (1939), 533-34.

15 ■ Ibid., p. 538.

16 ■ Cited in Aurel Kolnai, *The War Against the West* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), p. 25.

17 ■ Menczer, *A Commentary,* p. 131.

18 ■ Béla Menczer's letter to Oszkár Jászi, August 10, 1940, Oscar Jászi Papers, Uncatalogued Correspondence, 1940, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. I am grateful to

Dr. Jean Ashton, Director of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, for permission to quote from the Jászi Papers.

19■ Ibid.

20■ Menczer, *Bread,* III, pp. 41–42. He was confirmed at London's prestigious Brompton Oratory in 1948.

21■ Ibid., I, p. 65.

22■ Béla Menczer, "Oscar Jászi," *The Slavonic and East European Review,* XXIV, 63 (1946), 100.

23■ See Donoso's famous *Ensayo sobre el catolicismo, el liberalismo y el socialismo* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1985).

24■ Juan Donoso Cortés in Béla Menczer (ed.), *Tensions of Order and Freedom: Catholic Political Thought, 1789–1848* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994 [1952]), p. 170.

25■ Carl Schmitt, "Donoso Cortés in Berlin, 1849" in *Positionen und Begriffe* (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1988 [1940]), p. 77.

26■ Ibid., pp. 83, 85, and Béla Menczer, "A Prophet of Europe's Disasters: Juan Donoso Cortés (1809-1853)," *The Month,* CLXXXIII, 959 (1947), 275–76.

27■ Menczer in Menczer (ed.), *Tensions,* p. 139; see also, Béla Menczer, "Metternich und Széchenyi," *Der Donauraum,* V (1960), 81.

28■ Metternich, cited in Menczer (ed.), *Tensions,* p. 44n.

29■ See Menczer, "Metternich und Széchenyi," 79.

30■ Béla Menczer, "Hungary's Place in European History," *Modern Age,* III, 1 (1958-59), 76.

31■ Menczer in Menczer (ed.), *Tensions,* p. 136; see also *A Commentary,* p. 10.

32■ Menczer, "A Prophet," p. 274.

33■ Menczer, *Bread,* I, p. 79.

34■ Menczer's letter to Oszkár Jászi, July 17, 1948, Oscar Jászi Papers, Uncataloged Correspondence, 1947–1949.

35■ Béla Menczer, "Spanischer Konservatismus" in Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner (ed.), *Rekonstruktion des Konservatismus* (Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1972), pp. 294–95.

36■ Ibid, p. 299.

37■ Béla Menczer, "The Full Story of Béla Menczer's Démarches to Try to Help Hungary in 1956," p. 39. I am grateful to Dr. György Litván for making this unpublished manuscript available to me.

38■ Juan Donoso Cortés in Menczer (ed.), *Tensions,* p. 176.

39■ Menczer's letter to Oszkár Jászi, January 13, 1950, Oscar Jászi Papers, Uncataloged Correspondence, 1950-1952.

40■ Menczer, "The Full Story," p. 37.

41■ Carl Schmitt, "Der unbekannte Donoso Cortés" in *Positionen,* p. 120.

42■ Menczer, *A Commentary,* pp, 93-94, 131; *Bread,* II, p. 85.

Miklós Györffy

Apathy, Irony, Empathy

Árpád Ajtony: *A birodalom elvesztése* (The Loss of the Empire), Pécs, Jelenkor, 1998, 223 pp. • László Garaczi: *Pompásan buszozunk!* (What Fun We Have on This Coach Ride!), Pécs, Jelenkor,1998, 135 pp. • Gábor T. Szántó: *Mószer* (Nark), Budapest, Magvető, 1997. 244 pp.

An unusual collection of short stories has just been published by Jelenkor Kiadó, the Pécs-based publisher. Although all the pieces in it were written around the beginning of the 1970s and were published, if at all, in magazines, they have never been collected in a book. Then twenty-five or twenty-six years of age, Árpád Ajtony was a promising young talent. (I should perhaps disclose that he and I are of the same generation and that he was a good friend of mine.) At that time, young writers just starting out in their career had a hard time of it, as the cultural commissars were extremely suspicious of the generation which appeared on the scene in the 1960s, and whose response to the growing influx of Western influences was not in harmony with official expectations. One, almost paranoid, method of keeping the young troublemakers on a leash was to use every trick to procrastinate publication. They were allowed to publish in magazines and in anthologies—in a quarantine of some sort—but not in book format.

Árpád Ajtony was one of those whose book was just not to be. Whether it was for this reason or some other—perhaps he does not know himself—he left Hungary in 1973, and has lived in Paris ever since. To the best of my knowledge, he has not written a line since. For some time now, he has been teaching social psychology at a university near Paris, and has hardly any contact with his native country. After a delay of almost thirty years, *The Loss of the Empire* has finally come out, confirming in retrospect that his reputation as a talented writer had been well founded. The book evidently bears some features of the period in question, yet it strikes the reader as anything but outmoded. Like many of his contemporaries, Ajtony was influenced by the French *nouveau roman,* which might perhaps explain the dispassionate objectivity of his short stories, with their tedious accuracy in recording the visible and relatable surface of events and objective facts, yet refraining from suggesting comprehensive or symbolic meanings. The presentation could perhaps be traced to the cinema, which greatly influenced the *nouveau roman* itself. The cinema was very close to Ajtony personally: for a number of years he worked as a script writer, contributing to some of the experimental films made at the Balázs Béla Studio. Irrespective of all this, however, and quite in contrast with the declared principles of the *nouveau roman,* Ajtony's short stories always have

---

Miklós Györffy
is our regular reviewer of new fiction.

some mystery, which mostly cannot be revealed, even though they appear to be there in every little detail of the text. Floating these secrets was Árpád Ajtony's exquisite speciality, which linked him to some of the Hungarian writers of the 1900s, called the "knights of mist".

The longest piece in the book, also entitled "The Loss of the Empire", was intended originally as a script, though never made into a film, and though distinguishable in form from Ajtony's other writings. It is about a family of four: the mother, the father, a twenty-five year old son and their daughter named Zsuzsa, who all live in a house with a garden in Buda. Then there is Tamás, a seventeen-year-old schoolboy, who is a misfit and a drifter; although he has his own separate life and friends, through his friendship with Zsuzsa he is becoming more and more bound up with the family in the villa. Almost nothing is known of the girl's mysterious brother, who scarcely sleeps at home and who has a gun, and about whom the family members disclose absolutely nothing. The locked attic of the villa is the "secret", his "empire". At the end of the story Tamás, more or less by accident and presumably in self-defence, shoots the unexpectedly returning brother; then he and the father bury the body in the garden. This not only strengthens his previously vague position in the family, it also robs him of something: the "empire" of the secret. This is an atmospheric short story with many secrets. It occurred to me that this "fugitive" boy of twenty-five could have been the personification of the 1956 Revolution's memory, which had to be concealed and hidden, and finally killed, so that it could no longer haunt us. The motif of the gun supports this, along with a vague feeling that the boy is being tailed. But then the boy could equally be some kind of a prodigal son, and his secret the Alain Fournier secret of puberty, to which the prematurely aged and secretless Tamás could not relate and therefore had to rid himself of it somehow.

One of the finest pieces is the enigmatic story "Kázmér Rákóczi", which is about a decorous and scholarly teacher of Hungarian literature, one of the old guard, whose entire spiritual constitution and unsuspecting nature place him so much out of touch with the milieu in which he teaches, that he finally allows himself to be walled in under a cubicle in the ruined amphitheatre at Óbuda. It is almost as if his students had performed this act out of respect for the old man, and also as if his implicit wish had been fulfilled. "I Went to See Cselebi" is about a peculiar young man with a Turkish-sounding name, whom the school girls all have to visit at some point, allegedly to obtain forged papers to document their absence from school, but in reality to be initiated into the secret. The "secret" here is on the one hand obvious: the loss of virginity; on the other hand it remains unveiled: we never find out who this Cselebi is, what it is that he can do, and why the girls have to visit him. The hero of the short story "I Would Like to Make a Paper Shako"—made into a short film at the Balázs Béla Studio—is a clerk, who, on discovering that he cannot fold a paper shako impromptu, promises to his son to make one in the evening. During the day he learns how from one of his colleagues, but he is also humiliated by some young thugs while meeting his lover in the woods. Adulthood is the inevitable betrayal of the purity of childhood.

"Shopping for Porcelain", a story verging on the absurd, derives its grotesque character from the point that a secret is suggested here, too, when in fact there is none. The whole story is about how Róbert Kálmán and his friends are trying to come by bathroom "porcelains", rated as poor

quality and therefore sold cheap, for his weekend house in Szentendre. The reduced realm of meaning of the short story anticipates the minimalist prose of a fashionable trend today. By contrast, in "Critical Timing", which is a powerful account of a two-day trip abroad by a man and a woman in stifling scenes, some secret is once again surrounding them, in the form of missing explanations: where and why did this man and woman travel together, and what is the connection between them? The objective lack of an explanation perhaps reflects the tormenting vagueness subjectively experienced in their relationship.

It is not that we would have to rewrite the history of Hungarian literature of the past few decades on account of Árpád Ajtony's book. But the fact that he never became the writer he could have perhaps become makes another entry in the inventory of the irreparable damage wreaked by the cultural politics of the socialist era.

László Garaczi's autobiographical prose *What Fun We Have on This Coach Ride!* takes place roughly around the time that Ajtony's short stories were written, in the second half of the 1960s. The author was in his early teens at the time: the text variations written about his childhood, are subtitled "The Confession of a Lemur 2". The new book is a sequel to an earlier book *Mintha élnél* (As If You Were Living), which also contained the "confessions" of a reminiscing "lemur". Similarly to the earlier book, *What Fun We Have on this Coach Ride!* cannot be properly termed as a novel or a short story in the traditional sense, as it hardly has a story line starting out somewhere and moving in a concrete direction. Still, Garaczi, who had been one of the most radical exponents of the new prose, or, rather, "text" up to this book, and who had done everything in his power to undermine the traditional forms of narrative, has allowed himself certain "compromises" in this latest work. For one thing, he has provided a frame for his recollections: "In the afternoon they summoned me, and with some heavy rhetoric they handed me my school report book. I can't bring myself to open it, nine lines of densely packed words, stamps and signatures, I'm going to faint. I'm going home, but my legs fail me, I'm just shuffling with my feet in one spot. It could even be that they know everything by now, the news spreads like fire: I shot the bird with the hairdo. I press a bloody handkerchief on my face. I'll be lucky if they haven't called the cops yet. If I shoot her in the eye, I'm off to the nick, Madame Justice rubs her palms, didn't I tell you that the kid was a ruthless mass-murderer, a Mengele? She provokes me into getting another school reprimand, and I'll be thrown out, I'll become a bum and prison-meat, society will reject me, I'll be fishing through dustbins, oh, God, why have I grown up?"

With one sling-shot, the narrator, who feels at the age of ten that he "has grown up", breaks an office window at Lignimpex, an export-import company, and hits a secretary. On the way home with the reprimand in his bag, he is in mortal agony, because he dreads parental punishment. The confessions are being made in this delaying situation caused by the anticipation of a beating, which is a mere literary fiction, of course: it represents a filter, through which the entire former life of the "kid" narrating the story shows up in a comprehensive and consistent manner, along with the preliminaries and consequences of certain motifs. Garaczi talks about his childhood not so much chronologically but thematically: one by one, he talks about his parents, his classmates, his teachers, the classes and the breaks between them, the street and the games, about the awakening of sexuality, the

training sessions in the sports club and the school trips.

Yet, the book is not just about these banal themes—there is nothing wrong with banality in Garaczi's opinion, anyway; it is about everyday life in the 1960s in general, and about the conversational mode which authentically conveys these childhood memories. The 1960s come in as facts. Garaczi's apparent ambition is to conjure up, in a nostalgic manner and as accurately as possible, a period which now seems like history, with all its typical accessories and cheap gadgets that meant so much to children: among the things that come up in the book are the tiki-taki (a pair of plastic balls attached to each end of a piece of string, manipulated so as to collide in rapid succession), the biro with the stripping girl, the Jaffa ice-cream, "button football" (a cross between tiddly-winks and table football); these contemporary relics are recalled in a manner that can best be described as a textual orgy: "The chicks are running around with bags all frills and foams, except for the less well-off who are swinging plastic bags washable with a viscous sponge. In the stops of the trolley cars there are German-made vending machines in aluminium casing; now you can shop even after closing time, 2 x 2 forints and the cookie or the facial cream pops out, plus the change, 50 fillérs. Then there is the carriage of the street vendor selling pretzels, with the pretzels behind the glass and with a locker box at the bottom, all fitted on the wheels of a pram. There is a bear face made of neon tube on the façade of the café, bubbles of neon, while inside, on the walls, huge brown coffee beans are flying about in the Elite Department Store, ready-to-wear clothes for all occasions. That is not an anorak, Aunt Klári says, only dudes speak like that, it is a wind-cheater. A stool made of yellow-stripped imitation plush for phone desks."

Besides the clumsily outmoded objects, the confessions vividly recall contemporary life on the streets and in school, with the lunacies of the Pioneer movement, all this achieved, as the above passages demonstrated, with the help of a characteristic, multi-layered narrative. The narrator sticks to his childhood perspective only part of the time, slipping in and out of the perspective of reminiscing. The "lemur" confesses love to his childhood, to the bygone days, both by reverting to it and by distancing himself from it. This equally applies to the representation of the hero's conscious mind and to the style of the narrative. Garaczi has a masterly way of switching between the direct and the indirect depiction of how children's minds work. Sometimes he makes his characters speak in direct speech, and sometimes he presents them from an ironic distance, seen through an adult's recollection, described in "adult words": "He already knew that for a raffle ticket offering a chance to travel to the World Youth Meeting, Ági Kun would show hers to him: what she has got, so what has she got, but then again, who cares. Why, you can see Kati Serey's, the elastic band in her knickers expanded as she squats. A cunt. Serey is in the first class, that's almost pre-school, you don't talk to babies like that. From a fifth-former's viewpoint, even a fourth-year is a ridiculous half-complete creature: Say hello to Uncle Bob! His father asks him before leaving: What would you like me to bring you from Karl Marx Stadt? Everything and a peg-top. It's maddening to think that not so long ago he, too, was one of these little fellows with their embryonic consciousness. By the same token, the sixth-years loom large over the horizon as some kind of mythical giants, living the lives of the strong and the powerful, the secret initiates. Next to them, he, a mere speck of dust of a fifth-former, can only hope that one day, through some divine miracle, he, too, will

become strong and powerful, in other words, a sixth-year."

The book—whose title is a reference to school trips—remains faithful to text writing insofar as childhood and the workings of children's minds have no symbolic meaning: they mean nothing but themselves. So, the book is driven by the ambition to express itself with the greatest possible "textual", narrative and psychological accuracy even when an adult perspective is being applied. There is no question, therefore, of a construction or a composition, in which childhood or puberty become the medium of a centralized narrative principle or a symbolic system of interconnections, such as is the case with Géza Ottlik and Péter Nádas, or even with Péter Esterházy, in recent Hungarian literature. At the age of forty-something, Garaczi can remember the world of his pre-pubertal experience remarkably vividly, and has a charming way of relating it. A similar originality in this respect has been demonstrated in Hungarian literature only by Frigyes Karinthy and Iván Mándy. Garaczi, like his two predecessors, is primarily attracted to the ironic and grotesque charm of childhood, to the absurdity of the world of adults when seen through the eyes of children. Real pain and suffering have no place in this jovial world with all its nonsenses. With his book, one of the best pieces to appear last year, Garaczi has accomplished something that very few people have achieved in this genre. He has written a thoroughly enjoyable and funny book. At the same time, like other virtuoso writers' texts (for example, Lajos Parti Nagy's prose), this book, too has a weak point: even in this relatively small volume, the reader rapidly has his fill of witticism, of constant sparkling.

Gábor T. Szántó's *Nark* contains two short novels. The author was born in 1966 in Budapest, this is his fourth book, and the critics have paid little attention to his previous work. From a thematic point of view, there is a striking contrast between the two novellas: one tells of a moral crisis of a chief rabbi, which ends in his suicide, the other gives the confessions of a woman about her marriage and her acts of adultery, with an account of her sexual pleasures and humiliations, which verges on pornography. Still, certain similarities are also evident: both are written in the first person singular in the form of a divulgence, with the act of writing as one of the themes. On top of that, both portray a crisis, a trap, out of which there is no escape other than suicide.

The word *"mószer"* (Hebrew in origin) means informer. In the form of *"bemószerol"* it has made its way into Hungarian slang, with the meaning "to denounce somebody, put the blame or inform on somebody". Szántó's elderly rabbi used to have charge of the Pest congregation; now he is a pensioner living alone. Once he taught at the rabbinical seminary. Now—we are in the mid-1990s—he holds classes for young people interested in studying the Talmud and Jewish history. On one occasion, a student tells him that next time they would like to learn about informers. The rabbi turns pale: he thinks it is a provocation, as he himself worked as an informer in the early days of communism. Up till then he has hoped that nobody knew about this, although ever since the political changes he has been living in fear, dreading that the truth would get out. It seems that it is no longer possible to keep it secret: in Germany a book was published on the relations between the Stasi and the Jews, and his involvement was mentioned in it, though not his name—yet in a way that allowed those who knew him to identify him. The German connection dated back to the 1960s, when, for four years, he worked in East Berlin in a dual capacity: as

a rabbi and as an informer for the Stasi. Later he was posted back to Budapest, and now it appears that his students have found out and want to humiliate him.

The confessions written in the form of a diary can be read, according to the writer's fiction, as the rabbi's was sent, through an intermediary after his death, to the editors of the Jewish magazine *Szombat* (Sabbath) for publication. "I have neither added to, nor taken anything away from the story." Whether this fiction has any real foundation, or if it has, then what it is precisely, we do not know, but neither is it of any interest. It serves as a device of authentication for the reader, and since the author fully re-lives the rabbi's crisis, we can accept this as the old familiar form of hiding. The diary is useful not only because it allows the rabbi to give a day-to-day account of his life—how he responds to the students' provocation, how he tells them about the less than glorious incidents of informing in Jewish history on the basis of historical sources— but also because it reveals the entire life story of the rabbi. In this way he can explain why he accepted the role of an informer (he was more or less coerced into it), and we can find out how much damage he caused to others.

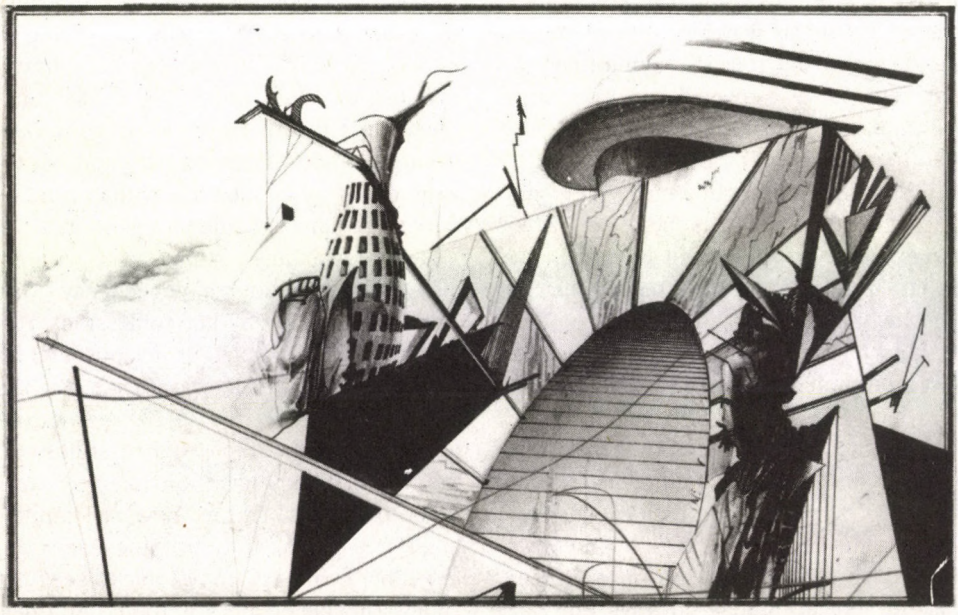
The most complex and most interesting part of the monologue is the list of his excuses, some of which are historical and some private. Having been through Auschwitz and having lost his entire family, the rabbi could not, and would not, reject communism wholesale, the regime that eventually brought him liberation. Besides, he firmly believed that by putting up resistance he would cause more damage than by cooperating with the authorities and furthering their trust for the Jews. Regarding his hero's private excuses, Szántó very accurately portrays the wife, about whom we learn at one point that, out of moral weakness and without the knowledge of her husband, she herself might have been enlisted as an informer, and this suspicion poisoned their relationship for the remainder of their lives.

After the total collapse and a stroke, the rabbi discovers that the reason why he was able to do what had been expected of him over and over again was that he feared them more than he feared God. So he had no choice but to commit suicide.

The first-person-singular hero of the other novella "Me? *(da capo al fine)*" is a relatively ordinary young woman, who decides to write the story of her wrecked marriage at a time when her life hits the rock bottom. She has an interesting motive: her husband is a writer of some sort, the type who always has great plans but never actually writes anything; he regularly makes notes about his wife and their deteriorating marriage, in this way writing as a frustrated ambition itself plays a part in the failure of the relationship. Against such a background, and to some degree as a consequence of it, the woman decides to write her account: "...I would be lying if I failed to admit that I was sometimes tempted to write pretending I was him. Sometimes this helped me to get away from my anxieties. It was my intention to write our story in such a way that, if he is honest, he himself could have written it."

So the woman's compulsion to write is also a symptom of her dependency. The same is suggested by her confessions: regardless of the point that her husband is an insufferable brute who cheats on her and who humiliates her, taking revenge on her for his frustrations; and regardless of the fact that they have not touched each other for quite some time now, she cannot break free of him. If for nothing else, then to get her own back, to be able to see him suffer. This dependency is rooted in a gut feeling: whether she is in the act of com-

mitting adultery with a man, someone who can actually give her genuine satisfaction, or whether while masturbating, she always pictures this contemptible husband of hers in the process. She discovers while writing her confessions that no matter what she is doing or what she is feeling, in some strange way that also involves her husband. And while initially the husband's treatment of her seems outrageous, the further we go on reading the notes (for example on learning the sordid details of the wild sexual debauches between the woman and her casual lover, and also on discovering how she uses this to rouse her husband's jealousy, thus turning him into a pathetic and helpless figure, a "faithful" husband, in sharp contrast with his earlier brutality), the more we come to see her as both a vile monster and a victim of her hopeless situation. This is the "Ego" that the heroine of *Én?* (the Hungarian word for "I") discovers in herself. So finally, the whole thing could start all over again, since "if I want to be absolutely honest, I must admit that in a certain sense I am happy." Like Camus' Sisyphus who has a task ("We should picture Sisyphus a happy man"), she has a "me" of some sort, and "somebody" to go with it. ❧



Tibor Szalai: BSCH Architecture, 1985.

Frederick Turner

There Still Stands a City*

The Lost Rider: A bilingual anthology. The Corvina Book of Hungarian Verse. Selected by Péter Dávidházi, Győző Ferencz, László Kúnos, Szabolcs Várady & George Szirtes. Budapest, Corvina Books, 1997, 432 pp. • *The Colonnade of Teeth. Modern Hungarian Poetry.* Edited by George Gömöri and George Szirtes. Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe Books, 1996, 270 pp.

One of the great cultural legacies of the world is at last beginning to come to light. A linguistic community numbering little more than ten million today, perhaps a few million more if one counts emigrés and those stranded outside the border by war or treaty, the Hungarians have produced in the last couple of centuries a body of poetry that is the equal of any in the world. With these two collections we get a glimpse at the riches that have been hidden from the rest of the planet by the formidable barriers of a strange language, a limited number of native speakers, and a political and historical presence almost always obscured by foreign domination. It is indicative, in fact, that the editors of *The Hungarian Quarterly* felt it necessary to turn to a reviewer as unqualified as myself—I do not speak more than a few words of Hungarian, and am not a Hungarian expert but a British-American poet, interdisciplinary scholar and translator. I hope that the naïve view of a sort of poetic Candide may be valuable in assessing the impact of these anthologies on a public woefully ignorant of Hungarian poetry.

In Hungary small children can recite, with charming expressiveness, great swathes of their nation's verse. Poets are held in high regard—when this reviewer travels there, he is made to feel like a foreign prince, and the names of the poets he visits are well known to taxi-drivers. Only the Chinese and the Irish, in this poet's experience, show such great respect for the poor rhymer.

Why is poetry so important in Hungary? Perhaps part of the answer is that the earliest Magyars were, like other central Asian tribes, a shamanistic people, led by poet-healers, ritual impresarios, who sang the world into being. Once settled in the Danube basin, the Hungarians lost their independence in the sixteenth century and seldom regained it until today; all their revolutions except for the last one—of 1989—

Frederick Turner
is a poet and scholar. He teaches literature at the University of Texas at Dallas and is the author of volumes of poetry, novels, criticism, essays, pamphlets, short stories, aphorisms. He is co-translator, with Zsuzsanna Ozsváth, of a volume of poems by Miklós Radnóti (1909–1977), Foamy Sky, *Princeton University Press, 1992, which has had two printings so far. Their translation of a volume of poems by Attila József,* The Iron-blue Vault, *is forthcoming.*

* István Vas: "Pest Elegy", *in* The Colonnade of Teeth, *p. 80. Translated by George Szirtes.*

failed, and their political leaders were usually murdered. Flooded again and again by waves of settlers, Hungary could not preserve any racial homogeneity even if it were in its cultural tradition to do so, which it is not. The only thing Hungarians had, then, to preserve their identity, was their language, which must survive amid, as they say, an ocean of Slavs and Germans. And it was the poets—the successors of the shamans—that kept the language alive.

In *The Lost Rider,* which covers poets born from 1554 to 1923, the force of the poetic tradition is obvious. There seems to be an almost unbroken succession of poetic apprenticeship and shamanic inheritance, older poets acting as mentors and welcome influences for younger ones. Even when, in the case of Attila József's rejection of Mihály Babits, the thread is apparently broken, the younger poet comes sadly to see his error in doing so, and rededicates himself to the common work. There is a rhythm or cycle in which we can see Hungarian poetry emerge from the simple Magyar Skeltonics of Bálint Balassi, and civilize itself by exposure to the French and classical worlds in the work of Csokonai and Berzsenyi, the first evoking the delicate rococo of Fragonard and Watteau, the second the worldly yet high-minded humanism of Horace and his later Christian followers. Then in Vörösmarty, Arany and Petőfi we find the first great flowering of the fully integrated European/Hungarian voice. The tragic romantic philosophy of Vörösmarty and the Beethovenian cultural nationalism of Petőfi are for this reader eclipsed by the grandeur of Arany. I wish there had been more room for narrative poetry in both collections, and this is especially so in the case of Arany, whose verse stories, with their astonishing economy, make meaning in a way beyond the reach of prose. With Ady, the rough Hun strength of the tradition is now humanized, sensitized, transformed from the inside into a vision as refined as a cultivated flower yet as robust as the hardy stock it is grafted to.

In Babits and Kosztolányi Hungarian poetry reaches its apex. For this reader no poet in the world is Babits' superior in evoking that mysterious shiver of beauty that is the choicest reward of poetry, beyond any moral or mental insight yet including both. Babits is one of those extraordinary writers—like Ben Jonson, though Babits is the better poet—who are able not only to create a magnificent oeuvre of their own, but also become a father to many other poets. And Kosztolányi's "Dawn Drunkenness" is perhaps one of the three or four most moving poems in the Hungarian language, one of the great poems of the world, taking us as it does, without any lapse of intellectual integrity, to the very gates of paradise.

Nurtured by these examples, and by others of the time scarcely less influential, comes the last astonishing flowering of the tradition in József and Radnóti, whose apocalyptic vision of the century just ending—a vision both of cosmos and of psyche—is for me a key to the next. Although giants like Vas and Weöres survive up to the dawn of Hungarian liberation, the tradition seems to this reader to have been at least partly broken, and something else has been struggling to be born. That struggle is, I take it, the major focus of *Colonnade of Teeth,* which collects the major poets born after 1900.

The tradition makes itself felt in a variety of ways. As soon as Hungarian poets mastered the western European meters, they began to combine them with traditional Magyar measures, and explore the very different metrics of the classical Romans and Greeks. They built up an unequalled repertoire of metrical forms and modes of innovation, such that with the

exception of the sonnet and a handful of stanzaic patterns, it is almost impossible to find a form repeated without variation in the traditional Hungarian canon. Paradoxically, in fact, it is the advent of free verse in the twentieth century that begins to make different poems and poets sound alike in these anthologies (though this may be the result of problems in translation).

The tradition also generated a group of set-piece genres, partly overlapping with those of the rest of Europe, but largely indigenous to Hungary. They include the following:

The lament for lost love.

The multi-part elegy, in different tones and voices, often including those of the dead poet when appropriate.

The poem on hope.

The anthem of tragic patriotism (there is no other kind of patriotism in Hungary).

The miraculous vision that appears in the midst of ordinary life.

The *ars poetica*.

The autumn poem.

The poet's birthday poem.

The sickness or mortality poem.

The panoramic philosophical meditation.

The political protest.

The love-poem to the wife.

The mysterious catalogue-rant, expressing the overwhelming richness of life.

The poem of bodily selfhood.

Poets take on these genres when they feel ready, as arenas for paying tribute to predecessors, to challenge them in emulation, to declare their membership of the tradition, and to bend the genre to their own personal style and vision by significant variation or new genre combinations. Thus János Vajda in "Twenty Years After" and József Kiss in "Oh Why So Late" take on the lost love theme of Csokonai's "To Hope" and Ady's "Graceful Message of Dismissal," while Vas's "Approaching Fifty" combines the birthday-poem motif of Kosztolányi, Radnóti and József with the mortality theme of Petőfi, Arany and Füst—and the theme appears again in Zoltán Jékely's "To My Bones," incorporating the bodily-selfhood theme of Radnóti's "Foamy Sky." Or again, consider how Kosztolányi's angels in "Dawn Drunkenness" echo Ernő Szép's in "A Solitary Night Ramble," which in turn inspires so many of József's lonely meditations; and how Árpád Tóth's angelic beloved in "Evening Radiance" reappears in so many of Radnóti's poems to Fanni.

We can now see that this condition of close collaboration with older poets and with the dead is not given to all poets. As I have already suggested, the tradition in Hungary seems to have been broken in the Forties; it had been shattered elsewhere in the West long before. For poets of my generation, the task is to rebuild it, piece by piece. If we do not have a Jonson or a Babits, we must find one or become one. Hungarian poetry actually survived the modernist revolution longer than most; but in *The Colonnade of Teeth* we can see the transformation clearly, as we move from those poets still in the classical tradition such as Illyés, Radnóti, József, Szabó, and Vas, through transitional figures such as Weöres and Pilinszky, to the poets of the contemporary postmodern avant-garde.

In what does the rupture consist? Formally, a deliberate abandonment—or unmourned loss—of a range of traditional poetic characteristics, the most obvious of which is regular meter. Unlike the free verse poets of Western Europe and the Americas, who were already a generation removed from poets who could pass on their metrical skills, Hungarian poets did not, on the evidence, lose their actual ability to write in meter. *The Colonnade of Teeth* shows writers occasionally working in strict form through the whole period, if the translations are to be trusted on this score.

But the lute is so often unstrung that something is perhaps lost in the process of retuning. The metrical loosening is accompanied by several other changes that add up to a clear difference from the earlier tradition: a discarding of clear central argument and logical progression; an abandonment of sequential plotting in those poems which describe events; abandonment of the Aristotelian beginning-middle-end structure; diminished control over length and relevance; abandonment of grammatical completeness; loss of moral clarity; and a relative absence of that quality of joy and hope that is so characteristic of earlier Hungarian poetry. As Radnóti put it prophetically in "A la recherche," "fragments of poems multiplied" in those days. In subject, too, there are changes: poems of possessive desire, physical obsession, and transient sexual encounter replace poems of love and devotion, bitter political satire replaces social and cultural idealism. Shouting replaces singing. As is found throughout the Iron Curtain countries of the time, poets go underground, their tone takes on a cynicism about any public values, and they retreat into the privacies and obscurities of dream, idiosyncratic imagery, and the confessional.

This last paragraph may sound like an indictment. It is not: there is in the new poetry an intensification of the imagery, new qualities of surprise in tone and diction, and a variety of new subjects and personalities. There are moment of staggering beauty, such as Weöres' "Lost Parasol," and the gorgeous ending of Zsuzsa Rakovszky's "Addict." Győző Határ's "Vampire" is outrageously funny. There is a spare intellectual elegance in the work of Szabolcs Várady. The old qualities are not, moreover, being abandoned inadvertently: one can imagine plausible arguments against meter, logic, grammar, structure and so on, such as: those old forms are oppressive, they are, literally, what Radnóti called them ironically, "ancient prisons," whose results are all too clear in the present tyranny. Or: a new age calls for new forms, and since all such forms are socially constructed and in turn construct readers in their image, if we would have a new human nature we must have new, freer, artistic forms. Or: the public world has given us the brutal reality of tanks and a murdered president: the only way to thwart the inhumanity of the collective is by a retreat to the inaccessibly private. Or: all hope has died, let us live entirely in the moment.

What caused the great interruption? In Hungary there are so many reasons that the change is overdetermined. There was, of course, the general iconoclasm of world modernism, the dismantlement of all the old artistic forms of musical melody, poetic meter, visual representation, dramatic mimesis, and sequential narrative, under the belief (mistaken, as it turned out) that they were mere social conventions without a basis in human nature. Obviously there was the tragedy of the Second World War, and its aftermath, the gigantic disappointment of Soviet "liberation." In Ferenc Juhász' great poem "The Boy Changed into a Stag Cries Out at the Gate of Secrets" we see the high hopes with which some poets greeted the Marxist regime; the son, now transformed by Soviet-style education into something utterly alien and inaccessible to peasant culture, celebrates his newfound freedom and rejects the anguished call of his mother, couched in the traditional imagery, to come back to her. His enthusiasm for dialectical materialism and collectivization was soon to fade, however; and if the notes to *Colonnade* are to be believed, loses his creative power thereafter. What replaced hope was a simulacrum of it: the atmosphere of optimistic public lies, totali-

tarian oppression, and private compromise (so finely captured in many of these poems, such as Nagy's "Squared by Walls") that is familiar in iron curtain literature. More devastatingly still, there was the huge ugly burden of repressed and denied guilt at Hungary's role in the Holocaust, a drag on any celebration of the heroic identity of the nation. But perhaps even these shattering handicaps might have been overcome without breaking the poetic tradition. Petőfi sings from under the hooves of the Russian cavalry, and Hungarian poets have always flourished in defeat. But the decisive break may have been one of simple mortality. Within the space of seventeen years, from 1928 to 1945, Hungary lost by disease, suicide, and murder, seven of its greatest poets, the seed-corn of the tradition: Árpád Tóth, Dezső Kosztolányi, Gyula Juhász, Attila József, Mihály Babits the father of poets, Miklós Radnóti and György Sárközi. There is a pause in the late forties and early fifties in both anthologies; and when poetry begins again it has a different tone.

Hungarian poets seem well aware of what has happened to them, as a few random quotations demonstrate.

And even if
sleep comes, will tomorrow waken anything?

—Ferenc Juhász, "November Elegy";

history consists
(it said) of four seasons
spring summer
autumn and winter

now winter is drawing near

—Sándor Kányádi, "History Lesson";

rock of mother-daylight, take
me back again into your womb.
Being born was the first error

—Sándor Csoóri, "Barbarian Prayer";

In Ruritania
there are no plugs in the baths
lavatory seats aren't sat upon but vomited over
offices smell of cabbage
culture of cheap eau de Cologne.
With thickly padded shoulders in a jacket cut too straight
the writer stalks about in the field of Word
he bends down picks up a piece of reality
sniffs at it and chucks it away grimacing

—György Gömöri, "From a Traveller's Notebook";

you think yourself a seer because you've been disappointed. And in your infinite wisdom you bawl at me like some cheap whore. You come back with your dowry, your naïve ideas, your bloody revolution! Bring back God, the family, tradition, and kick me out! But are we not one person? And isn't your imagination the whole problem? The wheel of time remains indifferent, you are a squirrel in the cage rushing round on the wheel which like a lathe turns out the centuries.

—Ottó Orbán, "The Spirit of the Age";

there at the frontier
is the sacred lie: which is hope.

—Domokos Szilágyi, "Frontiers";

Well, rest in peace there: time goes on its way.
That's quite enough rhyming on pain now for one text.

—György Petri, "In Memoriam: Péter Hajnóczy".

In Petri's fine poem "Electra," echoing Sartre's *The Flies,* Electra decides to kill Aegisthus not out of loyalty to her father Agamemnon, the source of her

tradition—for *her* Agamemnon is a "gross geyser of spunk/ who murdered his own daughter"—but out of contempt for her new apparatchik father-in-law with his "trainee-barber's" face and for her "whore" mother.

Radnóti's sonnet written on March 27th 1944, "O Ancient Prisons" (not included in either anthology) is again prophetic:

O peace of ancient prisons, beautiful
outdated sufferings, the poet's death,
images noble and heroical,
which find their audience in measured breath—
how far away you are. Who dares to act
slides into empty void. Fog drizzles down.
Reality is like an urn that's cracked
and cannot hold its shape; and very soon
its rotten shards will shatter like a storm.
What is his fate who, while he breathes, will so
speak of what is in measure and in form,
and only thus he teaches how to know?

He would teach more. But all things fall apart.
He sits and gazes, helpless at his heart.

István Baka echoes him in "The Mirror Has Broken":

The mirror has broken. From its fragments we
May piece together something like a view,
But earth and sky will not be welded—see,
The darkness comes before the night is due.

The view has broken, from its shards somehow
The mirror may be put together yet,
But earth and sky have changed positions now,
The dark has spilled over the day and set.

I think I detect among some of the younger poets, especially Zsuzsa Rakovszky and Győző Ferencz, a gradual return of hope, and with it a recommitment to the ancient crafts of meter and argument; there are even moments of piercing beauty. The future of Hungarian poetry presents a great question: can Hungarian poets recover the glory of their tradition, without compromising the hard-won insights and freedoms of their long national nightmare? The problem is that the last Hungarian revolution was won not by military heroes, not by noble nationalistic principles, not by intellectuals and not by poets, but by business people, technocrats, families, bourgeois civil society. How does one celebrate the patient growing of wealth and culture, the slow processes of cultivation, virtuous discipline, democratic compromise, economic federalism, wise environmental management, the evolutionary chaos of the market?

Hungarian poetry may be in a better condition to find a way out of the failing conventions of modernism and postmodernism than are most current national literatures. It has many large advantages. Its technical skills have been honed by translation. The traditions of the city of Budapest, in which scientists, artists, writers, psychologists, mathematicians, philosophers and social thinkers meet and talk in the coffee-houses, has largely averted the two-cultures ignorance of the West. The people love poetry. The geography and history of the nation compel it to think in terms of Europe and the globe itself, and do not permit insularity. A brilliant entrepreneurial spirit will provide the national wealth. But above all, its own poetic tradition is an inexhaustible resource and warrant for the future. ❧

W. L. Webb

Once Upon a Time in Central Europe

Gyula Krúdy: *Sunflower* (Napraforgó), translated by John Bátki, with an Introduction by John Lukacs. Budapest, Corvina Books, 1997, 208 pp. • Miklós Mészöly: *Once There Was a Central Europe: Selected short stories & other writings.* Translated, with an introduction, by Albert Tezla. Budapest, Corvina Books, 1997, 244 pp. • *Give or Take a Day.* Contemporary Hungarian Short Stories. Selected by Lajos Szakolczay. Budapest, Corvina Books, 1997, 256 pp.

I first visited Budapest early in 1969, angry and frustrated at what was happening to my journalist and writer friends and acquaintances in Prague and to all the improbable hopes of their premature revolution. Refused visas by the no longer friendly Czechoslovak embassy in London, I had discovered that for the moment it was still possible to get a week's *laissez-passer* to Prague from the thus far unpurged embassy in Hungary. En route, I spent a week or so trying to take the political temperature in Budapest and finding my way to what was then *The New Hungarian Quarterly* and its then literary editor and György Lukács's study, before being summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be asked what the hell I thought I was up to and why hadn't I reported to them on arrival, as protocol required.

The official before whose desk I found myself seemed an intelligent, not entirely unsympathetic fellow of about my own age, and what began as an interrogation turned into a polite enough sort of argument—until I offered my too warm sympathies on the indignity, the embarrassment, the *shame* he and his historic nation must have felt, having to join the Russians and East Germans, not to mention the Bulgarians, in sending tanks into a friendly, neighbouring country. At this point he lost his diplomatic cool. "You Western liberals are all the same," he snapped. "You know nothing about life here, and what has happened in this part of the world. Let me tell you where you are, and what is at stake here. In my lifetime and yours, in the village where I was born, not so many kilometres from Budapest, the local magnate still exercised the *jus primae noctis* with a young bride he happened to fancy, and quarrels were more often settled with knives than in courtrooms. You're not in some comfortable English suburb now, at the end of centuries of comfortable English history!" A strange outburst, I thought then, oddly mixing Party line and what sounded like a real, personal exasperation at yet another Englishman failing to understand that Hungary too shared what the historian Norman Davies once described as Poland's unhappy geopolitical situation in "Europe's gangland".

Out in the countryside a day or so later, in the courtyard of a once great house—just where I can no longer remember—the

W.L. Webb
is a former Literary Editor of The Guardian *and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford.*

caretaker told me a no doubt oft-told tale, pointing out the spot where just such a landowner, once again in the decade in which I was born, had shot himself after losing at cards, having staked successively his horses, the estate, and his wife.

I thought of these encounters as I was reading this trio of novels and stories by Hungarian writers recently published in English translations. To an English reader, for example, Gyula Krúdy's luminous and wilful pastoral, peopled with archaic, semi-mythical figures—damned poets and doomed aristocrats, dreamily erotic *hetaerae* and rude country squires—is pure *fin-de-siècle,* art nouveau in prose for which I can't think of a real Anglo-Saxon or even Celtic-English literary equivalent. It seems a curiously late arrival in history, published in 1918 by an author who didn't die until after Hitler had seized power in Germany. But remembering what I had been told during that first encounter with Hungarian culture and history, what had looked oddly dysynchronous began to settle into place. Even allowing for Krúdy's own particular nostalgic and elegizing disposition that John Lukacs evokes so well in his devoted and helpful introduction, it is clear that this novel was a product of a time and place where the past routinely haunted the present, a culture full of noonday ghosts. Wasn't it another Hungarian writer, Zoltán Szabó, who wrote, "The past... is never idle"? Though perhaps the problem here is better illuminated by the English novelist L.P. Hartley, (in The *Go-Between*), who wrote, "The past is another country. They do things differently there."

At any rate, it would be fatal to read *Sunflower* anachronistically, in an end-of-the-twentieth-century English or American time-frame—on a plane journey, say, or sporadically amid the usual half-distracted hustle of current reading. Happily, I had the luck to read it in an old house in a village surrounded by forest in an unsmart part of the Provençal *arrière-pays* where an archaic wildness lingers. It was a long way from the misty melancholy of Krúdy's heartland in the great Hungarian plain, but there were nights of uninterrupted reading to adjust to the pace of prose of a richness we can no longer afford, and the woodsmoke and the mistral that rattled branches and shutters weren't uncongenial to his entranced conjurings of a Magyar dream-world.

Lukacs is right, surely, to see Krúdy as less a Proust than an impressionist painter—Monet, he thinks, painting in words his love for the things he saw and remembered, though some of the English Pre-Raphaelites come to mind too. Even more I was reminded sometimes of his contemporary, the equally impressionistic and muse-intoxicated composer Frederick Delius, Krúdy's narrative depending, as it does, on something very like Delius's arrogant but not meaningless "All that matters is a sense of flow". This writing has that riverine, musical flow, and to a remarkable degree it carries the reader along through the Klimt-like whorls and swirls of a story that doesn't bear synopsis. Its characters appear and dissolve as people arrive and fade in dreams: the aptly-named Álmos-Dreamers, generations of romantic country gentlemen dying for love, and their unearthly glamorous women; Kalman Ossuary, the penniless gambler and *homme moyen sensuel,* more than a little a self-parodying sketch of the dangerously addicted author himself ("I have a wicked but honest nature"); Pistoli, the sexually predatory squire, a latter-day Magyar Falstaff ("...he sized up feminine gullibility as precisely as a grocer weighing out saffron"). There is some luscious erotic writing, and his people often step out of their *Jugendstil* frames to say things that surprise: Álmos-Dreamer lives "a life as me-

lancholy as the Jack of Spades"; "The one thing I've learnt at the madhouse is that you mustn't be depressed," Pistoli muses.

What abides chiefly is the scene-painting, little pastoral and urban scenes lamplit by the intensity of his nostalgia. Barefoot peasant women march at twilight to the chapel on the Feast of the Virgin: "Sunbrowned faces, white teeth, liquid eyes, lush eyebrows, these maidens of The Birches must have learned their gait from the geese, for their ancestresses had come all the way from Asia on carts drawn by buffaloes." An old Jewish gambler in the grey dawn of Pest makes his way home from the gaming tables where he once dissipated a fortune and at which he can no longer play, imagining the wholesome, orderly ease of the bourgeois families under whose windows he passes.

Outside his own context it's not easy to place Krúdy in a world in which American hegemony spreads ever more widely a Henry Fordlike attitude to history and nostalgia (if history isn't exactly 'bunk,' it has surely come to an end in the triumph of economic liberalism). Best approach him and his *Sunflower* as a happy stumbling on an extraordinary attic of the rambling house of the European imagination, strangely lit, and crammed with richly faded dreams.

(A note on translation: Throughout my reading of these books, I was aware of how what John Lukacs calls "the loneliness of the Hungarian language" must compound the problems of producing at least resonant analogue texts in English, and felt grateful as always for those who take on these intensely demanding and illrewarded tasks. All the same, while John Bátki's version of *Sunflower* produces many nuanced and aptly glowing pages, there are sudden irruptions of American neologisms that would have startled Krúdy, and not just his new English readers: "Let's see the dough," says a croupier in the high years of Budapest's *belle époque,* no doubt he was a sceptical chap. "Drop by", "looks like" and "breakup" (of a relationship) are just about manageable; "that creep", "ducks ass haircut," and "Hot diggety-dog!" require a fairly serious suspension of disbelief.)

Miklós Mészöly is a thorough-going modernist (a mode which, of course, itself can seem sometimes a little old-fashioned now), but the title of this collection of his stories and critical writings—*Once There Was a Central Europe*—not only raises the eternally vexed question of whether there is or was a common regional identity, but provokes other thoughts. What time is it in Central Europe? Once-upon-a-time, or so it often seemed until quite recently, when capitalism managed at last to synchronize all clocks.

In fact, the most brilliant of these pieces, a long story called "The Glory of Colonel Sutting", touches the fringes of Krúdy's world as it carries us on a sort of a mythologized, magic carpet tour of the later history of the eastern marches of the Habsburg Empire. The colonel is, in the most literal sense, a legend in his own lifetime: "His name rang from the Beskid Mountains to the lower Danube"—his campaigns in love and war are spread across the map and the years leading up to 1848, but his origins are obscure, as indeed are the actual details of his career. Is he a harmless, romantic eccentric, or—the view of some in the empire's large department of professional paranoiacs—has he remained in the k.u.k. army "only to be able, at the given moment, to stand at the disposition of the revolution with the full weight of his rank and connections." (The narrator/author comments: "It is likely that this, too, was close to the truth; only, it lacked convincing proof.") The level of

parody and fantasy, the play with history and period styles, are of the post-modern kind, but some of the fugues and flares of metaphor combine manic playfulness with a tenderness, a passion, even, whose source becomes clearer when you discover the story's date—October 22, 1986. It is an elegy not only for the Hungarian Uprising whose thirtieth anniversary this was, but for the whole tradition of oppressed revolutionary nationalism and its struggles throughout Central Europe. Here is a love scene of almost operatic eloquence, like a parody of Mickiewicz; at other times he seems to be trying to distill an essence of Romantic revolutionism in all its drastic colours—blood, the glinting sword, flashing eye, pale bosom, the wild night sky. The story's climax is a great ride across the landscape, the history, the very consciousness of Mitteleuropa, a rich poetic evocation of a vividness that quite forgets the masks of postmodernity:

> At night he rode into Baja, the former Francovilla, in moonlight commanding awe. On the city's eastern edge, he rode past a fenced-in hog market on a wagon road boggy with manure. Under lean-tos, drivers snored in uncouth obliviousness, having waited for weeks for the consignment to arrive from Siberia that they would then take over from the local swineherds and drive on to Vienna...
>
> Before turning west, he first rode along the course of the Danube up to Bogyiszló... Sometimes he would lie down for the night with the black mare on the musk-smelling moss. He would draw close to the horse's thigh and fall asleep under the gravid arch of her drenched, bulging abdomen...

Even allowing for the fact that these stories were written over a period of almost forty years, Mészöly is a strikingly eclectic writer, whose experimenting and search for form, however, is never simply a kind of showing off but clearly a matter of need and nature. There is nothing else like Colonel Sutting's story here, except an occasional gleam in the dark rememberings of *in memoriam revolutionis,* another lateish piece, which also has plenty of what one critic finds characteristic of much of his art, "a very fascinating cruelty and enchanting sadism".

Certainly in several examples of a kind of ominous pastoral in which he specializes ("Encounter", "Shade", "The Old" and "The Dead") there is a very insistent sense that in the midst of life we are in death—born astride of the grave, as Beckett puts it; though perhaps that is an unhappy gift of his central European generation. Mészöly's own view is that he is "more drawn to the tableau of suffering than that of happiness," and in an essay "On the Craft of Writing" (1969) he describes his own initial impulse as neither to entertain nor improve the world, but as "mental hygiene": "...art wants to ruin the simplicity of happiness with its own resolute anxiety: 'Let whatever torments me torment others, too'". In his case there seems warrant enough for such a view in some brief autobiographical disclosures in an interview, "The Map of Intransigence", printed at the end of the collection. This shows him as a prisoner of war carrying "still fresh corpses in a wheelbarrow," then, post-war, deep in the wasted provinces, working as a manual labourer, later flour-mill supervisor, in a world that presented itself "with a little exaggeration, like the short pauses for breath during the Thirty Years War—children and women pulled the ploughs, they gave birth beside streams, food was lacking, walls sooty and smouldering... a theme and a panorama from Gogol." No doubt such "gifts" from experience show too in a kind of dangerous, "folk-expressionist" comedy not unlike that of the Bohemian Hrabal, of which there are

some notable pages in the long and often moving novella-length "The Old and The Dead", and in a strange piece from 1971, "A Map With Cracks. Wimbledon Hyacinth", the last story here, written in the early 1950s but unpublished and, like much of his work, unpublishable until the late 1980s, carries the rubric *In memoriam 1949–89,* and memorializes the Hungarian experience of actually existing socialism by casting a baleful eye on the manoeuvrings and petty corruptions of life in a tennis club frequented by the *jeunesse doreée* of the system's heyday.

The collection is completed with a few other brief critical pieces, some of which I found rather aridly abstract and oracular, and a dozen or so short pieces called Video Clips, snap-shots or negatives from his past, wartime, the bitter 'Fifties, practising an increasingly enigmatic minimalism as they progress. But taken as a whole, this is a valuable introduction to the work of a writer whom Anglo-American readers can now add to a reading list of post-Kafka writers from geopolitical Central Europe with such names as Bruno Schulz, Bohumil Hrabal, Tadeusz Konwicki, Zbigniew Herbert and Miroslav Holub.

The spirit of Bruno Schulz seemed to me to hover over several of the best stories in the Corvina collection of contemporary Hungarian short stories called *Give or Take a Day;* or if this is not Schulz's ghost *in propria persona,* as it were, at least one senses the spirit of that tradition of masochistically absurdist fantasy which he preeminently adorns, and which in itself amounts to a significant common Central European cultural inheritance. I find a benign version of it, for example, in the innocent witchcraft of "Yesterday", by Attila Mózes, one of the four Transylvanians among the twelve writers represented, a haunted elegy in which the widow of a banned writer sits at a window over a dozing courtyard reifying memory and fantasy, and time slides back and forth like clouds in changing weather. László Márton's wonderful "Meditation on a Great Big Zero" has a truly Schulzean father, engendering a similarly fraught domesticity, but also incorporates a dire parable of the way people used to play at freedom. Lying awake at night, a boy remembers

> snatches of new-fangled patriotic verses... from my schoolbook: the new houses in our fatherland are like young girls, and new dresses of plaster are being put on them; that electric light is like a bouquet of pearls, and new factories clatter more loudly than a hundred lads' boots, and the iron bridge reverberates and the tunnel roars, and up on high shines the star on the wing of the aircraft. All that was splendid, it was the honest truth, and most of all it was very sad.
>
> It was sad to think that, however spacious, however alluring the future was, this brand-new world, scarcely built yet, was nearing its end; that everyone would shortly have to leave this still beautiful country...

Which might serve, I suppose, as an ironic envoi for part of the historical experience of all the authors in this collection.

Mihály Kornis's "Morning" begins balefully: "Mother's body hangs decorously from the rope, her shapely legs doing a light pirouette"; later, "Dad visits us from the grave to eat apples. He waits until it grows dark and we are fast asleep, then sneaks out to the kitchen and makes a racket with the plates"—a tone and a vision from one of the darker patches along the fantastic continuum between Schulz and Bohumil Hrabal, and one of several stories depending, so to speak, on a suicide by hanging.

László Fábián, however, is a more *sui generis* sort of fantasist, using precise visualisations, like instructions in a film-

script (he did in fact work for the MAFILM studio as a scriptwriter), for his meditations on the lives and extreme experiences of the great early twentieth-century Arctic explorers of the early part of the century. "Amundsen, Amundsen" reminds me very much of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's fruitful speculations in his "portraits from the history of progress", but this is less cocky and ironic in tone, more poetic and trance-like in its summoning of these Arctic scenes on such hallucinatory detail. Bernard Adams, incidentally, is the excellent translator of this story, as of those by Márton and Mózes, the best of the collection.

Pervasive fantasy apart, these writers resist generalization, except for the fact that Fábián's story is the only one not rooted in the dark soil of the nation's experience in this century. Péter Nádas, in "August" (from *Yearbook*), writes of a three-cornered love affair and of the Hungarian way with civil war: "The oldest son took up arms in 1956 and was sentenced to death... But the sentence had not yet been carried out... The next oldest was a political officer assigned to military counter-intelligence." Nádas's real concern though is the microscopically precise analysis of motive and behaviour, work of the finest emotional engineering, which generates an almost erotic intensity of perception. Of the stories written more directly out of the Hungarian people's experience the most powerful is "Diamond", by Ottó Tolnai, a writer from the Vojvodina part of the forced Hungarian diaspora. It is an almost unbearably painful account of the life of a doubly alienated compatriot, a woman *Gastarbeiter* in Germany. Born in the Bácska, in the shadow of suicide and bitter poverty, abandoned then perforce by the socialist grandparents whose devotion to Stalin didn't prevent them from being sent to the Gulag, her husband's early death leaves her to the punishing work of picking grapes in the Rhineland, then crippling, brutal work in the asparagus fields between Darmstadt and Heidelberg, where the lines of women poison themselves with painkillers at the end of every other row. (Until he began popping pills too, a student who worked for a time with them "simply couldn't understand why the whole thing looked so dreamlike, so ballet-like, why the women would tell such odd stories while working.") It is a clear and remorseless account of such work and of the struggle of the spirit as well as the body with such a life. But perhaps, after all, this is fantasy of a kind, too: the fantasy-in-reality of the daily world of the outcast, the marginal in the latest phase of the never too comfortable, sometimes murderously surreal history of *Mitteleuropa, Zwischeneuropa,* whose artists must be expected from time to time to echo the old woman's last words, "It's too much. Too much." ❧

Zsuzsa Lovag

A Crowning Achievement

Éva Kovács: *Species Modus Ordo.* Selected Essays. Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 1998. 473 pp., 264 illustrations.

Éva Kovács died a few days before the publication of this lengthy volume of selected essays in December, 1998. She had a high international reputation as an authority on medieval goldsmithery. Although all of the forty articles contained here have already been published in various Hungarian and foreign journals, their collection sheds light on the work of an exceptional, thorough and dedicated scholar. The texts have been arranged for publication by Mária Verő and Imre Takács.

The articles are milestones in Éva Kovács's lifework, firmly and resolutely leading onto the great opus, the manuscripts that now sadly rest amongst her papers. Those that appeared as books were by-products of her research, and were written for the general reader. (The results of much cajoling and pressure on the part of publishers.) *Kopfreliquiare des Mittelalters.* Insel-Bücherei Nr. 840, 1964; *Limoges-i zománcok Magyarországon* (The Limoges Enamels in Hungary, Budapest, Corvina Books, 1968); *Árpád-kori ötvösség* (Goldsmithery in the Árpád Age, Budapest, Corvina Books, 1974); *A Mátyás-kálvária* (The Matthias Calvary, Budapest–Helikon, Corvina Books, no date); and—with Zsuzsa Lovag—*A magyar koronázási jelvények* (The Hungarian Crown and Other Regalia—also in English, German and French—Budapest, Corvina Books, 1980, 1988).

All scholars will confirm that research is never complete, but merely abandoned at some point. Éva Kovács never abandoned research, and she never felt that the time for reaping rewards (publication in book form) had come. Every one of her findings posed dozens of new questions, directing her towards new territories, which she immediately set out to explore, accumulating a mass of manuscripts and notes that would have provided the material for several volumes by less thorough authors.

The essays in *Species Modus Ordo* reflect her scholarly attitude. "Casula Sancti Stephani Regis" was published in *Acta Historiae Artium* 5 (1958), as her doctoral dissertation, "A magyar korona a legújabb kutatások tükrében" (The Hungarian Crown in the Light of the Latest Research)

Zsuzsa Lovag
is Director of the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest. Her publicatons include Mittelalterliche Bronzekunst in Ungarn *(also in Hungarian), Corvina Books, 1979,* Aquamanilék *(Aquamaniles, Budapest, 1984) and, with Éva Kovács,* The Hungarian Crown and Other Regalia, *Corvina Books, 1980, 1988, also in German and Hungarian.*

appeared in *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 6 (1957). In these early writings, she reviewed the literature on the regalia, almost as if surveying a territory before embarking on its life-long exploration. It may not be of importance from a scholarly point of view, but it speaks volumes for their author's integrity that, in the 1950s, she had the courage to address a subject which, for long years after the war, was considered taboo in Hungary.

In the first essay, on the coronation mantle, the young scholar sets out on a distinctly independent path, in rejecting János Horváth's interpretation of the visual programme as a Credo; she identified it as an illustration of a Te Deum attributed to St Ambrose. As to the style of the embroidered scenes, she rejected the traditional Regensburg interpretation, albeit admitting the difficulties inherent in carrying out stylistic criticism on an object known only from poor illustrations.

The coronation regalia were returned to Hungary by the U.S. government in 1978 and this was the beginning of a new period for Éva Kovács, opening the way to research based on autopsy. In the foreword of this book she described it as "a gift from one's profession". She reported on the preliminary results of her research in a book that was first published in 1980, and in several essays: "A magyar korona latin zománcai" (The Latin Enamels of the Hungarian Crown, 1982), "Események és eredmények: új utak a magyar uralkodói jelvények kutatásának történetében" (Events and Results: New ways in the study of the Hungarian regalia, 1983); "A magyar koronázási jelvényegyüttes kutatásának hat éve" (Six Years of Research on the Hungarian Regalia, 1986); *"Iconismus Casulae Sancti Stephani Regis"* (1988); "Művesség és tudomány a középkorban. A magyar koronázási palást készítésének egy lehetséges aspektusa" (Craftsmanship and Scholarship in the Medieval Age: One possible aspect in the making of the Hungarian Coronation Mantle, 1993). It is exciting to read these essays and follow the changes in her picture of the insignia, both in depth and in scope, and how the questions—which she had already formulated in her dissertation—were being given answers of increasing complexity and scope. The iconography of the mantle, based on the Te Deum, is complemented with several details about the donor, St Stephen, and his concept of the sovereign as *Rex et sacerdos,* emerging from his Admonitions as well as from other sources. To arrive at as complex a view of the robe as the one she proposes in her 1988 article, autopsy was essential in order to reveal the details on its back, previously unseen. Similarly essential was research carried out over three decades, which, in various roundabout ways, frequently turned back to the coronation regalia.

One of these round-about paths was her study of the Giselle cross over several years; the results are summed up in this present book in "Gizella királyné keresztjének feliratai és ikonográfiája" (The Inscriptions and the Iconography of Queen Giselle's Cross, 1994). Here she expounds the iconographical and stylistic similarities between the cross and the mantle, along with a solidly-based hypothesis that both had been made at King Stephen's court, where she was his consort.

Another one of these apparently roundabout approaches provided a possible solution to the problem of the cross on the upper hemisphere of the crown and the patriarchal cross on the orb, which is explained in the greatest detail here in *"Signum crucis—Lignum crucis*. A magyar címer kettős keresztjének ábrázolásairól" (*Signum crucis—Lignum crucis*: On the Representations of the Patriarchal Cross in the Hungarian Coat of Arms, 1984).

The connection between the patriarchal cross, used as a symbol after the end of the 12th century in Hungarian royal representation, and the Byzantine *stauroteka* of similar shape, along with the relic of the True Cross in Hungary, for which there is solid evidence after the time of St Stephen, suggest the hypothesis that the enamel depicting the enthroned Christ on the hemisphere of the Holy Crown had been pierced in order to attach to it the most holy relic of Christianity. The assumption, only sketched out briefly in the paper, resembles the questions that Éva Kovács frequently asked herself before going on to an answer based on thorough work. Perhaps the answer is already there somewhere in the sea of her unpublished notes.

While researching the origins of the filigreed gold setting of the sceptre, Éva Kovács was able to identify a goldsmith's workshop active at the end of the 12th century in King Béla III's court. In addition to the setting of the sceptre, the workshop also produced filigreed jewellery discovered in the grounds of the royal basilica of Székesfehérvár in the 19th century, along with a golden ear-ring complete with a pendant in the shape of a miniature building of centralized plan, found in 1964 while excavating the royal palace of Esztergom. See "Jeruzsálem-fülönfüggő Esztergomból" (A Jerusalem Ear-Ring Pendant from Esztergom, 1974).

The second burial place of Béla III and his first wife, Anna of Antioch, was reopened in January 1967 in the Matthias Church in Budapest. (The royal couple's remains were discovered in Székesfehérvár in 1848, and reburied in 1898.) The funerary accessories of the king buried *regio more* are the most complete collection of medieval Hungarian regalia; flawless scholarly treatment led to their publication as "III. Béla és Antiochiai Anna halotti jelvényei" (The Burial Insignia of Béla III and Anna of Antioch, 1972), which is included in the present volume, along with another essay, which appeared in the same year, "A középkori magyar királyság jelvényeinek kérdéséhez" (On the Problem of the Insignia of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary). The problem of the patriarchal cross was first formulated here, and was subsequently addressed in great detail in the above-mentioned essay published in 1984.

The medieval relics associated with royal representation figured prominently in Éva Kovács's research. The essays "A székesfehérvári királyi bazilika XI. századi kincsei" (The 11th-century Treasures of the Royal Basilica of Székesfehérvár, 1967) and "Egy elveszett magyar korona" (A Lost Hungarian Crown, 1968) mostly discuss written sources. However, her inspection of goldsmith work from a technical and stylistic viewpoint also produced some extraordinary results. Through detailed analysis and a comparison of historical sources, Éva Kovács was able to show that the golden cross in the treasury of Cracow Cathedral, which had been published by several prominent authors as a piece of Venetian craftsmanship, had its covering made out of two female crowns produced in a goldsmith's workshop in King Béla IV's court in Hungary. Through the stylistic analysis of the crown of the reliquary of St Sigismund of Plock, as well as other Hungarian jewellery, she convincingly argued for the existence of a royal goldsmith's workshop, the later products of which included the coronation cross in the Esztergom Basilica and the Zavis cross in the treasury of St Vitus Cathedral in Prague. Originally published in German in *Acta Historiae Artium,* the article is published in Hungarian in the present volume as "Még egyszer a krakkói koronakeresztről" (Once More on the Crown

Cross of Cracow, 1973). As to the jewellery serving as analogies for the crowns, it is discussed in "Két XIII. századi ékszerfajta Magyarországon" (Two 13th-century Types of Jewellery in Hungary, 1973).

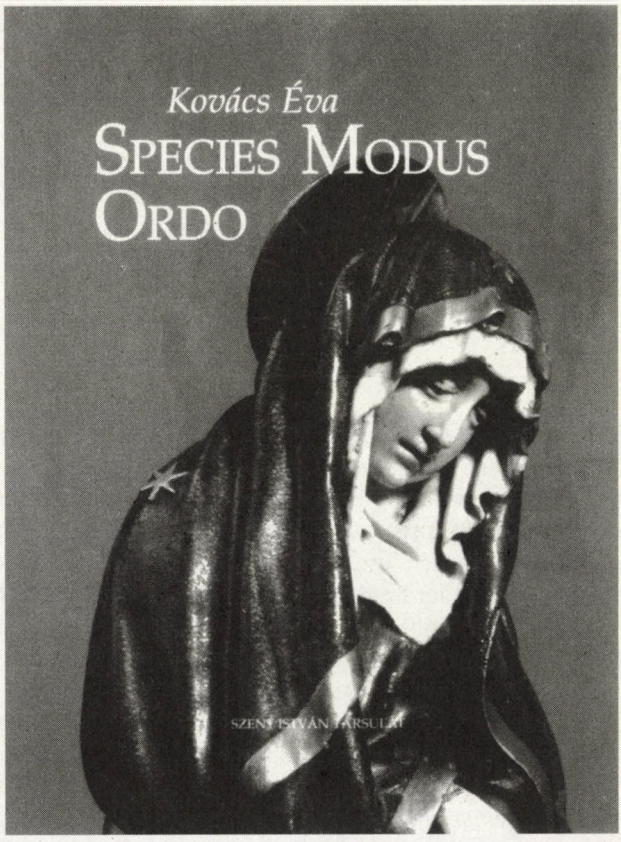
Relics pertaining to the royal representation of Hungary's Anjou kings—in the Aix-la-Chapelle Hungarian Chapel, the crown of the royal tomb at Nagyvárad (Oradea), the crown in the reliquary of St Simeon of Zára (Zadar), as well as a few other fragmented pieces of jewellery—also engaged Éva Kovács's attention for many years. Her research results were published, among other places, in the catalogue of an exhibition held in Székesfehérvár to mark the 500th anniversary of Louis the Great's death; another piece concerning these, "Magyarországi Anjou koronák" (Anjou Crowns in Hungary, 1976) has been included in the book.

The other half of the essays selected for *Species Modus Ordo* are associated with an extraordinary object, the Matthias Calvary in the Treasury of the Basilica in Esztergom. This exquisite work decorated with *ronde-bosse* enamel of gold comes from a similarly illustrious place, the ducal court of Burgundy: it was Margaret of Flanders' gift to her husband, Philippe le Hardi, for New Year's Day in 1403. While on this subject, I would like to relate a personal memory. More than twenty years ago Éva Kovács presented the results of her research on the Matthias Calvary at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; while showing slides of the details of the object, she read out a French description of the Calvary dated 1403. After her astounding lecture, one colleague happened to say something to the effect what an incredible stroke of luck it must have been to stumble on a contemporary description of the artwork. Somewhat irritated, Éva Kovács replied that ploughing through hundreds of sources and unpublished medieval documents borrowed from French libraries over the years also helped.

The *magnum opus,* the monograph on the Matthias Calvary, was in the making for more than two decades, and is ready for publication. Apart from the handsome little book mentioned above, all she published on the subject were other surviving examples of the French *ronde-bosse* enamel, which she had studied thoroughly, and whose origin and dating she was able to determine from historical sources precisely on the basis of the accurate dating of the Matthias Calvary. Of these, the present volume contains the essays "A párizsi ötvösség 1400 körül és a források" (Metal Working in Paris around 1400 and the Sources, 1975), "Világi ötvösművek a középkori Franciaországban (Secular Metal Works in Medieval France, 1980); "Hattyú és strucc: Lancaster és Luxemburgi?" (Swan and Ostrich: Lancaster and Luxembourg?, 1980); "A Szentlélek rend ereklyetartója, Anne de Bretagne hozománya" (The Reliquary of the Order of the Holy Ghost, the Dowry of Anne de Bretagne, 1981); "A gótikus arany *ronde-bosse* zománc időrendje, elterjedése az irott források tükrében" (The Chronology and Spread of Gothic Golden *Ronde Bosse* Enamel in the Light of Written Sources, 1981).

The study of historical sources means long and arduous work, yet one that leads to large profits for art historians, too. The French documents contain ample references to Hungarian material; this have been published in "Későközépkori francia inventáriumok magyar vonatkozásai" (The Hungarian Aspects of the Late Mediaeval French Inventories, 1972); "A gótikus *ronde-bosse* zománc a budai udvarban" (Gothic Ronde Bosse Enamel in the Royal Court of Buda, 1982); "A magyarországi Jakab mester" (Master James of Hungary,

1967); and the articles about a hard-drinking, quarrelsome and rowdy Hungarian master who had moved to Paris: "Egy magyarországi himzőmester: Etienne de Bièvre" (A Master Embroider from Hungary: Etienne de Bièvre, 1984); "Etienne de Bièvre himző utolsó munkái és az aranygyapjas rend ornátusa" (The Last Works of the Embroider Etienne de Bièvre and the Vestments of the Order of the Golden Fleece, 1983).



The essays as they follow each other demonstrate an ever more refined scholarship, eventually weaving together a tapestry of interrelations. Research always starts with the objects themselves, from a thorough structural and technical inspection, since every object discloses its unique details. At the same time, the medieval objects always carry something beyond themselves which can only be revealed through a comprehensive knowledge of the medieval mind, the spirit of the age and the historical context. Finally, one has to know the members of the craft and the structure of the workshops, and that can only be achieved through familiarity with the historical sources.

From the essays emerges the portrait of their author as that of a scholar who is equally familiar with the technical aspects of goldsmithry and the complex relations of iconography, heraldry and the origin of artworks, not to mention relations between those who make and those who commission the works. She always wanted to know more and pass it on; she always wanted to go on polishing and enriching the results of her research; she always strove for perfection. This is the reason why the monographs on the coronation insignia and the Matthias Calvary have never been published, although I have no doubt that the drafts are in her drawer, and that they are outstanding as they are.

The outside cover of the book shows a detail from the Matthias Calvary, the figure of Virgin Mary mourning her Son. Éva Kovács's unexpected death came just a few days before the book was presented to her fellow scholars. This allowed colleagues who had gathered for the occasion to say their farewells to an outstanding peer. ❧

George Gömöri

Budapest Love Song

Michael Blumenthal: *When History Enters the House: Essays From Central Europe.* Port Angeles: Leasure Book Studio, 1998, 219 pp. $15.00 ISBN 0-9651413-2-2.

The author is an American writer and poet of Jewish background; he has so far published six volumes of poems and one of fiction; he is also a university teacher. For reasons which are more accidental than romantic, he lived in Hungary from 1992 to 1996 and while he managed to learn a smattering of the country's "lyrical albeit impenetrable language", he nevertheless led the life of a (temporarily) expatriate American scholar. He did not stop writing during these years—his short essays and *feuilletons,* here collected, attest to his interest in observing the new environment with humour and much empathy. His book can be read as an introduction to present-day Hungary seen through the eyes of an intelligent and, on the whole, perceptive American.

Blumenthal's collection is divided into seven parts, following a rough chronological pattern: the first chapter deals with "The Sins of the Fathers" and discusses such issues as anti-Semitism, and, more generally, xenophobic policies in Germany and in other countries of Central Europe, including Hungary. For Blumenthal this largely belongs to the past, and though he is concerned with the anti-Semitic remarks of certain Hungarian politicians such as István Csurka and others, he rejects "labelling" and avoids the mild paranoia (persecution complex) which affects many older Jewish immigrants in the United States. He finds strength in the democratic mass-movement which set a limit to right-wing rhetorics and vindictiveness even in the Hungary of 1992 and interprets the results of the 1994 Hungarian elections, won by the ex-Communist Socialists, as the expression of nostalgia not so much for an ideology as for a "sense of security". It is, however, not so much his understanding of Hungarian politics but his close reading of Hungarian culture and, even more so, everyday life, that makes Blumenthal such an interesting observer and participant of (metropolitan) Hungarian reality.

Culturally, he is closest to those people with whom he shares opinions and experiences. There is only one long interview in this collection and that is with György (George) Konrád, one of the Hungarian writers best known abroad and ex-

George Gömöri
is a Budapest-born poet, translator, critic and scholar living in Britain since 1956 and teaching Polish and Hungarian literature at the University of Cambridge. He has published several volumes of his own poems in Hungarian as well as translations of Polish verse and English translations of Hungarian poems.

President of International PEN. It was originally printed in *The Paris Review* and does not contain much that is new to readers of Konrád, though it has a number of odd misprints ("Var" for "Hvar", "Nadasda" for "Nadezhda", "vishni" for "lishni" and "Gombrowitz" for "Gombrovicz"); but it shows Blumenthal's interest in exploring the thoughts of one of Hungary's best contemporary writers. Other literati mentioned or quoted by him elsewhere include Attila József and Arthur Koestler, György Petri and Péter Esterházy, and, of course, Árpád Göncz who, apart from being a very popular President, is also a translator from English and a writer in his own right. This is done in a piece in which Blumenthal sings the praises of "beautiful, battered, grimy" Budapest, a "city of *Túró Rudis* (small chocolate-coated cream-cheese bars) and grime-caked stained-glass windows" (p. 112), a place with a great past and still unrealized future. "In Budapest," says Blumenthal, "the future beckons to us with hope precisely because it is not yet realized, not yet perfected". In other words, what he likes about the place is that it is so much *unlike* his home, the (ever-Braver) New World.

The funniest parts of *When History Enters the House* are those where the author draws comparisons between Hungary and America, or returns home on a short visit to realize that in some ways the "working future" is also full of contradictions and ridiculous social rules. I sympathize with his dislike of "political correctness" which dampens the natural expression of sexual attraction and agree with the censure of the phoney (turn-on-your smile) friendliness exhibited by most Americans *vis-à-vis* strangers. I also appreciate Blumenthal's sentiment for the Hungarian *lángos* which tastes so much better than the artificial-smelling and-tasting products of the Dunkin Donuts chain. In a sense our American escaped to a pre-technological world in Hungary and enjoyed himself greatly for a while; but everything seems to come back full circle and the last two essays in Blumenthal's collection, entitled "Homesick at Last" and "What I Loveth Well Remains American", shows that ultimately he finds relief from both the rat-race and sophisticated/politically wayward Central Europe in the deep forests of Montana. The exile returns home to re-interpret the values of his homeland.

These essays and sketches read well, even though in some cases the style is a bit journalistic and the wit focuses, somewhat predictably, on comparisons between American progress-cum-decadence and cosy Hungarian backwardness. There are flashes of original humour, too, for example in the sketch on the swimming-pool attendant Uncle Józsi (not "josi", as given on page 118) and the ingenious use of the elaborate wire hanger on which the customer has to place all his clothes. The caustic piece on the O.J. Simpson trial (how it reflects American values) and the sketch on the excellent Budapest Bábszínház (a puppet-theatre), one of the positive legacies of Socialism, are exhilarating. While many of these essays were written for the English-language press in Hungary (*Budapest Week*, *Budapest Sun*), so that they are truly "occasional" and, in a sense, ephemeral pieces, they can be read with profit by anyone interested in the Hungary of the post-1989 years, a country steeped in culture and politics, slowly adapting itself to a world of commercial values and to global consumerism. ❧

János Kárpáti

András Szőllősy: His Stellar Position

The concert programme at the Széchenyi Academy of Literature and the Arts on October 17, 1998 included four compositions by András Szőllősy, one piece by György Ligeti and one by György Kurtág. Zoltán Farkas, a leading young critic put the significance of the concert aptly: "On my stellar map, in the constellation of contemporary Hungarian music, there are not two but three stars of primary magnitude. They include András Szőllősy. I know I am not alone in this conviction, but apparently, Szőllősy's oeuvre has not entered the mainstream of international recognition, unlike that of his two fellow composers. It is no exaggeration to speak about fashion when it comes to the international reception of Kurtág and Ligeti's compositions, Szőllősy's music, however, is the subject of the affection and respect of a limited number of performers and listeners. As one of them for years, I've had the feeling Szőllősy has not been given his due place by the public and by concert managers. It was therefore most pleasing to see that the programme reflects my value order as unequivocally as a declaration, for it sensitively arranged a series of works by all three composers. The evening could have been captioned 'the living classics of Hungarian music', were it not that this would sound like cheap advertising and were it not so alien to the personalities of the three composers themselves. Formalities, or respect for authority are alien to them. Yet it is of special importance to me to hear these three composers—who share their roots and then took such different paths of development—in a single concert at last."[1]

János Kárpáti
is Professor of Musicology and Chief Librarian at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. His books include Kelet zenéje *(Music of the Orient) Budapest, 1981,* Bartók's Chamber Music *(Stuyvesant, N.Y., Pendragon Press, 1994.) and* Tánc a mennyei barlang előtt. Zene és mítosz a japán rituális hagyományban *(Dance in front of the Heavenly Rock Cave: Music and Myth in the Japanese Ritual Tradition. Kávé, 1998.)*

András Szőllősy was born in Transylvania, in Szászváros (Orăştie) in 1921. He finished school and took his first courses in music in Kolozsvár (Cluj), and then continued his studies in Hungarian

1 ■ Zoltán Farkas: "Hármas csillagzat. A Széchenyi Irodalmi és Művészeti Akadémia hangversenye." (Triple constellation. Concert Staged by the Széchenyi Academy of Literature and the Arts). *Muzsika* XI, 1998. no. 12, p. 35.

and French language and literature at the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, in conjunction with studying composition at the Academy of Music. As the example of Kodály confirmed to him, the parallel studies of music and the humanities was self-evident for Szőllősy. In the first year and a half at the Music Academy, his master was Zoltán Kodály; after he retired, Szőllősy attended the composition class of Albert Siklós and János Viski. In 1943, he wrote his dissertation on the music of his master in the inspiring atmosphere of the Eötvös College, an élite institution modelled on the French École Normale Supérieure. The work, published as *Kodály's Art,* was a pioneering venture, as Szőllősy's aim was not a traditional discussion of Kodály's music but musical analysis, which combined the newest work of Ákos Pauler's philosophical logic, the psychology of Jung and Freud, the sociology of Max Weber and Lévy-Bruhl and the music aesthetics of Mersman.[2]

After the inspiring beginning in Kolozsvár and the parallel studies with Kodály and at the Eötvös College, Szőllősy's education was given further impetus by a study trip in Italy. In the academic year of 1947–48, he attended Goffredo Petrassi's master class at the Santa Cecilia Academy in Rome. The musical benefits of that year were, however, only to appear later. Szőllősy returned to a country in turmoil with hardly any time to compose. "Between 1945 and '48 an incredible intellectual fermentation was going on," he said in an interview published in 1984. "Even concert managers began to open the gates wider to let in works by composers shut out during the war years. Stravinsky's Mass, Alban Berg's Violin Concerto, and many other important works were performed... But this effervescence did not last long, people got sucked up in some office of the new apparatus—this way or that. I myself worked out my time, a few years, in a cultural ministry that went through frequent changes of name and leadership beginning with Keresztury, continuing with Ortutay and finishing with Révai".[3] The year 1950 was a milestone for Szőllősy: he became a teacher at the Music Academy. He assisted Dénes Bartha and Bence Szabolcsi while they were laying the foundations for a department of musicology, and as a lecturer in general music history, a compulsory subject for all the Academy students, he set the very high standards that he had learnt from Kodály, at the Eötvös College and from Petrassi.

Few compositions survive from this period, most having been discarded by the composer himself. The climate was not sympathetic to introspection or experimentation. On the one hand, Kodály's influence was still too all-pervading, and on the other, the demand was for political marches and choruses. There remained but one sure point to inspire the young composer toward individual attempts: poetry, in which he immersed himself with renewed interest and even more deeply than at his university studies. He stored hundreds and hundreds of Hungarian and French poems in his memory. From scores of aborted attempts, one gem still glows radiantly: the two-page Attila József miniature ("In a Quiet Sheaf", 1947) published in the periodical *Valóság,* proving that, partly consciously and partly subconsciously, the spirit of French music was working. The same vocal line was continued

2 ■ *Kodály művészete.* (Kodály's Art). Budapest, Pósa Károly, 1943, 160 p.

3 ■ "A *Vigilia* beszélgetése Szőllősy Andrással" (*Vigilia* Interview with András Szőllősy), *Vigilia* 49, 1984, no. 3. pp. 175–183. The first minister, Dezső Keresztury (1904–1996) was a poet and critic, Director of the Eötvös College, with a tenure between 1945–47. He was followed in the post by the talented ethnographer Gyula Ortutay, who was ready to mediate and compromise with the Communists. József Révai, minister between 1949–53, was the dreaded chief ideologue of the Stalinist period.

by two, more acknowledged, compositions of 1955: a setting of a Zoltán Jékely poem (*Night in Kolozsvár,* for voice and wind quintet) dedicated to the singer Erzsi Török, and the solo cantata *Restless Autumn* to Miklós Radnóti's poem (set for baritone and piano).

> In the middle of the fifties it dawned upon us that we had to take our cue from other directions, that our isolation from new musical trends in Europe will inevitably cast us into a sort of parochialism," he said in the quoted interview. "We began to talk about it with close friends including Rudolf Maros, György Ligeti and Kálmán Halász. Ligeti and Halász had not been pupils of Kodály, thus separation was easier for them. In 1956 both moved abroad, Maros, who spearheaded the search for new paths at home, and I, the two of us remained. He had a course with Hába in Prague, I had my year with Petrassi, by way of encouragement.

A major turn came in Hungarian composition in general in the sixties: all the conditions for a break with the suffocating influence of Kodály had been created. The "thirties" generation had grown up, they could find their own voice more easily, without any binding ties, picking their way amidst the currents of East and West without inhibitions; the older men began to revise what they had been doing so far. Rudolf Maros, who had been struggling with Bartók's style, composed his best orchestral pieces in his forties, between 1959 and 1965 (*Ricercare, Eufonia* I, II, III), and György Kurtág, born in 1926, marked his quartet of 1959 "Op. 1", as if declaring that he counted his real creative output from that piece on.

In Szőllősy's work, *Tre pezzi per flauto e pianoforte* opened a new chapter. That was when the Latin spirit he learnt from his teacher Petrassi began to ferment in his composing and put an end to grappling with the traditions at home; another Italian musician, the flautist Severino Gazzelloni ensured the success of this at festivals of modern music in Darmstadt, Madrid and Venice. The real take off, however, occurred in 1968, when he composed Concerto no. III. which won first prize at the International Rostrum of Composers in Paris in 1970, making his name known all over Europe. It was the beginning of a long series of instrumental works, its major stations being *Trasfigurazioni* and *Musica per orchestra* (1972), *Sonorità* (1974) and *Lehellet* (1975) for symphonic orchestra, and *Musica concertante* (1973), *Musiche per ottoni* (1975), *Pro somno Igoris Stravinsky quieto* (1978) and *Tristia* (in memory of Rudolf Maros) for chamber ensembles.

Orchestral style

Progressing along the road chosen in Concerto no.III, András Szőllősy arrived at two related and complementary works laid out on a monumental scale in 1972. He completed *Trasfigurazioni* in April and *Musica per orchestra* in June. The apparatus of the two works already suggests the rehabilitation of the large orchestral sound: he envisioned a large symphonic orchestra without percussion or plucked instruments, which in itself clearly indicates that one of his intentions was a negation of the then fashionable clinking-tingling sound ideal. The symphonic orchestra is deployed in its ascetic simplicity, and every instrument sounds as its character requires. That, however, does not mean an impoverishment of sonority—in Szőllősy's scores at least; quite the contrary, a new world of sound opens up to the listener, which may compete with the colourful range of the "effect music" on several counts.

In this orchestra, individual instruments or their groups are combined into blocks, on occasion complementing, some-

times confronting one another. It is genuine music for orchestra indeed, without "orchestration", as the composer conceived it precisely for the outlay of the traditional orchestra. His approach is in stark contrast with the ever subtler differentiation and stretching of harmonic effects and the spectrum of colours as employed by the post-romantics or impressionism. Szőllősy aimed to integrate, to render a variety of diverse colours in a compact unity.

At the back of Szőllősy's works there is almost always a twelve- or thirteen-tone row as an organizing-governing principle. Its importance, its role in the work must not be overestimated, though, for Szőllősy was never an orthodox dodecaphonist, always reserving the "right" to weave in other, at times traditional compositional techniques. The secondary importance of the *seria* is also confirmed by the fact that sometimes one and the same series can be discovered in different compositions: the basic row of *Trasfigurazioni,* for example, in Miserere, in *Canto d'autunno and Paesaggio con morti,* in various environments, where very different mechanisms are in operation. Obviously, to him the serial technique means nothing more or nothing different than tonality meant to the composers of old: a frame of reference on which the structure is built. At the same time, this more or less hidden common background or frame eventually becomes an important part, an essential component of the personal idiom appearing in the compositions.

Since its premiere on June 1, 1973, *Trasfigurazioni* has been performed several times in Hungary and abroad as one of Szőllősy's most successful and effective compositions. Its value—and its synthesizing ambitions are indicated through the overriding idea behind all the transfigurations being unfolded both as a row and as a real melody. The remarkable unifying intention is also borne out by the fact that the immanent organizing principle permeates rhythm too. The quantitative structure of the series, measurable in half-notes, determines the clatter of the final groups of eighths in the dramatic closing block. In other words, the organizing potential of the row in the sound also asserts itself as an organizer in time without any forceful intervention. It is perhaps not unnecessary to note that while the serial technique of Messiaen and Boulez pairs the rhythmic values to pitches somewhat arbitrarily, Szőllősy's procedure is more unlaboured and eventually more logical.

Another highly characteristic feature of the composition is how the peculiarity of tone-colours and the organic nature of the structure are demonstrated at the same time. The famous "bell" *(come campana)* effect, cropping up in other Szőllősy works, too, is solely produced by the strings and winds by accentuated attacks on the notes *mf* and *f,* followed by quick *decrescendi.* A careful analyst will also realize that the clusters evolve from the "spatial" (vertical) reshuffling of the melodic line and that the rhythmic values of the "bell clappings" derive from the temporal projection of the row.

The inspiration of the text

After the heights of *Trasfigurazioni* and *Musica per orchestra,* which were followed by another two orchestral works, *Sonorita* and *Lehellet,* Szőllősy left orchestral composition for a time and went searching among the more intimate media. In 1973, he wrote *Musica concertante* for András Mihály's Budapest Chamber Ensemble and in 1978 another chamber piece, *Pro somno Igoris Stravinsky quieto* for "Ensemble M" of the Netherlands.

Szőllősy's sympathy for Stravinsky is long-standing and deep-rooted. *Pro somno Igoris Stravinsky quieto* is an instrumental requiem; constructed upon the text of the

funeral mass, it is not a vocal work. The words of the requiem are spoken, whispered, or shouted into the music by the instrumentalists themselves. The harmonies of the composition, starting with the very first chords of the deep winds, unmistakably evoke Stravinsky's music. The auditive associations are later buttressed by an actual quotation: the series stated by the strings is identical note for note with the tone-row of Stravinsky's *Introitus,* composed in memory of T.S. Eliot.

The quotation from Stravinsky is no mere reference; it has an intense role in the highly elaborate structure of the composition. That, however, does not preclude the use of tone painting known from music history and varied wittily. To the words "Quantus tremor" fear is added by the *col legno* effect; after "Tuba mirum" the tremolo of the brass brings to mind the trumpets on Judgement Day. And it is no surprise to hear the declining lament motif, well-known in Szőllősy, as the conveyor of grief in the "Lacrimosa" movement.

In the first fifteen years or so after his revival as a composer in 1964, Szőllősy seemed to be resisting the human voice. It is hardly mistaken to attribute this aloofness, like his negative bias concerning percussion, to his aversion to fashion. Someone who set out on a life of composition with the words of Attila József and Miklós Radnóti was perfectly aware that the poetic text enjoins great responsibility upon the composer, and a good text often paralyses all attempts at musical adaptation, instead of providing the composer with wings.

It is, therefore, astonishing that in 1982 a period began in which four closely related but significantly different vocal compositions were turned out by Szőllősy's workshop. *In Pharisaeos*—against the Pharisees—has a chorus for mixed voices to a text from the Vulgate. Not much later Szőllősy composed *Planctus Mariae* for female voices, a pendant as it were to *In Pharisaeos.* The two compositions must have been evolving and maturing in his mind together, not only repeating and intensifying, but also complementing and even counterpointing each other. The former is a "masculine" work of harsh tone, a passionately accusing lament, psychic flagellation, threat; the latter is gentle and painful "feminine" music, mourning and consoling. The former is for mixed voices, with the predominance of the male, the latter is for female voices, including two soloists in salient roles.

The Biblical passion of *In Pharisaeos* brings Kodály to mind, but while the story of *Jesus and the Traders* is enacted in an epic form, in Szőllősy's work lyricism is enhanced to dramatic proportions. No other trait reminds of Kodály, although Szőllősy is sailing on nearby waters: he composed for mixed voices on a Biblical text, dotted with suggestive exclamations and an intricate web of polyphonic parts. One of the major tools of breaking free is the use of lean deliberately neo-baroque melodic writing. However, it is not directly linked to baroque music as it lacks lengthy melody tendrils and broad development; it is fragmented and coarse, displaying the signature of an intermediary or mediating genius, that of Stravinsky.

The text for *Planctus Mariae* was compiled by Szőllősy from two literary works: one is Jacopone da Todi's *Stabat Mater,* the other is a fragment of an 18th-century Hungarian passion play. The choice itself implies creative invention: the juxtaposition of Latin and Hungarian layers. Viewing the entire composition, it appears self-evident that the Latin text carries the slightly abstract theme in baroque style predestined for counterpoint, while the passion play passage in Hungarian is set in the stylized melodies of folk laments. Underlying the contrast, however, one may

discover identity, as in the great masters of variation: one may find the kernel of the baroque theme-head in the declining lament of an oriental flavour set to the words "Alas, my precious son", only it is inverted: the fifth is replaced by a fourth, the diminished seventh by a major second.

Szőllősy's vocal work received a great impetus from a commission by the King's Singers: they asked him to write something for their ensemble and timbres. *Fabula Phaedri* for six male soloists (2 altos, 1 tenor, 2 baritons, 1 bass) was completed in September 1982. As it was the third vocal composition completed that year, it must have been written in close interaction with the other two works. The connection, however, only concerns the construction and the technique, for the work itself introduces something quite new into his oeuvre. It is risqué and virtuoso, and as such, it has no precedent, or counterpart in either his oeuvre or the entire Hungarian choral literature.

The great first century Roman storyteller, Phaedrus, who earned a name first by translating many Aesop fables into Latin, narrates the naughty story of a Roman wedding in iambic hexameter. Two young men—one rich, one poor—loved one and the same girl, who eventually chose the rich one for a husband. The nuptials, however, were disturbed by a storm, and the donkey carrying the bride—which by chance belonged to the poor suitor—balked out of fear and dashed home. And thus it happened that the marriage was eventually consumed by the poor lad.

Szőllősy was captivated by the story's humour, its pictorial quality and its dramatic potential for representation. The Phaedrus tale abounds in spectacle, from the bustle of the wedding, the storm, to the gallop of the donkey. Szőllősy did not cringe, especially in this humorous medium. Yet pictorial quality and humour do not exempt him for a moment from using the rigorously contrapuntal technique he chose for himself in his previous vocal works. Indeed, polyphony is even more intricate and sophisticated in this piece, with double fugati, crab canons, voice-pair imitations appearing at any point of the composition besides the frequent canons at the major second, and the listener, delighted by the humour and the pictorial effects, does not always realize what cerebrally structured music he is hearing.

The King's Singers had a great success in many countries with this Szőllősy piece. This encouraged the ensemble to commission another work for them. The second six-part vocal chamber work was Miserere, completed in 1984 and premiered at the Brighton Festival. Though both *In Pharisaeos* and *Planctus Mariae* are religious in spirit, only Miserere can be taken for a proper liturgical composition. It is, however, these very works that convince the listener that liturgy is not the goal but a tool for Szőllősy to formulate a universal human experience. Though counterpoint played a great role in his former vocal works as well, it was promoted to the supreme, the absolute, organizing principle in the Miserere. The rigour of construction is further entranced by the monothematic material, as if suggesting being moulded from a single idea.

The consistent but far from orthodox use of the twelve-note row also implies that elements alien to it may also be given a role in the musical process. Such alien matter is Bach's Lutheran chorale, "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" intoned in the Finale, the psychological climax of the piece, sung by the tenor to the words of "Miserere mei Deus". Szőllősy is inclined to use a new element towards the end of a work, whose appearance produces surprises and—after the appropriate preparation—purification, catharsis: the peal of

bells in a string ensemble (Concerto no.III), a Liszt quotation at the peak *(Musica per orchestra),* trumpet in a chorus *(In Pharisaeos)*. The chorale intoned towards the end is also such a recurrent formal element, a key moment of the dramaturgy.[4]

Reviewing what Szőllősy has produced, the first impression is that Szőllősy is not a very prolific composer, since apart from a special year or two, most years are marked by a single great composition, and many are silent years. When, however, we take into account his works not intended for the concert hall, we will find him most productive. Between 1954 and 1977 he composed music for no fewer than 31 films, 17 stage and 18 radio plays. The numbers add up and testify to his attraction to the dramatic forms and the quality is indicated by his collaborators: major Hungarian writers and film-makers counted on his continuous cooperation, including Géza Hegedüs, Sándor Sára, Ferenc Kósa, István Gaál. Productions of plays by Vörösmarty, Móricz, Sophocles, Plautus, Shakespeare and Brecht used his music. Such commissions were always taken very seriously by Szőllősy. He regarded them as training in composition as well as a search for the appropriate solution. He was aware that creators, just like sportsmen, had to practice a lot to be able to transfer the imagined harmonies to notes.

András Szőllősy's momentous musicological and composing work was first awarded the Erkel Prize in 1971, which was followed by more important awards such as the Kossuth Prize in 1985, the Bartók-Pásztory Prize in 1986 and 1998, and in 1987, the title of Commendeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by France. Although pleased by these, András Szőllősy felt the real acknowledgement was the new commissions that brought him into contact with leading performers and allowed him to compose. Apart from the works called to life by commissions, *Canto d'autunno* was composed for the BBC in Wales (1986), *Paesaggio con morti* for the Scottish St. Magnus Festival (1987), the String Quartet for the Orlando Festival in the Netherlands (1988) and Elegia for the Berlin Biennale (1993).

The lure of chamber music

Although the genres alternate in his oeuvre largely because of his commissions, there has nonetheless been a special inner rhythm that has asserted itself. As we have seen, in the 1970s orchestral compositions predominated, and vocal music in the first half of the 1980s. In the latter half of that decade, it was instrumental chamber music that came to the fore. *Fragments* of 1985 is a typical border case or a Janus-faced composition. Its vocality points backwards, and its chamber music character foreshadows the chamber works that followed. It is a trio for mezzosoprano, flute and viola with the contrapuntal instrumental parts joined and balanced by a vocal part. The text was compiled by the composer from poems by a friend from his younger days, István Lakatos. Though the lines were picked freely, hence the title, they coalesce into a closed and compact structure in the five extremely succinct movements. This compactness is especially enhanced by the tonally and melodically reinterpreted chorale in the last movement, conceived in the spirit of Bach, yet contemporary in sound and evoking the cathartic closing moments of the passions.

4 ■ In his "Korálok és harangok Szőllősy András műveiben" (Chorales and Bells in the Works of András Szőllősy) Zoltán Farkas presents the full catalogue of chorale instances in fifteen compositions, but this juxtaposition of all moments reveals that the chorale is rarely a real quotation, it is mostly just "chorale-like". *Muzsika* XXXIX, 1996, No. 3. pp. 1–8.

The attraction of chamber music was made all the stronger by a great challenge: Szőllősy was asked by the Orlando Quartet of Holland to compose a string quartet for them. He could not resist, and in December 1988 he completed the composition, a new masterpiece worthy of the Bartók tradition in chamber music. The first performance was on July 30, 1989, in the town of Kerkrade, at the Orlando Festival. András Szőllősy's Quartet is a par excellence exemplar of the genre, in which the composer demands exceptional mastery of the four instruments and extraordinary musicality for the rendering of the four interlacing parts. There was another major work prior to the Quartet: *Paesaggio con morti* (Landscape with Dead People), a piano piece dedicated to the pianist Péter Frankl and premiered at the St Magnus festival in the Orkneys. This marked the revival of another genre, since so far, in his music the piano was mainly a chamber music partner. In keeping with his ambition to meet all requirements of a given genre, Szőllősy wished to create a work that was in every way a piano composition, and, accordingly, he adopted the attitude of the great 19th century pianist-composers, and primarily that of Liszt.

In Szőllősy's work, death is more than a recurrent idea, it is constantly present. It is no fear of his own passing, but a grief and mourning caused by the void left by the departed that is not, and cannot be filled. Explicitly, he has only mourned for Stravinsky and Maros, but it is known indirectly that *Planctus Mariae* was inspired by the death of his mother on October 23, 1956—and by the memory of the Revolution. This piano work is no "landscape after battle" but speaks about the losses of a lifetime, the landscape is animated by memories of many a lost friend. It comes as no surprise then that after four years of silence, he was again inspired by grief. The stimulus was the death of a childhood friend, the Transylvanian physicist Ákos Máthé, that elicited Szőllősy's new piece, this time for solo cello and string quartet. The combination of the instruments is unusual: it is not a quintet with an additional cello in which, on the Brahmsian model, the deep tone predominates, but it is the articulated confrontation of a solo instrument and a chamber ensemble. The musical form is Passacaglia, in 3/4 time, dotted rhythm and progression in variations. Yet is would be mistaken to tag the work a neo-baroque stylistic play. For the baroque elements, just as in Stravinky's late works, are conjured up ingeniously recreated and reinterpreted. *Passacaglia Achatio Máthé, in memoriam* had its first performance in the concert that closed the Hungarian Radio's series devoted to contemporary music in June 1998, and was performed by Miklós Perényi and the Auer Quartet.

In 1993, András Szőllősy was coopted by the Széchenyi Academy of Literature and the Arts as a member, and in 1996, the community of Hungarian musicians celebrated his 75th birthday: Árpád Göncz decorated him with the Middle Cross of the Order of the Hungarian Republic, and in an afternoon session in the Old Music Academy's Liszt Ferenc Room three papers attempted to describe some salient features of his life-work, followed by a rich selection of his works in the evening, ranging from the epochal Concerto no.III to the String Quartet of 1988, a summation of the entire oeuvre.

The Quartet is an even sadder "landscape" than the piano piece. The latter ends with a chorale purifying and at the same time consoling in its historical perspective and wise acquiescence. By contrast, the Quartet with its very slow Finale *(Adagio assai),* with the contrast of the lonely melodies and the cold flageolets, the final smoothing over of the repeatedly declining, parallel melody tendrils never meeting in time or space convey the shocking and disconsolate message of death. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Kings, Dukes, and Counts

Milán Füst: *Negyedik Henrik király* (King Henry the Fourth) • Attila Lőrinczy: *Balta a fejbe* (Hatchet into the Head) • Imre (Emerich) Kálmán: *Csárdáskirálynő* (The Czardas Princess) • Albert Szirmai: *Mágnás Miska* (Mishka the Magnate)

There is every reason to describe Milán Füst's *King Henry the Fourth* as a historical play. (Füst himself gave the number in letters rather then numerals). The subject is the Holy Roman Emperor excommunicated by the Pope, who went to Canossa and who, according to historians, was an incalculable, whimsical fellow who acted on incomprehensible impulse. This is how we see him in the play too, although Füst hardly overdid the homework. The actions and the character of the eponymous hero correspond to fact; yet the setting of the play is not really historical but rather the stage of the author's psyche. That expression—"the stage of my psyche"—was a favourite formula of this great individualist, who created equally significant work as a poet, novelist, aesthete, or as Shakespeare translator, and who, in the twilight years of his long life, thundered at the world in prophetic rage about life and literature, both in his solitude at home and in his university lectures.

Füst still is one of the great non-understood. In his younger days he besieged the theatres with his plays; the theatre managers, whose goal was to entertain—even at the Hungarian National Theatre—rejected these plays glowing with dark dramatic passion. He lived long enough to see, in the early sixties, two of his works on stage. The Hungarian theatrical world remembers the 1964 première of *King Henry the Fourth* as legendary. When the curtain came down, a trembling hand, caught in a spotlight, reached out of the proscenium box to acknowledge the audience's rapture. Then a greying, King Lear-like head showed up and finally the entire man sitting, as on a throne, in the well-upholstered easy chair of the box. The title role was played then by Miklós Gábor, one of the finest actors of his time, who was almost eighty when he died last year.

Written in iambic verse, *King Henry the Fourth* was naturally inspired by Shakespeare whom Füst admired, but it also formulates within the trappings of a historical play a typical middle-class conflict: the soul of the "lyric ego" at war with both itself and the world, showing strength in its weakness, struggling between extremes in its lost state. The key to Henry's character is the deliberate clowning, the cutting mockery and self-irony, the suddenness of turning from cruelty into doing penance and then back again. In a

---

Tamás Koltai,
editor of Színház, *a theatre monthly, is* The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular theatre reviewer.*

word, the exaggeration of the individual. The character has no "key," in the same way that there is no key to Hamlet's procrastination, or to the open villainy of Richard III, or to the sudden jealousy of Leontes. Or, if there is one, it is no more than a rough compensation for covering up the inner sensibility. Henry does not take his kingship seriously: he womanizes, humiliates his wife, and when he is treated like a naughty child, he unexpectedly promises to mend his ways. After regaining his throne he takes vengeance for the wrongs he has suffered, he mocks the high aristocracy, he alienates his sons, who worship their mother, and stages orgies for which the Pope curses him. True, after his penitential journey to Canossa he again strengthens his power, but his grown-up sons ultimately treat him as he had treated them. They depose and incarcerate him. At the end of the several decades the play covers, the care of a kind-hearted nun lightens the days of the broken old man.

The National Theatre of Győr has revived Füst's play, which has not been seen too often on stage, even in the last quarter of a century. An interesting point about this production is the fact that it has been directed by Géza Tordy, once a leading actor of Budapest's Vígszínház, and has a member of the present Vígszínház company, Attila Kaszás, in the title role. Today the Vígszínház, which can seat more than a thousand people, would not dare to take on Füst's play, not expecting a public response sufficient to justify keeping it in the repertory over several seasons. The box-office now rules. (The last premiere at the Vígszínház was Ben Elton's *Popcorn,* a commercial success in London.)

The Győr theatre has Hungary's largest stage—a problem to directors—and the huge spaces are put to work splendidly by Róbert Menczel, the designer. The trapdoor, revolving stage and lighting produce an impressive visual image which suggests the historical perspective, yet costumes and behaviour are closer to the present day. Kaszás is more powerful in portraying Henry in his old age, so the play culminates splendidly. In the last scene, the deposed king deftly handling his wheelchair, for all the world a typical inmate of an old people's home, flips at his nurse the pits of bottled sour cherries given to him as a gift. A bitterly sardonic bourgeois ending to a drama about a king.

It would probably be grotesque to call Attila Lőrinczy's play *Hatchet into the Head* a historical play, even though here too the actors speak, love, and murder in Shakespearian pentameter. But the characters are present-day *nouveaux riches,* big shots, small-scale gangsters, girls of easy virtue, heavies, and ghosts returning from the beyond. Right in the first scene, the playboy Richárd, who comes from a good family, happens to say as he is lying in his blood, after being tossed out of a suburban bar: "I surely was not born to play, / For, even when I win, I don't care a monkey's fuck..." Later, over the urn containing the ashes of his uncle, killed in a yachting accident for which Richárd must bear some responsibility, he assaults his freshly widowed aunt Anna. The ghost of his father strengthens the intentions of this alienated young man and he decides to have his entire family—except for his mother—murdered by two contract killers. The plan misfires and Richárd comes to a bad end.

Clearly the author, in his first play, is diluting the essence of *Richard III* and of *Hamlet* into a contemporary drama. This has already worked several times in reverse, with numerous maffioso-Richards and bungled schoolboy-Hamlets. Lőrinczy is trying to find out whether Shakespearean language and dramaturgy can produce a Shakespearean conflict in today's circum-

stances. Or something similar. After all, by now even the interpretations of Shakespeare have become devalued; if one can make a parallel between the two ages at all, then the Renaissance age is savage, raw, and has format, while ours is savage, raw, and petty. It is not Lőrinczy who waters things down, but the life pattern at his disposal, which is devoid of meaning and thin. This is the medium in which our Hamlet-Richárd, who does not decide to become a villain but is driven to escape into villainy by what his loathed family did in the past, must suggest both ethos and fatal depravity.

No mean task either for the hero or for the author. The lecherous, swanky, unbearable family is a sufficient motive for bitterness. On the other hand, a new development is that the father's ghost provides him with no alternative—except for an instruction to recover his stolen Rolex; indeed, Richárd interprets his high-toned terseness as encouraging the unscrupulous deed. In the end it is a senile grandfather keeping vigil over his son's urn who prevents the murder of the entire family by the hired killers, one of whom even bites the dust, while the other finishes off the commissioner of the deed with choice tortures.

The piece switches back and forth between grand guignol and buffoonery, between pamphlet and tragedy, and the whole is kept together by Shakespearean blank verse embedded in a style which I would call, for want of a better word, rhetorical argot. It is language that plays first fiddle in Lőrinczy, by raising the underworld cant to the "poetic," or by parodying archaism, or by caricaturing conversational snobbery, or by being an ironic intarsia of quotations. It is the language that meshes the horrible and the risible, the grotesque and the tragic, the majestic and the petty as, for example, in a pathetic monologue by one of the killers in which he nostalgically laments on his childhood while, switching into drastically abusive language, he is slicing up his still living victim. This blasphemous eloquence, which has several variations, works splendidly in the play. What it cannot do, however, is portray in greater depth. The speech of Lőrinczy's figures characterizes manner, not character. Thus the hired heavies easily change into buffooners in the murder scene and the ghost-father, to make up for his ghost face, appears in the company of "heavenly prostitutes." Even the protagonist Richárd remains a commonplace character without the flowery fabric of speech. This much can be held against an author who otherwise exhibits a powerful dramatic (mainly theatrical) talent.

Gábor Máté, who directed this production by the studio of the Katona József Theatre, could have turned the piece into a simple parody of Shakespeare. He succeeded in avoiding this pitfall and took the play for what it is, a new Hungarian drama. The most important element in his stylization is a set suggesting the theatrical framework and signing places and objects, distancing them from reality. Costume, lighting and musical effects are also used to this end. Although I could imagine the play produced in a more realistic manner (the more natural the medium in which blank verse is heard, the more frivolous the contrast between the subject and the tone), Máté's perception of the play has a consistent style.

In the last scene Richárd and his father's ghost (transcendental in a transparent raincoat) are looking at his own funeral. Father and son, stepping beyond this tavern of today (as once the poet Attila József described breaking out of a petty existence) stand phlegmatically side by side; all they have to say to each other concerns the result of the weekend football game. Meanwhile, the women digging the grave disinter a cat's skull. "Alas, poor

cat" they say. Hommage à Shakespeare, we can say, sensing the change in the times.

An inexhaustible store for our relationship to the kings, princes, or, at least, counts of the past is the Hungarian operetta. (It is actually Viennese, but in Hungary nobody takes this claim seriously since, after all several of the great names, above all Ferenc (Franz) Lehár and Imre (Emerich) Kálmán, were Hungarians.) The most famous work is Kálmán's The *Czardas Princess*. No theatrical season goes by without its being performed somewhere. The most important revival of the nineties was that at Kaposvár, whose director altered the text. (Nothing new in this, as the "Hungarian variant," now classic, was prepared in the fifties for the legendary *prima donna* Hanna Honthy, creating the principal role out of a minor one.) At Kaposvár it was something else: they put the melodramatic love story into quotation marks. The young Habsburg archduke does, of course, win the hand of the cabaret singer and it turns out that his aristocratic mother had also been fished out of the cabaret. The Kaposvár director, however, went beyond caricaturing the sentimental "three cheers for love!" cliché (which, by the way, was the original title of Kálmán's operetta) to choreograph the grotesque *dance macabre* of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus he postdated the story by a few years to the end of the First World War and, in a rewritten third act he has the entire cast march, to the sweet strains of a waltz, onto the cruiser Novara moored in Fiume, which then duly and leisurely sinks.

Although the production by the Katona József Theatre of Kecskemét does not go that far, it offers pleasant entertainment. The comic dancer, for example, steps out of a shell made up of the cabaret girls, like Botticelli's Venus. As he dances, his cuff twists to a length of several metres. Prince Lippert-Weilersheim, the romantic lead, behaves like a defiant democrat stepping beyond the bounds of his social class. On the other hand, the cabaret singer advancing to the rank of a princess, Szilvia Vereczky, does not become the patriotic girl donning the Hungarian national colours as is usual in traditional performances. (In the original play this character is a Romanian, Sylva Varescu.) If there is anything provocative in István Verebes' direction, it is in his not falling in with the traditional rose-coloured idyll. Toward the end, a footman carries a gramophone with a funnel across the scene, from which issues the voice of the famous diva, Hanna Honthy. This, too, is a kind of hommage.

At Kaposvár, where there is a long-standing tradition of poking fun at operettas, the director of a famous production of *The Czardas Princess,* János Mohácsi, staged another popular operetta, *Mishka, the Magnate,* by Albert Szirmai. This too is a story about the "class war". István Baracs, a civil engineer working near a count's château, meets the young comptesse Rolla Korláth and, naturally, they fall in love. The noble family, just as naturally, would not dream of a mésalliance, whereupon the engineer takes vengeance: he dresses up his stableboy as a count, and "Count Mishka" enjoys himself by cheeking the aristocracy present at a ball. The director also puts the clock forward by a few years, so that this 1916 piece takes place after the First World War and after the hundred days of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. At the very beginning, Count Korláth makes frequent and threatening reference to leading figures in the defeated Communist dictatorship to the recalcitrant workers building the railroad. (They, of course, do not figure in the original.) This operetta count is friendly with the commander of a white-terror squad, holds racist views, and makes contemptuous statements about

Blacks, Asians and (naturally) the Gypsies, as well as about organized workers. And he asks Baracs, the engineer replacing his arrested predecessor: "Are you a Serb?" This becomes a kind of *ceterum censeo:* every time Baracs indignantly mentions that he had been looked down upon as a Serb, everyone asks "Are you *really* a Serb?"

In a play which even in its original form is about the vengeance taken by a technocrat against the aristocracy by means of a stableboy passed off as a count, and in which the insulted young comptesse retorts by dressing up the kitchen maid as a countess, the addition of a pinch of racism, nationalism, and irredentism to the class-struggle hoax is only icing on the cake. If everybody speaks contemptuously of the Gypsies anyway, even the stableboy playing the title role, then why could the butler of the count not be a Scotsman, especially if, according to an interpolation, "being Scotch means the same to the English as being a Gypsy means to us?" And if the principal guest expected throughout the play, the eccentric count shooting in Africa, marries the daughter of a tribal chief (this is in the original play), then why could the black beauty not appear as a perfect Parisian lady of fashion to embarrass the racist host?

All Mohácsi does is to thoroughly examine the consequences of the basic situation, from the morganatic marriage to the unsaleable wheat crop. For the original background conflict of *Mishka, the Magnate* is a railroad swindle. Count Korláth wants the branch line to be built to his granary, and the stubborn engineer Baracs gives in—the price of his marrying into the family. Mohácsi's scornful gesture is that even the main helper of love breaking down class barriers, the Grandmother in the count's family, takes the side of self-sacrifice: in the name of her old flame, then a notary's clerk and now holding a top official post, she even holds out the hope to the subborned engineer that he would be "given the title of a count."

"I beg you, in Africa conditions are, so to speak, Asiatic" says the civilized elephant shooter to the boorish count. This, at any rate, is grotesque. (Asian was long the disparaging term used by Hungarian snobs considering themselves to be the centre of Europe.)

Thus the play continues being written, the daft jokes acquire a malicious social semiotics, and that not only by verbal additions but also on the classic arena of operetta, the ritually enlarged ball ensemble. The mimicry of the aristocracy in the second act, stepped up to the point of being absurd, is pure pleasure. The guests, provoked into imitating what they believe is fashionable, initially Mishka's modish dress (he has rolled up the lapels of Baracs's dinner jacket which was too large for him), but later they also get round to smacking bottoms and his particular way of holding his female partners. The guttural r of the kitchen maid/countess starts an epidemic of spitting, and so on. Mohácsi unleashes the well-organized mayhem in which the first-class Kaposvár company participates with its usual discipline and individuality. A significant role is given to the exotic aquarium of the ballroom, all kinds of fishy creatures turn up in undignified positions, the galaxy of guests takes turns in the swimming pool, on the banquet tables, and on the chandelier; in the course of a duel with pistols and swords a column falls over, the conductor's baton catches fire, the musical instruments come up from the orchestra pit and so on as the action escalates. This operetta blown up out of proportion and taken to its own idiotic extreme is truly great fun.

It is a pity that some of the actors cannot manage operetta with their voices, so that it is chiefly the *libretto* which remains memorable in this musical piece. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

A Hopeful Run

The 30th Film Week 1999

Ildikó Enyedi: *Simon Mágus* (Simon Magus) • Zoltán Kamondi: *Az alkimista és a szűz* (The Alchemist and the Virgin) • Ferenc Grunwalsky: *Visszatérés* (Homecoming) • András Salamon: *Közel a szerelemhez* (Close to Love) • Can Togay: *Egy tél az isten háta mögött* (One Winter Behind God's Back) • Péter Tímár: 6 : 3 • Miklós Jancsó: *Nekem lámpást adott kezembe az Úr Pesten* (The Lord's Lantern in Budapest)

It has been a long time since we have had such a good year. There were so many good things on offer that the critic is hard pushed to decide what calls for the greatest jubilation: that there were films aimed at the box-office, or that such a healthy number of young film-makers made a debut after seven lean years, or the new films by directors making a come-back? Perhaps that we will definitely not be going empty-handed to film festivals abroad? Perhaps we are finally seeing the emergence of those with the courage to grapple with the animal called Hungarian reality. Or perhaps that more film-makers are exploring different directions, as was manifested in the rich variety of subjects, genres and styles. That, of course, is also an indication that the film-makers as well as trying to find their own voice and cinematic style, are also trying to find their own audiences.

The eurostory, or postmodern magic

Of the films shown at the 30th Film Week, none was what you could call a perfect, flawless masterpiece. But there is something to be said for that too. The way things stand in the making of feature films (and in the world in general) today, if a film is flawless, then it is inevitably either sterile or insincere. We have an ample sufficiency of that kind of film without further contributions from the Hungarian cinema. Among our imperfect films, then, *Simon Magus* is the one with the fewest flaws, and those it has only make it more endearing. In it Ildikó Enyedi has achieved a delicate balance between beautiful images, wonderful gestures and a cornucopia of motifs and simplicity of storytelling. She has showed herself able to forgo the perfectionism she evinced in *Magic Hunter* a few years ago to the detriment of the story.

Simon Magus takes place in modern-day Paris, where a world-famous Hungarian psychic arrives at the behest of the French police to help them resolve a baffling crime. Simon is world-weary, he has had enough of working wonders, he is jaded and grumpy. Then he meets a young girl, who knows nothing about him, not even that he is a foreigner who doesn't understand a word of French. She only sees in him a handsome man, a mysterious stranger. Simon duly solves the crime, then has to flee from the press; in doing so he runs into Péter, a fellow countryman and one-time enemy, who had left the country a long time before. Péter chal-

---

Erzsébet Bori
is our regular film critic.

lenges Simon to a duel: to have themselves buried alive and resurrect themselves three days later. Although Simon is not really interested in this challenge, he accepts it because he has arranged to meet the girl three days later and has nothing better to do till then. The story, of course, has an antecedent in an ancient legend: the first gnostic, Simon of Samaria, who lived in the 1st century A.D., went to Rome to engage in a battle of wits with Saint Peter. In one version of the story, Simon demostrated his ability to fly before a gaping crowd; Saint Peter meanwhile prayed until Simon fell to earth. According to another source, he died after burying himself alive, promising to rise again on the third day—and this blasphemy was his undoing.

Ildikó Enyedi found in Paris the modern-day equivalent of the capital of the Roman Empire; in the all-questioning, relativizing attitude of the gnostics, she identified a precursor of the *enfants terribles* of postmodern thinking. If my interpretation of the allusion is correct, then the message of all this is that appearances are deceptive: even when we firmly believe that we have come to the end of something, and all the indicators seem to confirm this, in actual fact we are only at the beginning.

In this film Enyedi at last had the opportunity of working with actors who suited her; Péter Andorai's interpretation of the title role is masterful, almost effortless; so too are Mari Nagy and Julie Deslarmes, who is quite literally disarming and lyrical in her role as the young French girl. The casting is so perfect that her actors hardly have to open their mouths to give their characters life.

While both the soundtrack and Tibor Máthé's camerawork are good, they do not stand out as separate from the film, but are fully integrated with it. This is largely thanks to the film's clear, transparent and solid structure—a feature which, overall, was sorely lacking in this year's film festival. To put it quite simply, Enyedi has learned her craft well, and she now uses her consummate professional skills as a tool. She has learned to do without things—and she knows how to make things invisible. *Simon Magus* has a message, it has a strong conceptual basis and is driven by a personal motive—but the message does not need to be spelled out; we do not need to be familiar with the early gnostics, nor indeed with the lives and the rivalry of Simon and Peter, in order to understand and enjoy the film.

Zoltán Kamondi's *The Alchemist and the Virgin* is almost like the twin of *Simon Magus.* When Kamondi made *Paths of Death and Angels,* many began to draw comparisons between Enyedi and Kamondi's view of the world, that is their mysticism. Had they not both been in production at the same time, it might have proved difficult to resist the temptation to suspect that wire-tapping had been involved. Let us say no more than that both are exponents of the eurostory—which is gradually emerging as a possible counterweight to the Hollywood-style story—and so it is not surprising that the same French producer attached himself to both of them. Both films use multi-stranded historical and mythological elements as a basis for constructing a modern tale, set in the present and with a message directed at a contemporary audience. Although both *Simon Magus* and *The Alchemist and the Virgin* give a wide berth to didactics or moralizing—the impulse to teach, to provide pointers towards a truer, more authentic life, is undeniably present.

The two start out from very similar premises: this world is a difficult place to live in, its gaudy make-up and its frippery and trumpery only veil its age and cover its scars; we have reached a point of no return and there is no way of knowing where

we are going; the ground is shakey under our feet and in the infernal cacophony we can no longer hear ourselves, let alone understand what others are saying. This is a postmodern state of being, and as such is quite familiar. From there they both arrive at the same final resort: the human heart, and our most basic, universal and indestructible emotions. Is this just banal? Of course it is, and thank God for that.

Along with Macbeth, Kamondi must have many a time said something like "I dare do all that may become a man; who dares do more is none". He has dreamed up a wildly romantic tale of a chemist obsessed with discovering the secret of making gold, a professional gladiator and a girl possessing extraordinary hypnotic powers who acts as a kind of "fifth element"; events both fabulous and terrifying take place in rapid succession. The whole thing is gothic and rumbustious, it manages to be both contrived and shoddy simultaneously, and inclined to fall apart at the seams; one of its most amazing features is precisely this: the whole thing comes back together every now and again, and meanwhile—just as in Ildikó Enyedi's film—there are images and scenes which seep through, leaving an imprint, which will make it hard to forget. Both hypothetically and intellectually, *The Alchemist and the Virgin* wants to be regarded as ironic in its intention (how could it possibly be otherwise?). One suspects, however, that its creator took it rather more seriously, but occasionally took fright and felt he had to put in something silly. The palms go to the two excellent Polish actors (Danuta Szaflarska and Dariusz Bonaszewsky), along with the tempestuous Eszter Ónodi and the versatile Norbert Növényi, and to László Melis's musical score.

All the virtues of Kamondi's film cannot disguise its flaws, the most obvious being its unresolved ending. It is not that one has any objection to happy endings, but while the two eponymous characters are smashing up the set—the alchemist his laboratory and the ex-virgin the piano—an important event passes unnoticed: we do not find out why Teddy Bear, the strongman is wandering about in the background; it does not occur to us that this is where the bad thread of fate snaps or that the present-day reincarnation of the strongman no longer has to die a violent death.

Images of life

The most ambitious enterprise was that of Ferenc Grunwalsky: to portray the "other Hungary" on film. Not the gangsters' Hungary; they only have a minor role to play here. Neither does *Homecoming* simply transfer to the screen the kind of gloom and doom chronicles or the political journalists' expressions of outrage that now fill the press. Grunwalsky neither whinges nor depicts; he just chucks the whole thing at us as it comes, right in our faces. Along with the little but tough Pál Bogár, Ferenc Grunwalsky has also reinvented himself and come home. (The subtitle of *Homecoming* is *Little but Tough – Part 2;* in other words this is a sequel to a film made in 1989.) Grunwalsky's film at that time was about the Hungary of the eighties *A Full Day,* as a counter to the socialist type of pseudo-social documentary film which, to the great benefit of us all, seems finally to have died its death.

Homecoming is far from perfect. Grunwalsky himself has done everything: he wrote it, directed it, shot it and he probably put together the soundtrack for it too. But along with an excellent set and costume designer, the film could have done with a competent dramaturge to edit out the self-indulgent, superfluous episodes, the passages where the film just idles

along without relevance to its essential message. It is set in a small Hungarian town; on the other side of the street there is a smart new petrol station, on this side a former spit-and-sawdust bar turned café-bar, with its sixties' design, a beer-garden tagged on, with a corrugated tin roof, a multitude of sheds and outhouses, shacks and extensions, a never-completed family home, already lived-in before it was even built, and the people who live in it, with their track suit tops, floral patterned housecoats and leggings. Grunwalsky spares no thought for those members of his audience whose sensitivity threshold does not stretch as far as their neck. There were scenes which I could not bear to watch, and even the voices gave me the shivers. One woman's legs are twisted off and broken; another person has his eyes put out; a third has a plastic bag pulled over his head and is sealed alive into a metal drum, a fourth drinks himself to death—and I don't mean in a stylized, symbolic once-removed manner. American action movies are full of a violence which is more brutal, and more blatant, but in their case you don't miss a thing by looking away from the screen. (You might as well keep looking anyway; it is a kind of cinema that you would not even for a moment consider that it had any connection with reality at any level. Grunwalsky's films on the other hand are unadulterated chunks of life itself.)

The start of the film is totally crazy—I don't remember when I last saw anything like it—first of all it opens with a silent scene in a bar, which then appears to go hazy and start wavering; a figure with his back to us is playing with the table football, his companion sits at the table staring into space; then the women arrive, they exchange a few words, someone strikes up a sombre ballad. Zsuzsa goes home, lies down, there is silence. When the door suddenly bursts open we jump up with her in terror. There is very little dialogue in *Homecoming,* and this could be improved upon if they spoke even less. There is only snuffling, rasping, groaning, sighing, retching, yelling, whining and screaming. Giant faces fill the screen, horror-stricken, wrecked, disintegrating, hopeless faces. New faces. These new films are not able to use (or use only as allusions) those actors who have seen better days and who now appear on giant billboards and on TV screens advertizing banks and washing powders; nor can they use well-worn actors from the soap operas and other light TV. Yet there seems to be no shortage of actors. There are some new actors, and not only from abroad. Some have emerged out of the provinces, from the theatrical fringe, from the cellars, from goodness knows where.

We see three formidable actors in András Salamon's film. I was very much looking forward to this film whose working title was *A kínai lány* (The Chinese Girl) but which ended up with the rather ungainly *Close to Love.* András Salamon is capable of making films like Ken Loach's. *Close to Love* confirmed this belief, though this was not the film. (Perhaps this was not what Salamon was trying to achieve or—more likely—he was not quite brave enough.) He has nevertheless succeeded in making it a fabulous love story: a police cadet from the sticks and a Chinese girl, a story that, all told, should take up around 78 minutes. *Close to Love,* however, runs to 112 minutes. Another flaw in style, one might think at first, but here it is the script which is flawed. It is based on a book, the story line is good, but it is as if Salamon has not thought through the idiosyncrasies of the feature film as a medium. Things which do not demand explanation when written and can be perfectly adequately mentioned just once, in film just

hang in the air—a film's relationship with the obvious is completely different because it cannot rely to such an extent on the imagination of the viewer. Salamon fails to provide the reference points by which the daily life of the principal character could be imagined, or how it is possible at all for such a naive village lad to function as a policeman, or how the attitude of his companions changes from benevolence to hatred. Not why, but how. Because the viewer, unlike the director, knows from the outset that all will not end well with this love affair, and is taken aback by the fudge of a shoddily tacked-on happy ending. And Salamon really gets into a bit of a mess with the issue of Xenophobia. It is pointless to deny that Xenophobia exists in Hungary and is found in definable sections of society, but the current handful of neo-nazis do not present the greatest threat. Perhaps most alarming in the film is the racialism within the police force, while the most interesting is the question of how the average Hungarian citizen is coming to terms with the presence of foreigners.

The cast, on the other hand, cannot be faulted; they play everything, including the impossible. Rather than the usual extravagant police chases, the film manages to fit in only one single surprise raid. There are a few shots of a dark warehouse, but before they break in, as the patrol car crew sits with growing suspicions in their car, they look at each other and only need to exchange a few syllables and sketchy gestures to agree and work out their plan of action: the tension created could cut the air with a knife.

Debuts and come-backs

The part of Hungarian cinema that is on the ascendant is indicated by the presence of new directors making their first films, and producing for the most part interesting, but irrelevant, experimental work—not that there is anything wrong in that. The film-making duo Gergely Pohárnok and Attila Hazai's entry was clearly impelled by the desire to produce a film relating to a particular generation. Hazai's earlier attempt in a similar vein *(Rám csaj még nem volt ilyen hatással*—No Chick Has Ever Had this Effect on Me Before) is repeated here, this time with Hazai himself behind the camera. This effort, *Candy Blue* would have been better, or would have got further, if it had achieved what it set out to do, to be a film version of Attila Hazai's novel, *Feri—Cukorkékség* (Feri—or Candy Blue). Hazai's writing has one peculiarity, without which it loses its interest: it is impossible to decide whether it should be taken seriously or not. The way his novel *Feri* or *Budapest Schizoid* balances on the borderline between the natural and the ironic (not to say parodizing) could even be regarded as something of a stylistic tour de force. The film, however, makes practically no attempt to reflect this ambivalence; after a few moments' hesitation it draws in its horns and decides to take the easier option, that of humour.

Intention and result coincided more happily in the film *Európa Expressz* (Europa Express), which could well be a box-office success too. For quite a while people had been saying that at last there was a film which was a real, fast-paced American-style action movie. This is enough to send the unwitting cinema-goer fleeing for his life, and it has to be said that I went to the showing out of a sense of duty. I don't know what happened or how it happened, but somehow somewhere along the line in the process of making the film he must have come to his senses and snapped out of the American dream. Ideally, it was the producer who realized that the film was set to become

a laughing stock and deftly shifted it onto a different plane. In this way Csaba Horváth's film has become a genuine fast-paced parody of the commando film. We can have a double laugh over *Europa Express* first of all at the film itself, and second at the thought of it as a serious movie.

The films made by the Közgáz [University of Economics] Visual Brigade never fail to astound me with their naturalness, their oafishness and their honest, productive messing about. Every frame they make is utterly believable. What does bother me, however, is the shoddiness, which they seem to have made into a ruling principle; these people are not saying that anything goes, they are saying that anything can be brought into the film. This is what happens if one turns down the services of a dramaturge; if they come across anyone or anything in the course of filming, then you can bet your shirt that it will be included in the film, and indeed it will have no less weight than the film's central characters or leitmotif. It works, however, when they show something they think beautiful or interesting, or when for example the script says that the friends set out in heavy rain, and meanwhile in fact the sun is shining for all it is worth. A proper film crew in this situation would call a halt and either wait, or get the rain machine going; this crew, on the other hand believes in the power of the word, and they simply announce that now it is raining. This is exactly what they do in their *Három* (Variations for Three). The three referred to, incidentally, are life, death and love; or man, woman, child, or possibly something different entirely.

It has been a long time since Can Togay's summer film, *The Summer Guest* came out. His new work, *One Winter Behind God's Back,* is a beautiful winter film whose only flaw is that it is too crammed—with themes, motifs, principal characters, events, as well as atmospheric and stylistic features. It is as if he has packed seven years' worth of plans and ideas into this long-awaited work: a novel about growing up, adults seen through the eyes of children, the landscape, forests, valleys, a village in the hills and, in addition to all of this, the wonder of cinema, memorable scenes from old films *(The Nibelungen, La Grande Illusion, Dr Caligari, Der letzte Mann),* the romance between the beautiful cinema cashier and the taciturn woodcutter. The publicity handout specified the place and time in which it is set: Romania, at the start of the post-Communist transformation. Fortunately, this does not feature in *this* form in the story itself, which is subtle and timeless; at most there are veiled references to it, and in the form of a village assembly. Fabulous, on the other hand, are the great masses of soft snow which, in winter, cut the village off from the rest of the world; the white trees and houses, and the way in which the wind whips up the snow and chases it across the fields.

Together again

After several long years there finally seem to be grounds for the hope that cinema-goers are finding their way back to the Hungarian film. There may have been numerous and potent reasons for the estrangement, but the historical moment has arrived when both parties seem willing to recommence the relationship. The opportunity is of course one to be grasped with both hands, but those who expect too much will probably be disappointed. Film-making is expensive, potential audience numbers are low in such a small country, and it cannot in all seriousness be expected that we'll start mass-producing commercial hits like *Dollybirds.* Success usual-

ly comes unexpectedly, but I would not go as far as to say that it is simply a matter of chance. Péter Timár is nowadays a sure hand in the picture business at knocking out successes; audiences adore every other film he makes, but they go to see the rest as well. His latest, *6:3,* looks set to repeat the unrivalled success of *Dollybirds.* Once again it is an amusing take on the past imperfect, on one of communism's bleakest and most execrable periods. This time we see a string of images from life in the fifties, framed by that great and frequently polished trophy of our former glory, our so-called golden soccer team of the fifties. Undeniably Puskás, Czibor and company did leave behind an indelible memory for soccer fans everywhere; from the Highlands of Scotland to the pubs of London. I personally have heard people recite flawlessly the names of the eleven who beat England 6:3 in Wembley stadium in 1953.

The other favourite with audiences is Róbert Koltai, the darling of cinema-goers and producers alike since 1993, although since the deservedly successful *We Never Die,* he has not made an unambiguously good film. *His Professor Albeit* starts out as a promising comedy about a secondary-school teacher who falls in love with a beautiful pupil, but it fails to develop into anything more than a feather-light fairytale with music-hall humour and cloying solos.

Hungarian Cinema

The 30th anniversary film week was accompanied by the usual increase in interest, but this time there was a new smell, or at least a whiff of something new in the air, although perhaps it was only in my imagination.

Let's stick to the facts. It is the cinema programme, late February 1999, and it is as if we have flown back in time, like the good Tuti, the enthusiastic hero of *6:3.* There are nine new (those premiered at last year's or this year's festival) Hungarian films showing, and of those, three have managed to get into the multiplexes too. Over and above the familiar hits (Timár, Koltai), *Espresso* (directed by Tamás Sas), made on next-to-nothing, is doing surprisingly well.

Miklós Jancsó has made a major feature film again and, even more surprisingly, *The Lord's Lantern in Budapest* has been doing very well for several weeks now. For once, at last, there is nobody throughout the length and breadth of the country who can claim not to understand the new film by Jancsó, who was in the past so often accused of being impossible to understand.

The director announces, and proceeds to light up every dark corner with its glow. There have been numerous attempts, using various artistic media and diverse genres, to capture the essence of what has been happening in Hungary during the nineties. Well, here we have it. Miklós Jancsó has it by the scruff of the neck. The story's main drift concerns three jovial (timorous, sly, simple-minded) gravediggers who paddle and pedal, shovel and mow and still make a loss; they then undergo some amazing metamorphoses and transfigurations, they set up a company, they marry, they wipe out a family, climb to the highest heights and fall flat on their faces, just as in real life. Maybe one day a castle will stand on the site in the closing scene, but for the moment there is only the negative impression of the building, a grave, a hole into which one is invited to collapse when the dance is over.

Miklós Jancsó, however, does not believe in the last judgement, or perhaps he just doesn't have the patience to wait for them to send someone from above to separate the good from the evil. He seizes a fire-hose—the cleansing stream of water is

turned on himself too—and there will be those who do the wetting and those who get wet, not to say drenched. The three gravediggers, played by Zoltán Mucsi, József Szarvas and the phenomenal Péter Scherrer, along with the relations and business clients, all have a whale of a time for once; and the music again gives a wide berth to the usual pre-packaged clichés commonly used by Hungarian film-makers. Ferenc Grunwalsky, also involved as a co-writer, handles the camera with verve; the most memorable images are the total ones; the graveyard is a vibrant green, but nowadays it is more hectic than is normal, and it is no wonder that the deceased cannot rest in peace and are forever rising up again.

The film could not be more topical if it tried; entering the cinema from the street is almost less of a shift than going to the kitchen to fetch a beer in the advertising break. Everything we see on the screen fits seamlessly into the conventions of street performance and the stories of street theatre. Life and death, liberty and love, private misdemeanours and public morality; the familiar Hungarian methods of making money and changing careers blink back at us like well-known faces from the screen; this is what we get up to, this is how we do it, and there's not an allegory or a stylization in sight, let alone any hint of a parable. Jancsó is inviting the viewer to laugh. This robust farce, this *commedia del'arte* in cinematic form, makes us see the flip-side of those things which in real life send us into a rage, make us sad or rouse us to indignation.

Last year eleven Hungarian feature films went into distribution—if distribution is the right word when something is shown a few times from a single copy in only one cinema in the country. Otherwise, we are talking about only eight films, for which 400,000 people bought tickets. What does the Hungarian cinema-goer want? Difficult to answer. Lean times and lack of choice, along with inconsistent distribution and marketing make the current picture less than transparent. I would nevertheless venture a wager: Hungarian films will double their audience numbers this year. At the very least—and that's not all that much. ❧

Ferenc Dániel

Tandori on a Stroll

A Film Portrait of the Poet

Tandori Dezső. Directed by Gábor Zsigmond Papp

In a small country whose language is also an isolated one, poetry always has a special role. This was certainly confronting the authorities in Hungary, under both the hard and the soft dictatorships. The most relevant words were pronounced by great generations of poets. In 1958 a new apprentice appeared among them, a young man who had perfected the art of form, with a unique knowledge and vision and a devastating ability to turn the various linguistic elements inside-out and then reassemble them. His name was Dezső Tandori. The cultural powers-that-be had no idea how to deal with him. He was tolerated, but they detested him though politics was not at all part of his nature. It was just that he did not fit into any aesthetic pigeonhole. At the same time, he was frighteningly prolific, almost to the point of being pathologically graphomanic. Even if estimates seem far-fetched, his total publications may well number around 600 over the last forty years (including a huge number of prose translations, with such feats as Musil's *The Man Without Qualities,* volumes of poetry and translated poetry, works of prose, crime fiction, plays for radio, story-books, essays and criticism). He has created personal mythologies around sparrows, teddy bears, and, recently, race horses.

Almost imperceptibly, with the demise of Socialist Realism, the advent of democracy, and the commercialization of public taste, it became irrevocably clear that Tandori was not just a relic of the old era. With poetry which is precariously poised on the cusp between life and death, he has matured to become something of a living classic. Both his past work and his most recent poems set a standard to be emulated.

In the Hungarian film-making tradition the principal trend is one that expresses social commitment, rather than exploring individuality. The reasons are complex and reach far back into the past, and I do not want to pass judgement on them here; nor, for that matter, do I want to bore by analysing them. Suffice it to say that it was such a pleasant surprise to find some young film-makers, Gábor Zsigmond Papp and friends, choosing Dezső Tandori as the hero and subject of their debut film—as well as appointing him as their inspirational cinematographic tour-guide. Tandori

Ferenc Dániel
is a dramaturge at Hungarian Public Radio. He is also a critic and has been involved in making animated and documentary films.

is now sixty; both as a writer and poet and as a personality he defies classification. It was clear from the outset, and the young film-makers knew this, that they would not get very far if they tried to make a film about Tandori through the usual film portrait approach to a poet. As he himself has written (professes and practises): "I have become a motley figure nowadays."

As regards the habits of this nowadays motley figure, he bears no resemblance whatsoever to the writer as we knew him during the long period of dictatorship (Tandori: "that time was unsustainable, because it was not viable, just... a world"), because the writer then wore the guise of a "conscientious minor bank official", like that of someone who is not a fully-fledged member of the Hungarian literary fraternity, and who "had to be accepted on his own terms". Nowadays Tandori is a tramp in shabby clothes and knitted cap, a vagrant, a clown, a racingman, sometime exponent of the art of living on the breadline; occasional vegetarian, and a rescuer of birds. And not just any old how: "I confess to being a sparrow-royalist and I am mortified if I go for years without remembering the spirit of painters like Paul Klee, or Morris Graves, who spent half his life painting nothing but birds because he felt that on wings he could perceive the "divine element" of life and who, if he is still alive, has been living for the last half-a-century in the Canadian-American wilderness, on his small plot of land, Japanese style."

The team of film-makers tried to bring out the natural soliloquizing, the need to have his say which interweaves with Tandori-the-clown's circus-style comings and goings. They even followed him, with their camera, to London. Cheap little hotel. Betting shops. Races. Tandori's £1 stakes. His winnings. By this stage it is immaterial whether or not he is communicative; the eternal paradox of the moving picture remains: just how much of the hero's synchronous inner/outer state is it able to translate or transmit? Not a lot? No, not a lot, which makes one aware of the silences, or is it an awareness that something is being held back? Tandori: "One of my visits to London set a standard for me. We were doing a biopic, I was translating Hungarian texts into German, and at the same time I busied myself betting on the horses and having a wander about the place. As for the filming, and the translating too: so far they've been disappointing. But then on the next race I increased my winnings sixfold. There are still the horses — that's what is left of the standard — and as for what are 'angels'? Roaming about, while thinking about those dear to me, living and dead, about myself, or about absolutely nothing at all?" Elsewhere Tandori says: "I am an unhappy loner by nature, although at the same time I don't quite comprehend the way things are; why should any kind of parallel living be a 'problem' if it is completely, hermetically separate? Can there be such a thing? Now I can look forward to ten, maybe twelve happy years with another—(maybe it will be the last) sparrow, which is only just a year old; and there is no talk of 'self-surrender.'"

Imperceptibly, however, and without recourse to any special device to do so, the film-makers bring us, the audience of this film portrait, face to face with the fact that what this is really about is the self-surrender of their roving hero. In figurative terms: about death. The various episodes chosen by Tandori are ordinary, everyday ones, but in some strange way they are like a roll-call of the deceased. The horses he bets on have names like Primitive Heart, Without Friend and Beachy Head—the favourite clifftop for

suicides in England; "he has a good laugh" about these.

Intermittently throughout all this roaming about, the film-makers, aware of Tandori's obsession with finding magic numbers, numerological associations related to a notion of eternity which is one of anguish, interpose flashes of numbers. 7—"list number seven of dead Hungarian writers". 15—"If I am now nearly 60, then I can expect to live, let's say, another 15 years. Let's say. That means that I have 1/5 of my life left to live. If I get up with all the little birds at 5 o'clock in the morning and I'm up till 9 in the evening, then that's 16 hours. One-fifth of that would be 3 hours 12 minutes. But this way it is not possible to grasp, to feel, what 'one-fifth' is, or what '15 years' is. But transpose it onto a day; then, I can tell you: from 5 in the morning I live 18 hours and 12 minutes. Or alternatively, taking it from 9 in the evening, I'm now at 5.48 p.m. — I die at 9 p.m. Here's a joke too... on the radio, which supposedly I'm not listening to, I hear that the last book on Hungarian botanical gardens was published in 1914; since then there have been a lot of works on 'twenty-sixth-grade plant rarities' from foreign parts instead. This is how we ought to live. We've just got to keep on trying." A film portrait can only point out the existence of this numerology, not keep pace with it.

It is refreshing to see a film that does not belong to any particular genre. A stopping-point: an improvised stage-set made of paper and cheap fabrics. Centre-stage we see Tandori. The scene is purposefully casual. The positioning of the camera is also designed to appear accidental. Why? For Tandori's benefit: "It is a dreadful problem that in Hungary the prevailing notion about literature is that it should be smooth, there is the expectation that it should be carefully crafted. This is wrong. In England there was a horse called Lamtarra, a Derby-winner as well as winner of two other big races, and which was booed off the course (or rather, his owner was) for going into retirement (put to stud) unbeaten and with four victories to his name. But horses are not a good basis for comparison. A writer does not have the option of being "put to stud" when his powers wane."

Maybe not the stud farm, then, but he can become a motley figure, who can be "described" by these rapid cinematic associations: not only does he believe in the secret connections of numbers, as all gamblers do; he also believes in a sort of determinism inherent in the potentialities of objects, events, things, times of day, states of being, rumours and experiences of the mind. This is an organic process which takes place from the inside. According to this theory a book is not an "escape" to somewhere, but rather an "entrance way" into something. Writing does not set out anything in figurative or summary form, or as a non-existent concept or conceptual something. "Every object, every force-field we ourselves create or experience, even a form condensed into an essay, has its own 'novel'". Poetry: a "comprehensible absolute". What makes a human being toil: "is not destructiveness, but rather 'the human being is really constructive'; a pair of bird wings are enough to make his nihilism vanish into the blue beyond, and it is not madness which is imposed on someone, in the form of poetry (or prose)".

One of the objects of Tandori's experience must be the multitude of signs in London advertising "Tandoori chicken". As he has been drawing graffitti-style forms himself of late, the posters and scrawls which rise in front of him on the street — this is the film-makers' construct — fall into a kind of poetic order, into a net of con-

textual associations: they "focus" on him. Because this flippantly bragging, motley figure of nowadays also keeps a rigorous eye on his affairs. T.S. Eliot. Kafka. Rilke. De Staël. Wittgenstein. A detailed account of a Koala Card Championship. Reminder notes on which Tandori "sets out" or "keeps a record of" what he has written to date, to whom or what he will be faithful until death, how the big and small numbers occur in the lives of his "holy people". What are the factors which make up his values? —"not those good people who reward motleyness. The words are all to be taken as if in inverted commas. The "real intelligentsia"? I don't know. Their vogue words—obsession, destructiveness, somewhere, anyway, etc., to mix them well— are alien to me. They have read more Derrida and Habermas, etc., than I have de Staël, Beuys, Michaux, Dubuffet, Wols, Artaud; maybe on Wittgenstein we coincide..."

In this film-portrait Dezső Tandori appears a charismatic, photogenic "character". Yet the question has to be asked: knowing the limitations of the medium, why did seeing the film leave him with a bitter taste, a feeling of embarassment? Was it perhaps the camera's terrible objectivity which he found off-putting? "... despite the fact that I see myself as old in photos, on film, I'm not decrepit, far from it..." We have no clear explanation for it, except perhaps that most people feel some anxiety when faced with their own image on film. It is as if they had been robbed or branded in some way. A justifiable fear. Tandori's fear is also justifiable, because his current poetry is frequently animated and transfigured into words by an inner camera-eye which bears the mark of death:

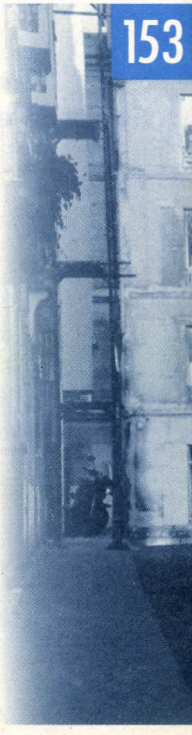
> *...Tradoni sits in a room, writes the poem,*
> *and it's not about being conscious of writing: that he's writing*
> *about writing about writing; but writing is part of the room, a way*
> *of investigating a subject, and the bird custodian now begins*
> *to investigate when he looks up at a shelf where a vase stands*
> *which was once occupied by a bird who took it from another bird,*
> *but then he died, and the other bird, whose vase it was, whose*
> *twigs it was, who is still alive, is not roosting on that vase,*
> *has not gone back up to the vase, below the vase, since then the shelf*
> *is abandoned, nobody is gardening on the potted plants,*
> *that bird died, and Tradoni knows those who are to blame.**

The moving picture, even in its once-upon-a-time, pliable, subordinate form, "cannot help but record", and this makes it merciless. We who have adopted it are motivated by self-interest; even robbed of our aura, we always want to be eye-witnesses. In the belief that everything is as it always was. ❧

*From: Dezső Tandori: "Stress on an Abandoned Place", translated by Bruce Berlind.

Step by step Sólyom brought to the Constitutional Court the trappings of power which would help raise the profile of this brand-new legal institution in the state hierarchy. In actual fact, however, the Court has attracted genuine respect because of its rulings. "We are professional idealists in a pragmatic world. We represent the abstract values of the Constitution, and one of our most important functions is reestablishing the law's tarnished reputation. I think this is the fulcrum which will allow us to lever the old world out of its place." This is how László Sólyom, President of the Court, in his accustomed prophetic tone, once described the mission of the body defending the Constitution.

From: Endre Babus: The Superego of the Transition, pp. 3–11.



ISSN 1217-2545

9 771217 254005 91

800,-Ft