The Hungarian Quarterly

Volume 49 • Winter 2008 • €14.00 / $16.00

2

- János Kornai on the Joys and Woes of a Researcher
- István Deák on Randoph L. Braham's Geography of the Holocaust in Hungary
- John Batki on Krúdy's Traveller on the Crimson Coach
- John Pinfold on "Foreign Devil Riders"
- Péter Eötvös in Interview
- Aba-Novák, the Barbarian Genius
- István Nádler's New Painting
- Literature and the Global Economic Crisis
- 1968 Tour d'Horizon

The Hungarian Quarterly

First published 1936

The Hungarian Quarterly
formerly *The New Hungarian Quarterly*
8 Naphegy tér, Budapest H-1016, Hungary
Telephone: (361) 488-0024 Fax: (361) 488-0023, (361) 318-8297
e-mail: quarterly@mail.datanet.hu
homepage: http://www.hungarianquarterly.com
Published by The Society of the Hungarian Quarterly
Printed in Hungary by AduPRINT, Budapest,
on recycled paper

HU ISSN 1217-2545 Index: 2684

Cover & Design: Péter Nagy

Annual subscriptions:
$60/€50 ($90/€75 for institutions).
Add €15 postage per year for Europe,
$21 for USA and Canada,
$24 to other destinations and $42 by air
to anywhere in the world.
Sample copies or individual copies of back numbers $24/€20,
postage included.
Payment in $ or €.
Annual subscriptions in Hungary Ft 5,500
Single copy Ft 1500
Send orders to The Hungarian Quarterly
P.O. Box 3, Budapest H-1426, Hungary

All export orders should be addressed to
The Hungarian Quarterly

The full text of *The Hungarian Quarterly* is available
twelve months after print publication on EBSCO Publishing's
database, Humanities International Complete
and on the Central and Eastern European Online Library

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
is a member of the Eurozine netwo
www.eurozine.com

eurozine

OKTATÁSI ÉS KULTURÁLIS
MINISZTÉRIUM

The Hungarian Quarterly
is published with the support of th
Hungarian Ministry of Education
and Culture

1968

BOOKS & AUTHORS

THEATRE & FILM

MUSIC

OBITUARY

Cover illustration: *Vilmos Aba-Novák:* Laura, *1930, tempera, wood, 99 x 63 cm. Hermann Ottó Museum, Miskolc.*
Back cover: *The First Race at Pest on June 6, 1827. Coloured lithograph by János Schmid after a drawing by J. E. G. Prestel and Alexander Clarot. National Széchényi Library, Budapest. Three stars of the Hungarian turf (from top to bottom): Overdose, the emerging sprinter, Kincsem, unbeaten in 54 starts in the 1870s and Imperiál, the wonder-horse of the 1960s.*

János Kornai

The Joys and Woes of a Researcher

I consider it an exceptional honour to be appointed an honorary doctor at your university, the Krakow University of Economics. I am moved by it, with feelings of joy that resemble those of a farm worker reaping the harvest. But having chosen that metaphor, I must add that the pleasure of harvest is preceded by the tough work of ploughing and sowing, and continual concern about whether the harvest will be flattened by hail or ruined by a storm. And in some years that happens, the painstaking work is fruitless, and the farmer does not reach the happy moment of harvest.

Let me turn from that metaphor to my own life and say something about research, not farming. I will seize this chance, the ceremonious moments of receiving an honorary doctorate, to say a few personal words about the joys and woes that come with the work of an academic like myself.

Research

There is always great joy in hitting upon the problem to be solved. I am excited not only by the task of solving the puzzle, but by the realisation that I have a puzzle before me. I cannot generalise here about the experiences of others, but in

---

János Kornai

is Allie S. Freed Professor of Economics Emeritus at Harvard University. After his appointment in 1986 as Professor of Economics at Harvard University until his retirement in 2002 he divided his time between Cambridge, Massachussets and Budapest, Hungary, where he was a research professor at the Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences till 1992, when he became an emeritus fellow of Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study. His books include Overcentralization of Economic Administration *(1959);* Anti-Equilibrium *(1971)*; Economics of Shortage (1980); *perhaps his most influential work;* The Socialist System. The Political Economy of Communism *(1992);* The Road to a Free Economy *(1989);* Struggle and Hope *(1997) and* Welfare, Choice and Solidarity in Transition: Reforming the Health Sector in Eastern Europe *(2001), co-authored by Karen Eggleston. On June 19, 2008 János Kornai became an Honorary Doctor of the Cracow University of Economics, the 14th honorary doctorate he has received. This is the address he gave on the occasion.*

my case, I do not always know at the start of some research project exactly what I want to examine. I am not moving toward some well-defined target, and I would have been in trouble if I had had to state in advance for a bid for EU funding exactly what task I was undertaking. When we arrived in 1975 in Stockholm, where we had been invited for a year, my wife and I talked a great deal about how the year should be spent. It was a few years after my book *Anti-Equilibrium,* and at first I thought I might write an "Anti-Equilibrium Revisited". However, I was to hold a series of lectures on the operation of the socialist economy to PhD students at the University of Stockholm, and I was prompted to provide for them a comprehensive picture of how the socialist economy worked. Meanwhile I decided that the shortage syndrome would have to provide the iron frame to which I could apply my other ideas. The comparison is not a forced one. The architect designing the appearance and internal structure of a building may experience joy similar to mine when the drawings for the building emerge out of many sketches, showing the building as a whole. My wife often remembers how I called out to her amidst the sounds of typing (for this was before the age of personal computers): "I do not know what the end of this story will be, but I already feel I am progressing with it as swiftly and straight as an arrow." Those were moments of joy indeed.

People often recall the cry of Archimedes: "Eureka!"—I have it! That feeling is not confined to scientific immortals like Archimedes. It is felt by our kind of researchers as well.

I am glad to say that moment in Stockholm was not my only experience of that kind. I was in Helsinki when I wrote the first half of my book *The Socialist System.* The most important chapter of it, in my opinion, is the one that explains the chain of causality connecting the various spheres of the socialist system, and suggests how far they can be seen as decisive elements in the political structure and ideology. We were walking in bright sunshine through an open-air museum on one of the islands when my mind became filled with a picture of mosaics. I sat down and quickly noted down my ideas. These are the moments of enviable bliss in a researcher's life.

But nobody should think that the months or years of each research project consist only of such happy hours. Most of the time is spent, let us face it, on humdrum work. Nobody in our profession can be a Picasso, able to put down on a piece of paper in moments a sketch that others consider a work of genius. We have to drudge, for days, months and years on end. We have to read masses of specialist literature to cover the antecedents to our work and the conclusions being reached by rival researchers. We have to gather and process data, make calculations and prepare tables. And having reached the stage of writing a piece, we have to weigh each word and repeatedly revise each draft. There is no denying that this involves suffering rather than enjoyment. Performance calls for more than discernment, intuition and an analytical capability. It also needs patience or *Sitzfleisch,* as the Germans call it. You want to jump up and do something else, and it takes self-control to order yourself back to your books and computer.

There are a number of instruments to be found in the research chamber of torture. One merciless instrument is research failure. You realise after long struggles that you have strayed up the wrong road, which does not lead anywhere. One of my experiences of great failure has a bearing on Poland. Oscar Lange's oft-quoted model of socialism confirms that under certain conditions, market socialism is capable of the same performance as market capitalism. I took issue with these conclusions in the Hungary of the 1960s. I felt almost sure that market socialism would not fulfill its promise in reality, obviously because some of Lange's assumptions made sense only on the page of a journal, but not in practical reality. So with mathematicians and computer specialists, we set about designing a simulation model that was supposed to represent a dynamic economic system similar to Lange's type of socialism. We wanted to build into it some relations that would represent the frictions of real systems, such as the rigidity of prices and the distortions of information. We followed good instincts in trying to approximate the model to reality as closely as possible, but that made it ever more complicated. Yet however we tried to adjust it, it refused to work. We spent weeks and months on it. Perhaps another, more ingenious team than ours would have succeeded, but we had to admit defeat and finally abandon the plan.

One central idea in *Anti-Equilibrium* and *Economics of Shortage* was that the actors on the two sides of the market are not equally strong. Either one or the other is stronger—we face either the buyers' or the sellers' market. One of the main system-specific features of the alternative economic systems—capitalism or socialism—is the direction in which the scale is permanently tipped: the general relative strengths of buyers and sellers.

Many people incline to admit there is truth in this assumption. Unfortunately I failed to create a mathematical model adequate to the problem. I tried to obtain help from other, better designers of models, but I failed to find a real intellectual partner for the task. I knew I had something very important to say, but I could not express myself well enough. Something similar might be felt by a poet who experiences something but cannot put it into words, or a composer who fails to write down the music audible in his or her head. I have a recurrent bad dream of standing at the rostrum of a great conference and not being able to utter a word. Psychologists would call it a typical anxiety dream. There has been more than one message of mine that I have not managed to express adequately. This is one of the worst torments in a researcher's life.

Publication

Let us move on. The research is done. The next phase is to publish it. It is a proud, joyous feeling when your work comes out, and you have the printed article or book in your hand. An author of a newly published work has something of the joy felt by a mother in her newborn child. But there are previous phases as well, and these are not easy to endure.

Let me mention first the historical period in which we authors were subject to pressure from the Communist political regime. Those whose message had a political content faced a difficult dilemma. What forum of publication should they choose? The more critical their work and the deeper it delved into the fundamental attributes of the socialist system, the stronger the dilemma became. If they were intent on telling the *whole* truth, they could only use illegal channels of publication. If they chose those, they laid themselves open to persecution, of themselves and possibly of their readers. Certainly, each samizdat publication reached relatively few readers, and illegal "flying university" lectures were attended by relatively few listeners. In addition, there were the torments of harassment or even incarceration, and a general feeling of isolation.

The other alternative—which I chose in the years of repression—was to devise writings intended for legal publication. But that meant undertaking self-censorship in the interests of legality. I always insisted on writing *only* the truth, but I had to accept that I could not write the whole truth if I wanted my work to see legal publication. I refrained in the late 1970s and early 1980s of stating in *Economics of Shortage* that the ultimate explanation for the dysfunctional attributes of the socialist system lies in the political structure, the autocracy of the Communist Party, and the political activity and institutional system suggested by official Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Self-censorship is a demeaning torment. The only comfort is that for the price of it, you can put some recognised truth into many people's hands. *Economics of Shortage* was read by several tens of thousands in Eastern Europe and sold a hundred thousand copies in China. Was that a comfort? Yes and no. It is a good feeling repeatedly to meet people in China or Russia, or here in Poland, who tell me the book opened their eyes. And it is an ineradicable woe to think how much of what I wanted to say had to stay inside me in those days, when I wrote the book.

Let me add for completeness that there is a special feeling of pleasure associated with self-censorship. What was the cleverest way to evade the censors and eagle-eyed editors and watchful supervisors at party headquarters? How could I smuggle in a message between the lines? How could I write 22 chapters of *Economics of Shortage* so that a reader with a quick ear could guess right away the contents of the missing 23rd and 24th chapters? That cat-and-mouse game provides an intellectual enjoyment well known to writers, poets and social scientists under all sorts of dictatorship.

The change of system in 1989–90 came as an intellectual liberation, a first experience of the joy of full expression. That joy is not something Western colleagues can appreciate. It is a natural condition for them, but far from self-evident to us Eastern Europeans. Only those who lived in the shadow of the Berlin walls of censorship and self-censorship could appreciate their collapse.

Even now, the joy of freedom of speech is not unalloyed. For research economists, it is often restricted by narrow-minded interpretations of the ideas of mainstream economics. The truly significant exponents of that productive school

of thought, people like Arrow or Samuelson, never sought a thought monopoly. On the contrary, they positively encouraged those who came up with new, unorthodox ideas. But mediocre and biased economists often put up obstacles to the publication of work that falls outside the mainstream. I usually describe myself as someone who has one foot in the mainstream and the other stepping beyond it. I have had papers rejected by anonymous referees, sometimes complemented by arrogant sermons. Or the referee and the editor have tried to impose their ideas on me through "conditional acceptance" of the work: do what they prescribe and they will publish your article, otherwise they will not. I have not bowed to them in any such case, preferring to seek another journal to publish it. Yet there is no denying that such curtailment of authorial sovereignty is embarrassing, even demeaning. In my case, my status does not depend on the number of publications any more. I have been through the process of obtaining "tenured professorship", which is highly dependent on publication record, and I have bidden farewell to that position, after retirement and becoming professor emeritus. But I can understand the difficulties facing my younger colleagues. Should they follow their own path bravely? Or should they choose and work on a subject that will win the sympathy of referees and editors? Which is better: intellectual conformism or the risk of isolation and a break or retardation in one's career? Such dilemmas also belong to the dark side of the researcher's calling. None of us can run a triumphal march. Those who set out to be researchers have to reckon with the woes of publication as well.

Reception and responses

After the first phase of research and the second of publication comes a third: the afterlife of the work. Will there be reactions? Will it exert an influence?

This phase does not start normally with publication in print, but much earlier, when the researcher first presents his or her research findings at seminars or as a draft circulating among colleagues. If the work is really good, then there will be very welcome appreciative comments from the outset, and these belong to the joys of research. In my experience, there are also comments of other kinds, expressing disparagement ("We knew that") or doubt ("What use is that?"). And those are still better than the comments of those who misunderstand what one is saying or twist one's meaning, more or less intentionally.

Such reluctant, sometimes provocative or even malicious comments have cropped up constantly alongside my successes—at the stage where the author is still passing the manuscript around. I remember how our later very successful work *Kétszintű tervezés* (Two-level Planning), co-authored with Tamás Lipták, was received by two referees at my place of work. One greeted it warmly and the other poured scorn on it. This may rob some of any desire to continue. Certainly it calls for great confidence in one's ideas to prevent oneself being deterred.

Later, after publication, come the reviews and citations—or not, as the case may be. Some authors say they are only concerned with the higher truth and pay

no regard to its reception. I doubt that they are being sincere in that. Those who research and write wish to influence people. At least they would like their colleagues to give some attention to their work. And if an economist talks about topical matters and public affairs, he or she would like not only fellow academics but the general public to pay heed.

The reception may be unpleasant or even insulting for political reasons. I write something and people attack it, because the attackers' world view and political philosophy differ from mine. This has to be accepted by those whose message has a political content. It is a bad feeling to read attacks on one's work, but it can be mingled with a little pride at having written something that "got people going" a little. At the beginning of the 1990s, I coined the expression "premature welfare state" and there have been several hundred references to it since, to my delight. But it feels bad when a Hungarian sociologist with whom I have been friendly for decades does not wish to talk or respond to a greeting, because she feels my criticism of excessive state spending beyond what is appropriate to the country's level of development is a stab in the back for humanity and modern civilization.

There are also successes and failures, joys and woes alike awaiting economists who step beyond narrowly interpreted academic life, into the border areas that impinge on science and politics. It is a joy if they find their advice is taken, and a fairly bitter experience to see it ignored. I have undergone both in the last few years, often hardly distinguishable when the joys of influence and woes of indifference or resistance have been combined.

But let us turn back again from the borders of science and politics to academic life. The degree of joy or woe depends not only on the actual degree of influence exerted, but also on the degree of influence the researcher had expected. The sense of joy and the sense of woe depend on the difference between aspirations and results. Let me add a few personal words here.

When I try to assess my work with hindsight, I think it is important to consider not just single theoretical assertions or relations, but also the outlook and methodology with which I approach the problem. This type of approach I termed the "system paradigm" in one of my studies. I had a good many favourable reviews for my book *The Socialist System* (important entries in the list of joys), but the appreciation was usually confined to the way my work had contributed to an understanding of the socialist system. What I had aspired to was to see the methodology of the book noticed and utilised by others who happened to be dealing not with the socialist system, but with some other socio-historical formation. That kind of reception was lacking.

If I mention this occasionally to close friends, they ask why I expect so much. Were my aspirations lower, my chagrin and discontent would be less.

That is true, yet perhaps not. The wise advice is in vain because our bodies do not contain a clever little dial for regulating our aspirations, our demands of ourselves and the level of influence expected. If we had one, we could turn our

aspirations right up or right down like a gas ring. But the level of aspirations cannot be regulated, or at least, I have never managed it.

Great ambition is the great motive force. Those whose gas ring burns low may be calmer and more balanced, but their performance is the lesser for it. It is the feeling of discontent and unfulfilled ambition that goads us into greater performance. Although this often comes at the price of feeling low and disillusioned, it may also spur us on to new, difficult scientific tasks.

I see quite a few elderly researchers in this hall, who will certainly understand the feelings I am talking about. But there are young people sitting here as well, and I hope they also have grasped what I have said about my own career. If they shrink from the torments of a research career, they should step back now. But if they are prepared for such a career, they should reckon with the woes and the great, special, incomparable joys that a research career brings. Believe me, it is worthwhile.

Let me once again thank the Krakow University of Economics for choosing to add to the list of joys that I keep, not the list of woes, by awarding me this high honour at this fine celebration today. ❧

László Márton

What You Saw, What You Heard

Here I have to commemorate Jenő Bazsinka, whose chief claim to fame was that he did not become a writer. I did in his place. Rather like the cursed ferryman in the fairytale who thrusts an oar into the hands of an unsuspecting wanderer who happens to be passing by that way on the grounds that he, too, should row a little, Bazsinka stepped over to me and asked to do him a tiny little favour, one that could easily be met, of writing in his stead a story that he himself, for various reasons, was unable to write, though it was very important that the work be done and should be ready for the class's wall-newspaper by tomorrow morning at the latest.

It was a matter of honour for Katie, Attila's girlfriend!

"The story that I ought to write is actually very simple," Bazsinka clarified. The reason he could not do it himself was precisely because he was at a loss with simple things. He was always seeking complexity, unsolved and insoluble problems. "So anyway," he carried on with his explanation, "the story has to include that a gym class is in progress. Along comes Katie, bringing the class diary from the girls to the boys. She is wearing a light-blue school smock and dark-blue jeans. Not that it's important, I could drop it from the story. The main thing is Katie comes along, she goes through the changing room and goes into the boys' gym with the class diary then comes out of the gym without the diary and goes away. That's it. Nothing really."

László Márton

is a novelist, playwright, translator and essayist. Among his works are a trilogy of historical novels set in 17th-century Hungary and a drama trilogy on 16th-century Transylvania. Two of his novels have been translated into German (Die wahre Geschichte des Jacob Wunschwitz *and* Die schattige Hauptstraße) *and he has also written a novel* (Die fliehende Minerva oder Die Letzten Tage des Verbannten) *and a novella* (Im österreichischen Orient) *in German. Márton's translations into Hungarian include Goethe's* Faust, *as well as works by Luther, Novalis, Kleist and Walter Benjamin. The short story published here is the title story of his latest collection reviewed by János Szegő on pp. 143–46 of this issue.*

"If it's that simple," I asked Bazsinka, "then why don't you write it yourself? After all, you're the one who dreamed it up!"

He expostulated that that was exactly the point! He hadn't dreamed up a single bit of it!

I could tell from the look in his eyes that he was lying. I took pity on him.

"And no longer than three typewritten pages!" he exclaimed in relief. "For one thing, I don't want you to fritter away your whole afternoon on it. For another, three pages is precisely the space it has to fit at the bottom of the wall newspaper. For a third, because no one reads anything longer anyway, and the main thing is that this story, in which nothing but the truth is written down, will get to be read by the whole class. That is what restoring Katie's honour calls for."

I wrote it for the next day and put it up on the wall. Ten years later my first book appeared. Like the unsuspecting wanderer in the fairytale, who is never able to put the oar down once he has grasped it, so I too was unable to leave off what I am still doing now. But this is not about me but about Bazsinka. And also about a simple story that suddenly became so very, very complicated for him.

But before everything else, I need to relate a few important particulars about the changing room and the boys' gym. After all, those were the places Katie passed through in the true story about her.

Let me begin by saying that when we were fifteen-year-olds Bazsinka as a rule would sit in the changing room and read during the P.E. lesson. He was a weedy, freckle-faced boy who wore thick glasses and did not so much loathe as feel a profound contempt for anything connected with sport or physical education, any training aimed at discipline. On top of which, the P.E. teacher—a ruddy-faced, beefy, balding bloke—whom fate had brought into contact with us in our senior years at primary school conducted a veritable witch-hunt on weaklings, wastrels and, as he termed them, "freaks".

Bazsinka in all his born days was never anything other than a wastrel, weakling and freak.

I don't feel it is my job to recount how the ruddy-faced, balding P.E. teacher made the life of twelve- and thirteen-year-old Bazsinka a living purgatory. After all, by then we were fifteen years old and had left the humiliating and ignominious childhood years behind; we were grammar-school pupils by then! The grammar school was a commodious redbrick edifice that had been built in the Thirties; it was reputed to have "always been a liberal-minded place." Much later, as an adult, I heard that just a few years after it was opened there was a practice of carrying out "Petőfi raids" during Hungarian lessons: there was a teacher who would make surprise attacks to check on pupils' knowledge of Petőfi's poetry. He would spout out ten or a dozen lines of a poem and pupils were expected to know which poem they came from. He would then cite the title of a poem, and the pupils were expected to spout back by rote from the poem in question.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to remind readers that, at the time of these "Petőfi raids", outside in the streets raids were being carried out that a knowledge

of Petőfi would not be enough to get you through. One morning, that teacher, who was otherwise the very model of punctuality, did not turn up at the school for in point of fact he had boarded a tram on which, one stop later, a raid was instituted, and the officials of the authorities found his papers to be not in order.

The grammar school that had always been a liberal-minded place had a bearded young chap as the P.E. teacher. He had qualified not long before at college. And he had a long Greek name, like one of the characters in the *Iliad.* Unlike the ruddy-faced, balding teacher, over whose lessons there prevailed a mood of punishment battalions and death camps, he tried to take physical education, the training of the body, seriously. He explained that the abdominal muscles could be built up easily and quickly, but without regular training and they could also become flabby all too soon; the back muscles, by contrast, could only be developed into the finished article by slow and dogged work, but once that had been attained, they were durable. He would plan both exercises and team games accordingly.

The thing was, though, that Bazsinka was disgusted by muscles, his own puny muscles above all, and he was not to let anyone tell him what to do. To the question whether he would prefer to play football or basketball, he replied that he would like most of all to read. From then on, he was left in peace, and during P.E. lessons he would read in the changing room—most often hefty and serious books.

In point of fact, he was not absolutely truthful, because what he would have liked to do most of all was not to read, but to write. He didn't make any secret of it; indeed, he made a point of stressing that at home he spent every moment of spare time in working on a novel about the self-liquidation of the personality, the self-annihilation of characteristics, though he did not go into any details. At school, on the other hand, he wrote short stories. Most particularly he wrote short stories during Russian and physics classes, because, as he claimed, the cooing of the one lady teacher and the monotonous drone of the other had as much of an inspirational effect on him as the sound of wind in the old oaks at Dodona or the smell of rotten apples had on Friedrich Schiller. All the same, he also wrote a tidy number of short stories during the form-teacher's session with us, to say nothing of the periods for civil-defence instruction.

He would then take the short stories home, type up a fair copy on his mother's Czechoslovak portable typewriter, then the next day post them on the class wall-newspaper, of which he was the sole editor and author. Let me add here—I could have said it earlier too—that the redbrick grammar school was, at this point in time, being used as a demonstration school for the University of Budapest, which meant that probationary teachers nearing the end of their training would turn up at two points in the year, in the autumn and spring term. They would sit quietly at the back of the class for a week or two, then, sooner or later, step out in front of the class and strive to behave like real, fully fledged teachers.

The reason I mentioned all that was because in one of the Russian lessons the trainee teacher, a tall, gaunt, curly-haired mature student, noticed that Bazsinka was not occupied with plural nouns in the instrumental case but with something

else. He was called Péter Pál Sziklai. He asked Bazsinka what he was up to, whereupon Bazsinka answered that he was engaged on a literary labour, to be more specific, he was writing a short story. As seasoned witnesses, we watched with mildly contemptuous interest to see what would transpire.

Different teachers, depending on their temperament and frame of mind, would react in different ways to Bazsinka's literary labours, if those happened to coincide with one of their lessons.

Judit Spengler, the chemistry teacher, ripped one the works in progress to shreds and burst into tears. Mária Czóbel, the biology teacher, also rubbished the literary labours and for the remainder of the period put Bazsinka on the spot by calling his name two or three times to answer questions.

Balázs Somlai, the geography teacher, who had a quick temper and, as a result, often landed himself into rather ticklish situations, generally held his tongue and would just turn purple as he watched Bazsinka pursuing his literary labours, but then, all of a sudden, but with all his might, would hurl a stick of chalk at Bazsinka, or if he did not happen to be have a stick of chalk in his hand, then a sizeable bunch of jingling keys, which could be quite risky for others, because Balázs Somlai did not always aim too accurately.

József Nagy, the history teacher, stood behind Bazsinka and ran his eye over the literary labour before getting out a thick black felt-tipped pen to cross through the uppermost page and, with an ambivalent smile, declare that there may be no censorship in Hungary, but there was vigilance.

So we waited with mild curiosity to see what kind of show Péter Pál Sziklai was going come up with. Instead, however, he first asked whether it was possible to learn Russian while writing a short story. Not possible, is it? So then, was it possible to write a short story while learning Russian? Not possible?

Of course it is! It's always possible to write a short story.

As a result, Péter Pál Sziklai told Bazsinka to go on writing his short story, and when it was ready to show it to him.

Even from that it is evident that he was a magnanimous person, who was not wanting in a modicum of wisdom. I have no doubt that he would have made an excellent teacher. As it was... But no, I shall save that for a bit later.

The short story was finished, and Bazsinka showed it to Sziklai. He later on showed him all the others as well. After school was over, if Sziklai had the time, and he usually did, they would go to the Mini coffee bar and chat for hours about literature and other issues of the world. Sziklai made Bazsinka aware that women did not take it amiss in the least if a chap who was a total stranger groped their behind in the street. True to his master's guidance, Bazsinka groped one woman's behind, but he was instantly slapped across the chops so hard that his spectacles went flying. After that, they stuck to talking about literature.

I no longer have a clear recollection of the short stories that Bazsinka wrote as an adolescent. Most of them I only read once, or maybe not even that. I have a vague idea that in them, and through them, he was trying to free himself of

oppressive fantasies. In one of the stories, gigantic snakes as long as a street slithered into a town and crushed all the houses. In another, if I'm not mistaken, the earth's crust cracks open at several places and all existing things drop into the void. A third was about the corpses in a mortuary playing cards and winning all of the pathologist's money, indeed ending up winning even the tongue in his mouth.

These literary works were profoundly shocking to occasional readers. One story, one in which the giant Atlas, in a sudden moment of passion, whips the Earth from his shoulder and skewers it on his enormous phallus, was within an ace of prompting a ban to be placed on the class wall-newspaper. Others said that Bazsinka had a sick mind and ought to see a psychiatrist. Yet others said "even modernity has its limits," or just "Ugh!" As far as Bazsinka was concerned, this was worth more than any praise they might give; it reinforced his belief that he was on the right track, and he ought to strive even harder to surprise, unsettle and horrify his real or imagined readers. He was not seeking praise; he wanted to produce an effect. The trouble was Bazsinka's stories had little or no effect on Sziklai, who would yawn to read horror stories stuffed full of poetic imagery and indecent expressions. He said that one could sense the effort it had taken, indeed that was all that could be sensed. The twenty-five-year-old man informed the fifteen-year-old boy that readers did not take it amiss in the least if a tyro writer strove for authenticity rather than striving after effect.

That alone shows that he would have made an outstanding critic or editor. He, however... But no, I'm sorry: I shall save it for a little later to relate the frightfully little that I know about Péter Pál Sziklai. He said that it did not signify a writer had courage to take the Earth from Atlas's shoulder, or to announce an advancing front of garish-blue desert jumping mice. The hell it doesn't! But if one uses one's eyes and ears.

"Do me a favour, old chap,"—for a while he had addressed Bazsinka as that: old chap—"from now on write down what you have seen with your own eyes and heard with your own ears, and only that! And write it down exactly how you saw or heard it, don't deviate a jot from that, either to the left or to the right!"

"You know, a writer needs to be accurate before all else, because accuracy is the same as authenticity!"

That alone shows that Péter Pál Sziklai would have made an outstanding aesthetician. He, however... But let's leave that! The main thing is that Bazsinka was true to his master's guidance, and from then on he strove to capture mundane reality both as a whole and in its details.

But how did reality—or "the revolutionary character of the everydays," to use a contemporary turn of phrase—manifest itself in the early Seventies, as viewed through the eyes of a grammar-school boy? What was it like? To be brutally honest: boring.

Likewise Bazsinka's new short stories, they too turned out a bit boring. Those irresponsible flights of fancy ended, the flickering obsessions burned out. To be replaced, for example, by a meticulous three-page description of sweeping up

leaves in the autumn, or shovelling snow in winter. A row in front of the liquor store; scenes on a tram or bus or underground train; and above all, portraits of school life till the cows came home. After all, Bazsinka spent the greater part of his time in the commodious redbrick edifice, where three decades before he could have been an eye- and ear-witness to the "Petőfi raids," his chances of surviving which could not have been said to be too great, in respect of the real raids that were going on in the outside world, that is.

To his credit it should be pointed out that the impulse to shock did not completely disappear from even these new literary attempts, with their striving for slavish replication. On one occasion, for instance, he compiled and typed out over three pages of graffiti that were scrawled on the walls and doors of the boys' toilets, then when called to account for it, he defended himself on the grounds that he had only written down what was there for others to see as well, and every day come to that. I should note that he was not being entirely truthful on this occasion either, because that material was not visible in that assemblage anywhere. The fact is that the material in the boys' toilets amounted to no more than a page and a half, so Bazsinka had sneaked into the girls' toilets after school, where he had found ample material to fill three-quarters of a page that was of interest. Since even then he had been left with a bit of space, he used some ruse to get hold of a key to the teachers' convenience as well. The pearl of his pickings there was the doggerel:

Underneath place a slash
Anyone who's seen a blonde gash.

He added as an editorial comment that he had counted a total of 29 ticks from various hands under the couplet.

By and large, though, Bazsinka's new stories were nothing like as entertaining as that. I recall that in one of them he described an ID check at Bosnyák Square in Pest. Or rather, the only bit that fitted into the three pages of typescript was a monologue of the policeman who carried out the check. All that he set down, and nothing else, was what he had heard. Far be it from him to wish to poke fun at the serving ranks of the police of the Hungarian People's Republic, which was what the leaders of the school's Young Communists League organisation unanimously asserted. A writer does not wish for anything, he does nothing more than observe the world and write down what he observes.

"If that's the case," they asked him, "then why doesn't he observe anything good or nice? Why is it only ever things that present worries, troubles and problems?"

The class wall-newspaper was suspended for one month.

That was intended as a severe warning.

From another angle, that gave Bazsinka plenty of time to take stock of himself and rethink afresh his literary efforts. He went to his serious, grown-up friend and master in order to seek advice on what was to be done.

Péter Pál Sziklai had in the meantime got through his probationary period and the state exam, picked up his diploma, and it had been his firm intention to secure a teaching post, but then he had been given a job in the propaganda section of the

Hungary–USSR Friendship Society. It behoved the Hungary–USSR Friendship Society, or HUFS for short, to have its headquarters in a street or square named after a great Soviet writer, and perhaps it just happened to fall on Gorky Avenue and an elegant two-storey house with a garden built for a banker, in which not a living soul was ever to be seen except for the gardener. Bazsinka approached the garden and house with no little trepidation, as he feared he might not be admitted.

Yet admit him they did; what is more, they were more than ready to tell him where to find Comrade Petey Sziklai.

Comrade Petey Sziklai was sleeping slumped over his desk, not waking even to the tap on the door. No doubt the night before he had not occupied himself with sleeping, and he was in the habit of catching up on it at his desk. He was not in the slightest bit pleased by the visit from a loyal ex-pupil, but when he heard what sort of cares were weighing on Bazsinka's mind, he brightened considerably.

"Write about harmless things, trivia, old chap!" he exclaimed. Bazsinka should not seek to capture the totality of the world right at the start, because that was a bit steep. Above all, it could be misunderstood. Better some trifle, but one which alluded to the bigger picture. The way the heavens were reflected in a puddle!

"Yes, write about a puddle! Or, let's say, a tree trunk with a cracked bark. A plastic bag being blown along a deserted street by the wind. About what you saw, what you heard!"

"It could even be humorous for all I care!" the master added to his list of good counsels. "Write miniature slices of life of the sort that are witty, on the one hand, yet also have lots of human interest!"

At which he bundled Bazsinka out of the room.

That is what was behind the writing of the first version of the story about Katie. When the appearance of the class wall-newspaper was permitted again, Bazsinka wrote a short story about a bag that is bowled along by the wind at the corner of Mayakovsky Street and Lenin Boulevard. Then he wrote about an empty tin can in which rainwater had collected, and in the sky, as reflected in the water, wild ducks could be seen flying in formation. Then he crossed out the wild ducks and wrote airplanes instead. Then he also crossed out the airplanes. In the end he also crossed out the autumn sky.

It was then that he resigned himself to humorous slice of life. He strove to uncover in them, or to register with his own sensory organs, a human interest angle. On one occasion he became an eyewitness to one such point of interest when he was sitting reading in the changing room during the P.E. lesson—a Jorge Luis Borges short story, I think, one about memory. About a memorious memory that completely records everything, in every last detail, that a man by the name of Funes observes, experiences, thinks or imagines.

Bazsinka was musing on whether Borges might have seen a human being who was blessed and cursed with such a memory, until it occurred to him that of course he couldn't have, being blind.

At that point he looked up.

What he glimpsed was the heroine of the next humorous slice of life, Katie, who was wearing a light-blue school smock, dark-blue jeans, and lily-white gym shoes. Katie cleaned the gym shoes lily-white with shampoo every Sunday, which one could tell because Katie used to froth every time it rained when she went home after school.

Not that that's important; I may even drop it from the story. The point is that Katie arrived, bringing the class diary from the girls for the boys. In point of fact, though, it is only here that the difficulties begin, because my task is not to recount what happened next, but how I am going to piece together the elements of the humorous slice of life that is to be written by Bazsinka, or in other words reconstruct the creative process.

That is no easy task, given that the event in question occurred thirty-three years ago.

Following this, Bazsinka gave up on his literary ambitions once and for all time. His interest turned towards chemistry; he became a chemical engineer and is now involved in making cosmetic articles out of vegetable oils. Let us see, though, what became of his humorous slice of life.

First of all, take a rainy early-autumn day. It is important that the weather still be mild, so that the boys play football outside in the schoolyard even though they become wet through in seconds. We establish at one glance that Katie's gym shoes are not yet frothing, because when she got off the No. 7 bus to come to school it was not yet raining.

Now, though, a splashing and gurgling can be heard. The sound might be coming from the drainpipe that runs by the changing-room window, but we know that it is coming from the shower room next door. Now the shower room was a roomy place, with at least fifteen showerheads, but the pupils almost never used them because the gap between the end of P.E. and the next lesson was just too short.

The lesson is still in progress, however, and somebody is using one of the showers. The person has been letting the hot water run for at least ten minutes by now, and since the door is open, the steamy air has already started to filter to the dressing room as well. We also happen to know who that somebody is: it's a boy in the parallel stream. Let us call him Dezső. What one needs to know about Dezső is that he had been held back a year anyway, and, on top of that, last year he had ploughed the tests in three subjects, so he was repeating the year and was therefore two years older than the rest of us. He was a strapping, blond-haired young man with a good physique. He did not have much to do with the others, nor they with him.

I suppose that what may have happened is that someone had kicked him on the ankle, that he started limping and quit playing. Just before, when he had limped off to the dressing room, he was covered from head to toe in mud, but he was able to wash that off quickly and so was now enjoying the hot water and the slow relief of the pain. He then screwed the tap off and started to dry himself.

It was at this point that Katie came along with the class diary. When she came into line with the open door of the shower room, she caught a glimpse of Dezső

with his back turned to the door and the gleam of his pale arse. She came to a standstill, clapped her hand to her mouth in surprise, and gave a scream. Dezső, on hearing that, threw the towel aside, stepped forward and upbraided her in a harsh, rasping tone:

"What's up, tottie? Never seen a plonker before?"

At which Katie dropped the class diary and took to her heels. It's also possible that by then her gym shoes had started to froth a bit.

It won't hurt to mention that Dezső had a well-developed, hairy plonker and had every right to be proud of it, though his previous words might also be interpreted as a confession on his part that he was a plonker— all of him, that is.

Bazsinka wrote up his humorous slice of life about this on three typed pages, with the authenticity of an eye- and earwitness.

He pinned it up on the wall-newspaper, using twelve "Hercules" drawing pins. The pins certainly deserved to be named after that mighty hero, because they held vigorous, robust literary works in place. At the next break a little throng gathered round the twelve "Hercules" drawing pins. Sniggers and laughter were audible. Bazsinka finally got a taste of literary success. He proudly stalked up and down the corridor.

There were some people, it is true, who took a dim view of words like arse and plonker being used in a humorous slice of life, but each of the words was only used once, and even then in an ellipsis, with only the first letter to hint at what the reader was supposed to think. More important than that, however, was that in that little article or sketch one was at last able to recognise our own problems, the everydays of the student young in the People's Democratic Republic of Hungary, and it even emerged that there was hot water in the dressing-room showers.

Bazsinka therefore proudly sauntered along the corridor, accepting the plaudits. That is, until someone whom I named Attila at the very outset confronted him and asked:

"What's the big idea anyway?"

He asked it in the tone and with the facial expression of someone who was about to lash out. Bazsinka, to whom the praise had gone a bit to the head, retorted that there was no big idea; he had only written down what he saw and what he had heard, and even those concerned could surely not take it amiss that his slices of life had human interest, on the one hand, and were funny, on the other. Attila did not lash out, however, said only:

"It's not fucking funny, screw you!"

He spun away at that, went into the classroom, unpinned the humorous slice of life from the class wall-newspaper, and ripped it into shreds, just like Judit Spengler had done. All that was missing was for him to imitate the teacher's sobs.

Even the combined strength of twelve "Hercules" drawing pins was unable to protect Bazsinka's literary labours. And the story might well come to an end here, given that this was Bazsinka's last literary creation: he never made any further

such ventures. The true problem, though—the clash between art and morality—was only just beginning.

For Bazsinka art was represented by the principle that one should write down what one observes, morality by the idea that one should have due consideration for the honour of others.

Attila, for his part, having been outraged that in the true story about his girlfriend, Katie, she had a close-up view of the naked body of a total stranger who was two years older than her, came to realise that he had made a mistake in ripping up Bazsinka's short story. The class's wall-newspaper was now bereft, and the twelve "Hercules" drawing pins glinted reproachfully as if asking, "You see what isn't here, don't you?" Some people asserted that Attila destroyed the humorous slice of life because in it was the phrase "Katie spied on Dezső while he was taking a shower," whereas others simply swore that "Katie made an advance on Dezső."

The story that Attila had ripped up, though, would have testified to exactly the opposite, for what was written in it was that Katie had fled screaming the moment she saw something that she ought not to have seen! She had been all but transformed into a laurel bush, like the similarly bashful nymph in the work by the ancient Roman poet, although he did not quite write down what he had seen in reality.

Enough of nymphs, though Katie, the heroine of Bazsinka's tale, was indeed a bashful maiden. She had received a religious upbringing, and on a silver chain around her neck she wore a little cross that glinted like the drawing pins on the wall-newspaper. She used to say that she, for one, intended to be a virgin when she married; she was going to give herself first to the man who swore to be true to her for ever at the altar!

It is therefore not hard to understand why Attila was prickly over Katie's honour and was ready to defend the highly-valued treasure at all costs. He would now gladly have put Bazsinka's short story back on the wall-newspaper. True, some indelicate matters and bad language were to be found in it; still, it was better that Katie fled screaming from the sort of things that ought not to have been mentioned than if, say, she had been attracted to them.

Unfortunately, by then even the shreds of Bazsinka's short story were nowhere to be found. It is perhaps unnecessary for me to say that Bazsinka only ever typed out a single copy of his works, and he discarded the rough. So there is not the slightest hope of being able to get out of the clash between art and morality by displaying a carbon copy.

In any case, Attila would not have been satisfied with the unaltered text of the humorous slice of life. As he put it himself when he went over to Bazsinka in one of the breaks and briefly outlined the bottom line of Katie's honour, he was demanding a "revised edition."

That "revised edition," to Attila's way of thinking, would have departed from the original in just one particular: would Bazsinka be so kind as to write a pair of underpants onto Dezső as he was standing under the shower. The rest could stay in place. In other words, Dezső is taking a shower in his underpants, Katie comes

along with the class diary and is so bashful that, even at the sight of the underpants, she screams and scarpers. That way would make it really funny, and also add just a little bit of human interest too, to the previous version.

Whereupon Bazsinka responded that the story no longer existed. One could say it had never existed even. He was not prepared to alter a word in a non-existing literary work.

He then came to see that it would be rather unfortunate if Katie's honour were to run aground precisely on the shoals of his non-existing short story. He declared that he was ready to make any alteration that did not conflict with his authenticity as a writer. The underpants, though, were totally inauthentic; to write a pair of underpants onto Dezső while he was taking a shower was pathetic nonsense. Did Attila imagine Dezső was going to pull his trousers onto a wet pair of underpants? And that he, Bazsinka, would be prepared to write that?

By then, however, Attila had accustomed himself to the idea of being a co-author. As we know from experience, a censor can always be regarded, to a certain extent, as a co-author.

"What if Dezső were to have two pairs of underpants," he ventured, "one wet, the other dry?"

"Write it yourself!" Bazsinka advised. "Write about Dezső in his underpants, or in topper and tails for all I care. Write it whatever way you want."

"But I can't write!" yelled Attila. "You're the writer! It's your job to do it! Your responsibility!"

"And I will only write what I have seen and what I have heard!" Bazsinka riposted superciliously. "I didn't see any underpants, so there can be no question of underpants."

Attila now laid down his trump card.

"It's a matter of principle, flippin' heck!"

That very moment the bell sounded to signal the start of the next period. Bazsinka yelled across even more superciliously than before:

"A writer can't afford to have principles."

"Now, now!" Péter Pál Sziklai wagged a finger, having on this occasion not been sleeping but browsing through an issue of the magazine *Kritika,* which had recently undergone a complete overhaul, both inside and out. "Now, now! Easy there, old chap! Who said that a writer can't afford to have principles?"

The most recent issue of *Kritika* had a review of Nobel Prize winner Heinrich Böll's short novel *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum,* which praised the committed left-wing West German writer for the exemplary moral high-mindedness with which he stuck to his principles and for denouncing the machinations of the bourgeois press.

The novel is about a cleaning lady to whom Böll restores the honour that reactionary newspaper reporters have torn to shreds, and, by implication, the honour of the West German working class as a whole.

"You see, old chap!" Sziklai continued his instruction of the loyal pupil. "We don't doubt for a second, do we, that Heinrich Böll is grounded in West German

realities and puts its social relations to artistic use? And yet he still has principles, very much so! That's how you have to do it, old chap! A writer should not just use his eyes and ears at random, but on a principled basis."

It now became clear to Bazsinka too that if it was not beneath Böll's dignity to restore Katharina's honour, then who was he, Jenő Bazsinka, to stand in the way of Katie and her lost honour? It had to be restored, no question about it.

Yes, but how? What was the best way of doing that?

Should he maybe, after all, write a pair of underpants onto the showering Dezső?

But there even the master said that was nonsense. Dezső taking a shower in his underpants was both implausible and unrealistic. The sort of thing that even Heinrich Böll would not be prepared to write, even if the West German working class to a man were to ask him! Only Vietnamese students took showers in their underpants, or at least that's what Sziklai had seen at the student hall of residence in Budaörs.

He was cast into care-laden musing, but then suddenly his eyes lit up.

What if a Vietnamese student were to be standing in the shower, instead of Dezső, and he were wearing underpants? This time it was the loyal pupil himself, forgetting his bounden duty, who said that was nonsense. How would a Vietnamese boy come to be at the redbrick grammar school? The Vietnamese who were studying in Hungary were all at university. The master did not let himself be disconcerted. This one's an exception! He's a grammar-school pupil! His parents are working in Hungary and they send him to a Hungarian school to learn Hungarian.

Their faces were flushed, their hair dishevelled, beads of sweat were on their brow. All at once the telephone rang, but Sziklai said that he was in the middle of a very serious and urgent piece of work, said he was sorry and put down the receiver. Never before had Bazsinka been so happy as at that moment. His own master had declared that his work was serious and urgent, and they were working together on it! Péter Pál Sziklai would be his co-author!

It then crossed his mind that a co-author was not necessarily a productive phenomenon, artistically speaking. After all, Attila also wanted to be a co-author. It also crossed his mind that the Vietnamese who were working in Hungary were living in tight communities and did not come into contact with Hungarians, and school education for their children took place at their embassy.

He became a little dejected, but Sziklai did not let the despondency infect him. Ideas bubbled out, each one better than the last, like sparkling water from a soda siphon. Bazsinka was right, he declared. It would be better if the Vietnamese boy were to have Hungarian parents, foster parents that is to say. Not long before a well-known Hungarian actress and her film-director husband had adopted a little Vietnamese boy. That was no doubt not the first such case. Let the man be a doctor, a surgeon, let's say, who was sent out to North Vietnam officially after the big American campaign of carpet bombing... In one of the hospitals there he comes across the boy... whose parents have been killed... brings him back to Budapest and adopts him.

Within half an hour a complete life story, rich in twists and turns, was ready, the subject of which—at least on the pages of the story that was to be written by Bazsinka—is standing in the shower in his underpants when Katie happens to come along with the class diary.

Sziklai was satisfied. He leaned back in the armchair and took a breather. He said that this phase of the creative process was much like a show trial in principle, though perhaps the consequences were not quite so rigorous.

Bazsinka did not understand what he was on about, but he did not pay it much heed either, because there was still one small, but not completely negligible, problem left to be dealt with.

The Vietnamese boy taking a shower in his underpants needed to be given a name, and a genuine Vietnamese name at that! It was true that no one would be able pronounce the name properly, let alone remember it, which was why everybody came to call him Dezső; still, he had to be given a genuine name too. Literary authenticity demanded it.

That was all very well, but by then both of them were tired, and the only genuine Vietnamese name that came to mind was Ho Chi Minh. Nothing else. And even Bazsinka could see that the Vietnamese hero taking a shower in his underpants in this humorous slice of life could not possibly be called that.

Another splendid idea occurred to Péter Pál Sziklai.

"You know what, old chap?" he shouted out. "Nip over to the Vietnamese embassy, it's not far away, and ask them to give you a few personal names—six or eight of them, let's say. Write them down, then come back here and we shall pick the best one!"

The Vietnamese embassy was indeed nearby, at the corner of Bajza Street and Benczúr Street, little more than a stone's throw from the HUFS headquarters. Bazsinka faithfully followed his master's instructions: he said he would be back shortly, and he set off for the corner in question.

While he makes his way down the flight of marble steps of the former banker's residence and strides out through the wrought-iron gates, I shall swiftly say what the moral is, because this story has a moral, to be sure, that one may particularly draw to the attention of prose writers under the age of 18. The moral of this story... But no, I had better say what happened to Sziklai.

Well, it wasn't that anything much happened to Péter Pál Sziklai. Not long after the incidents that are being related here, he got married. A few years later, he divorced and at the same time he left his job at the HUFS, whose star was by then in the descendant, and he had found a job in film production. At the instigation of his second wife, he learned Portuguese and set up a company that sold Portuguese cork in Hungary, to start with on a small scale, later in bulk shipments of growing size. Then, around the mid-Nineties, he switched to retailing Portugal's world-famous bathroom tiles, what they call *azulejo,* with enviable success.

One day at an exhibition of bathroom products he came across Bazsinka, who by then—as I've already mentioned—was into manufacturing cosmetic articles.

They chatted about old times, and it soon became clear that neither of them was interested in literature any more. For all Sziklai's assertions back then, that it was always possible to write short stories, it seems that is not always true. The magical world of bathrooms, on the other hand, had nevertheless, after the passage of three decades, reunited them, master and pupil, and, looking back on it, they came to the conclusion that the gym hall shower that had featured in Bazsinka's short story had constituted, as it were, an organic antecedent to the present encounter.

If you are the author of a literary work the first edition of which has been destroyed, whereas a second edition has not been produced, it is worth first giving a name to the subsidiary character invested with a copious and full life history and only then giving him underpants—that is the moral that I can offer. It is a moot point whether the reader will be able to make any use of it. However that may be, it was to no avail that the Hungarian parents enrolled him in the redbrick grammar school, the Vietnamese boy taking a shower in his underpants remained forever nameless. For Bazsinka, you will perhaps not be surprised to learn, was unceremoniously shown the door at the Vietnamese embassy.

"We no have names," they said in broken Hungarian. "Go please away!"

When he trudged back, head hung low, empty-handed, to the former banker's residence, he was given to understand at the porter's lodge that Comrade Petey Sziklai had departed not long ago and would not be coming back that day. The following day, the master happened to be in the middle of a meeting when his pupil called; he sent word that he was extremely busy around then. It was indeed approaching November the Seventh, the anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution, a time when there was a substantial increase in the work that had to be done by the HUFS propaganda section.

What else could Bazsinka do but go back home, sit down and stare out of the window? He put in front of himself his mother's Czechoslovak portable typewriter, but even then nothing came to mind.

Yet Attila asked him every day if he was working on writing the revised edition. Bazsinka answered that he was, but both knew that even the reverse was not true.

As it was, Attila's interest was not purely private in nature since he had, in the meantime, taken over editorship of the wall-newspaper. He could not write, and he didn't even try; instead he cut out shorter or longer articles out of *Youth Magazine* and pinned those up. On taking over editorship he bought a big box of Hercules, so he had plenty of drawing pins. He told Bazsinka that he was not willing to publish any other material from him unless and until the revised edition was ready. Bazsinka, for his part, was beginning to suspect that he had fallen into a trap from which there was no escape, scratched his head for a while longer. In what way could the revised edition of the slice of life be made both funny and authentic? Representing reality in principle while restoring Katie's honour in practice?

He scratched his head in vain; no acceptable solution occurred to him.

Three months passed with this futile, unproductive torment. We were by now in mid-December, the snow was falling, the Xmas break was fast approaching. One day Attila had enough of the lack of response from the sole contributor to the wall-newspaper that he was now editing. He stated that the work entrusted to him was being sabotaged by Bazsinka, and he was not going to tolerate it any more. If by tomorrow morning Bazsinka had not brought him the revised edition of the humorous slice of life that had been removed in September, then he, Attila, was going to call it a day on the functioning of the class wall-newspaper, and Bazsinka would have to face up to any consequences.

In other words, it lay in all of our best interests for this author to get a grip on himself at last and in accordance with the expectations that rested on him. To say nothing of the fact that his girlfriend, Katie, was very, very much looking forward to reading a story about her that was both humorous and of human interest and yet, above all, innocuous and the gospel truth. One that he, Attila, would like to present by way of a Christmas gift to his sweetheart, who was exceedingly fastidious about her honour.

It was at this point that Bazsinka appealed to me, asking for my assistance in the way I have already recounted at the beginning of the story that you are now reading. We were not friends, but he trusted me, and I, in my own fashion, did in fact assist him.

I started by going over to Attila at the next break between lessons and, as one says nowadays, "reaching an agreement". I had no moral hang-ups, authenticity was not important to me; for my part, I paid not the slightest heed to whether or not I was writing something I personally had seen and heard or something else. The only goal I had for my literary efforts was to win Attila's approval.

Not that I particularly liked or respected him; in fact, if anything, what I felt for him was more in the way of contempt, though I can't say that even that was very strong. Still, it was his goodwill that I was seeking because he amounted to the readership in person. It was clear to me that if he liked it, then so would Katie.

More than that, he was the total literary public, along with all the temptations and snags which go along with that. I had the good sense to be able to skirt the snag on which poor, stubborn Bazsinka had come to grief. Or rather, not so much come to grief as stew in a bitter juice of his own making. I never, for one moment, thought that a writer cannot have principles; but then again, I didn't think that he could have any either.

So I decided that I would defer to Attila's wishes in every respect. At the same time, I was quite clear in my own mind that Attila himself was not really aware of what he wanted. I first had to make him want a thing in order then to be able to defer to his emerging wishes.

First of all, I pointed out that the incident that I was going to report on, faithfully and in detail, had happened three months before—so long ago that no one now could remember exactly what had happened.

"What are you trying to tell me?" he asked suspiciously.

I responded that from a distance of three months, and looking at it from a more elevated perspective, certain aspects of a story that is the gospel truth become uninteresting. It was all the same, for instance, whether it happened to rain or the sun was shining on that day three months ago.

"How d'you mean?" he asked, by now somewhat frostily.

I meant that I had no option but to rely on my memory, and as far as I remembered it was a gloriously warm, sunny day. It could be that my memory was false or inaccurate, but it was a sunny day and the yard was not muddy...

"I'm not going to be conned by you, ferchrissakes!" Attila snarled. "D'you take me for an idiot or something? Dezső takes a shower in his underpants, and I insist on that! All you have to do is write the revised edition the way I decided! Don't try and worm your way out of it!"

I told Attila that I too thought that having Dezső in his underpants was a good idea, but it was no longer enough. Back in September, directly after the events, that would have been enough to restore Katie's honour, but now it was insufficient. If I was to write a pair of underpants onto Dezső now, and put that up on the wall-newspaper, then people were going to say, "That's all? It took three months of diddling to come up with that?" No, Attila, old pal, we need to adapt the whole idea. Though of course still keeping the piece authentic, witty, and so on.

Attila thought a while.

"What are you thinking of, then?"

This time he asked in the tone of voice and with a facial expression of someone who is eager to agree to something, as long as it was just a little bit acceptable to him.

I told him what I was thinking. Unlike Bazsinka, I wanted to use the imagination as a fresh reserve to work from and replenish the stock in store when necessary. I imagined, or that is to say remembered, that on the day on which the humorous slice of life took place, the sun was shining brightly. All the boys were out in the schoolyard, along with the teacher. "The boys are playing football, the teacher is refereeing. As a result, Katie will bring the class diary out to the yard. And here she is! She is wearing a pale-blue smock. And trousers. Dark-blue jeans. And white gym shoes. That's important.

"Hang on!" Attila interrupted. "It would be a good idea to explain why Katie is not in her gym outfit, why she is not taking the gym lesson along with the other girls! Otherwise people are going to think that she has nicked off class."

"No, she didn't nick off!" I said self-assuredly. "She was no doubt having her period."

"Forget that!" Attila clenched his fist. "I'm not having you put in the wall-newspaper that my chick is menstruating!"

"I'm not going to write that," I rejoined. "I was just thinking it."

"Don't even think it!" Attila choked off any further explanation from me.

I tried not to think of Katie having her period. She hadn't, wasn't now, and was

not going to. Already another suggestion—true, not a very original one— had come to mind:

"Then let's write that she has a cold. She did not listen to her mother and so she has caught a slight chill. Will that be OK?"

Attila was now forced to agree to that. If one was not allowed to think of her menstruating, we could think of her catching a cold, indeed could write that down, though just briefly in passing, of course. We could get on with it. Katie is bringing the class diary, and she now comes into line with Dezső. Let me repeat, this is outside, in the yard, the sun is out and shining. It follows that Dezső doesn't have a spot of mud on him, nor is he even sweating, because it is not as hot as all that. It follows that he is probably not going to take a shower, and he's certainly not taking a shower right now.

Attila still did not grasp what he himself intended to do, although I had long ago guessed.

"So," I carried on, "on the one hand, Dezső is not taking a shower, and on the other, Katie doesn't so much as have a glimpse of him in the shower room next to the boys' changing room. That's cracked the problem. Katie's honour is restored."

"Fair enough," said Attila, his face a bit dopier than was strictly necessary. "The honour may be there, but what makes the story funny?"

That was exactly the question I had been waiting for; I could not have asked for more!

"Look here, Attila, old pal, here's the punch line! Where we are is that Dezső isn't muddy or even sweating—oh, and I almost forgot, no one kicks him on the ankle. He's not even tired; he's very much in form. It is important for us to underline that a free kick is about to be taken, and Dezső is going to kick it. But he hasn't kicked it yet, because there's a dispute over who was breaking the rules. Dezső is standing with legs straddled wide apart, the ball in front of him. Along comes Katie and comes to a standstill. She doesn't so much as glance at Dezső, only looks at the ball. Dezső is offended that he should be ignored so completely, and so he speaks to Katie in a harsh, rasping tone:

"What's up, tottie? Never seen a footie before?"

"Now then!" Attila broke in. "Now then! Stop right there! No one's going to say to my tot that she's a tottie!"

By now I had lost patience, but I still inquired in the sweetest tone I could muster, in that case how should Dezső address Katie. Attila didn't know. Whatever it was, let him speak to her in a way that was witty but did not compromise her honour."

Could he address her as 'mama'? Or maybe 'mummikins'?

Attila inclined to 'mummikins'. That, he reckoned, was compatible with her honour, because no one could seriously think that Katie was Dezső's mother, which is precisely why it sounds amusing:

"What's up, mummikins? Never seen a footie before?" Dezső says.

"So what's the punchline?" Attila asked, still mystified.

The punchline is that Katie puts the class diary down and in her lily-white gym shoes takes a huge swing at the ball, which whizzes between Dezső's straddled legs and, being impossible to save, slams into the net. Goal!

The light of understanding suddenly flashed into Attila's eyes.

"Brilliant!" he called out.

I have to admit, the praise did me good, even if it did come from such a thick and aggressive bloke as I am trying to make Attila look. Anyway, there wasn't much time for me to lap up the praise before a fresh misgiving struck him.

"A goal kicked in an underhand way like that isn't playing by the rules! The referee won't allow it!"

By then, though, I was sure of myself.

"The referee only matters in real life," I riposted. "In this story what matters is that the ball should be on target. Katie hooked it in, and that's it. What happens after that, we can leave to the reader's imagination."

Attila thought for a short while before nodding.

"Fair enough. You know best," he declared. "You're the writer, on your neck be it."

Then he patted me on the back and added:

"But then the praise is all yours as well."

We were fifteen years old.

That afternoon I wrote out the revised version of the humorous slice of life in line with the points that we had talked over on the previous pages. Our family had an East German typewriter at home, an Erika, so I tapped it out on that. I managed to keep to the three-page limit, and next day I showed it to Attila, who was satisfied with the text. All he did was correct a few typos.

I pinned it up on the class wall-newspaper, and sat back to await the effect.

The overwhelming success that I had anticipated failed to come about, strangely enough. Bazsinka smirked scoffingly. Others went over and read through the humorous slice of life, curled their lips and said nothing. Most did not even bother to read it or even cast a glance that way. Katie, who had been missing from the first two periods, at this juncture came into the classroom. She took off her coat, went over to the wall-newspaper and started to read the humorous slice of life that was aimed at restoring her honour.

All of a sudden, she buried her face in her hands and slumped down on the bench. She was sobbing so hard that she quivered. She then pulled herself together, slipped back into her coat and walked off without saying a word. On the very day that her honour had finally been restored after three months of shillyshallying!

I didn't know then what I know now, which is that in short stories the whole point is often what is left hidden and then, all of a sudden, is put on view. On the day that her honour was restored Katie had been to the gynaecology clinic, where it had transpired that she was three months' pregnant. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Ádám Nádasdy

Poems

Translated by Christopher Whyte

A Place We'd Look Good in

Stílusos helyet

That summer holiday was tough, the kind
that sorts the men out from the boys.
Buckled wheel spokes, bungled trips,
open-air films we sat through with clenched teeth.
Nowhere was good enough, no matter how
thirsty we got, and we started to hunt
for somewhere stylish, a place we'd look good in.
Without success, with less and less success,
we got fed up looking, every proposal
came a cropper. In the end just a toilet
would have constituted a victory, the very
meanest of satisfactions. That, too, was useless.
Don't worry, we'll hold out till we reach home.

2005

Ádám Nádasdy,
a poet, linguist and translator, is associate professor at the Department of English Linguistics of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. He has published six volumes of poetry, has prepared highly-praised new translations of Shakespeare's plays and has written many popular linguistic articles for the weekly papers.

Light Switch

A villanykapcsoló

The only thing I remember clearly
is how the country I'd have been ashamed
to name popped up unexpectedly:
Hungarian People's Republic. Though
they pronounced the acronym differently
in Moscow. Ten years old, in a top class
hotel, with my parents. Things ranged from
the showy and the kitsch to the overdone,
and no-one addressed a single word to me.
Which explains why that touch
of home brought such delight. I had to check
what was written on the back, "produced
in Hungary", or the manufacturer's name.
It wouldn't come off when I pulled,
so I took a knife to it (knowing full well
that was forbidden!). My parents
were out at some party or other
and wouldn't be back till late. At last
it came away. Yes, Hungarian. I thrust it
back into place, but the light
in the middle of the ceiling wouldn't go on.
My mother complained that nothing here
was properly finished. "Darling," my father said,
"they're Russians". I kept a low profile, wondering
what it was that never got properly finished.

2005

On a Stone Staircase Worn Smooth

Simára koptatott kőlépcsőn

A court poet's what I'd have liked to be,
a soft-stepping, sage little Pekinese,
a hanger on—that's what they taught me
to do, and battle constantly with my status.

I'd like to have lived in places you couldn't get
out of, where everything's seen at one remove,
dawn, time passing, the angle of the light,
reconstructed from accidental details.

To be tossed between a chosen few
like a bright chrome flipper ball, to dart
like ricocheting gunfire, smack after smack.
To be reduced, like clear meat broth.

I'd need to be informed of everything;
what I pass over, ceases to exist.
One cannot answer for excessive space.
Better a palace with not too many wings.

2005

Natural Disaster

Elemi csapás

It all slips from my grasp, that's why I can't
afford a moment's distraction, everything
goes higgledy-piggledy, objects, people...
I buy boxes to put them into,
a filing cabinet where I can sort them out,
a diary, a cork board equipped with pins,
but there too they get jumbled up.
If I let them, they soar off in clouds,
unless I pursue them like a whale,

jaws gaping wide, up to my elbows in it.
I swing the cupboard door to make a draught
and suck them in, but all I need to do
is narrow the focus, get lost in a detail
and once more havoc sets in, friends
rush off, clothes fly into the air,
each day more of the cutlery is missing
and I'm left standing there, like a homeless person
clutching his blanket after a hurricane.

2005

On the Big Dipper

A hullámvasút

Were I to pause, I'd have to sober up.
Better to look a fool, stark naked,
screaming and shrieking as it all spins round,
even if it's unseemly to get
so out of control. Like the day the big dipper
ground to a halt. The contraption had broken down.
Prosaically the mechanic clambered
along the rails, bawled at the people below.
We sat there through minutes, long enough
for it all to evaporate: the fear, the airy stomach.
The cut-price pleasure vanished, and left
only the narrow tracks reeking of oil,
nails, a light switch seen from an angle,
a dreary Hades, real life. No more bumping,
swooping. And I froze. No more tumbling,
or dizziness as you gasped to catch your breath.

2007

Sluggish Current, Fingers and Toes

Lassú sodrás, húsz ujj

I ended up eating my nails. Once
I woke at five in the morning, in utter darkness.
Where the Hell was he? Ringing him up
wasn't allowed. But five on a Saturday morning?

I made up my mind to clean the fridge
from top to toe. I wanted to leave it
spotless, practically took the thing to bits.
Jabbed at the shelves, pushed the doors so
far back the springs went bust.
And while I was at it, once every half-hour
(more frequently would have been
out of the question, I didn't intend
to let my feelings get the better of me)
I would trim the nail on a finger or toe.
Twenty in all. I was at it for ten hours.
To no avail. I ended up eating my nails.
It's not about whether he loves me or not.
Of course he does. The problem is,
where the Hell is he? Where in the name of God?

2007

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Nudes,*
c. 1921, oil, canvas, 120.5 x 86 cm.
Private collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Self-portrait in Rome,*
c. 1930, tempera, canvas, 78 x 60 cm.
Budapest, Kovács Gábor Collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Light,*
1926, oil, canvas, 200.5 x 117.5 cm.
Private collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Harbour in Italy,*
c. 1930, tempera, wood, 48 x 55 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Landscape in Italy,*
1930, tempera, wood, 56.5 x 70 cm.
Private collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Bay,*
1930, tempera, wood, 100 x 110 cm.
Private collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Acrobats,*
1934, tempera, wood, 51.5 x 59.5 cm.
Private collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Circus Barker,*
1932, tempera, wood, 50.5 x 59.5 cm.
Hungarian National Gallery.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Hungarian Mountain Village,*
1937, tempera, wood, 100 x 131.5 cm.
Private collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Blind Musicians,*
1932, tempera, wood, 92.5 x 112 cm.
Private collection.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: *Mask Maker,*
1941, tempera, wood, 70 x 90 cm.
Private collection.

Julianna P. Szűcs

Aba-Novák Revisited

Aba-Novák, the Barbarian Genius. A Retrospective.
MODEM, Debrecen, 21 April 2008–20 July 2008.
Catalogue written by Péter Molnos, 2008, 151 pp.

Vilmos Aba-Novák (1894–1941) is one of the key figures of the art world of inter-war Hungary. Without him, we cannot make sense of the direction that the nascent modern art of the 1920s would take, nor understand Hungarian experiments with monumental art. Yet Aba-Novák's career, his ambivalent valuation and his recent rediscovery testify to more than just a charismatic personality and a powerful artistic oeuvre. They are symptomatic of Hungary's past as well as its present, but most of all, of how we, the present, relate to our past.

Be that as it may, 2008 was the first time since the Hungarian National Gallery's 1962 restrospective that his scattered works were collected and put on display at the MODEM, the wonderful exhibition hall opened a few years ago in the city of Debrecen. The well-balanced, thoroughly researched and highly successful exhibition was curated by the talented young art historian, Péter Molnos, the author of the recent hefty Aba-Novák monograph by the same name (Népszabadság Könyvek, 2006).

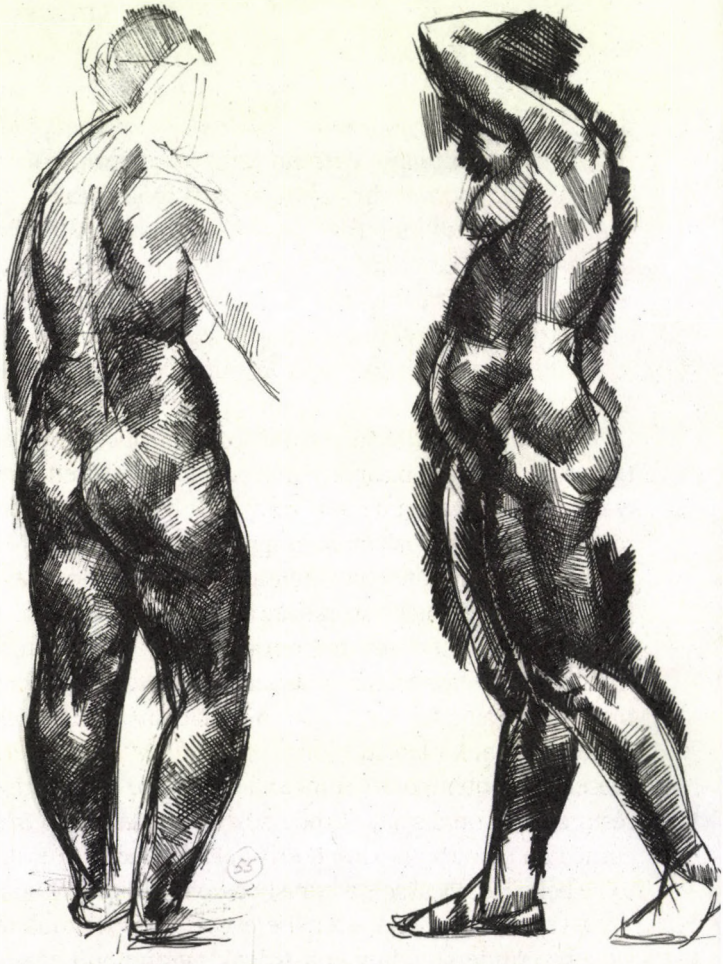
Perhaps not quite coincidentally, the exhibition has come at a time when Aba-Novák's monumentalist works are again in the public eye. I have in mind the enormous (243 square meter) war-memorial fresco on the vault of Heroes' Gate in Szeged (plastered over, for political reasons, in the late 1940s, its restoration is now complete); the seccos lining the St Stephen mausoleum in Székesfehérvár; and primarily, the 14 huge panneaux (depicting the highlights of Hungarian-French relations) that represented contemporary Hungarian art at the 1937 Paris World Fair, and which, now restored, are on display at the Csók István Gallery in Székesfehérvár. The panneaux earned Aba-Novák the Grand Prix in Paris, and, if eyewitnesses and earwitnesses are to be believed, Picasso's astonished exclamation: "Who is this barbarian genius?"

Over seventy years after the event, does the qualifier "barbarian" get us any closer to understanding Aba-Novák's grand and enigmatic oeuvre?

Julianna P. Szűcs
is professor of art history at Janus Pannonius University, Pécs, and editor of the monthly Mozgó Világ. *She has published widely on inter-war and contemporary painting.*

The drawing virtuoso who wanted to be something more

"Aba-Novák produced graphics with such passion and in such numbers that we could only stand and gape... Inert objects seemed to come to life. The armoire became monumental, the half-open drawers had a belly-laugh, and the chairs appeared to be cavorting about... Every job was a last-minute job, and when it came to work, he was indefatigable." So, in the early 1920s, wrote a classmate, who had ample opportunity to observe the huge, blond, Teutonic-looking art student storm his way through his years at the Graphic Art Department of the College of Fine Arts. Forcefulness, vitality and a hot-headedness that made him act—and work—fast: all these were salient character traits of Aba-Novák's. His modus operandi, however, told his peers little about the mainsprings of his drive: the modest circumstances of his family; the need for a regular income—hence his opting for a teacher's degree in art; the terrible years spent in the trenches; the post-war struggle with poverty as he tried to make his way as an artist.



Vilmos Aba-Novák: Female Nudes Standing, *c. 1921. Private collection*

Endless frustration and boundless talent —the perfect alloy for achievement-orientation and a manly creativity. All the sources at our disposal describe Aba-Novák as having a brilliant talent for all the drawing techniques: pen, charcoal, etching and cold-needle etching. Initially, the subject matter was practically indifferent. A good graphic artist, however, is always drawn to subjects that tell a story,

and indeed, Aba-Novák, too, succumbed, at times, to the joys of narrative drawing (*Mene tekel,* 1921; *Savonarola,* 1924). But his main interest, at this time, remained the female nude.

He was not alone in this. An entire generation of artists, those who tried to find their place in the new post-war Hungary, had scenes of some earthly paradise as their favourite theme, and placed within that setting the human being as such, primarily the female human being. Their fascination with the idyllic seems natural enough after the harsh realities of wars and revolutions. The new art of the day before had discredited the avant-garde, and a cold ultra-conservatism was all that the White counter-revolution had to offer; small wonder that many an open-minded young artist found refuge in a perfect world of their own imagining.

Vilmos Aba-Novák: Back of Male Nude Standing, *c. 1922. Private collection*

Art historians have found a technical term for all this: "Arcadia". In the early 1920s, it was still reigned over by István Szőnyi, but Aba-Novák was among the knights of Arcadia, as were the two people closest to him at the time: a fellow art teacher, the promising Károly Patkó, and the diabolical and beautiful Erzsébet Korb. They produced drawings and etchings and soon were making large oil-on-canvas representations of idealised people living ideal lives. A long series of Female Bathers, Nudes and Hermits resting 'neath the lush foliage of some dense coppice marked the beginning of the graphic artist Aba-Novák's perhaps a-little-too-ambitious career as a painter. Though his Arcadia was not quite as reverential nor as heroic as that of his friends, their joint experimentation with the colours of the prism seems to have filled him with energy to last a lifetime, even as their common interest in larger-than-life, monumental figures would determine the direction his artistic development would take.

The painter who longed for self-renewal and fresh air

"I sketched something on a large canvas almost three metres long and two metres wide... I keep staring at the unfolding picture as it grows uglier and uglier." This was in 1928; Arcadia had disappeared from Aba-Novák's atelier a few years earlier. During the agonising years of trying to find his true idiom, he scurried back and forth between Felsőbánya (Baia Sprie) in Transylvania and Zugliget in the Buda hills, wavering between an Impressionist–Post-Impressionist tradition rooted in nature and Expressionism—a style which was not very highly regarded in Hungary at that time. *Light,* a painting of his from 1926, tells us everything about this period of creative crisis. The upper part of the canvas is a sparkling, radiant apparition, amorphous and non-figurative, the lower third shows behatted, masculine men, and lithe, gaping women: they are graphic, concrete and humorous. The central third is a dark mountain range separating the earth from the sky, as if one had not much to do with the other. But it is not just the landscape that the ominous mountain range cuts in half; it also shatters the picture's aesthetics. The principle of harmony, the picture conceived as a self-contained whole, is violated by the clash between its "coloured" and "graphic" parts.

Eschewing the avant-garde while avoiding conservatism, not rebelling but making no compromises either—it was an untenable position. To Aba-Novák's great good fortune, he was whisked away on a two-year scholarship to Rome at the very moment when it was no longer possible to continue his old ways as an artist.

High hopes attended the enterprise. The opportunity to study art in Italy made available by the terms of the Italian–Hungarian Treaty of Friendship opened up new vistas not just for Aba-Novák (whom the offer caught off guard), but for the entire Hungarian art world. The new Collegium Hungaricum was to be housed in one of the most beautiful of Rome's historic buildings, the Palazzo Falconieri. The man put in charge of the cultural mission was the medievalist art historian, Tibor Gerevich, a highly competent man of great erudition, who had a fine eye for quality. It was he who selected Aba-Novák, along with several other promising artists in their twenties and thirties, young artists willing to carry out the project of developing a Hungarian art idiom that was neither revolutionary, nor conservative, nor bourgeois, nor gentrified.

The fruits of Rome

Aba-Novák's *Bay* (tempera on wood, painted in 1930) was hung at a focal point of one of the most beautiful rooms of the Debrecen exhibit. (Beside it, around it, before it and after it hung a great many other Italian landscapes.) The horizon in *Bay* lies in the upper third of the picture: it is a bird's-eye perspective. The lighting is an hour after sunset, just before darkness falls. In theory, the picture should have suggested an air of melancholy, peace and quiet. The usual motif complex of sky-water-shore-boat-man, however, denies expectations as it admits a new element,

boardwalks zig-zagging from the shore to the horizon. It is enough to upset bucolic calm and transform the elegiac into the dramatic. The oblique rays of white wood transect the vast expanse of blue, light up the heart of the bay and provide a cheerful foil for the flirtatious red and joyful yellow of the two boats.

Bay, and the other wonderful Italian tableaux, would never have been what they are had Aba-Novák not radically revamped his painterly idiom. If he had not abandoned his ever more hopeless struggle with tonal colours, had not made the most of his outstanding talent for drawing, and if he had not—thanks to Károly Patkó, his friend and fellow-artist—come upon an old new technique: tempera.

For Aba-Novák, this was much more than using paint mixed with a different emulsifier. There is a lot that you cannot do with tempera that you can do with oil. You cannot paint over it, you cannot apply it in thick layers; it has no tolerance for humidity, and it does not give a shiny surface. It is for these reasons that painters of panels turned away from it in the 15th century (or in the 16th century at the latest), and that it is something of an anachronism in modern art, and quite peripheral in contemporary art. Nevertheless, tempera allows the artist to express things that oil paint, for all its virtues, cannot. Since patches of colour can be placed side by side, with the focus on the shades of colour, the painter does not have to concentrate on the colouring. For the picture keeps the colouring, and even highlights it, leaving the artist free to focus on the graphic elements. And when he does, what counts is not *l'art pour l'art* problems like tonal harmony, balance or light and shadow, but The Story, pure and simple. The Narrative, which the painters of panels of the preceding century preferred to forget about. They did so partly because The Grand Narratives—religion, mythology and history—had come to seem meaningless to their public, or worse yet, had become discredited. If Picasso did indeed call Aba-Novák a "barbarian" artist, he could only have meant it in the sense that we use the term "naive" in naive art: colourful, interesting and story-like.

After an enormous detour, Aba-Novák had come full circle: as a consummate artist, he finally learned to make the most of his talent for visual narrative, that asset par excellence of graphic artists. Obviously, for this, it was unnecessary to have gone through the traditional genres of his craft: landscapes, portraits and still lifes. (Still life was, at any rate, quite foreign to Aba-Novák's robust constitution.) It was not necessary even if—as the superbly staged Debrecen exhibition also highlighted—it was precisely during his transitional apprentice years in Rome, and just thereafter, that he produced the most attractive paintings of his career. By that time, he was fully aware of his artistic powers, but was not quite ready to exercise them.

Yet, he could not be blind to the enormous possibilities latent in his seaside townscapes, and the "comedians" panel paintings (*Red's Band,* 1931; *Fair,* 1930; *Circus Stall,* 1931) painted a few months later, after returning home. The mass of amusing detail, the colourful scenes, the full-blooded visual anecdotes all combined into a delightful texture which was almost too rich for what was traditionally considered to be traditional painting. To put it plainly: it was a technique suited to frescoes, panneaux and monumental works of every kind.

At this point, the literature on Aba-Novák goes on to note that obviously, the artist had come under the influence of all that he had seen during his years in Italy. On the one hand, the early Christian murals, particularly the gloriously expressive mosaics in the Basilica dei Santi Cosma e Damiano in Rome, or the apse mosaic in the Palatine Chapel in Palermo of Christ Pantocrator; and on the other hand, Italian Novecento works, primarily Mario Sironi's futurist-simultaneist cum classicist murals, and Fortunato Depero's brightly coloured industrial-art tapestries. And true enough, these influences seem undeniable if we consider Aba-Novák's first post-Italian experiments and the reactions of his scandalized public.

The fresco covering the arch of the parish church in Jászszentandrás had in it Aba-Novák's past experience as painter and graphic artist, the momentum he had acquired in Italy, as well as his yearning for a modernity free of the avant-garde. It is quite another matter that *The Last Judgement* (1933) was not much of a success with officialdom. The fantastic fresco—which had portraits of many contemporaries among The Damned (who stared with studied nonchalance into the shocked churchgoers' faces), and in which The Saved, the somewhat vacuous-looking Hungarian saints, lined up on the wall like some archaic army—caused an uproar that nearly threatened to nullify the prestige gained by the artist's stint in Rome.

But only nearly. Aba-Novák's career took off in the early 1930s, and it seemed that not much could stop its progress. Gradually, people began buying the landscapes, and particularly the pastoral folk genre paintings whose technique he had worked out in Rome, and which he perfected in Szolnok and in Zsögöd (Jigodin), Transylvania. His contribution to the 1933 Klebelsberg Kuno Memorial Exhibition, and then the mural plans he presented at the Religious Art Exhibition of 1934 held promise of monumentalist works which neither state nor Church could do without if they wanted a progressive image with which to win over the younger generation. The immediate result was the fresco commissioned for the vault of Heroes' Gate in Szeged (1934): in spite of the local resistance to it from places high and low, it was, in the end, pronounced a success. Aba-Novák always had less trouble coming to terms with the civil authorities than with the Catholic Church in the form of the ultra-conservative local parish priests and the ecclesiastical censors hiding behind the bulwarks of Church bureaucracy.

The fact is that panel painting satisfied his ambitions less and less. "As I see the future of painting, the middle class is far from being a significant cultural factor, and soon we'll be working for the public sector," he wrote in *Magyar Művészet*, one of the best art journals of the time. More and more, his paintings were filled with powerful characters in grotesque situations (*Blind Musicians,* 1932; *Mask Painter,* 1933; *Mask Maker,* 1941), figures which even today are considered to be allegories for the cornered artist. It seems that he simply had to find a way to vent the critical erudition that characterised him and his art from the very start. For if he really did want to work for the public sector, it was advisable to dampen the satire smouldering in the plans and sketches he submitted for public commissions.

Fiasco or apotheosis?

The latest studies of Aba-Novák have made a point of giving a detailed analysis of his few months in New York. He set out for the New World in 1935 with high hopes, and returned with a proportionate sense of failure. The underhand dealings of the New York gallery owners have been mentioned among the causes, as has the modest interest shown in his works by the art-buying public. Then there was his disgust with big capital, and his longing for home and family. Whichever aspect one might focus on, it is a fact that he returned from New York a changed man. He seems to have given up his hopes of becoming a collected painter and turned all his energies to murals. "Till now, his figures had an air of irony, which seeped from his caricatured circus series into the whole of his art. Now, all this has disappeared from his style; his art has lost its insistency, and stands purified, as it were, ready to be entrusted with the greatest tasks," wrote Ervin Ybl, one of the most sensitive of the art critics of the time, after Aba-Novák's 1936 exhibition.

It follows from the nature of exhibitions that these "great tasks" could not be seen in Debrecen. What was on display were the plans, the sketches, the recollections, the reviews. For the originals, one has to go to Szeged and Székesfehérvár, to the Városmajor Catholic church in Budapest and the cemetery chapel in Pécs. And one can use one's imagination to picture what the panneau of Miklós Horthy entering Kassa (Košice) would have been like, had it ever been completed.

But let's be honest. It is not for these post-New York works that we like Aba-Novák, whenever we're inclined to like him at all. Even the most successful of these works, the gold-medalist panneaux painted for the Paris World Fair, seem like a too-loudly-declared pledge of allegiance. It is as if these abridged histories with their caricatural forms were a little too much like the panels on which the movies of the day were then advertised, as if their freshness were as transient and perishable as those cinema billboards.

Yet, in the shadow of the monumentalist works—and this is what the Debrecen exhibit has taught us—there really are some monumental paintings. Some of the pictures that Aba-Novák painted almost incidentally, by way of not losing the feel of the brush in his hand, rank among the best works of Hungarian art.

The uneven rhythm of *Cows,* painted in 1936, the dense, unwholesome foliage in *Hungarian Mountain Village,* painted in 1937, and the passionately torn, naked branches of *The Way Home,* painted in 1938, tell us more about the inner tensions, the explosive atmosphere and disintegrating world of pre-war Hungary than the panneaux, with their tempera-painted heroes beribboned with witty legends of grievances meant to sum up a thousand years of history.

Aba-Novák's is a paradoxical oeuvre: in the early years, as a painter of panels, he was always struggling with the genre, and lived from crisis to crisis. When he followed his star, his faith and his convictions and started painting murals of questionable artistic merit, and became a financial success, it was then that he was able to paint, just incidentally, the panel paintings which show true genius. ❧

Éva Berniczky

In the Light of the Waning Moon

The depot was solitary in dominating the bleak flat part, stretching as far as the steep crevasses that rent the hilltop. Anyone taking a shortcut through there would have very little idea about what the area, with the high fencing around it, was keeping hidden from them. They might at most take a guess at what they were snaking past on the way to the steps that connected the short bit of street above the castle with the busy street on the far side of the castle. Early in the morning and at dusk, the more timid would rarely swap the long way round for this much shorter route. Anyone who overcame their anxieties and cut across the deserted terrain tended to contain their curiosity, quicken their steps, and as far as the unevenness of the steps allowed, hurry down or clamber up the desolate hillside. It was as though certain parts of the day made it unpredictable whether those who opted for the castle steps would gain some advantage over themselves. Their repressed fear seemed to slow down rather than speed up the passage of time. In the time when they were picking their way across the whole area, with its sparse signs of life, there was no chance of being left unscathed. In self-defence their bodies had halted production of proteins, and in this state of benevolent deficiency they were able, albeit just temporarily, to stop seeing. This twilight-blindness accorded with the gloom and was just as much part of the castle hill as was the depot with its sombre shadows, which many persisted in thinking of as unapproachable even though there were more and more well-trodden paths in that direction. The tracks that set off from the steps were clearly yellow, as if they were made in clay, and led straight to the walls and at the foot of the concrete they lost any sense. People who took the designated route never encountered those who used the paths.

That morning, though, someone did spot an apparition among the bare and the evergreen bushes.

Éva Berniczky

*has a collection of short stories and a novel (*Méhe nélkül a bába [Midwife without a Womb], *Magvető, 2007), reviewed by János Szegő on pp.143–46 of this issue, to her name. She lives in Uzhgorod, Ukraine.*

"Would you look at that!" he did not say or whisper so much as breathe into the cold air. Then, still not raising his voice, kept softly breathing out, "Just look at that, there! Would you look at that!"

No one heard what he was mumbling; that was not the reason why those who overtook him were lining up, but it was because they were terrified that someone in front had come to a standstill at a place where it was imperative to move on, where previously not one of them would have stopped. It was not the mumbling that they were responding to, they did not even hear what he was saying, they just followed the head movement in the direction that the earlier-comer was staring. Like him, they did not move but, if only out of sheer force of habit, nor did they venture into immediate proximity to the wall. From that distance, they could largely leave it up to their imagination; that dictated what they labelled as having happened, what they did and what they did not believe. The minutes passed; a growing number of them turned towards the wall. It mattered little, in point of fact, which of them discovered it, and at precisely what time, the spectacle was in itself at once the marker of both time and place, with those concerned also continuing to live their momentary reality in the spectacle. Their nature did not prevent them in the slightest from gazing with enjoyment at what was horrifying them. They did not snatch their heads away; from a safe distance perhaps, but they kept their eyes glued on a thing that, in the presence of others, they would have been embarrassed to be uninhibitedly engrossed in. As it grew light their situation worsened further, with ever more of them being able to make out something.

Her grey bouclé wool coat merged into the gnarly, two-metre-high wall of the fencing, filling the gap left by a missing slab of concrete, or vice versa, the wall of the fencing merged into the grey bouclé wool coat. She might possibly not have attracted anyone's attention had it not been for her face; the face is what gave wee Pantyó away. The cinnabar red, the scaly grey and silvery deathly-blue glistened mockingly on the slipshod foundation. The lacklustre mask stiffened the skin into lifelessness; in the bitter cold the make-up stiffened quickly on the thick lips, the eyelids and lashes; only her feline body remained lithe despite the nip in the air. She fitted in better with the gap than with the fair-booth head that was stuck on the outside. Bizarrely, it seemed perfectly natural that the body from the neck down should not belong to her.

Valerie's face was congealed into a smiling whimper under the mouth, being cut off slightly above the chin, a bit like a fairy tale broken off out of necessity that, for some banal reason or out of forgetfulness, is not told to the end, but in truth there is no need because everyone knows ad nauseam how it carries on.

It was not so much her invisible body that was missing as the showman who at the end of the show, in the usual course of events, puts his assistant back together again, with the limbs stuck outside the wall being reunited with the trunk that had found its way to the other side. They could certainly have done with a skilled showman, the sort that was able to reassure and vouch to those who found themselves there to take his word for it, this woman here had not climbed the castle

hill in order to fit her shapely hips into the wall. There was no one and nothing, however, to present the numbing sight. The attraction had another name; even the person being subjected to it was not addressed by anybody as pretty Valerie, or Vally, or even Val. The locals knew her in a different capacity, when she was on duty at the Russian Billiards and she fried potatoes and served customers under the name of wee Pantyó. She fried supremely tasty potatoes. Those who worked on the other shift had long tried to puzzle out what made her potatoes so inimitable.

"Where did you get them from? It's no use trying to keep secrets, you pig-headed cuss! We'll get it out of you one day, see if we don't!" they would constantly coo into her ear.

She peeled the evenly smooth tuber thickly, supposing that it would not stand out from the rest, but even without the peel its colour, aroma and moisture content set it apart from the locally grown crop. She put down her knife and let her round face fall as though she had pared away the outer layer from that one as well, then along with the peel she threw away all the incriminating signs. Her high forehead glistened; her immaculate skin continued to soften in the oil's seething vapour, blackheads never dried up on it. The other girls were able to keep tabs on her in the corner of the eye, but they never worked it out even though the explanation lay right under their noses, so simple that it was incomprehensible. She would just laugh when they quizzed her.

"I dig them straight out of the grubby soil. Let me be! Can't you see? Nothing can get mixed up. Nature puts everything back in the right place in time."

The first time she had squeezed through to the other side on Lysitzin's account she was able to convince herself with her own eyes how few things were guarded with that much caution. All she found behind the wall were the choice potatoes heaped up in an immense sheep-pen and a mountain of anthracite that had been dumped in the middle of the depot that, apart from storing it, had been laid in for heating purposes. She was slightly surprised by the even more insignificant content of the insignificant inner world. In view of its futility, the fencing that surrounded the larger and the smaller mounds in the middle of the huge area aroused in her an inexplicable respect for authority.

"Keep an eye on what isn't there," she ingratiated herself with Lysitzin, "I'll carry off the rest, never you fear."

In her ecstatic agitation she had quickly sized up what she had seen and accepted a tiny role in the nonsense of using a couple of hundredweight of choice seed potatoes to dress up the appalling black mound of anthracite. That is how she got involved with the two guards who until Easter, right up to the spring seeding season, had checked on each other in keeping watch over the seed potatoes that had been brought in from a land far away. Up here it was not so simple to keep the highly fastidious flatland variety healthy. Apart from standing guard, on colder evenings, due to the risk of freezing, they would keep the draughty sheep-pen heated, which stayed warm as long as they sedulously shovelled in anthracite into cast-iron stoves, throwing off heat as long as the fire

was kept flickering. In truth, it was not for the warmth that the bellies of the stoves were kept well-stoked, they merely strove to ensure that the thread of mercury in the thermometer did not dip below freezing point.

It made not a jot of difference to this unjustified and deliberately misleading assessment of the situation that the high concrete wall sagged haplessly along almost its entire length. Although the material of which it was made had long been crumbling, and the destruction had become irreversible, the process, perhaps precisely because neither a beginning nor an end of it was to be seen, represented impregnable, invincible force. Even at the most critical points, where it might have collapsed at any moment, the wall remained standing, against all the laws of physics. No one was able to come away clean from anywhere in its neighbourhood, with the crumbling areas sometimes, even when there had not been a breath of wind for weeks, sifting down like fine grist. When the wind picked up, a bit of care certainly would not go amiss, because the slightest breeze could easily tear away quite substantial chunks of concrete. The yawning gaps would usually be filled in with materials that were incongruous with the concrete, and these patches would shine alarmingly through the dawn mist, rather like wee Pantyó's face that morning under the cheap make-up.

Ever since he got to know the serving girl, he had been unable to do without her for any length of time. He gave many signs of his affection; for one thing, no one else apart from him called her Valerie. Lysitzin did everything he could to retain a gaping, man-sized fissure in the collapsed concrete for this meek creature through which she might slip again to get to him the next time. His dogged efforts, however, did not pay off; his attempts to evade his relief-duty partner's attentions were in vain. It was useless his clearing away the rubble that had dropped onto the ground, for in the majority of instances the other spotted straight off which way the wind was blowing. Lysitzin kept on trying.

"No one's paying you. With that gammy leg of yours you'd do better kicking your heels. Who're you pushing yourself for? Nobody expects it of you, dummy!"

He did not get very far for his trouble; at any rate he did not manage to persuade the short-statured fellow. Stegura just could not leave the structure to Nature's mercies but kept on continually plugging the wall. Although he obviously wanted a lot, he would not have listened to his lanky partner for all the tea in China. He continued working with maniacal application on fissures that he discovered, wiring over the smaller holes, while the man-sized ones he clumsily propped up with sheets of tin, plastic slabs or planks of wood. Whenever the chance arose, he would carry off bricks, one at a time, from nearby building sites to the settlement, lugging them up bit by bit in a bill-sticker's bag, and he obtained sand, cement and lime from the same source. He made do with trivial amounts of the materials, and even those he was circumspect about lifting in case any of the bricklayers working down below should catch him at it. On rest days he was able to move more freely, and at those times he built splendid stacks into the wall. There was nothing to hold him back, for as soon as he took over the area

when he went on duty he would immediately set about asserting the petty bit of power that he wielded.

As a matter of course, he would start the workday by strolling along the fencing. After a close inspection he would then take stock not only of any newly discovered holes, but even the slightest cracks. On his own admission, he was much more concerned about proliferating hairline cracks than quite sizeable chinks.

"The dangerous ones are the ones that don't show. There's nothing to patch up on them, but the cusses are waiting there, behind them, on the look-out."

He would step away, turn his back to the wall, tormented by a suspicion that the concrete might burst open at the damaged point at any second and give birth to another reprobate.

"Damned blighters! The cavities in the concrete are just full of them."

It was impossible to stay alert round the clock without help. His truly agonising suffering came when in unguarded moments, slumped on the bunk, he dozed off for more or less of a nap. The wall of the shack would then slip and simultaneously shift from its original place, and it would move away until it had fused to the two-metre wall of the depot. The building contracted in rhythm with the guard's snoring, creeping closer and closer to the sack.

In the end, the new wall took up the shape of the surrounds of the sleeping figure like a sarcophagus, conforming so precisely to the world of the wide-awake Stegura that he would quite unnecessarily wake up. Although he felt he could not be more vigilant even while asleep; indeed, he was ever more sensitive and accurate in picking up events that were occurring around him, and he could not have got up from that position as there was simply nowhere in which to get up. Meanwhile he heard clearly the hideous sound that emanated from the wall, droning like a radio that cannot be switched off as if it were under central control. It was transmitting nothing apart from a nerve-racking tapping and scraping, and the damned blighters would fall silent on the single obligatory wavelength only at times when they were being listened to. They left short intervals between the taps when they were all ears, for as long as they were listening, to where the material of the wall had thinned, where they might break their bodies through with the least pain. That silence was worse than the noise, hanging so oppressively over the diminutively framed guard as to almost squash him. His face flushed, he felt he could not hold out much longer. He paid such close attention to the attention being paid by the beings whose progress he was unable to make out from their stirrings that he laid off snoring, even forgot to take air. He would be choking with uncertainty for minutes on end and was still unable to convince himself whether the intruder was loafing about on the far side or, at that very moment, setting foot in the depot or still just pushing their shoulders through. If the head was awaiting to be delivered, after all, he could come down on it, and although he had never so far tried to use it, at the bottom of his heart he had long yearned for the day when he might finally have at his disposal high-quality human material that would, most likely, prove more fruitful than wooden planks, plastic, bricks, or tightly woven wire meshing. It would be a breeze filling in the widening gaps with that resilient material.

No one could have seen further than Stegura asleep, but no light was ever thrown on how two-metre tall Lysitzin, through his very lankiness, had no difficulty in pulling a fast one on his watch partner, because he elegantly kept his lips sealed on that. Even without standing on tiptoe, he was able to keep an eye on the far side of the fencing, but he never confused that natural endowment with the talents that he had acquired. He came from an immigrant family; his dark moustache not so much as twitching on his immaculately milk-white skin. Whether it was the cropping that did it or the daily buffing, or maybe both, at all events the most esteemed part of his countenance unquestionably showed up better in the Russian Billiards than it did in the windswept depot. The more he tended his moustache among the heaps of potatoes the more the uneasy feeling took hold on him that the degraded company he kept were sceptical about the genuineness of his moustache. The time had long gone when the wind, which, sad to say, indiscriminately swept away anything that could be moved, had provided proof enough. Lysitzin lost, one by one, all these people and objects, all of whom and all of which could prove the genuineness of the moustache.

"On November 7th, my father, along with other immigrant offspring who lived in this part of the country, always celebrated the fact that his ascendants had been able to flee into this dark appendix of Europe."

However magnificent the smoke rings that the youngest Lysitzin puffed while playing cards, imperiously slapping down the high-value cards, he could not deny his wife. In vain had his father back then read out the family tree as an evening litany, not long after he died his son was netted by a string of factory females, who were promptly astonished to discover, as is always the case with Russian immigrants, that there was nothing special about him below the belt. He was unable to free himself from the puzzlement regarding the origins of the organ and he soon surrendered to Zalina, who proved to be the readiest of the proletarian girls to blow on his burning tool.

Zalina had no chance of standing comparison with the Russian Billiards' serving girl. Unfortunately he was too late in coming across his ultimate refuge in wee Pantyó, who never for a moment doubted the genuineness of his moustache. Little wonder, then, that the unhappy spud sentry addressed the noble-minded woman by her rightful name.

Valerie, poor wee Valerie.

She in her turn could gaze for hours on end at that black tussock imbedded in the snow-white skin, playfully stroking every bristle, even counting up on more than one occasion how many of them made up the moustache. She would bend close to Lysitzin's face and rapturously carry on counting in order to sense the man's odour. It was the same thing being repeated from the time she was a small girl.

"Father tied me to the leg of the massive dining table so I could not move, and even so he couldn't keep me back at home. The boy next door set me free. It was with him that I went away the first time. We didn't get far."

The memory gladdened her, evoking in her the transitional state that she had so greatly enjoyed at the time. As one male freed her from another, between them she was free for the time when she no longer belonged to one but not yet to the

other. From the one whose odour she was accustomed to she fled to the unknown man. To get from one to the other, from the old to the new, and meanwhile not lose herself among the obstacles in between, that was all she needed to take care of. Nature had presumably created her from the start to break through from any designated place to the other side. She did not force her life into another existence out of necessity but out of pure fun; it didn't matter that it was attended by physical discomfort, didn't matter that her head became stuck in the next cleft in line. She did not despair too greatly, not even when her face became scratched all over by the make-up and the crow's feet cracked into ever-newer tracks around her eyes and in the meantime a nosegay of delicate capillaries blossomed under them. Her fate hardly ever got the better of her, and the fencing only seldom. Heaven knows how many kinds of wire netting she had found a way through by then; it was just this solid-looking wall that ran forever that regularly put her to the test, for at first she could not find one of the holes that were necessary for climbing in and out. Whenever she managed, at great pains, to fight her way through at some point, she could be sure that she would never be able to squeeze back through the same opening a second time. There was no chance for her to get used to the old; she constantly had to worm her way through at another place, because the next time she would in any case be unable to find the already tested chink as by then it would have been bricked up.

Stegura was not mistaken; never before had he succeeded quite so easily. He hardly used any mortar on this occasion, though, true, the trifling amount that he used he mixed so it would bind more tightly than usual. He sprinkled in a lot less sand, but he did not spare the cement from the mix. Let it be strong so even howling gales would be no match for it. He carried out his work with pleasure and relish, and on top of everything he would not be compelled to listen to any blighter who was trapped as the wretch whimpered in a blend of crying and chuckling. It may have been on that account that throughout the smoothing process the same inseparable composite of sick jollity and animated sadness was emitted from the wall. Then before long even that gave way to perfect silence, until the customary dawn wind began to whistle. Stegura helped it with his humming. By now he was merely gathering his tools together; that is the time when he habitually whistled. He took great care in cleaning out and packing away his buckets, his trowels, the sieve and the planks, but this time he pottered about with particular satisfaction and was hardly tired at all by the time he had finished. To fill in a hole that big would have taken him days and all the raw materials he had used to date. If he had been a regular at the Russian Billiards a stray twinge of guilt might have awoken in him, but as it was he stood with an untroubled soul behind the stranger who had helped him out with her body this daybreak. He stepped back a few paces from the plugged wall to be able to inspect his latest handiwork from the right distance. From there too he judged it to be in order. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Éva Forgács

Forces and Harmonies

Vertical. István Nádler's New Painting.
An Exhibition at the Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art.
April 11–June 1, 2008

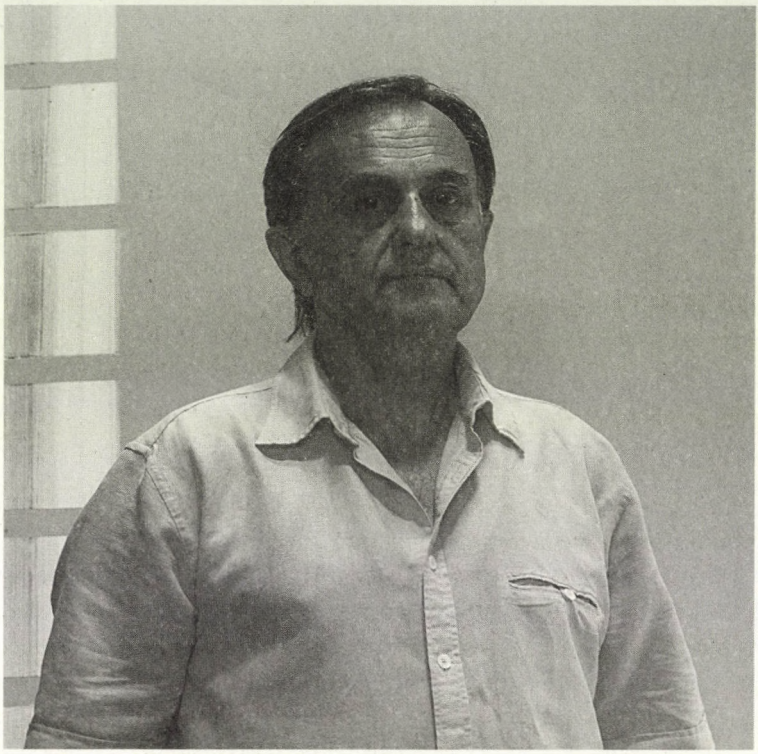
Several recent exhibitions have proven that Nádler continues to be an artist bursting with creativity. His newer works bring forth a number of visual motifs and he has apparently settled on a long-gestated artistic vision and idiom. His latest exhibition at the Ludwig Museum, though it did include a few older paintings, was primarily the outcome of six extraordinarily productive years, from 2003 to 2008: works painted in Zug, Switzerland in 2003; in Berlin, Budapest and Feketebács in 2004; as well as canvases dating from 2004 to 2008 and reflecting his latest use of motifs and colours. The exhibits filled all the rooms on the first floor of the Ludwig Museum; perhaps for lack of space, they did not include the *Ligeti Series* painted in 2003 to honor György Ligeti on his 80th birthday. Though close-knit, the *Series* is, nevertheless, a heterogeneous entity, and would have stood apart from the other works on display; it would, however, have formed a bridge between Nádler's earlier works and the exhibited ones.

Clarity, concentration and harmony are one's basic impressions on viewing the paintings. The show exudes the kind of peace and tranquillity that one usually experiences in the presence of classical art.

Nádler is usually considered an abstract painter, for he paints non-figurative pictures. His works of the last fifteen years or so, however, raise the question of just what this categorisation means. Piet Mondrian, in many ways, though not entirely, Nádler's kindred spirit, defined himself as an "abstract-realist" painter, one who was committed to the "reality" of natural things, but who, instead of painting the appearance of visible objects, visualised their relations. "Nature moves me deeply, I just paint it differently," he wrote, "the more the natural is

---

Éva Forgács,
former Associate Professor of Art History at the Hungarian Academy of Crafts and Design, is Adjunct Professor of Art History at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California. She is author of The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics *(CEU Press, 1995) and co-editor of* Between Worlds. A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes 1910–1930 *(The MIT Press, 2002).*



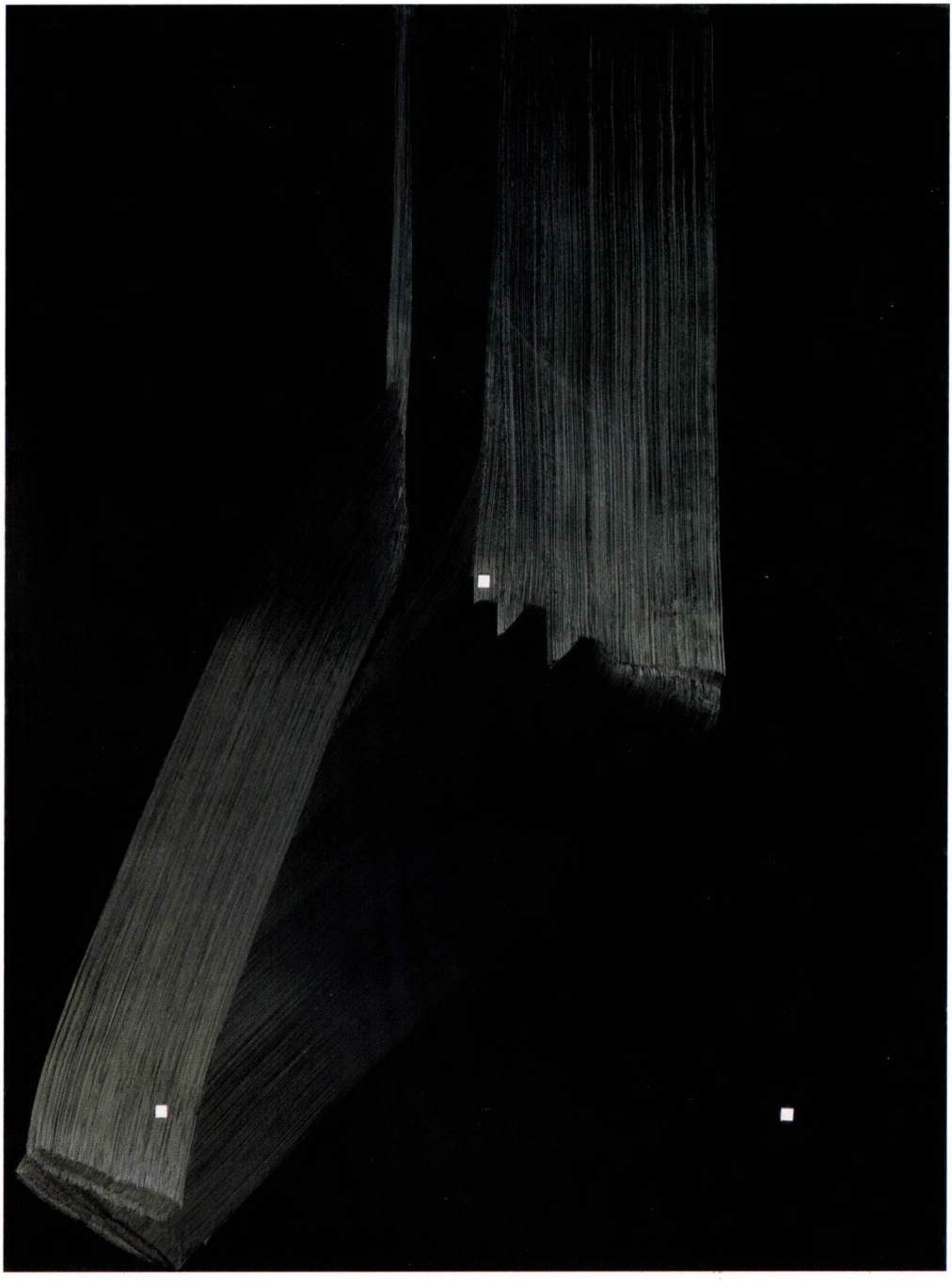
István Nádler, 2007. Photograph by Hans-Ludwig Böhme

abstracted, the more pronounced is the expression of relationship."[1] Relations, Mondrian was convinced, were every bit as real as visible objects. Nádler, for his part, paints not the abstract essence of real objects, but makes visible the relations of the non-material world.

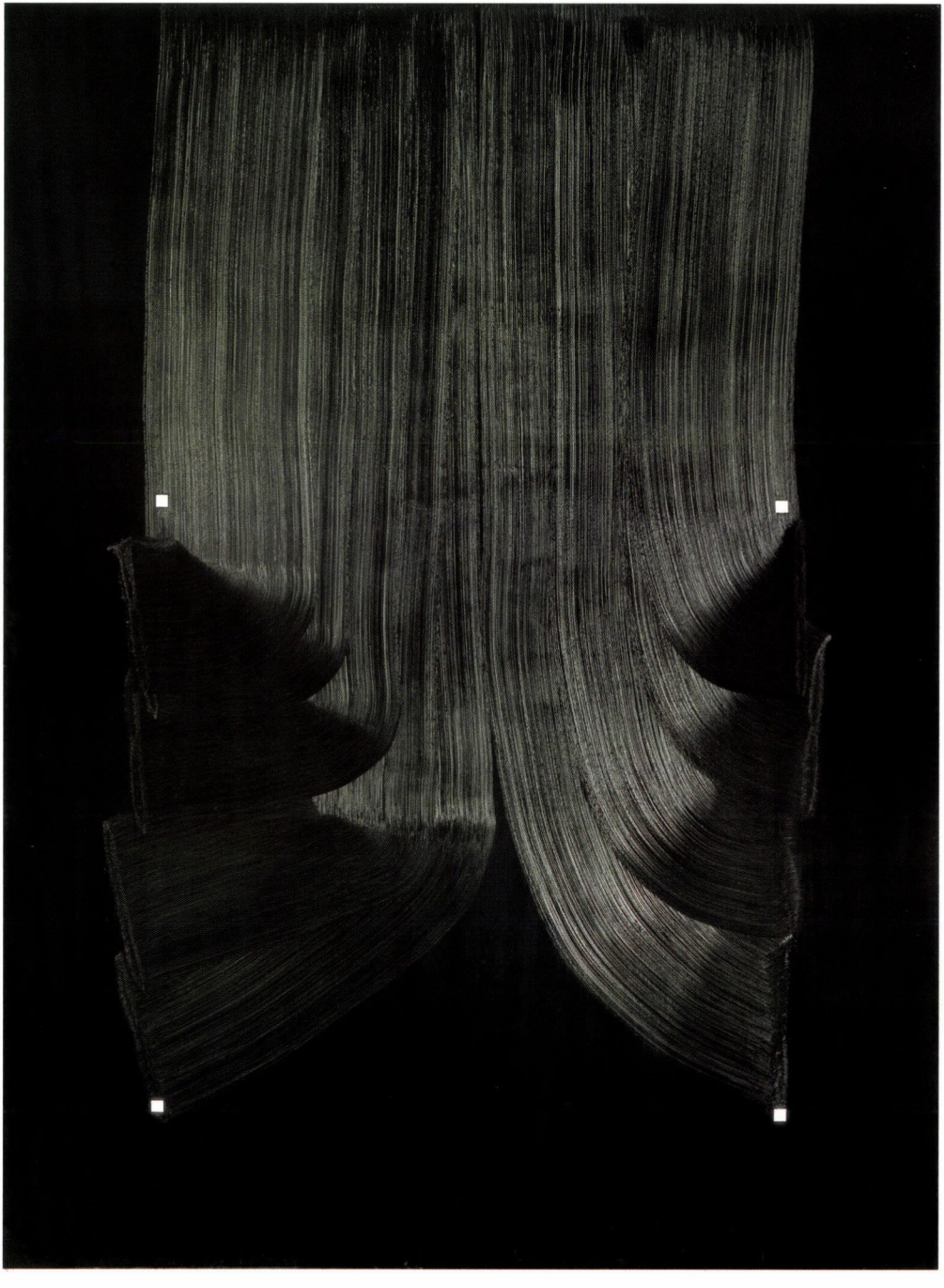
Most of Nádler's works come in series. Some are in pairs, others in series of eight or more canvases, and many of his themes are developed in sets of four pictures, which remind one of the four-movement structures of a symphony. Nádler has long been known to derive more than inspiration from music. Music, particularly contemporary and Far-Eastern music, also serves him with structural models for the interplay of intuition and construction: for how to make visible, in terms of form and rhythm, sensations experienced through what Malevich called "pure sensation".

Nádler uses a consistent system of visual symbols. His compositions feature vertical lines and pillar forms, powerful horizontals, diagonals and crisp white squares. The latter constitute geometrical forms to which the choreography of his wide brushstrokes provides a dynamic counterpoint. The focus on texture to

1 ■ Piet Mondrian, *Natural Reality and Abstract Reality.* New York: George Braziller, 1995, pp. 19 and 21.



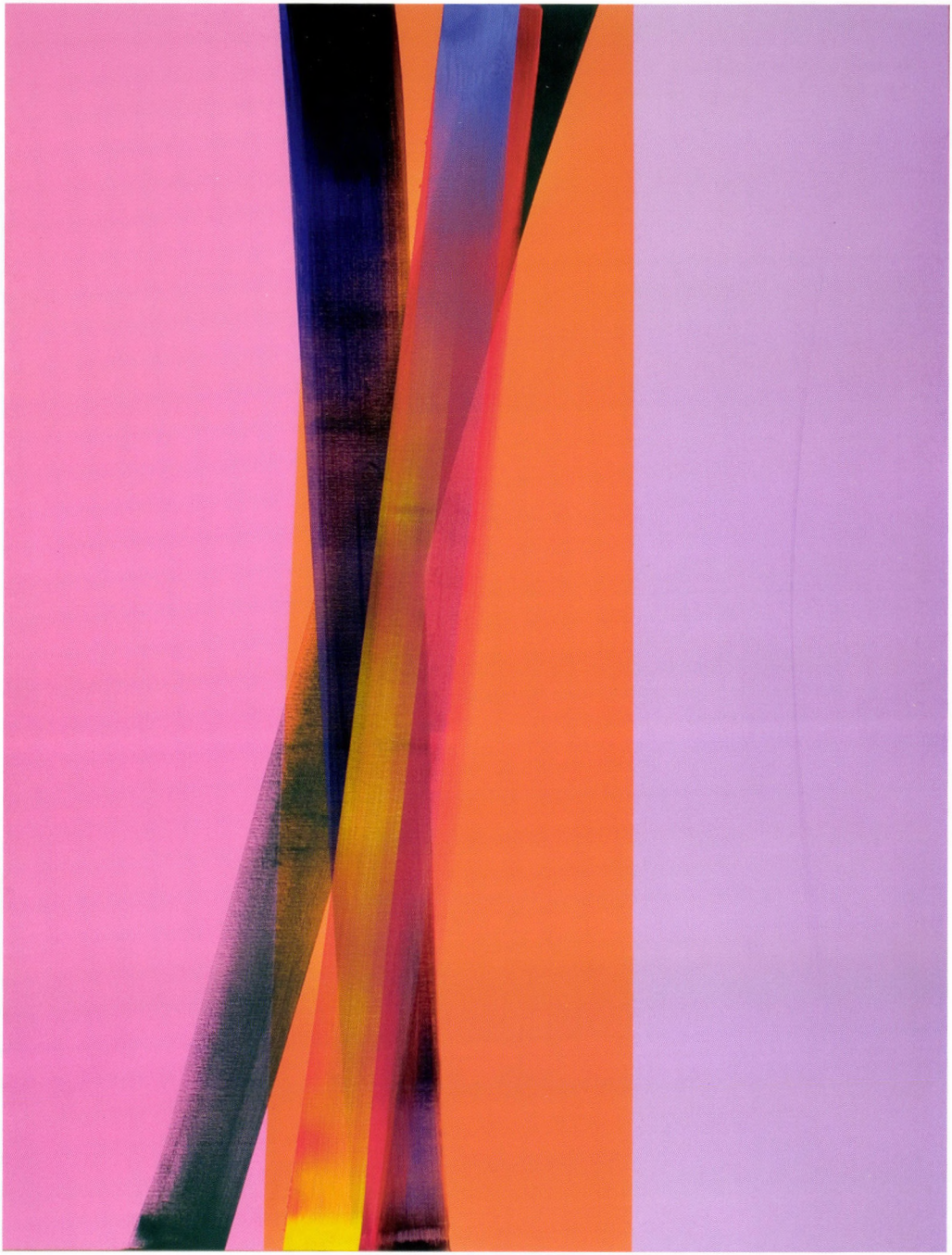
István Nádler: *Zug No. 3,*
2003, oil, canvas, 160 x 120 cm.
Property of the artist.



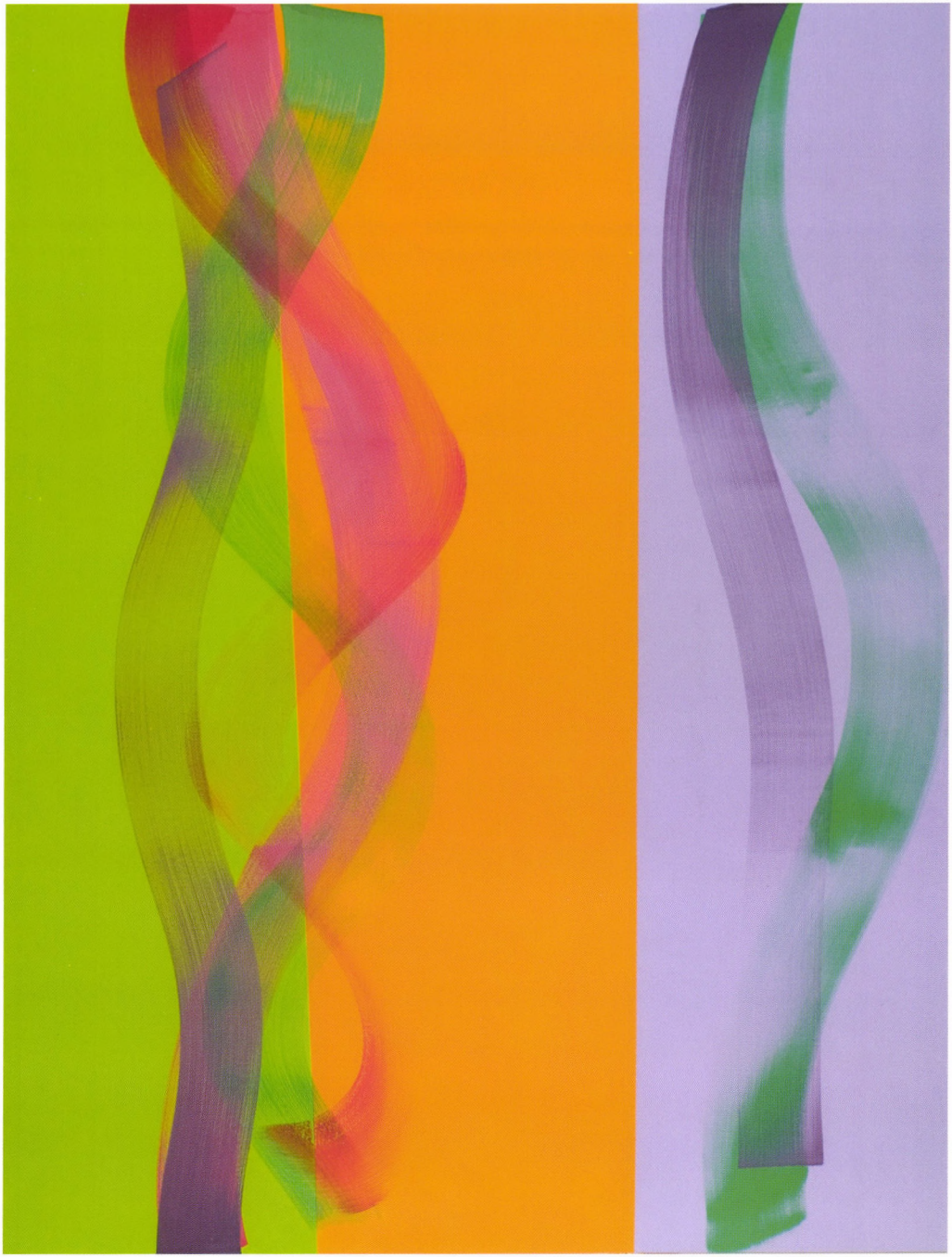
István Nádler: *Zug No. 2,*
2003, oil, canvas, 160 x 120 cm.
Property of the artist.

István Nádler: *Zug No. 2. A,*
2003, oil, canvas, 200 x 150 cm.
Ludwig Museum, Budapest.

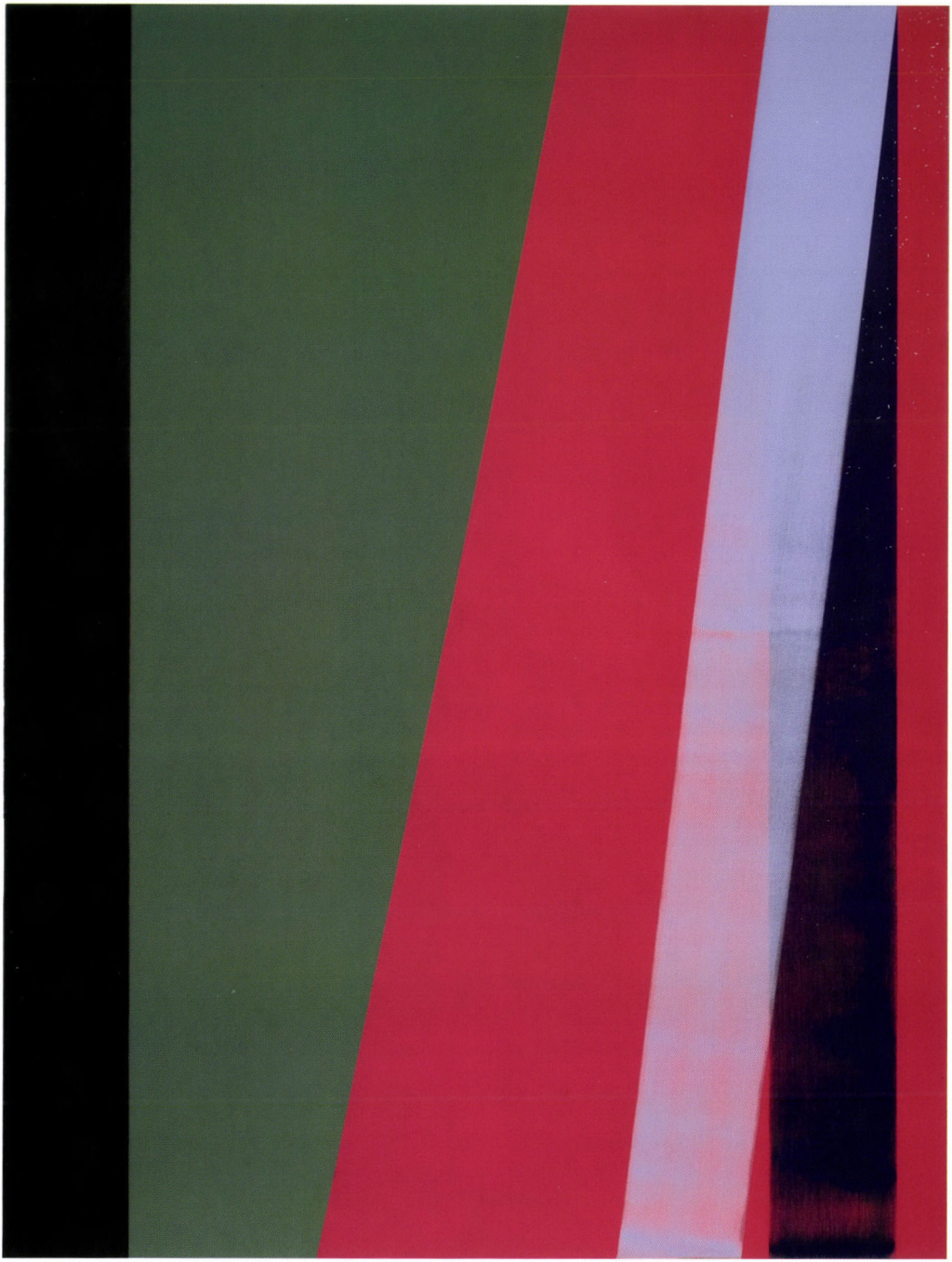
New Painting by István Nádler



István Nádler: *Diptych I. B,*
2007, casein tempera, canvas, 240 x 180 cm.
Private collection.



István Nádler: *Diptych II. B,*
2007, casein tempera, canvas, 240 x 180 cm.
Property of the artist.



István Nádler: *Sometimes - Sometimes I,*
2008, casein tempera, canvas, 200 x 150 cm.
Property of the artist.

István Nádler: *Sometimes - Sometimes II,*
2008, casein tempera, canvas, 200 x 150 cm.
Property of the artist.

István Nádler: *Feketebács No. 4,*
2007, casein tempera, canvas, 240 x 180 cm.
Property of the artist.

enhance the gesture is Nádler's specific invention and has appeared in his work from the late '90s on. He uses an unusually wide, 25-centimetre industrial brush for the purpose: its round handle allows him to twist and turn the brush in one sweeping motion, with no physical impediment to limit the gesture's taking shape on the canvas.[2] Nádler uses the big round brush to paint a second layer of black over the canvas and the texture—the imprint of the bristles with this second coat of paint—reflects the light in such a way that the sweep of the gesture is unmistakable. Gesture painting can take place only in those moments of utter concentration of which the textbooks on Chinese ink drawing speak: the brush must be moved only at the very moment that "the heart and the mind" achieve perfect balance, when neither reason nor the senses predominate. Like one doing tai-chi, Nádler becomes a conductor of cosmic energy: that is what moves his hand. The gesture is unrepeatable and incorrigible.

Not engaged in the abstraction or structural reduction of the natural object, Nádler is not an abstract painter—even if his pillar motifs did originate in real pillars seen in Rome. On the contrary, he makes visible relations, which, for the most part, are expressed in mathematical or musical terms. As a painter, Nádler has found a foothold in that infinite cosmic field which surrounds the material world, and whose energies he has learned to become aware of through honing his sensory perceptions, a regime of sensitivity training, and a practically permanent immersion in music. His paintings, therefore, are neither abstract, nor self-referential: they are a system of symbols, which refer to a cosmic narrative. The titles often tell us as much: *Genesis* (2003), *Creation* (2003), *"...one steps between two—two drink from one"* (2001), *"...one turns in every direction. So all things become as one"* (2001). At the same time, Nádler's pictures follow the conventions of non-figurative painting in that horizontals stand for earthly existence, verticals and upright rectangles for the human figure, and the field bound by verticals and horizontals for the material sphere. Nádler aims not at lyricism, but at precision. His idiom is reticent, terse and economic.

The series of black pictures painted in Zug *(Zug Nos. 1–6)* are Nádler's major achievement. With their texture of black pigment reflecting the light and recording the energetic gestures, these paintings exploit the multiple meanings of darkness and infinity.

Nádler systematically exploits all possibilities of the colour black as a subject matter in its own right, and the occult (=hidden) theme. He creates spaces by layering black on black, and by contrasting luminous white squares to the fluidity of the gesture. The squares impose a geometric order onto the amorphous space and the personal gesture. The results are powerful images in which the unknown, black mass contrasts the clarity of order. What adds to the dramatic force of the paintings, and reinforces their Icarine intent, is the clash on the canvas of two

2 ■ István Nádler to the author, 6 May 2008.

diametrically opposed, but simultaneous trajectories: leaving behind the material world in pursuit of the unknown and channelling cosmic energies into the world of materiality. The black pictures are the apex of Nádler's artistic career to date: they show that the painter has managed to break away from form, and he is able to visualise pure bundles of energy in infinite space. Nádler's Zug paintings form a counterpoint to Malevich's Suprematism inasmuch as, unlike but not less transcendental than Malevich's white void, Nádler's void is black, with all the connotations of darkness. As we view the paintings, we are literally groping our way in the dark; but Nádler is there to show us the order in the metaphysical space of darkness, set against the abyss of the chaos beyond.

Nádler's new colour-compositions dating from 2004–2008 are a counterpoint to the black series in pictorial terms, though not in essence. The colours greatly differ from his earlier, Kandinsky-inspired, ecstatic bursts of colour. The pictures of his *Hommage à Vertical I–IV* (2006) and his *No. 13, 14, 15, 16* (2006) series are dominated by pinks, oranges and lime greens, along with various shades of blue, purple and white. Electrically saturated and shimmering, these colours add a touch of lightness unusual in Nádler's works. Light as gossamer, the colours are superimposed in melodic waves, and appear not a whit less transcendental than the black pictures. The *No.* series, with its repetitive, even, rhythmic strokes, is reminiscent of *Mural*, the frieze Jackson Pollock painted for Peggy Guggenheim. The spontaneity of the gesture and the evenness of the 'all-over' composition form a balanced whole in both works. In Nádler's new coloured paintings, gesture and composition are practically inseparable, since the pillars of the composition are painted with one sustained gesture, and the imprint of the brush can be traced in the colour-sweeps. With different means and in different ways, these pictures conjure up the same life-beyond-material-life as the black paintings, but, with their arpeggio-like structure and rhythms, present the viewer with a sense of timeless serenity. "The more we see the relationships of colours rather than colour itself, the more we will be free of the particular and consequently of tragic expression,"[3] wrote Mondrian, who took a similar interest in the correlation of the human and the universal, and the possibilities of expressing it in painting.

Like Mondrian, Nádler, too, is seeking universal harmony. The two decisive motifs of his work, relationships organised in geometric terms on the one hand, and the gestures that pit the self-contained forces of the universe against geometric order, on the other hand, form a balanced whole. As music has been said to be nothing but "sonorous air", Nádler's pictures are the visual imprint of energies made perceptible by light particles of various wavelengths, that is, colour. In music, the experience fades with the sound; in Nádler's paintings, the experience is timeless. ❧

3 ■ Mondrian, ibid. p. 25.

László Darvasi

Literature and the Global Economic Crisis

The crisis currently rocking the world is not necessarily a bad thing for literary life, or, more particularly, for Hungarian literature, and, still more particularly, for Hungarian writers.

That is a bold claim, but it has been given careful thought: the global economic crisis is not necessarily an enemy of the Hungarian writer, dashing in figure but haggard of feature though he may be. A writer, who up till now has usually fallen so far as to give up worrying about the paltriness of payments, or the wretchedly low print run of any book of his that, through some wonder, happens to be published, certainly has no further reason to worry. Now the book—never mind that the writer already daubed its title with a pooey finger, "My Life", on his mother's brow on his first birthday; and never mind the sweat poured out since then, and two tempestuous divorces—will not even be published. The more sensitive will soon notice, to their astonishment, that this is not an unmitigated woe. It does not always do a writer good to write, or for what he writes to appear week after week.

(A side issue, but still important: it is astounding, and quite incomprehensible, why a, let's call it, "I've Laid Down My Quill, Haven't I!" literary prize has not already been set up.

With it come very substantial emoluments and very substantial social prestige. So this year, for instance, the writer A. N. Other, on being awarded this prize, which is sponsored both by the state and by private individuals, and having completed a string of full-length novels, volumes of short stories, stage works and essays, a children's book, a dictionary, a collection of folk-song lyrics, and several volumes of translations from Inouit, took the prize in the spirit that was intended and has promised not to write a single line for at least the next ten years,

---

László Darvasi

has published short story collections, children's books and a novel, set in 16th-17th Hungary under Ottoman Turkish occupation, as well as several volumes of feuilletons under the name of Ernő Szív. Six of his books have been translated into German under the imprint of Suhrkamp and Rowohlt.

and to abstain from any form of literary activity, including denunciatory letters to the foundation's legal office.)

Even without books, which is to say without literary activity *per se*—writing, self-contemplation, suicide attempt, resuscitation, writing, writing, fresh, renewed suicide attempt—it is possible, and will continue to be possible, for someone to become a Hungarian writer. In many instances a book is a real obstacle to a fellow human becoming a Hungarian writer.

He was considered to be a writer as long as he did not write.

Unfortunately, he then started to write.

Then there are opinions of the kind: "What a pity he (or she) wrote that book! He (she) would be a much better writer had he (she) not written it!"

Now the global economic crisis will sort things out nicely and put everything in place; there are anyway more Hungarian writers than the country needs. As a result, at this time of global economic crisis, recognising their historical and personal necessity, maybe not straight away but gradually, as time passes, writers will have themselves reskilled as politicians, political commentators, consultants, security guards, human resources managers, official spokespersons, country priests, or in other words, fill the posts where there is a desperate manpower shortage and finally become useful members of society.

Some writers, if they have not done so already, will get jobs as teachers, and, it goes without saying, will teach themselves in those periods that they are acting as relief teachers for chemistry or p. e. at secondary schools, in girls' classes redolent of school-meal cabbage. And they will spout about themselves in exactly the same way in the silent crypts of university seminars, but even so this is much, much better than if they were writing. The global economic crisis demonstrates that literature, and hence writers, can be of no help to the world in its woes; scandal and misery are jumbled together just the same subsequently in the wake of resonant words and high ideals; the teaching of literature will be abolished from school curriculums, and in its place karaoke conspiracy theory and the insolvency process will be taught.

The brainier Hungarian writers will be able to switch trades and henceforth function as prosperous funeral directors, specialising first and foremost—they are brainy, after all—in burying their former colleagues, expired Hungarian writers. It will then be possible to experience, to be sure, that the familiar manifestations of national joy that attend the news of a death—the dramaturgical niceties connected with a burial such as swapping bodies, the priest's drunkenness, the squabbles of bickering, black-veiled widows over royalties as the coffin is being incinerated, or the blocking of a writer's resurrection—are in point of fact reminders of how the abandoned literary life operates.

Once the global economic crisis gets under way, women writers will go back to their jobs as wound dressers, trained cheerleaders at Party office building No. 213, go back to the VIP box in the kitchen and the clouds of steam in drying lofts, go back to acting as mummy to Attila József or the Nemecsek of Molnár's

Paul Street Boys. Or else they will again sit at the weaving loom until they quickly tumble to how much easier it must be to be a Luddite, a machine-breaker, than to fight with the noble weapon of literature against a society that is male-dominated to the core.

On the other hand, a very large band of literary wives will be relieved while the crisis lasts—and with good reason. They may be temporarily irritated by the wiping out, with the first bank failure, of a savings account that has been carefully fed for years, but later they will long for the return of these exciting, changing and uplifting days.

It's so obvious why that it almost hurts.

In the morning, a writer, just like any other normal, decent, seriously-minded member of the human race, switches his brain into gear, washes, gets dressed then beats a hasty retreat from home, and you won't see hide or hair of him until lighting-up time comes round in the evening, because that is what is called for by his new civilian occupation—clerk at customs HQ, Latin teacher to the local greengrocer's twins, or whatever. Not to spend the day at home raving and throwing a fit about how he is unable to write, or how critics are... it doesn't matter anyway. He is not tooling around at home is the main thing. He goes, gets out of the house, sees a bit more of the world than he does just going round the corner. Not least get properly dressed, and there can be no repetition of that unprecedented case of what happened at a conference gathered to discuss the importance of a marvellous novel. Even the President of the Republic was present at the event, admittedly, as it proved later, by mistake, because while taking a walk in the direction of the scene he thought he had seen a specimen of the very rare "nocturnal oil-beetle" behind one of the building's glass curtain walls, but it had turned out that it was merely a leaky biro in the breast pocket of a senile literary gent's jacket. The main thing was that the *chef-d'oeuvre* was just about to be placed on the pedestal that was due to it, but there was a moment in the interval between two presentations when the author's wife was plainly heard sighing and remarking: "But that's the crap he wrote in his beach shoes and the moth-eaten track suit that he twice took back out of the dustbin!"

The global economic crisis will also have an impact on a writer's sex life, of course. It is gratifying and deeply moving to be able to report that it will improve in every respect. The writer is freed of earlier inhibitions and pitches himself into sexual battle-fronts, trenches and bunkers on the basis that anything goes, it all comes to the same thing, he doesn't care about his paunch, or his clumsiness, or the barely passable size of his equipment, but, casting aside the shackles of excessive physical discipline, in an apocalyptic frame of mind becomes capable of discharging as many as eight ear-splitting premature ejaculations in rapid succession. If a male writer should shout out "I'm asking for state intervention! State intervention please!" that does not mean the same as it does on the lips of a female writer.

The global economic crisis equally has a good effect on the health of the Hungarian writer. He writes less, because for what and for whom should he write, and anyway there is nowhere to write for, so he not only imagines a walk, or making love, but actually puts these into practice. He moves about more, eats more healthily, and gets to know more about people, finally poking his head outdoors and even visiting quite exotic areas or run-down city districts, merrily turning tail if a farmer on a tractor or a pitchfork-wielding village thug should give chase, because he knows that he has landed into an intriguing relationship to LIFE, in capital letters, to reality.

In just the same way as there always were narrow-minded Hungarian writers who simplified things to black and white, to yes and no, there will also be some who will never discover the beneficial and forward-looking sides of the global economic crisis, greeting the process with deep pessimism and a mood swing that may degenerate as far as not shrinking from taking their own life.

If a writer's partner should notice that, in these harder times, the writer is unexpectedly more attentive to the family and no longer slagging off other writers, yet has an odd, drowsy, foggy look in the eyes, the partner should bear in mind the popular image that is spread about forms of suicide and instantly pack a bag, rush off with the kids to the mother-in-law, then send her round to check up on her son or daughter, and just sit back and wait.

Though that does not mean that there are not still traditional ways of suicide.

It will not be long before it will be possible to spot, in Budapest's inner-city Fifth District and across the river, in Buda's Castle District, signposts warning, "Look out for jumping writers!" People who fish in the Danube will start complaining that they are regularly hooking the bodies of dead writers instead of fish, and then one will slowly be able to draw the conclusion that playwrights are thinner, poets fatter, while novelists struggle a lot. To anyone vile enough to rub their hands in glee at this, saying that Hungary will run out of writers sooner or later, we send the message that the very strength, dignity and creativity of our society and nation demonstrates that into the place of every Hungarian writer who passes away, flees into suicide or changes career, there instantly steps a successor!

It is common knowledge that it is not a precondition for the existence of a writer, and therefore a Hungarian writer either, that there be readers.

Even in the absence of readers, there are writers, there is literature, book publishing, book fairs, editing of journals and readings by authors. Even in the absence of readers, very extensive oeuvres come into being. Naturally, a global economic crisis affects readers; life becomes more difficult, more tortuous, further improvements in the preservation of the species and the nation become problematic, and people gradually consume all reserves. It is at times like this that painful compulsory solutions are resorted to. People eat grandma, then the leather bikers' gear; next, the children's toys are sold off, then the two-piece suit for theatre-going, and finally, and definitely last, the books. A reader carries a

writer's books to a second-hand bookshop or the Chinese flea market, and to start with—until the wife dies, to be followed by the lover and, finally, the kids—the writer himself snaps them up. There will even be Hungarian writers who are lucky enough to manage in this way to buy back, and thus preserve, all the seven copies of their own novels that have been sold so far.

Having now proved that the global economic crisis redounds to a writer's good, a querulous comportment on the part of the writer, weeping, whining and whimpering, becomes utterly impossible. In a global economic crisis things are bad for heads of banks and government, for white-collar workers, and for the general population, but not for writers. Writers will come upon ever newer splendid subjects and there will be no publishing: thus another cause for worrying will be removed and he won't even have to work. He will never be underpaid, and epigones will have no chance to clatter along after him. Criticism will become toothless, whereas the writer, as the crisis deepens and governments and currencies bite the dust, will become an ever better, deeper and greater writer. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

INTERVIEW

Settled in the Present

Judit Rácz in Conversation with Péter Eötvös

Judit Rácz: *Rather than a run-down of your life, let me just ask into what periods would you divide it?*

Péter Eötvös: I was born in Székelyudvarhely (Odorheu, Romania) in 1944. I began a globetrotting life when I was just a few months old, when the Russians were coming from the east, so we were obliged to trek westwards. For quite some time my family wandered around in Austria and Germany, before coming back to Miskolc in eastern Hungary.

When a composer comes from Transylvania we tend to look for those roots in their music—in György Ligeti's case, not unprofitably either.

My family was not Transylvanian, but personally I feel I am completely Transylvanian despite the fact that, a brief engagement in Kolozsvár (Cluj) apart, I have not managed to get back there since.

So what does being Transylvanian mean?

The fact that all my personal documents contain the word Székelyudvarhely made me a queer fish at primary school. After all I wasn't born in Hungary but in a place that no longer existed—in one of those magical lost territories. I belong to a home that is a bit different from home.

That is, you constructed an identity for yourself out of nothing?

It was a self-image that made me feel secure without having any consequences. Those Transylvanian roots came out most strongly when we moved to the Netherlands when I was fifty. A sort of homesickness overcame me, which gave rise to a couple of compositions. I got out an old book, the folk-song collection

---

Judit Rácz,
a translator and journalist, was the Hungarian translator of Franz Liszt: The Virtuoso Years *and* Franz Liszt: The Weimar Years *by Alan Walker.*

Péter Eötvös (b. 1944), composer, conductor and teacher, is one of the best known interpreters of 20th-century music, often mentioned along with Ligeti and Kurtág as the youngest of a Hungarian triad of composers. Born in Transylvania, he received his degrees from the Academy of Music in Budapest in composition and the Hochschule für Musik in Cologne in conducting. Between 1968 and 1976 he performed regularly with the Stockhausen Ensemble. From 1971 to 1979 he collaborated with the electronic music studio of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne. In 1978, at the invitation of Pierre Boulez, he conducted the inaugural concert of IRCAM in Paris, and was subsequently named musical director of the Ensemble InterContemporain, a post he held until 1991.

Since his debut in 1980 at the BBC Proms, he has made regular appearances in London. From 1985–1988 he was Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

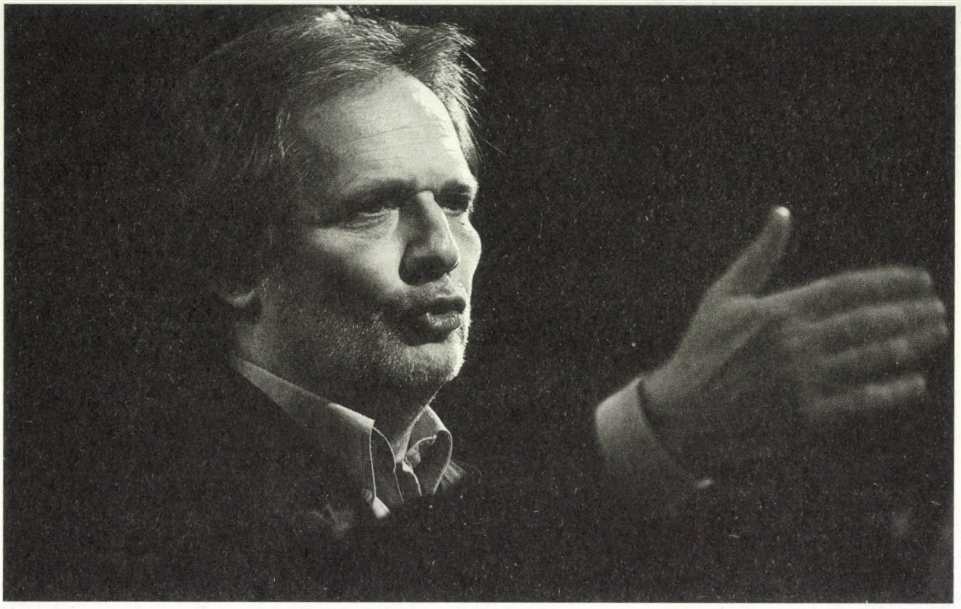
He has also conducted, among others, the Budapest Festival Orchestra and the National Philharmonic Orchestra (Budapest), the Radio Chamber Orchestra of Hilversum, the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Göteborg Symphony Orchestra. Other orchestras he has worked with as guest conductor include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Berlin and the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as the Los Angeles Philharmonic and New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra. He has also worked in opera houses including La Scala in Milan, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden and La Monnaie in Brussels.

Equally important to Peter Eötvös are his teaching activities, especially his work at the Musikhochschule in Karlsruhe (1992–98, 2002–) and at his own Contemporary Music Foundation for young conductors and composers in Budapest.

Eötvös's many compositions are regularly performed throughout the world by the most renowned ensembles. zeroPoints (1999) was performed for the first time by the London Symphony Orchestra; Atlantis (1995), a large-scale dramatic work and its sequel, IMA (2002), both based on poetry by Sándor Weöres, by the WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne; and Jet Stream (2003) by the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

In recent years opera has featured more prominently in his oeuvre. His Three Sisters (1998), based on the Chekhov play and premiered at the Opéra de Lyon in 1998, has been performed almost 100 times in the last ten years in 19 cities of Europe, staged by 10 different directors. Le Balcon is based on the play by Jean Genet and was performed for the first time with the Ensemble InterContemporain in 2002; Angels in America, based on the play by Tony Kushner, at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 2004. Lady Sarashina, performed in March 2008 in Lyon established a box-office record: 97 per cent of the tickets were sold. The world premiere of his latest opera, Love and Other Demons, based on the novel by García Márquez and directed by Silviu Purcărete, had its first performance at the Glyndebourne Opera in August 2008.

Not that he has abandoned orchestral works: among his most recent is the violin concerto Seven, a memorial for the Columbia Space Shuttle astronauts, performed for the first time in 2007 at the Lucerne Festival, with violinist Akiko Suwanai and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra under the direction of Pierre Boulez. Miklós Perényi will premiere the Concerto for Violoncello for the Berlin Philharmonic; the Gulbenkian of Lisbon and the Orchestre Philhamonique of Paris have jointly commissioned a piece from him. ❧



© István Huszti

Péter Eötvös

Szépkenyerűszentmártoni gyűjtés. What a marvellous name!* In it I found various fine songs and pieces of instrumental dance music. Three of the movements for strings for my *Atlantis* came out of this collection. *Atlantis* is about cultures that have disappeared, and those three movements are about the sinking of Transylvania specifically. At that time Pál Schiffer was making a documentary film about Transylvania, and it was he who told me that the traditional dance culture had vanished there, because the young were going to discos. That was one piece of information which made me realise that cultures in our own times are sinking. Another inspiration was Sándor Weöres's concrete poem "Néma zene" (Silent Music) in which there is a hidden line that goes *"Atlantis / foundered / the year / it sank / we don't / know."* And a third stimulus was that overnight the Soviet Union had simply ceased to exist.

And did you mourn the sinking of that particular culture?

No, one could only call it a culture in part, but it is an example of how an empire can sink within seconds. Fortunately, the Russian culture of Chekhov and the rest did not vanish with it. Cultures can cease in various manners, some passing on in a slow, natural process, others vanishing in a flash due to a catastrophe, or being eroded in some insidious manner... Another piece of mine, *Shadows,* a funeral dance that I composed after my son died, is Transylvanian music throughout. That is what my Transylvanian identity signifies for me.

* ■ The placename Szépkenyerűszentmárton (Sânmartin) translates as "Saint Martin, Giver of Fine Bread".

Is the inspiration behind Atlantis *tragic and melancholy?*

At bottom, I don't approach anything tragically; I try to view everything objectively. There are two sides to that, of course, joy and sorrow are present in the consciousness and in the body, but when I begin to work on something, I have to stay on the outside. I am neither a religious nor a political animal, because I feel that this would lead to a narrowing of my perspective. I am an observer by nature, which is vital when it comes to collecting material.

Can we go a little further into your life?

In Miskolc I learned to play the piano at an excellent music school, with Bartók's music becoming hardwired in my fingers from the age of five onwards. After primary school I passed straight to the Academy of Music in Budapest, Kodály accepted me in the class for the highly gifted.

You were accepted as a composer. Most people would assume highly gifted applies to instrumentalists. Is it possible to spot a talent for composing in a fourteen-year-old boy? What can one show at that age?

Oh, I had accumulated a whole "repertoire" by then; I took my collected works to show Kodály... There were all sorts of pieces, from a cantata on.

Have you disavowed them since then?

No, never! There is no need to disavow anything; whatever there was, was. That Academy of Music period was interesting on two counts. First of all, even today I consider the Sixties to be one of the most flourishing ages of all. That was the first time we had the opportunity to discover Western cultures. The group of people I got into were artists and musicians who were interested in what was going on in the rest of the world, so we followed everything up. The Sixties were a period when there was a double culture in Hungary: there was the official culture, which was what it was, and not so bad at that, and there was the avant-garde underground, which fortunately was left to get on with things, because that made it much easier for the political powers-that-be to keep tabs on it. I did not experience any form of banning; somehow my bread always fell buttered side up. During my Academy days, since I was good at improvising, I found my way into filmmaking and also into the Budapest theatre world. I produced music for a great many films, and I was the house composer for several of the big theatres. It is thanks to what I learnt during rehearsals at the time that I am now writing operas: theatre with music.

What kind of music was that?

I was a modernist.

Very modern?

Very. Electronic music, the lot. It was possible then, because new styles had got to Hungary with Polish films, and if the Poles were allowed to do it, then so could the Hungarians. That was when the Balázs Béla Studio was set up; modernity flourished there. If something was allowed to filmmakers, then it was allowed to theatres as well. For instance, Madách's *The Tragedy of Man* or *Timon of Athens* were turned into avant-garde productions at the National Theatre under Tamás Major's direction. There was quite a lot of resistance to the avant-garde as far as music went, however, and that still remains the case to this day. After I graduated I needed to continue my education to avoid being called up for the army. The funny side of it was that I was looking to get to Moscow to train as a conductor; I put in an application but got no answer. Time was starting to press, so someone suggested that I apply to DAAD, the (West) German Academic Exchange Service, so I did. Within a fortnight I had got an answer and a scholarship. That was how I got to West Germany in 1966. I made a beeline for Cologne, because that was the place for electronic music, which interested me at the time, and that was where Stockhausen, Mauricio Kagel and Bernd Alois Zimmermann were—and Ligeti too for a time. Everything that was big in the avant-garde was there, in Cologne. I qualified as a conductor, though I didn't set any great store on that. The very first day that I was in Cologne, incidentally, I saw a notice on the entrance door that Stockhausen was looking for a copyist. Great! That's me, I thought to myself. I copied an electronic score for him, *Telemusik,* so we were in daily contact. Then it transpired that I was a decent pianist so from that point on I became a regular part of his team. From 1968 on I used to travel to the West from Hungary as a member of the Stockhausen Ensemble.

Just like that? In those days travel was not that simple for Hungarians. What's your take on it? Were you one of the privileged few who had proved they could be trusted to come and go freely? After all, back here in Hungary you were friendly with some dicey people.

I travelled under contract to what was called the Hungarian Concert Office. I paid them a percentage of my earnings and I got my passport through them. The condition was that "the comrade had better come back," and the comrade always did. That was the scheme of things. Then in 1970 I was invited to go for six months to the World Fair at Osaka, and there the Germans invited me to work in the WDR Electronic Studio in Cologne. I was able to travel there perfectly legally, with a valid passport.

I imagine that your name must have given you some measure of protection by then, or was there perhaps something in your nature that made them let you come and go?

There's no two ways about it, I avoid getting into conflicts. I'm a Capricorn, so I usually get what I want by sheer persistence.

What were you concentrating on then?

Mainly electronic music during that long Cologne phase. It was quite by chance that I got back into conducting. A few of the Cologne musicians remembered the concert that I conducted to graduate, and they invited me to do a number of radio recordings, saying that I was a safe pair of hands. I travelled the world with Stockhausen, doing everything imaginable, from playing piano, percussion, constructing instruments, acting as a sound engineer—you name it, I learned it. I see it as a huge advantage that I have had the chance to be personally acquainted with every branch of music-making: I can produce professional-looking scores, I'm familiar with the science of acoustics, I have first-hand experience with musical instruments, I was even a répétiteur at the Cologne Opera House. With Stockhausen I played with the New York Philharmonic as well as the Berlin Philharmonic, I visited Lebanon, Persia, Japan... All that was very important, because the globetrotting and the sheer experience give a perspective that provides a huge sense of security. I did very little composing back then; I simply did not have the time.

But you knew that you wanted to be a composer.

I always was, from the age of four on. During the Seventies there was a large circle of musicians in Cologne, stacks of English and Americans, people from India and even further afield: a superb international crew who were constantly at work building the future century.

And was it built?

No, it became something entirely different; the world took another direction. In the Seventies, our avantgarde music and pop were still quite close to each other. But the symphony orchestras and their public were terribly stick-in-the-mud. My problem was that in my work as a conductor I was not moving in the same circle to which I belonged as a composer. As my career took off, it brought me to many of the major symphonic orchestras. Since the Nineties, however, there has been a rapprochement of the new and the old and now all the big orchestras in the West regularly play contemporary music, and play it magnificently at that.

You mean you are no longer considered a conductor of contemporary music?

I am simply a conductor; indeed, a composer-conductor, which is not a very common combination. Since about 2000 I have been a guest conductor at the Berlin Philharmonic. There it was Abbado who brought about a huge opening-up of the repertoire after Karajan's reign. That was when I was invited, primarily to conduct modern works.

Which composers did they consider as modern?

Ligeti, Kurtág, Harrison Birtwistle and a lot of younger composers, even Bartók, to some extent. I also got to conduct my own *Atlantis* on three evenings. It is largely thanks to Abbado lending his name and reputation that twentieth-century music

became socially acceptable, *salonfähig* as they say, in Vienna as well as Berlin, so that audiences of two or three thousand now find it quite natural to listen regularly to contemporary music. The regularity is very important. When Sir Simon Rattle took over at the Berlin Philharmonic, they became even more receptive, opening up in various directions. It turned out that every kind of music has its audience. After Sergiu Celibidache died [in 1996], the Munich Philharmonic also rejuvenated their repertory, and since then I have regularly conducted them. Last summer I directed Bartók with the Vienna Philharmonic in Salzburg, and it was under me that they played his *Cantata Profana* for the first time.

Do you suggest the concert items?

Sometimes I do, sometimes they do.

Is there any scope for daring?

One of the Berlin Philharmonic's programmes in April 2009 will start with one of the two 1921 transcriptions for orchestra that Schoenberg made of Bach chorale preludes. That will be followed by Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll,* then B. A. Zimmermann's *Requiem for a Young Poet.* That's a typical programme for Berlin. For a few years now I have had a series with the Munich Philharmonic, and an earlier Hungarian programme, for example, consisted of Ligeti's *Lontano,* Kurtág's *Stele,* my own *zeroPoints,* and Bartók's pantomine *The Miraculous Mandarin.* One of this year's programmes was Bartók's *Four Orchestral Pieces,* my own *Jet Stream,* Debussy's *Jeux* and Varèse's *Arcana*. There are always three performances, the first being part of a subscription season for the young, which I usually preface with a talk.

And do the young actually come?

The concert hall is invariably packed. Regularity nurtures audiences. What I find depressing in Budapest is the poverty of information that goes into devising programmes. I get the impression that here music is just treated as entertainment; the concerts give no perspective on contemporary music, there is no deliberate striving to educate. If children regularly attend concerts in Munich, that is not because they read the posters, but because for years their teachers have been preparing them to do so. It's the same at the Opéra de Lyon: in Lyon it's not just the music teachers who make it their business, but the teachers of literature as well, by talking about the literary context of a piece. They also invite composers to go to the schools, who explain in person what the process of composition is in the first place and play bits from the piece. That's how you educate an inquisitive audience.

What makes children look for something more than enjoyment?

Children play while they learn and learn by playing: if the two things are separated the teaching is to blame. I have no objection to enjoyment as such, just enjoyment when it is at the expense of learning, of information.

Eötvös Institute and Foundation

The International Eötvös Institute Foundation (IEFF) was set up by Péter Eötvös, together with other musicians and institutions, back in 1991. The original idea was that an institute for postgraduate instruction for musicians and conductors would be housed in the former royal castle at Gödöllő, some 20 miles north of Budapest. Although it was ultimately not set up in Gödöllő, the Institute has organised highly successful international courses and seminars, with the co-operation of a range of orchestras and musical institutions, in various European towns and cities (e.g. Amsterdam, Baden-Baden, Brussels, Budapest, Cologne, Darmstadt, Freiburg, Gothenburg, Hilversum, Lyon, Vienna). It also regularly provides for young conductors and composers to attend the annual Bartók Seminar and Festival at Szombathely, which is Hungary's premier contemporary music event, with participants having the chance to attend master classes, concerts and other artistic and scholarly events.

A new set of goals was put forward by Péter Eötvös, and to accomplish these he established the Eötvös Péter Contemporary Music Foundation, financed purely with his own money, with no outside support. This new foundation has worked with international partners (e.g. the Lucerne Festival in 2007) to carry on a number of programmes that were launched by the IEFF (e.g. the scholarships for composers to work at Edenkoben, Germany) and it cooperates with such organisations as the Budapest Music Center, which ten years ago launched a series of recordings that highlights Hungarian performances of classical, contemporary music and jazz and which are distributed to the major markets in Europe and further afield. ❧

If you had the time and opportunity, what would you do to change that? If, say, the Palace of Arts here in Budapest were to ask you to map out the next five years.

That might be on the short side. Six or eight years, a whole generational change in the way concerts are organised and consistent continuity are needed for something like that to have a chance. The sort of thing we did with the Ensemble Inter-Contemporain in Paris. Out of fifteen administrative staff, six were concerned with education. They would visit schools before every concert, taking a musician with them, and they would speak about what was going to happen. We noticed the first signs of a change after roughly three years: more and more young people started coming to the concerts, and they knew what they were coming to hear. The thing had started to intrigue them. We became a part of Paris's festival life and came into contact with the large and organised public that the festivals attracted. After around 5-6 years we had reached the point that we were playing to sold-out halls, and that's how it has stayed until the present day. The Ensemble InterContemporain is now celebrating its 30th birthday. With the big symphonic orchestras the difference is that they can plan longer-term and think bigger, so if only 300 attend the first concert, they don't just say, "See, it's not worth it! We'll try something else." Quite the reverse, they say, "More! Give us more!" That would be the example to follow.

Is it a matter of money, or will?

It depends on the money, but it's primarily a question of will. One has to build up a core that is able to stick consistently by the basic principles. Once the Eötvös Institute starts to operate on a permanent basis, I would like to implement an international exchange scheme, bringing the world to Budapest and sending youngsters out from here in order to see and hear more.

You worked with Stockhausen during some of his important years. How would you sum him up?

Stockhausen was one of those artists who build the future. Anything that type of artist does they do so in the knowledge that what they are creating is directed towards the future. Berlioz, Wagner, Bartók, Picasso, Eiffel, Le Corbusier were like this too. I include other arts here, because there is a poorly conceived concern for tradition that is rife in music. It is a bad habit that arose during the twentieth century—sad to say, as a product of performance practice. In philosophy, literature, the theatre, painting, you name it, the new is seen as a positive, indeed it is expected, whereas in music it constantly has to be justified in the teeth of opposition. To set about deliberately constructing the future, and at the same time constantly having to contend with opposition—that was typical of Stockhausen as well. That is why his relations with people around him were frequently quarrelsome, because he was by nature strong, vigorous, combative, but he only ever attacked in self-defence. That is why it was very important that I got to encounter him in 1966, because the training I had received at the Academy of Music in Budapest was based on an emotional musical tradition, one in which people received no technical information at all.

So, nothing of a technical or structural nature?

Nothing conscious or premeditated.

And did that hinder you?

Not while I was still in Hungary because I had no idea things could be any different. But when I got to Cologne it became evident that music is not just a matter of art but also—and I say this very softly—of science. A composer needs to know what a sound is, how it is produced, how it spreads, what gives a particular instrument its particular timbre. All the technical information that I had known nothing about I picked up in Cologne. Interestingly, though, my dealings with Stockhausen were based on an emotional tie, because there were few around him for whom emotion and meaning were attached to every musical sound (paradoxically, perhaps, that is the very thing prized by the traditional school in Budapest). He was surrounded by technicians.

And does that difference still apply? That in Germany the technical skills are perfected, but there is no emotion?

Naturally, the best musicians are at home in both. The emotionally-based training in Hungary was not a bad thing, it's just that it is only part of the story.

Are you referring now to performances or compositions?

Both music-making and musical thinking. Let me draw a parallel. Take a plant: underneath are the roots, on top are the leaves and the gorgeous corollas of the flowers. In Hungary teaching is concerned with the top, and it was only abroad that I learnt that a plant also has roots. There may be nothing showing above ground as yet, but down below everything is ready and correct for that to come into being. Training in Hungary takes as its starting-point the idea that a flower just is.

To stay with composition, can one say that composers in Germany, for instance, write far better works?

I wouldn't say that. A lot of technically fluent works are produced in which there is little or no emotional charge. But composers in the West generally take an active part in the performance process; many orchestras and ensembles commission music, so there is much collaboration, and that counts for a great deal.

As a composer, how do you relate to Stockhausen?

There is no relation, because his function in the world and mine were different. His was building the future, mine one of continuous participation in the community of music, which to some degree is oriented both to the present and the future, in regard to both composing and conducting. The fact that I conduct contemporary music means that the thinking of my own contemporaries is of interest, while what I produce as a composer is always written with a specific audience and even specific performers in mind. I don't regard myself as belonging to any school of composition and I have no wish to. On the whole, I belong nowhere. That must be something genetic. It's the same with my Transylvanian essence; I may feel Transylvanian, but I do not belong there...

When I speak to contemporary composers, I have yet to meet anyone who says, yes, I am a member of such-and-such a school, or I am a leading figure in, or just belong to such-and-such a trend.

There are many like that in the West.

All the same, if you were to try and view yourself from the outside, would you discern any tendency, anything at all, that might be classifiable?

Only Bartók. He is the ground around my roots; he is the one with whom I feel a connection. In music I speak Bartókese.

Do you perceive different schools or trends in contemporary music? Or are there as many voices as there are composers?

It is more a matter of a grouping by intellectual directions, which tend to be national or regional in character. I am fairly familiar with the Western output over recent decades. I find it interesting to note that French composers write music with a French accent, the English with an English accent, the Viennese with a Viennese accent.

Are they trying to be local?

A healthy kind of resistance to a global lingua franca is emerging. I see it as important, from the standpoint of cultural policy, that now when political borders have ceased to exist, regional cultures need to be promoted. One ought not to speak about national cultures, but the cultures of small areas, of which we have twenty or thirty in Hungary alone, and deliberately strengthen them. I see intellectual communities: Vienna or Paris have a *genius loci*; Budapest too has a powerful *genius loci.*

What is that like?

I see it as closed in, uninformed.

In what way do you notice that when listening to a piece?

I sense a very conscious exclusion of anything considered "alien".

Does that mean they are bad?

You can't put it that way! It's not that they are bad, rather that they often reiterate things to which solutions have already been found.

Whereas they ought to be bringing something new?

Every time. Culture is partly a matter of consciously nurturing a tradition, but also partly of pointing up new things, otherwise there is no sense to it. Only things that bring something new at the moment of their emergence can take their place in the tradition. Hungarian works reflect musical thinking that may be new for a local audience but they would find it hard to hold their own on an international platform. There will always be a few exceptions, of course. As we are speaking, there is a musical competition being held in Budapest for composers who are Hungarian by birth or background: one can see from the submitted works that a process of opening up is already under way. The next step would be to make the competition international.

Does it make you jittery to hear other people conducting your works? Can you let things go, or do you worry about getting an unpleasant surprise?

No, to the contrary! I am tickled pink that it's not me doing it; indeed, the very fact that someone else is conducting one of my works is in itself a mark of recognition. I can hear the pieces much better than when I conduct. I have had some marvellous experiences with full symphony orchestras and their conductors. And that covers a wide range. The premiere of *Three Sisters* was conducted by Kent Nagano, and very capably too. He has an unerringly fine sense of drama; he knows how to keep the stage in motion. He was followed by Niksa Baresa, who is

Slovenian by background but studied in Moscow and brings with him a feel for Russian culture. He took *Three Sisters* at half tempo, and that was glorious: a slow, tedious glory. I have no problem with that! It's best if one can just sit and listen. Knowing, of course, that I am also capable of conducting the music.

You have often said that a live performance is part of a piece. Does that mean recording robs a piece of some of its essence?

The only problem with recordings is that one loses the spatial ambience, though even that can be overcome: four-track technology was already available in the Fifties.

You have pilloried concert halls for preserving nineteenth-century listening habits, and enthused that in the round at the Berlin Philharmonic concerts one can sit anywhere. What is so good about the audience being able to sit behind the orchestra and having to listen to one section of the orchestra in particular? I only have two ears, I can't listen from every angle. What implications does this "democratic" seating arrangement hold for the sound?

Music is a pluralistic genre: it is polyphonic, and listeners are able to process several channels of information simultaneously. That is not possible in the theatre, because it interferes with picking up the words if different things are being uttered at the same time. My own ideal is to have the audience sitting around the orchestra, or else for the orchestra members to be seated around the audience on several sides. Anyone who has heard Stockhausen's *Gruppen* with the three orchestras set around them, or Nono's *Prometeo* with four orchestras and islets of soloists set in front, behind, above and below the audience, or Kurtág's *Quasi una fantasia,* will have a sense of the large significance space plays in music.

You are delighted if someone else is conducting, but does that go for directors of your operas? Do you take part in the work for the first production?

In theory, yes. There are some directors who are able to work in collaboration, but there are others with whom it is difficult to come to an understanding. I wrote stage directions into the score of *Three Sisters,* but not after that. The direction is always of huge importance for a first performance, but my experience has been that the initial reactions and critical reception, whether good or bad, only have a short-term effect on a work's fate, on how often it is played; after a while it will find its own level—provided it is fitted for the stage in the first place.

It is hardly a matter of indifference how long that takes, it is much more gratifying if that takes place while the composer is still alive. In your case this has happened quite swiftly.

Three Sisters has now clocked up nearly one hundred performances in various productions. On the other hand, the early reception of *Le Balcon* was poor, but since then five marvellous new productions have been mounted. The first responses to *Angels in America* were middling, but it has been performed constantly since, and

I have seen two productions in the States. The critical reception can help or hinder how often a work is played, but for me what is important is that the singers and audiences should like it, and that it is taken into the repertory.

If I may put you on the spot, how would you briefly characterise your operas?

Harakiri, Radames and *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams* are chamber operas, all three of them. The first two came to fruition in the Seventies, and they contain many elements that I consider to be characteristic of me. Multiplicity of languages, for instance, with *Harakiri* being in Japanese and also the local language of wherever it is performed, whereas *Radames* is sung in a variety of languages simultaneously. *Three Sisters* was my first full-length opera, and the libretto uses Chekhov's original Russian text. An important innovation is its use of a double orchestra: an 18-piece ensemble in the pit and a 50-piece orchestra behind the stage. I decided that all the figures should be male, including the female characters, which are also sung by males, but in the female range—by countertenors, in other words.

But that is not an absolute requirement, because women have also taken those roles.

I allowed that, because I was curious to hear how it sounds. The countertenor version is better, but it is difficult to insist on four countertenors everywhere, after all we are talking about guest artists who do not have a permanent contract with any opera house. That requires money. *Le Balcon* is a "frivolous" opera taken from Genet's comedy—a musical cabaret that I based on the cabaret musical idiom in the France of the Fifties. *Angels in America* was written in an American style, using Tony Kushner's two-part, multi-layered, seven-hour fantasia, one that the playwright himself treats as a stand-alone, mixed-genre work: a dramatic comedy which incorporates all sorts of theatrical elements. There is a distinctive American lightness of touch about the drama, and the American public have taken it to their heart as one of their own operas, which pleases me no end. *Lady Sarashina,* my fourth opera, is a sequence of nine scenes. She was a Japanese poet who was born exactly a thousand years ago, in 1008, but her stories are so modern that they might easily have been written today. I composed this to an English libretto, because that was the language of the translation in which I encountered the Japanese work. She has a marvellous way of talking—about the seasons, about her cat being the reincarnation of the daughter of a governor, about a rendezvous that fails to take place, about fate... In short, anyone between four and ninety years of age will find an appropriate scene in it. It is a playful mix which contains fairy-tale, fantastic and dream elements—I don't know what name to give to the genre.

Audiences will find a name for it.

And I shall give a prize for the best one, and even get it included in the posters! My fifth opera, *Love and Other Demons,* is based on a Gabriel García Márquez short story. I would be more than happy to call it a *bel canto* opera as it was an explicit goal of mine to accomplish an *espresivo,* "aria-style", music for the poignant dramatic content.

You have repeatedly claimed that there is no such thing as an Eötvös style, because in all of the operas the style arises, begets itself, as it is being written. Does this go for your instrumental works as well?

Yes indeed, it applies just as much to them. In an opera I build on how the roles of the singers develop, while in a piano concerto the style comes precisely from the technical and acoustic opportunities offered by the piano. Of course, that is exactly what everyone has always done.

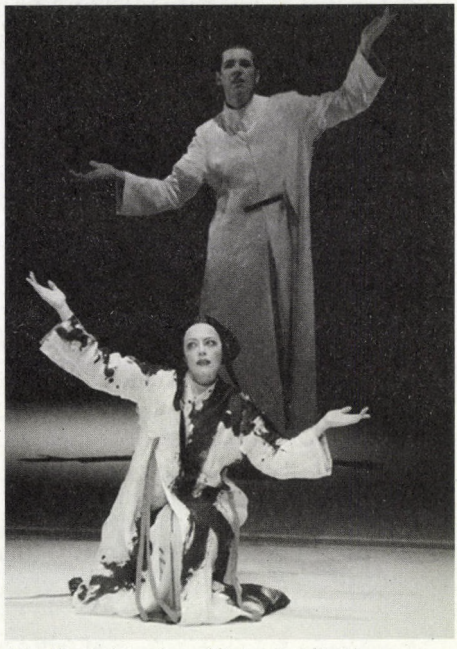
So you're saying there is no such thing as a Mozart style?

No, there isn't really. Anyone who listens carefully can tell how far removed the style of, say, *Così* is from *The Magic Flute:* it's the works that have the style, not the composer. Mozart has a uniform musical language, but his works all have different styles.

Is it really possible to know contemporary music? Isn't music a lot more complex than it was a century ago?

Not at all! The musical idiom of whatever is the prevailing contemporary trend is shaped by the individual composers of the age, as writers shape the idiom of literature, and that is what the language of an "age" consists of. The complexity does not reside in the age so much as it is manifested in the works. Every age has its complexity and its simplicity as well; music schools, academies and the public merely have the duty of keeping up with the age.

Oleg Riabets, Bejun Mehta and Alain Aubin in Three Sisters. *Théâtre du Châtelet, 2001*



Mireille Delunsch and Peter Bording in Lady Sarashina. *Opéra de Lyon, 2008*

Sofia Gubaidulina once referred to the Chinese custom for a painter to change his name when he became very famous so that he could again become an unknown. Anonymity bestows great freedom; fame can circumscribe and cramp. What does success mean to you?

Just that it is easier for me to plan ahead. I am one of those who keep musical life in Europe alive. Renown is also useful when helping a lot of young composers and conductors at the start of their careers.

Your path to success was fairly smooth and natural.

Indeed, first as a conductor, then as a composer too.

Do you attribute that to talent?

No doubt talent comes into it, and also a wideranging knowledge.

You use the words "knowledge" and "information" a lot.

Those are the most important things.

As far as contemporary music goes, you seem to be an optimist, or perhaps satisfied is the mot juste. *Many others complain that the audiences are not there or that the music can simply not be listened to.*

Here too it is just a matter of ignorance. Where you have an informed public there is no problem. In Hungary there is little information about music, and little passing on or acquisition of musical knowledge.

You are dissatisfied with many things in Hungary, yet you still came back.

I grew up in Budapest; it suits me to compose here, and I like the way the sun shines.

It also shines elsewhere.

Not the same way.

Physically, you are very much present here.

Intellectually too. The theatres in Pest are very important to me, because at last I understand exactly what is being said on stage. Even what is not said.

For a long time it seemed that you would stay abroad permanently. Did you ever try to settle anywhere else?

Me settle down? Nowhere. I am settled here—in myself. ❧

István Deák

Mindless Efficacy

Randolph L. Braham, ed., assisted by Zoltán Tibori Szabó: *A magyarországi Holokauszt földrajzi enciklopédiája* (The Geographical Encyclopedia of the Holocaust in Hungary), 3 vols. Budapest, Park Könyvkiadó, 2007, x, 1590 pp., maps, tables and photographs.

It was the habit of the writers and publishers of patriotic children's books in the late nineteenth century to produce richly illustrated volumes describing the beauties of the fatherland. This they did through the eyes of, for example, two little wandering orphans who had fled German-occupied Alsace-Lorraine, or those of a big brown bear who had come down from the Carpathian ranges to take in the spectacular sight of towns, villages, old forts and the glorious capital of what was then called the "Hungarian Realm". The book here reviewed also describes all the cities and many of the villages in that latter country, and if published more than a century ago, it may well have been dedicated "to our Israelite youth on the occasion of our beloved Hungarian fatherland's millennial celebration in 1896". Indeed in that year, Jews felt more than ever at home in Hungary; at last, the law treated them as full-fledged citizens whose only—legally insignificant—distinction was that, rather than being Hungarians of the Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran or Eastern Christian faith, they were Hungarians of the "Mosaic persuasion". Moreover, the elite of the Jews were fantastically successful not only in industry, business and banking, or as medical doctors, lawyers, journalists and other professionals, but now also in culture, the arts, the theatre and, increasingly, as landowners, judges, civil servants, university professors, mayors, members of parliament as well as police and army officers. It is true that a baptised Jew had an even better chance of access to positions traditionally reserved for members of the old ruling nobility, but then conversion was understood to be simply the last logical step in the process of assimilation. Some of those, however, who took conversion seriously, became much admired Christian clerics, monks and poets.

István Deák,

an American historian born in Hungary, is Seth Low Professor Emeritus at Columbia University. His books on Weimar Germany's left-wing intellectuals, the 1848 Revolution in Hungary, the officer corps of the Habsburg Monarchy and Hitler's Europe have appeared in English, German and Hungarian.

The many pictures in *The Geographic Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* show the often sumptuous synagogues and prayer houses built by the ever expanding and dynamic pre-First World War generations. The houses of worship represented the Jewish community's boundless self-confidence: no one but Theodor Herzl, the Hungarian-born founder of Zionism, could have imagined that half a century later, the synagogues and prayer houses would become holding pens for members of the Jewish community before deportation and warehouses for their confiscated goods. Nor would it have been easy to imagine that even later, following the end of the Holocaust, most of the religious buildings would be put to secular use or simply torn down. It all reminds one of the famous *Zentralfriedhof,* the great central cemetery in Vienna, whose Christian section is a marvel of delicate gardening care while its overgrown Jewish section, with its once magnificent but now decrepit crypts, serves as a monument to the Austrian people's successful effort to rid themselves of their Jewish fellow citizens. *The Geographic Encyclopedia,* too, serves both as a testimonial to the flourishing of the once nearly one-million-strong Hungarian Jewish community as well as a reminder of its greatest tragedy.

There is one more reason why the *Encyclopedia* reminds us of the "happy time of peace," as Hungarians like to call the pre-1914 period; it is that, in 1944, when the Holocaust took place, so-called Rump or Trianon Hungary was at its largest territorial extent. After losing two thirds of its territory and three fifths of its inhabitants following the First World War, Hungary by 1941 had recovered nearly half of the lost lands, and the Hungarian flag was again flying over long sections of the Carpathian ranges. Dörmögő Dömötör, the grumbling Hungarian bear, who was a beloved figure in Hungarian children's literature created by the Jewish author Zsigmond Sebők, would have been pleased to see a large part of the "Hungarian Realm" unified again, even though his own den in the Retyezát (Retezat) Mountains of Southern Transylvania remained in Romania. All this meant that, in the spring of 1944, when time came for Hungary to "solve the Jewish Question", the authorities were able—and generally delighted—to expedite to Auschwitz not only the Jews of so-called Rump Hungary, but also the hundreds of thousands who between the two wars had been citizens of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia.

The *Encyclopedia* is an opus considered by Randolph L. Braham to be his final achievement. Braham, the founder of Hungarian Holocaust studies, has changed the way many Hungarians think of the events of 1944. Braham grew up in northern Transylvania under Romanian rule, and is thus familiar with both Romanian and Hungarian culture. He survived the war as a labour service man within the Hungarian army, that strange temporary refuge in 1944 for over a hundred thousand young Jewish men who, just a year or two earlier, would have been much more cruelly treated within the same institution. Having lost his family to the Holocaust, Braham emigrated to the United States soon after the war and is now emeritus professor of political science and Holocaust studies at the City University of New York's Graduate School. He has written, collected and/or edited over fifty

books and hundreds of articles and book chapters on the subject. His chef d'oeuvre is the *Politics of Genocide: the Holocaust in Hungary*.* All those desirous of an in-depth familiarity with the Shoah in Hungary should start with this book.

The *Encyclopedia* consists of two volumes of text and a one-volume appendix that contains a substantial bibliography, an annotated list of special terms, a chronology of events, an index of names and places (but regrettably not also a subject index) and the biographies of the authors of the individual chapters on Hungary's then 41 counties. The two volumes of text are preceded by Braham's ninety-page-long *Introduction,* which summarises the history of Hungarian Jews and the major stages of their destruction, with as many precise statistics as can be gathered about an event in which the executioners rarely took down the names of their victims.

Braham's principal collaborator, Zoltán Tibori Szabó, is an historian and journalist originally from Transylvania whose major monograph deals with the flight of Jews back and forth across the Romanian–Hungarian border between 1940 and 1944.** The twenty-two other authors have come from various academic and journalistic backgrounds; clearly, they were given much freedom as to the context of their entries. Inevitably, their contributions are not of equal quality. It would be good to know what explains the devotion of these writers to the subject: family origin, a sense of collective guilt, or simple intellectual curiosity. But in Hungary, where Jewish assimilation has been both a magnificent success and a terrible failure, it would be uncouth to raise such a question.

What is sorely missing from the appendix is a separate listing of the current toponyms and the Hungarian equivalents of the hundreds of localities which in 1944 were within Hungary but today are (again) in Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia or Serbia. It is not enough to add the current name in parentheses to the Hungarian name in the index of names; at the moment, anyone looking for the home of a long-defunct parent in one of the neighbouring states is forced to refer to maps which do not even mention the Hungarian name.

The book moves from county to county in alphabetical order, which provides for the absolute orderliness necessary in an encyclopedia. The trouble is that such historic counties as Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun, which in 1944 included Budapest, are divided, have merged with others, or have disappeared from the map. The county of Gömör and Kishont, for instance, is today (again) in Slovakia and exists neither as a name, nor as a geographic term, nor as an administrative unit. For the coming English-language edition a detailed gazetteer listing the former and the present-day names of the counties as well as their precise locations seems indispensable. Most important will be the cross-references without which no student of the turbulent geographic history of Eastern Europe can function.

* ■ 2 vols, 2nd revised and enlarged edition; New York and Boulder, Colorado: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies and Social Science Monographs, 1994. Both the first and the revised editions have also appeared in Hungarian.

** ■ Zoltán Tibori Szabó, *Élet és halál mezsgyéjén. Zsidók menekülése és mentése a magyar–román határon 1940–1944 között.* Kolozsvár: Minerva Művelődési Egyesület, 2001.

Each author begins with the history and destruction of the Jews in the county he or she is describing and then turns to the individual localities, again in alphabetical order. Inevitably, one tends to read first the rich stories of larger and more famous places, yet the few lines dedicated to a small village with, let us say, three Jewish families, none of which survived the Holocaust, make for equally heartbreaking reading.

With some variations, each well-documented entry tells the same story of Hungarian Jewry's phenomenal rise and fall in less than two centuries. In the eighteenth century, Jews lived mainly on the estates of great landowners, who used the Jews for the collection of taxes and rents, the sale of liquor, money-lending, and cheap artisanal labour. Other Jews vegetated in the outskirts of cities which allowed them into the market place only in daytime and even then not always. In the nineteenth century, at last, Jewry began to expand into other areas of the country. Massive immigration from the Habsburg empire's western provinces and even more from Austrian Galicia and the Russian empire, as well as edicts of emancipation, especially that of 1867–1868, brought Jews to counties and towns which had never before seen a Jew. Yet until the end, Jews remained unevenly distributed, and perhaps the most discouraging stories of the book are the ones that tell how, in the spring of 1944, the Hungarian authorities made sure that every single Jewish family be brought in by the gendarmes from even the most far-away Transylvanian hamlet; never mind the war and the approaching Red Army.

The phenomenal rise of Hungarian Jewry in the nineteenth century was based on the decision of reforming nationalists within the ruling landowning nobility to develop the economy quickly before agrarian and feudal Hungary would fall hopelessly behind others in the expected race for national survival. The best candidates for developing the economy were the non-status-bound, footloose Jews as well as non-Jewish immigrants from the West. Closely connected with the programme of modernisation was the desire to expand the number of Hungarian speakers in a country where non-Hungarians formed an absolute majority. German- and Yiddish-speaking Jews without an outside power to protect and incite them seemed eminently amenable to conversion into Hungarian nationals. On their side, the Jews—at least the more educated and more ambitious among them—had every reason to subscribe to this unwritten contract with the political elite, and did so with enthusiasm.

The outcome was an economic revolution and a rapid process of integration, even of assimilation, symbolised by the new synagogues which on national holidays were richly decorated with Hungarian national flags. The most successful among the Jews received noble, even baronial patents from Franz Joseph, the emperor-king. In 1910, when Jews made up less than five per cent of the country's population, fifteen per cent of the large landowners were Jews as were the vast majority of those leasing large estates from the titled nobility and the Church. And yet these figures do not include the converts to Christianity who

were most numerous among the Jewish elite. The majority of the medical doctors, journalists, lawyers in private practice, factory owners and businessmen were also Jews. The Neolog movement among Jews was a supreme expression of this trend to assimilate, but even the status-quo conservatives, and many of the Orthodox professed to be dedicated Hungarian patriots. Only the Hassidim, mostly in northeastern Hungary, and the handful of Zionists were of a different opinion. Add to the three mutually suspicious main Jewish religious movements the growing number of secular Jews and the not-very-numerous but highly active radical Jewish intellectuals, and it becomes clear that Jewry was far from united at that time—or at any time later. The radicals themselves were assimilated to the point of thinking of themselves as the best of Hungarians, but they repudiated the liberal-conservative Hungarian government as feudal-capitalist oppressors of workers, poor peasants and the ethnic minorities.

On the Christian front, not all were satisfied with these developments. Many in the Churches blamed the Jews for the state's arrogating to itself the education of children and the licensing of marriages. Simultaneously, members of the new non-Jewish urban middle class, realising that they could not easily compete with the Jews in business and the professions, demanded the state's help in the matter. There were also in Hungary, as elsewhere, plenty of those who harboured old-fashioned religious and new-fangled racial hatred toward the Jews. The Hungarian government vigorously suppressed all manifestations of extreme anti-Semitism but only as long as the Habsburg Monarchy lasted.

As testified by accounts in the *Encyclopedia,* the First World War brought the apogee of Jewish successes with thirty thousand Jews—one out of every five reserve officers—wearing the emperor's golden sash, but the war also brought accusations of Jewish draft dodging, shirking, cowardice, spying, black marketeering and revolutionary agitation. Scapegoats had to be found for the suffering, the death, the hunger, the defeat and the truncation of the country. Besides, it is true that because so many Jews belonged to the intelligentsia, they harboured a relatively high number of political activists and white-collar criminals.

Military defeat and the Monarchy's dissolution were followed by revolutions, in which the Hungarian Soviet Republic became the most notorious, especially as much of its leadership consisted of politicians of Jewish origin. Their often mindless politics and occasional ruthlessness left behind indelible hatreds for which all the Jews would have to pay the price. It is hard to say whether the Final Solution would have been such a popular undertaking without Béla Kun and company, but the Jewish people's commissars certainly provided the excuse for Christian revenge twenty-five years later.

Thanks to French and Romanian military intervention, the Communists' Red Terror was replaced, in the fall of 1919, by a far more brutal White Terror. In 1920, the former Austro-Hungarian admiral and White counter-revolutionary Miklós Horthy was proclaimed Regent of Hungary. Jewish communities were desperate

to see in him a replica of the benevolent Franz Joseph, but he himself constantly hesitated between old-fashioned correctness and fascistic tendencies. Under Horthy as a semi-strong man, periods of right-wing radicalism alternated with periods of consolidation and the revived memories of the "happy time of peace." On his official travels, Franz Joseph had insisted on paying hommage to every major synagogue; Horthy never went to one, but his county prefects, police captains and city mayors generally attended on the major Jewish holidays.

Beginning in 1938 (if we discount the *numerus clausus* law of 1920 regarding university attendance, which was made much milder a few years later) increasingly severe anti-Jewish laws were introduced, but they were often disregarded in order to assure continued economic development and to prevent the anarchy threatened by the far-right opposition to the right-wing government. Until March 19, 1944, when the German army marched into Hungary with the purpose of mobilising the nation for a last-ditch effort against the Red Army, the chances of Jewish survival looked favourable. It is true that about 60,000 of them had already been killed for various reasons which are well explained in Randolph Braham's *Introduction,* but there were still 760,000 Jews alive—a hundred thousand of them converts to Christianity—who had been living a fairly normal life. The big industrialists among them had made enormous profits by manufacturing arms for the German and Hungarian armies whereas many shopkeepers, artisans and employees had lost their licenses or positions. The entries in the *Encyclopedia* point clearly to the gradual impoverishment of the Jews in the provinces, mainly because governmental measures discriminated in favour of Christian shopkeepers, artisans and professionals. The *Encyclopedia* entries show that the Jewish population greatly declined in the rural areas during the inter-war years. As emigration was near impossible, Jews tended to flock to the cities.

Still, up to 1944, hardly any Jew was starving, and the Hungarian government stubbornly refused to hand over its Jews to the Third Reich. It is small wonder then that, following the German invasion, the Jewish congregations obeyed the German-Hungarian orders to provide the Central Jewish Council, and thus the state and municipal authorities, with a detailed account of every Jewish community in the country. The truly terrible thing is, as the *Encyclopedia* demonstrates, how greatly the reports submitted by the Jewish congregations contributed to the "success" of the Final Solution.

The *Encyclopedia* entries are nearly identical in their description of the deportation of nearly half a million Hungarians Jews, the great majority of them women, children and old people. Men between 18 and 48 had been called up for labour service, a still unexplored military measure that spared their lives at least until the Arrow Cross takeover in October; it also prevented any kind of violent resistance to the deportations. Besides, the Jews had been given a false sense of security by Adolf Eichmann, the Hungarian authorities and the Central Jewish Council. How to judge the actions of the Council is one of the most hotly disputed issues of the history of the Holocaust. I am afraid that the information the *Ency-*

clopedia entries offer on the subject does not help us in answering the question as to whether the Council had deliberately or inadvertently misled the Jewish masses by insisting that the orders from above be obeyed. We must always remember, however, that the government had hitherto generally protected Jewish lives.

The story of the deportation itself could not be more dismal. No sooner did the Regent appoint General Döme Sztójay, a German protégé, as prime minister on March 22, 1944, than the new government issued an avalanche of anti-Jewish edicts, all aimed at humiliating, debasing, despoiling and ultimately annihilating the Jews. At a time when it should have been clear to all that Germany had lost the war, that the Red Army would occupy Hungary, and that it would wipe out the Hungarian ruling elite, the government and the administration spent most of its time and energy on devising edicts for the confiscation of Jewish telephones, radios, horses, cars, motorcycles, bicycles, jewelry, stamp collections, bank accounts, furs, as well as licenses to practise any trade or profession. Jews were given reduced rate ration cards; they were excluded from all clubs, cinemas, theatres, swimming pools as well as from most restaurants, and were allowed into public baths only when no Christian was there. But even the latter privilege was of little value because in many cities either the mayor's office or the directorate of the public baths decided that at no time should Jews be allowed to take a bath.

Jews were obliged to wear a "canary yellow" star whose size, form and precise location on the left chest were described with loving bureaucratic accuracy. Several categories of Jews were exempted from the decrees, such as war widows and their children as well as veterans who had lost an arm, a leg or their eyes in fighting for the fatherland. But the exemptions too were of limited use because by the time the war hero's petition for exemption was granted, he had often been taken to Auschwitz while the post office returned the letter with the stamp: "Addressee moved without leaving a forwarding address."

Were the authorities playing a cruel game? In some cases, certainly; in other cases they might have ponderously collected evidence for their decision, not knowing that the ghettoes would close down within a few days.

The process was incredibly rapid indeed. Following a rigid timetable, which had been jointly set by Adolf Eichmann, the two Hungarian deputy ministers in charge of deportations and a Hungarian gendarmerie lieutenant colonel, the country's ten gendarmerie districts proceeded to assemble the Jews in hastily created ghettoes. They then moved them to brick factories or lumber yards outside the larger cities and finally took them to railroad stations where they were crammed 70 to 80 in a boxcar. The conditions in the ghettoes were generally atrocious—often far worse than the cruel conditions the governmental decrees had prescribed: too little water; too little food; extreme overcrowding in some of the worst flats and houses of the city. Yet this was paradise compared to conditions in the brickyards where the sheds had no walls, latrines had to be dug, and health care was non-existent. Torture and robbery by the authorities were

routine. In nearly every ghetto, brickyard and railroad station the gendarmes operated a so-called mint at which wealthier Jews were thrashed until they gave up their hidden gold. Beatings were not a part of the governmental programme either but were practised with abandon and can be explained at least in part by the anti-Semitic propaganda of the previous decades which had insisted that Jews were hoarding ill-gotten Hungarian wealth.

Nothing, I believe, illustrates better the hopeless immorality of the period than the fact that hundreds of licensed midwives and student-midwives, as well as many medical doctors, assisted the gendarmes in performing vaginal and anal searches on Jewish women for hidden jewels. It does not seem that a single midwife refused to perform the task, yet their punishment would have been none or very mild; just as there is no evidence that more than a handful of Christians hiding a Jew or his goods were sent to an internment camp with which the authorities threatened at that time. (Under Arrow Cross rule, this too would change.) Note that, according to official entries reproduced in the *Encyclopedia,* both doctors and midwives were paid a modest honorarium.

We note in the *Encylopedia* that besides Adolf Eichmann and his few dozen Gestapo "specialists" other SS men as well as some German soldiers participated in the deportations. Still, the main part of the job was performed by Hungarians, according to some estimates 200,000 of them, from the county prefects down through the crucially important deputy prefects and district sheriffs all the way to railroad officials and their crews, village clerks, teachers, members of the state youth organisation and volunteers. As for the rest of the population, eyewitness accounts vary; I have often read of crying peasant women and of locals trying to smuggle food into the ghetto for their former neighbours, but the *Encyclopedia* itself tells mainly of jeering villagers, an occasional stone thrown at the column of Jews, and mostly, boundless looting. The Jews were obliged to lock their houses and to hand over the keys to the authorities, but the villagers broke in anyway carrying off paintings, books, gramophones, pillow cases, whatever the rich Jews had and their neighbours at least claimed never to have had. But then such scenes occur everywhere at all times when the authorities incite the population against a section of their neighbours. More important and sadder were the many "humble petitions" requesting Jewish flats, houses, fields, shops, horses, dogs and businesses.

Fortunately, the *Encyclopedia* also tells other stories as that of the servant girl at Zalaegerszeg, Zala County, who stated that she would rather wear the yellow star than abandon her Jewish employers, for which she was sent to an internment camp. As the local newspaper commented: "Shouldering the fate of the Jews is to deny one's Hungarianness." (p. 1363) There was also the Catholic Bishop of Transylvania, Áron Márton, who in his sermons and in his letters to the authorities vigorously protested the persecution and the deportations of the Jews. But post-war stories to the contrary, there is no evidence of other bishops having

attempted to celebrate the mass in a ghetto for their co-religionaries. In general, the Churches maintained a deafening silence.

The Gestapo had already arrested hundreds of anti-Nazi politicians back in March 1944, many of them conservative aristocrats; also, several high state officials, especially among the county prefects, resigned or went into retirement, but this made no difference because their deputies took over immediately.

Individual decency aside, the springtime deportations show that Hungarian society in the provinces generally agreed with the proposition that Jews be made to disappear from the country. We do not know how many of the "onlookers" guessed or knew that the deportation amounted to a death sentence, but there seems to have been a consensus that "they would never again come back."

And yet, all was not unmitigated tragedy, just as it was not in all such countries within Hitler's Europe where there functioned a government allied to Germany and thus able to mould its Jewish policy to fit its own strategic goals. Only in Poland, German-occupied Russia, the Baltic countries and the Netherlands, where there were no such governments, did the Final Solution lead to almost total annihilation. In France, the Vichy government efficiently protected most of its native Jews. In Belgium, whose government was in exile, the presence of the king (and a relatively lenient German military administration) may have favourably influenced the situation of the Jews. In Italy, the Germans were able to grab Jews only following the collapse of Mussolini's original fascist regime, and even then the municipal authorities, clerics, nuns and the general population successfully hid the great majority of Jews. In Bulgaria, another ally of Germany, every single one of the country's fifty thousand Jews was protected, but the same government sent the Jews in the Bulgarian-occupied parts of Greece and Yugoslavia to Auschwitz. Slovakia delivered the absolute majority of its Jews to the gas chambers, but more or less successfully preserved the survivors. Romania at first engaged in its own horrendous Final Solution, but ended up protecting not only the survivors but also refugees from Hungary. Previously, it was Hungary that had harboured Jewish refugees from Austria, Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

In Hungary, following the partial completion of the deportation, there followed a crazy dance forward and back regarding the Final Solution, which is well related in the *Encyclopedia*. First, Horthy decided, for reasons much too complex to relate here, to forbid the deportation of the Jews of Budapest. Meanwhile, the Jewish labour service men were declared prisoners of war (!) which more or less guaranteed their safety. While their families were being gassed at Auschwitz, labour service men received ample food and the pay of ordinary soldiers. Back in 1942–1943, Jewish labour service men had been brutalised, even killed by their guards; in 1944, Jewish men between 18 and 48 were often taken off from the deportation trains and enlisted in the labour service. It is as if, in that year, the civilian and the military administrations—men basically of the same Christian middle-class background—exchanged their personalities: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde had changed roles.

In August 1944, the Regent replaced the radically anti-Semitic and pro-German Sztójay government with a new cabinet, several members of which favoured Horthy's plan to surrender to the invading Red Army. All this brought further improvement in the treatment of the surviving Jews. Inevitably, there ensued, on October 15, 1944, a coup d'état by a few SS men and parachutists; the Regent was forced to resign and to appoint the Arrow Cross leader Ferenc Szálasi as prime minister.

In October, as earlier in March 1944, the condition of the Jews worsened radically; Eichmann came back to direct the death march of some fifty thousand labour service men and Budapest Jewish civilians to the Austrian border, there to build tank traps and be killed in the process. The Jews who were left in Budapest, perhaps 120,000 strong, were either placed under the shaky protection of neutral legations, or were forced into a newly established ghetto. In addition, some thirty thousand Budapest Jews were hiding with Christians. Now the latter, too, often went into hiding because few had the inclination to die for Szálasi and his fascist regime. So there came into being some sort of complicity between Jews and Christians. In any case, Budapest had always been the "sinful city", that is, more liberal, more modern and less traditional than the provinces.

Now was also the time for the Hungarian resistance movement to flourish. Led by the politician Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, several in the movement were martyred under the Arrow Cross regime. Individuals in the Churches, the army and civilian life risked or even gave their lives for their Jewish compatriots. The list of Hungarian Righteous Gentiles is not at all short at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

By the Christmas of 1944, the Red Army was besieging the city in which Arrow Cross fanatics and ordinary criminals engaged in terror. But the municipal authorities, the police and even individual Arrow Cross members tried and often succeeded in protecting the Jews. The so-called international and the main ghetto were liberated in Pest in mid-January, and the last German-Hungarian stronghold in Buda fell to the Russians on February 13. Nazi and Arrow Cross terror continued in Western Hungary until the beginning of April when the last Germans and several hundred thousand Hungarians left the country. Survivors of Auschwitz and of later deportations were freed only in May from the most varied concentration camps.

The *Encyclopedia* tells well the story of the return of the survivors; the arrest, the trial and the exemplary punishment of many Nazi war criminals; and the Communist takeover in 1947–1948 which brought many persons of Jewish origin—but of the Marxist-Leninist persuasion—to absolute power in Hungary. The *Encyclopedia* also tells of the flaring up of anti-Semitism after the war. Post-war pogroms in Hungary were not as bad as those in Poland; they fit into the picture of general European unease with the return of the Jewish survivors and their possibly asking for the return of their stolen homes, jobs or silver spoons. In the following years, the majority of Hungarian Jews chose to emigrate; the last great group fled following the Soviet suppression of the 1956 revolution.

Today, most of the perhaps one hundred thousand persons who are of Jewish origin are assimilated to the point of non-recognition. Yet there is also a flourishing Jewish literary, cultural and political life as well as an ever more aggressive right-wing anti-Semitism. Clearly, the Jewish story is not over in Hungary.

We are, however, left with a major dilemma which the *Encyclopedia* does not attempt to answer. Why did it all happen? Why did police officers who had been sitting at the same table with wealthy Jewish citizens at municipal festivities turn against them with furor in 1944? Why did city mayors and midwives find pleasure in debasing people to the point of suicide? Part of the answer lies in religious and ideological anti-Semitism that emancipation laws and Jewish successes had actually aggravated. Another reason may be found in envy and greed, both that of the state and of many among the public. There was definitely a class-warfare character to the violent execution of the Final Solution in Hungary as there was to the post-war expropriation of the Hungarian-Germans and, subsequently, of the old Hungarian social elite and bourgeoisie. However, the ultimate answer lies, in my opinion, in the Europe-wide desire to put an end to the presence in their midst of ethnic and other minorities. In Western Europe, this had been achieved earlier, and mostly through assimilation. In addition, all Western European countries, except France, had kept most refugees, especially Jews, out of the country in the inter-war period. But Eastern Europeans had to cope in the same time frame with masses of refugees, and even those who were not refugees seemed to want to move constantly from one impoverished country to another, from city to country and then back to the city again.

Even bigger than the question of the refugees loomed that of the ethnic and religious minorities, their sum total often surpassing the number of the so-called dominant nation within the country. Most politicians and perhaps most people saw no room for a peaceful solution; force was to be used to rid the nation of the most uncomfortable and most defenseless minority, the Jews, but also of Ukrainians in Poland, Poles in Ukraine, Hungarians in Slovakia, Turks in Greece and Bulgaria, Greeks in Turkey, and Germans everywhere in Eastern Europe, at least eleven million of whom were expelled or killed after the war. Lately, we have witnessed how Serbs, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Albanians have got rid of each other.

Because of its liberal noble tradition and generous policies in the nineteenth century, Hungary could have been an exception and it was—more or less—until 1944. But then the same people who had been quite humane before, competed with each other in showing who could be more cruel to his Jewish fellow-citizens before sending them away to never-never land. So Hungary fared no better than other European countries; in fact, it was among the very poor performers. The crimes perpetrated in 1944 are unredeemable and still haunt the nation. ❧

Géza Jeszenszky

Roads Not Taken

Pál Pritz: *Az a rövid huszadik század. Történetpolitikai tanulmányok* (That Short Twentieth Century. Historico-Political Studies). Budapest, Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2005, 357 pp.

No period in the modern history of Hungary has been as replete with tragic turns as the 20th century; future generations are as likely to feel the repercussions of these tragedies as we feel their impact on our lives today. Although most educated Hungarians will agree with this statement there is much less agreement as to the whys and wherefores.

Since the restoration of freedom of speech in 1989, besides documented, creditable historical works a great many misleading explanations, half-truths, conspiracy theories, whitewashings and scapegoatings have appeared in the printed and electronic media. Chaos and uncertainty have replaced the former "class struggle" version of history in most Hungarians' minds, with the consequence that there is little evidence of a realistic historical consciousness, one that neither cherishes delusions nor wallows in national masochism.

As the Hungarian-American historian, John Lukacs, sees it, "In the past, it was precisely our failure to rightly appreciate the situation in Europe and the rest of the world which led to our great national tragedies [...] Our foreign policy was characterized not so much by realism as sentimentalism."[1]

Though there is no denying that it was the decisions and interests of the Great Powers—if you like, the tide of world history—which determined Hungary's fate in the 20th century, there is plenty of evidence that at the crucial points, the country's leaders did have a choice, at least between a bad and a worse option.

At its best, Hungarian historiography of the Seventies and Eighties was refreshingly free from ideological constraints and, after 1989–90, it was free to

1 ■ John Lukacs, *Magyar írások* [Writings about Hungary]. Budapest: Európa, 2007, p. 12.

Géza Jeszenszky

was Minister of Foreign Affairs (1990–94) and Ambassador to the U.S. (1998–2002). In September 2002 he resumed teaching history and international relations at the Budapest University of Economics (Corvinus University). He is also a Visiting Professor—teaching the history of Central Europe—at the College of Europe, Warsaw-Natolin, Poland and at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), Romania.

shed the last remnants of its "red" skin. Foreign relations especially have been a preferred field of research for earthbound historians to this day, being an area of study where one can follow indubitable facts all the way to their even more indubitable consequences. Indeed, Hungarian history cannot be understood without due attention to its international context, a dimension about which the Hungarian public has, traditionally, had but the vaguest of notions.

Several excellent works in diplomatic history have appeared in the past fifteen odd years, some of them surveys of the foreign policy of post-1918 Hungary. Besides Ignác Romsics, whose research embraces the entire spectrum of 20th-century Hungarian history, Pál Pritz (b.1944) has contributed the most to our understanding of the subject. In this, Pritz is a partner to Romsics rather than his rival: Romsics—though he gives diplomatic history special consideration in his papers and books, building, as often as not, on his own primary research—is principally interested in general history and treats Hungary's moments of high drama with greater detachment than his colleague.

Pritz started doing extensive primary research and producing studies in the 1970s, while working in an administrative function at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Since 1989, he has published, on an average, a significant work every two years. His main interest is the foreign policy of the Horthy era, but his treatment of the preceding decades, and of the subsequent fifty years, is no less expert. His latest book, a volume of essays treating the major foreign policy dilemmas facing Hungary in the 20th century—decisions which are still hotly debated today—is based mostly on his own primary research. Since Pál Pritz belongs to no political or ideological camp, his findings stand a chance of becoming the basis of a non-schematic and realistic interpretation that most people can accept.

Pritz's approach is well illustrated by the abstract in which he summed up the paper he presented at the Congress of Hungarology held in Finland in 2001.

> Though there has not been a single century which did not seriously try the staying power of the Hungarians who settled the Carpathian Basin over 1100 years ago, none have been as fraught with cataclysms and reversals of fortune as the just passed 20th century. Though Hungary, within the dualist framework of the Monarchy, managed to achieve not only the maximum (possible) national independence, but also adequate safeguards for its liberties in the face of demands made by the Pan-Slav and Pan-German movements, the vast majority of the Hungarian political elite, from the turn of the century on, were busy trying to break up the framework of Dualism. We might venture the suggestion that this political misjudgement, in other words, this insufficient erudition in, and misreading of, foreign affairs also contributed to the inevitable dissolution of the Monarchy—and within it, the Hungary of St Stephen—which occurred at the will of the Entente and the non-Hungarian nationalities living in Hungary.[2]

2 ■ Programme of the Fifth International Congress of Hungarian Studies, Jyväskylä, Finland, 6–10 August, 2001, as distributed to the participants.

Pritz, like this reviewer, believes that history writing is not an end in itself, but serves "the common good, for it posits knowledge in place of ignorance and true statements in place of false notions, dispels the mist of legends and teaches us to see clearly" (p. 49). "Seeing clearly" helps citizens to make sense of national affairs and world affairs, and to make the right choices. Ignorance of the lessons of history has led to the downfall of many a leader, many a politician, and many a country. Though Stalin, Pritz tells us, had never heard the 1805 Talleyrand comment that "if the Russians were ever masters of Hungary, they would be omnipotent in Europe", he instinctively acted accordingly. The trouble was that Stalin's allies during the Second World War had never heard of Talleyrand's warning either, nor of Bismarck's, who had said the same thing, but in relation to Bohemia.

"Hungary's place in Europe in the 20th century involved an immense loss of status as compared to the previous century"—so reads the opening thesis of the paper referred to above (which also appears in the volume under review, pp. 115–116). It would be difficult to argue with this statement; the whys of it, however, are another matter.

Pritz, as we have seen, considers the dissolution of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Monarchy—and within it, of the historical Kingdom of Hungary—to have been inevitable. And yet later, in connection with several subsequent events, he convincingly disputes the notion of *"sic fata volunt"*, i.e. the notion that there was no way that modern Hungary could have escaped its fate. Why, then, should the dissolution of Hungary, at least in the way it occurred, be considered to have been inescapable?

Pritz himself states that a more far-sighted, more liberal policy on the part of the Hungarian ruling elite during the decades of Dualism would have set the stage for some kind of compromise with the Slovaks, the Transylvanian Romanians and the Croats. These nationalities, we might add, asked for no more before 1914 than the ethnic Hungarians who find themselves outside the borders of present-day Hungary are asking for today: comprehensive rights to their own language and culture, autonomy and co-nation status; but the pre-1914 Hungarian majority were as deaf to their demands as today's Romanians, Slovaks and Serbs are to the demands of the ethnic Hungarians living within their borders. Is it true, then, that a nation caught up in its own national ideals is incapable of legitimating the national apirations of another? And was Mihály Réz right to insist—as opposed to the idealist Oszkár Jászi—that concessions to the minority nationalities would not put an end to their demands, but would only serve to strengthen them; and that once they had achieved their self-determination, they would turn against other nations' liberties? "First freedom, then domination", he wrote.[3] Before 1914, thus, Réz, advocated a more absolute Hungarian supremacy.

R. W. Seton-Watson, André Chéradame and Louis Eisenmann, the British and French champions of Hungary's minority nationalities, were strongly critical of the

3 ■ Mihály Réz, *A történelmi realizmus rendszere* [Historical Realism as a System]. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1924, pp. 59–63.

official Hungarian minorities policy (which was much less hawkish than Réz and others would have liked to see) but, up to 1914, demanded no more than that the Nationalities Act of 1868 be conscientiously adhered to and Hungary—in respect of culture, education, public administration, etc.—function as a true multinational state. It was only after the outbreak of the war that they started calling for the break-up of the Monarchy into small nation-states. Judging by the relatively recent dissolution of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, we have to concede that sooner or later, the non-Hungarian-inhabited parts of historical Hungary would have seceded; nevertheless, given a more tolerant, more far-sighted Hungarian policy, secession would not have involved the severance of several million ethnic Hungarians from the Hungarian body politic, nor would it have resulted in enduring animosities that are as difficult to resolve as they are easy to exploit.

Hungarians have a great penchant for seeking—and finding—scapegoats for their defeats and miscalculations. Hungary's collapse in late October 1918 led to the truncation of the country within two months, essentially without resistance, and practically without as much as a shot being fired. We are still very far from an objective, widely-accepted analysis of how this could have come about, and who was responsible for it. It is convenient, but by no means constructive, to see certain individuals—Prime Minister István Tisza, or his assassins, for that matter, Béla Linder or Mihály Károlyi—as the source of all the nation's troubles, but it is no better to blame the irrational anti-Hungarian sentiment of the great powers (Great Britain and France), or the untiring and systematic campaign of defamation that Hungary's neighbours had been conducting for generations.[4]

The "historical necessity" theory is no less one-sided and no less escapist. It is unrealistic to assume that ideological scapegoats—excessive liberalism (as the historian Gyula Szekfű saw it) or the "remnants" of feudalism (as the Marxists would have it) were the gravediggers of the Monarchy.[5]

The position closest to being accepted today focuses on three determinative factors among the causes of Trianon: the wartime policies of the Great Powers, the outcome of the war, and the Great Powers' post-war plans. Both Pritz and Ignác Romsics, who has published a short summary of the topic,[6] share this view, adding that by late 1918, the non-Hungarian peoples of the Monarchy would be content with nothing less than their own independent nation-states.

Though there is an enormous literature dealing with the causes of the First World War, and the question of responsibility continues to provoke interminable discussion, only hardline Marxists have ever maintained that the outbreak of the war was inevit-

4 ■ This latter interpretation, which was widely accepted in the Horthy era, was revived by Gábor Koltay's film *Trianon*. Appealing mostly to emotions, the film fails entirely to deal with the real reasons for the terms of the Treaty.

5 ■ László Tőkéczki, "Mi volt a baj a dualizmusban? A 'feudalizmus' vagy a 'liberalizmus'?" [What Was the Matter with Dualism? "Feudalism" or "Liberalism"?] *Kortárs,* February 1992.

6 ■ Ignác Romsics, *A trianoni békeszerződés* [The Treaty of Trianon]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.

able, a matter of historical "necessity". We cannot prove, nor disprove, that the history of Europe, and so of the whole world, would have been different had the assassination in Sarajevo never been attempted, or if it had failed. We can no more adjudge what the future might have held for historical Hungary, had there been no First World War.

> Political history teaches us that a realistic historico-political approach is a *sine qua non* of success in politics. Picking and choosing examples from the, at first glance, all-legitimating storehouse of the past might bring tactical success for a time, but in the long run, historicising of this sort always backfires. (p.120)

Pritz rightly notes that Mihály Károlyi was guilty of naivety, of harbouring illusions about the victorious Entente, in short, was guilty of misjudging the post-war balance of power.[7] He is quick to add, however, that practically the entire country, Albert Apponyi, head of the delegation at the Peace Conference included, harboured the same illusion. Speaking of Béla Kun, Pritz follows Zsuzsa Nagy, Mária Ormos and Ignác Romsics in maintaining that it is unwarranted to blame him for the terms of the Treaty of Trianon, since the borders drawn at the peace conference had nothing to do with what the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic did: except for its western border, the map of the new Hungary was pretty well drawn by March 1919.

At the same time, it might be well to reiterate again that in late 1918, early 1919, Hungary could have won itself significantly more advantageous borders had it taken a hard line, rallied its army and put up a fight. The documents I myself have read in British archives confirm that the Entente would not have sacrificed a single soldier to meet the Czechs' or Romanians' demands. That effective Hungarian resistance was confined to a few isolated incidents had a lot more to do with the mood of the masses and the soldiers' councils, than any ill-advised statement by Béla Linder, the minister of war after the Michaelmas Daisy Revolution, or the illusions cherished too long by Károlyi and his government. It is time, thus, to make today's Hungarians understand, especially the minority that is particularly susceptible to the old "explanations", that we ourselves, or more exactly, our forefathers, bear the brunt of the responsibility for the loss of historical Hungary and the establishment of ethnically unjustified borders.

> Everyone is guilty in this, at every level of leadership in Hungarian society. [...] Everyone who was capable of forgetting the realities of what states were about and, like a child, chased a will-o'-the-wisp. Everyone who lived in ignorance of the very things that nations are based on: strength, self-criticism, and cohesion.[8]

7 ■ Freud's comment in late 1918 is more than telling: "I don't know what to make of this uneducated people's unruliness and immaturity. I have never been an unconditional supporter of the *ancien régime,* but I doubt that one can consider it to be a sign of political wisdom that of all those many counts, they've killed the most intelligent [István Tisza], while the most ignorant one [Mihály Károlyi] they've made prime minister." Ferenc Erős, "Ferenczi Sándor és kora" [Sándor Ferenczi and his Age], in Ferenc Erős, ed., *Ezzé lett magyar hazátok* [This Is What's Become of Your Hungarian Homeland]. Budapest: Osiris, 2007, p. 164.

8 ■ Miklós Bánffy, *Erdélyi történet,* III. [A Transylvanian Story, vol. 3]. Kolozsvár: Polis, 2002, pp. 274–5. (English edition: *They Were Divided.* Arcadia, 2001.)

Alas, Miklós Bánffy's verdict is dead right.

Pritz perfectly understands the shock of the Treaty of Trianon, "that dreadful document" (p.118); but is he right in regularly castigating the politicians of the Horthy era because their political programme "had the unreachable goal of resurrecting the Hungary of St Stephen"? Perhaps that was their goal, their dream; but was it their programme?

Beginning with Pál Teleki and Miklós Bánffy, Hungarian premiers and their foreign ministers clutched at every straw that promised some favourable modification of the new borders. We know that at the secret negotiations with the French which had preceded the signing of the Treaty, the Hungarians were ready to cede areas with Slovak, Serbian and Romanian majorities, and even the Székelyföld! However, Czechoslovakia, for its part, never made a sincere offer to return the Csallóköz (Žitný ostrov), which even today has a predominantly ethnic Hungarian population. There was great rejoicing, for instance, when the small town of Somoskőújfalu (10 square kilometers or so) was reannexed to Hungary in 1924, thanks to the League of Nations border adjustment commission.

The generation which had come of age in Greater Hungary learned a history which showed ethnic Hungarians to have been the moving force even in regions where they did not form a majority. It was a generation steeped in a culture that owed more to the severed areas than to the regions that comprised post-Trianon Hungary; this generation, in short, that had suffered the shock of Trianon could not, in its heart of hearts, give up hopes of seeing the restoration of Hungary's integrity. We might well ask, however, how wise it was of Hungary's policy-makers never to have publicly stated what adjustment of the country's borders they would have considered to be sufficient to take the matter off the agenda once and for all. And we might well ask how plausible it is that Czechoslovakia would have returned the Csallóköz if Hungary had agreed to seek no further adjustment of the common borders. What we do know for a fact is that the partial—mainly ethnically-based—border revisions effected between 1938 and 1941 were wholeheartedly celebrated in Hungary, with never a suggestion that they fell short of expectations.

It has long been Pritz's position that there was a significant distinction between the mentality of the foreign service apparatus inherited from the Monarchy and the new, perhaps "more national", diplomats. A typical example of the latter group was András Hory, Hungary's minister to Rome and then to Warsaw, and the head of the delegation sent to negotiate with Romania in August of 1940. Describing the difference between the two groups in terms of the centuries-old *labanc–kuruc* (i.e. pro-Habsburg versus independence) conflict is, it seems to me, a little far-fetched; it is more than far-fetched to compare the former to those seeking to come to terms with the neighbouring states, and the latter to the intransigent irredentists.

Writing about Gusztáv Gratz, the legitimist foreign minister of the first Teleki cabinet, Pritz notes that he "adhered to the *labanc* position", and highlights the difference between him and István Bethlen, who was more of a *kuruc* at heart. Of course, someone who knows the Hungarian history of the first half of the 20th

century as well as Pritz will be careful not to pigeonhole. In the study discussing Gratz and Bethlen's relationship, Pritz points out that, though their political philosophy differed in many respects, Gratz was close to Bethlen for years—just as the foreign relations review *Külügyi Szemle* edited by Gratz had close ties to Bethlen's *Magyar Szemle*. Gratz survived Mauthausen and wrote a book about the post-war years (which, however, only appeared in 2001).[9]

One can regret the fact that, as Pritz put it, "as a direct consequence of the Red Army's presence in Hungary, Gratz made changes in his book which seriously compromised his account" (p. 195). For my part, however, I think that this sober, diligent, ethnic-German Hungarian patriot would have deserved more sympathetic treatment.

A hardline approach in the face of insuperable odds lacks credibility, and is, in fact, ludicrous; it is also irresponsible and poor politics. Pritz is right to point out the destructiveness of a political climate that subordinated everything to the cause of revision. Indeed, Pál Teleki, who was prime minister at the time Hungary reannexed the predominantly Hungarian-inhabited strip of Czechoslovakia, and then later, northern Transylvania, had no illusions about the danger of Hungarian society's obsession with integral revision. In his diary György Barcza, Hungarian minister to London at the time, quotes Teleki as having said in early 1940:

> Our people have gone quite mad! Let's get it all back! By whatever means, with whoever's help, at whatever cost! The Germans know this well, and are making the most of it. People have lost their better judgement listening to all the terrible revisionist propaganda: the soldiers want to fight alongside the Germans, and have the Regent's ear; today, the revisionists and the army are one, they're the ones who'll get us into trouble. [...] Revisionism will be the death of us; it's revisionism that will embroil us in the war.[10]

Of course, Pritz is not saying that Hungary should have (or could have) revoked its demands for the readjustment of its borders, or not taken advantage of the opportunities presented. He does point out, however, that after Munich, Hungary could have come to an agreement with the Slovaks about their returning an area not much smaller than was, in fact, covered by the First Vienna Award, and that in 1940, the Soviet Union should have been asked to be a party to settling the matter of Transylvania. Pritz here is not playing "What if"—a thoroughly unprofessional game as regards history. What he is saying is that though Hungary's entering the Second World War and the ensuing national tragedy can be said to have been inevitable, the country did have choices at several points along the way, alternatives which, in retrospect, would obviously have been the better choice.[11] From the essays in this

9 ■ Gusztáv Gratz, *Magyarország a két háború között* [Hungary Betweeen the Two Wars]. Budapest: Osiris, 2001.

10 ■ György Barcza, *Diplomata-emlékeim 1911–1945* [Diplomatic Memoirs, 1911–1945]. Budapest: Helikon, 1994. I. 445–6.

11 ■ György Ránki was the first Hungarian historian to have called attention to this in studies written in the first half of the 1980s: "Mozgástér és kényszerpálya" [Range and Constraint]. *Valóság*, 1983/11; "A vonakodó csatlós – vagy az utolsó csatlós?" [The Unwilling Satellite, or the Last Satellite?], in *A Harmadik Birodalom árnyékában* [In the Shadow of the Third Reich]. Budapest: Magvető, 1988.

volume, and from Pritz's earlier writings, we can cull some of the most important turning-points where he thinks a better choice could have been made: Hungary shouldn't have joined the German–Italian–Japanese Axis on November 20, 1940, and then concluded a treaty of "perpetual friendship" with Yugoslavia; had it not, it would not have found itself in an impossible situation after the coup d'état of March 1941, which removed Prince Paul, the Yugoslav regent. Hungary shouldn't have rushed to declare war on the Soviet Union, and shouldn't have yielded to German pressure and practically declared war on the USA after Pearl Harbour. And it shouldn't have agreed to send the Second Hungarian Army to the front.

With the wisdom of hindsight, it's easy to declare the obvious. But Pritz does not judge precipitously or off-handedly, as his brilliant essay of over a hundred pages on the political career and trial of László Bárdossy well demonstrates. Bárdossy was promoted from his civil service job to the diplomatic corps by Pál Teleki, who then made him his minister of foreign affairs. Bárdossy saw very well that the Hungarian–Yugoslav Treaty of Perpetual Friendship was a liability which could yet lead to serious complications. When in late March of 1941 it did, Bárdossy spent what would prove to be the last few hours of Teleki's life with the Prime Minister, discussing the probability of a British declaration of war. It was in a much-deteriorated political climate—Germany, Bárdossy knew, had already decided to overrun Yugoslavia—that he accepted Horthy's offer of the premiership, motivated more by vainglory, perhaps, than an awareness of the enormity of the task he had undertaken.

Bárdossy approved the Hungarian army's march into Bačka in the Voivodina—a move that Teleki had decried as "corpse plundering" in his suicide note—on the grounds that Yugoslavia was disintegrating and that Serbian planes had, in fact, bombed Hungary. All the grand old men of the establishment endorsed the move: the moderate Bethlen, Kálmán Kánya, and even Miklós Bánffy. In less than two months, Bárdossy was faced with a dilemma on which turned the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and which would determine the country's future for generations: should Hungary join the war against the Soviet Union? Pritz convincingly shows that it was Horthy and not the hesitant Bárdossy who decided on the fatal "Yes", applauded by the cabinet and most members of parliament; Bárdossy himself changed his mind about resigning and stayed on as premier. He justified the move to himself with the argument that he was keeping the country out of even more serious commitments, ones that politicians more servile than himself were willing to make under German pressure. Unfortunately, Pritz tells us, Bárdossy was "constitutionally incapable" of resisting Germany's ever more insistent demands; "what would have been needed was the imperturbable robustness and self-confidence of Miklós Kállay" (p. 274). An accomplished and experienced diplomat like Bárdossy, Pritz argues, should have known better than to insult the Soviet foreign minister, Molotov, by failing to acknowledge his gesture of June 23, 1941 when the Soviet Foreign Minister offered support over the Hungarian claims to Transylvania in exchange for Hungary's neutrality. Neither should he have given an offhanded reply to Pell, the American Minister to Hungary after Pearl Harbour. And

mostly, he should have known better than to repeatedly give in to German demands.

Bárdossy was no Nazi, and had no sympathy for their aims, but he saw Hungary's future as best guaranteed by the victory of Germany (which was never quite certain). Yet, he should at least have felt in his bones what the Nazi leadership really thought of Hungary. It was only after the war was over that the German plans for Europe surfaced; most Hungarians still have no idea about any of this, though Pritz published a book on the subject in 1999.[12] In the volume under review, Pritz quotes and comments on a memorandum written in November 1941 by Albrecht Haushofer, one of the fathers of geopolitics:

> "If we want peace in Central Europe, then we need not just to oppose the latest Hungarian demands, but to revoke, in part, the revisions that have already been effected." Except for the areas returned to Hungary by the terms of the First Vienna Award, he wanted to "take everything back". (p. 161)

Pritz gives an exemplary analysis of Bárdossy's political career and of his conduct before the people's tribunal. He makes no attempt to trivialise the grave mistakes Bárdossy made during his year as premier, and then as a member of parliament, but he does show us character traits that deserve our appreciation. Speaking before the tribunal, Bárdossy accepted his responsibility but denied his guilt, pointing out that the country had been on a predetermined course. This kind of determinism, however, is what the entire corpus of Pritz's works of diplomatic history refutes: "Though the general direction was inevitable, there indeed was some range of action." (p. 327)

Personally, I was delighted to see in what careful detail Pritz deals with the question of Hungary's image abroad, demonstrating its importance by analysing the history of the last years of the war, and the subsequent peace negotiations. István Bethlen's plan for post-war Central Europe, drawn up in 1940, starts with the necessity of convincing the West of the legitimacy of Hungary's revisionist ideas. Analysing the document, Pritz has disregarded information available only with hindsight, and is quite indulgent in his assessment of Bethlen's unrealistic, deluded plans. But he does point out how thoroughly even a politician of Bethlen's stature could fail to look beyond Europe, and how very mistaken his analysis of the situation in Central Europe was. *Mutatis mutandis,* the same could be said of practically every one of Hungary's anglophile inter-war politicians, those who would be involved toward the end of the war in the failed attempt to defect from the Axis. Neither Horthy, nor Kállay, nor even Aladár Szegedy-Maszák was aware of how radically the Allies' picture of Hungary had changed after the summer of 1941, nor is there any evidence of such awareness in any of the numerous wartime memoranda Hungary sent to any of the Western Powers. Just what the true situation was we know from Gyula Juhász's thoroughly-documented work published over thirty years ago,[13] and

12 ■ Pál Pritz, *Pax Germanica. Német elképzelések Európa jövőjéről a második világháborúban* [Pax Germanica. German Plans for the Future of Europe during World War II]. Budapest: Osiris, 1999.
13 ■ Gyula Juhász, ed., *Magyar–brit titkos tárgyalások 1943-ban* [Hungarian–British Secret Negotiations in 1943]. Budapest: Kossuth, 1987.

yet it is almost as if even some professional historians believed that it depended on Churchill or Roosevelt's good or ill will whether or not Hungary would become a Soviet satellite, or that it would have been possible to ward off the border adjustments of the 1947 peace treaty, that "second Trianon", with a different policy, a different conduct of negotiations after 1945.[14]

Hungary's post-war fate was decided by Stalin and his advisers (if such there were) in 1941, right after Hungary entered the war; the conclusive moment was the decision on the Second Front made at the Teheran Conference in 1943. Churchill did not "sell out" Hungary with the "percentage agreement" of 1944, but tried to salvage something of the British (i.e. Western) influence in Central Europe. Even in the matter of Hungary's borders, it was Stalin who overruled the modest concessions suggested in the British-American proposals. These are details that Pritz does not say much about, since they have been addressed by other historians, primarily Ignác Romsics.[15] One cannot reasonably disagree with the analysis Pritz offered in his study on Hungary's place in the 20th century:

> There is no doubt that, once again, Hungarian foreign-policy makers had very few options between 1945 and 1948; as for the years 1949–1956, it is something of a euphemism to speak of a Hungarian foreign policy. [...] The Kádár régime, though born in treachery, filth and blood, attempted, in the longer term, to make peace with the people, and accordingly, to implement the programme of 1956 to some degree. The degree of freedom of action he had in domestic politics János Kádár had to buy from Moscow with an absolutely servile foreign policy: for many years, he even sent his would-be diplomats to study in Moscow. This was a slap in the face to the Hungarian nation's will to freedom, as was the fact that practically to its last days, the [Kádár] régime proved totally insensitive to the policies of forced assimilation to which the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring nations were subject.[16]

On the other hand, Pritz sees it to have been to Kádár's credit that all his talk about internationalism notwithstanding, "it may be assumed that prior to 1956, he clearly saw that 'internationalism', at the hands of the Moscow ideologues, had turned into the thief's cloak of Soviet imperialism". (p. 137)

There is no way of telling if indeed Kádár could have done more to support Dubček in 1968, as so many Hungarians then felt he should. But Pritz is right to think that he need not have given up the 1968 reform of the economy so easily, and that he could have showed more courage in the matter of the neighbouring states' Hungarian minorities.

14 ■ The otherwise excellent Gábor Vincze seems to make this mistake in his "Álmodozások kora. Tervek, javaslatok az 'erdélyi kérdés' megoldására 1945–46-ban" [A Time of Dreaming. Plans and Recommendations in 1945–46 for Solving the "Question of Transylvania"]. *Limes*, 1997/2, pp. 59–81.
15 ■ See Ignác Romsics, ed., *Wartime American Plans for a New Hungary*. Boulder, Colorado, distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1992. East European Monographs, No CCCLIV.; Ignác Romsics, ed., *20th Century Hungary and the Great Powers*. Boulder, Colorado, distributed by Columbia University Press, New York, 1995. East European Monographs, No CDXVII; as well as two collections of his studies: Múltról a mának [For the Present, about the Past]. Budapest: Osiris, 2004; and *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében* [Our Place and Destiny in the Danube Basin]. Budapest: Osiris, 2005.
16 ■ See Note 2.

The summary account Pritz has given on the foreign policies of the three post-1990, politically very different, governments (on which there have been intensive debates) is so diplomatic that it does not hurt the susceptibilities even of their main players.

The study entitled "Hungarian Foreign Policy and Hungary's Ethnic Minorities 1945–1993" deals with issues that are still relevant today. Pritz is highly critical of the line of argument behind the post-1945 deportation of the country's German citizens, and points out that Hungary's ethnic minority population as a whole declined as a consequence. He has nothing but praise, however, for the 1993 Minorities Act, which, "in respect of liberality and progressiveness, can legitimately be likened to the similar Act of 1868". (p. 177)

The studies in the book under review show Pritz to be an outstanding historian of foreign affairs, well-versed in political theory and historiography. His essay on the correspondence between François Furet and Ernst Nolte is the occasion of a clear-headed, even-handed analysis of the ideological similarities and differences between fascism, nazism and communism. His portrait of Carl Schmitt, on the other hand, is an opportunity to show that the "dictatorship-intelligentsia relationship" teaches concrete lessons of absolute relevance to our post-Communist times.

Still in the same vein, the opening study in the volume, first presented in the form of an address to the Academy of Sciences, deals with what he sees as problematic in contemporary Hungarian history writing: it took courage for Pritz to speak his mind on the subject, and it also caused a minor outrage. Pritz was strongly critical of the "postmodern" approach, which clearly distinguishes "the past" from "history", in that innumerable different accounts (histories) of the past are possible. He presents philosophical arguments to contend that it is possible to give a creditable account of the past, and that understanding its own past contributes to society's healthy self-identity. In a world where Hungarian historians have shaken off ideological fetters, the new-found freedom of interpretation does not relativise the past, Pritz argues, but refines the various accounts of it, and makes them more objective. Pritz comes out in defence of what could be called "untrendy" tenets: that history is a national discipline; that political history is not obsolete; that political history is still the most popular branch of historiography, and that only narrow-minded, nationalist, politically-motivated forms of political history have been discredited. As he sees it, Hungarian society, which traditionally has had at best a superficial interest in the world abroad, should realise the vital importance of the knowledge and understanding of world history, and of international economic, social and intellectual trends.

Reading Pritz, and the promising works of the new generation of young historians, a fellow-historian like me, who has tried his hand at politics, can regret only that there are so few who read the many fine historical works being published and even fewer of those who read them learn from these histories. Yet, a decisive question for our future is how informed Hungarians will be in the next few decades when it comes to thinking about politics, and especially international politics. ❧

Balázs Ablonczy

Recovering a Lost Tradition

Baron Móric Kornfeld: *Reflections on Twentieth Century Hungary: A Hungarian Magnate's View,* ed. Ágnes Széchenyi, Wayne, NJ: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, 2007.
Katalin Kádár-Lynn: *Tibor Eckhardt: His American Years 1941–1972.* Boulder, Co: East European Monographs, 2007.

Many Hungarian historians have reached the conclusion that the regime change was not abruptly brought about in 1990, in politics, but had its tentative beginnings a good deal earlier, somewhere around the mid-sixties, when a reassessment of the hardline Marxist-Leninist narrative proceeded in conjunction with experimentation in economic reform through what was labelled the New Economic Mechanism. Its permitting of "private initiatives", a faltering recognition of capitalism, did not mean that the old heroes of capitalism were to regain their place in the national memory. Public opinion, just as historians, were for a long time held in thrall by egalitarian prejudices. Indeed, to this day, there have been no satisfactory histories devoted to key figures in the heyday of capitalism in Hungary such as Manfréd Weiss, Jenő Vida or Adolf Ulmann. (For that matter, a comprehensive scholarly biography has yet to be undertaken in regard to such central twentieth-century figures as the Stalinist dictator Mátyás Rákosi, or Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of Hungary's native Nazi Arrow Cross party, or Miklós Horthy, the head of state for a quarter of a century.) It is only comparatively recently that credence has been given to the idea that the landed aristocracy and the (partly Jewish) upper-middle class might have done more than just "shamelessly exploit the proletariat"; that they might have created lasting values because they farmed with up-to-date methods, or were generous sponsors and philanthropists and managed to be both cosmopolitan and patriotic.

Although various studies on the sociological and economic aspects of those topics by the likes of László Varga, György Lengyel, György Kövér and Ágnes Pogány have hardly been widely read, a sign of gathering interest was the commercial success of *Sokszínű kapitalizmus* (Multi-hued Capitalism, 2004, see review in *HQ* 179), edited by Marcell Sebők, which sold out within days. Another is the rediscovery of Gyula Batthyány, a painter of aristocratic parentage, who was the victim of a show trial and spent five years in prison; an excellent album devoted to him, edited by Péter Molnos and also published in English

---

Balázs Ablonczy
is a research fellow at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He edits the historical journal Kommentár.
His Pál Teleki—The Life of a Controversial Hungarian *was published by Columbia University Press in 2007.*

translation, came out in a popular series last year, published by the daily *Népszabadság*. (It is worth noting that this rediscovery should be espoused by a left-wing paper, rather than by any of the right-wing media.)

Thus at least a segment of the public has at last begun to assimilate the fact that the reason why Hungarians scattered to every quarter of the globe during the twentieth century was because they were driven away by a Hungarian state that pandered to totalitarianism of one shade or another—often enough obliged to leave to avoid being killed by that same state. "A simple Siggie might be keen to go, but a Count Széchenyi feels obliged to stay," said Zsigmond Széchenyi, whose books about his exploits before the Second World War as a big-game hunter in East Africa were standard reading fare for generations of children. In the late Forties and early Fifties, however, Széchenyi was forcibly resettled and subjected to sustained abuse and humiliation. The nullifying of people such as him, the dispersal of their possessions and the squandering of their intellectual legacy are subjects that people are loath to address. This may well be the reason why there has been very little research into Hungary's exiles and why, even today, it is not uncommon for the word "dissident" to be applied to them, with all the pejorative overtones the term acquired when it took root in the Kádár era.

Opinion polls indicate that the Hungarian public are proudest, alongside the country's sporting achievements, of scientific accomplishments and most particularly of Nobel laureates of Hungarian origin (even though, with two notable exceptions—the biochemist Albert Szent-Györgyi and the writer Imre Kertész—the work for which they received their awards was not done in Hungary). In spite of this, there is still no public institution that systematically concerns itself with the several millions of the Hungarian diaspora, and which surveys and preserves the legacy they have handed down. There have been, and are, isolated attempts, such as the Lakitelek People's College Emigration Collection, the National Széchényi Library's Manuscript Archive, or the assistance given by the Ithaca Programme that, for a time, was financed by the National Cultural Fund. Having myself had first-hand experience of trawling through the papers and library of an émigré Hungarian aristocrat rescued from a skip in Paris, I am only too well aware that we are literally past the eleventh hour when it comes to putting proper arrangements in place.

It is quite hard to classify by genre these memoirs of Baron Móric Kornfeld's, whose publication is due to the efforts of the Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, based at Wayne, New Jersey. The selection of documents within it perhaps reflects most strongly the hand of the compiler and editor. Ágnes Széchenyi dedicated her previous book, *Menedékház* (Refuge, 2004), to the memory of Márta Sárközi, the wife of the well-known writer and poet György Sárközi, who herself was active in literary and social life. That volume was a resourceful blend of personal recollections, letters and scholarly exploration of the source materials. This same mosaic-like approach to presenting her subject also dominates this portrait of Móric Kornfeld (1882–1967), banker, collector and patron of the arts. The American edition is fuller in some respects (for instance, it includes a previously unpublished 1918 essay by him, and also the reminiscences of his son, the translator, Thomas J. DeKornfeld), but more selective in others (it omits several papers on specialist topics as well as many writings by Kornfeld himself that call for a detailed knowledge of Hungary's domestic politics). As it is, it shows many affinities to

a Hungarian documentary volume *Az Andrássy úttól a Park Avenue-ig* (From Andrássy Avenue to Park Avenue) published by Daisy Chorin-Strasser and András D. Bán in 1999, not long before Bán's tragically early death in 2001 at the age of 38,[1] which memorialises one of Kornfeld's relatives, Ferenc Chorin, who was president of the National Association of Industrialists in the early twentieth century.

Móric Kornfeld was the sort of twentieth-century figure who, under more fortunate circumstances, would have earned the gratitude of generations to come: he would have had a square in Budapest, a library and a scholarship named after him; his bust would be given pride of place at his former mansion at Iregszemcse, or at the villa (admittedly rented) in Lendvay utca in Budapest, which now houses the French embassy. None of this has happened, though that is something that we could certainly do something about. The highly discerning industrialist and banker died far from home and, apart from a narrow circle of family and friends (remnants of the old world he had been part of), unknown and unmourned. Ágnes Széchenyi has tracked down and collected all the source material connected with Kornfeld's life that is to be found in Hungary and in the possession of his heirs, including whatever could be picked up at the family properties in Ireg and Rakovice in modern-day Slovakia. In her 94-page introduction, with copious references, the editor pinpoints Kornfeld's place within Hungarian intellectual and political history and sketches in the family background, the network of friends, Kornfeld's pastimes and the standpoints that he espoused.

He was in fact a typical member of that élite caste of Jewish descent who, for decades on end, were at the receiving end of brickbats and insults for their activities, whether as patrons of the arts or as leading lights of the industrial and financial worlds. Marxists saw them as soulless exploiters of their workers, as the *haute bourgeoisie;* the extreme right wing saw them as Jewish financiers who had wormed their way into the nation and were sucking away its life-blood. It is nearly impossible to count just how many noble initiatives were championed by Kornfeld, who converted to Catholicism in 1925 out of genuine religious conviction. There is evidence that he was one of the supporters behind *Nyugat* (West), the definitive Hungarian literary periodical of the first half of the twentieth century when it started up in 1908; he also provided financial backing for the more conservative journal *Magyar Szemle*, which was staunchly pro-government throughout its existence from 1927 to 1944, and for *The Hungarian Quarterly,* when it originally started in 1936. He also set up a prize in memory of his father, providing grants to help needy students at the University of Pécs, and so on. Many, though, could only view this extensive patronage with scorn and anger, including even the deft-penned Slavist Lajos Gogolák, despite the fact that he was a frequent house guest of the Kornfelds. Ágnes Széchenyi has devoted considerable energy to digging out the evidence to disprove the latter's disdainful comments.

Kornfeld's father was Zsigmond Kornfeld (1853–1909), who for several decades headed the Hungarian General Credit Bank, became a key figure in Hungarian banking circles, chairman of the Budapest Stock Exchange, and eventually a member of the Upper House of Parliament. He read Spinoza in his spare time. The son, Móric, as a young man, was to be found pushing for reform of the dualist system of the

1 ■ *Illúziók és csalódások,* which Bán published in 1998, was brought out in English translation under the title *Hungarian–British Diplomacy 1938–1941: The Attempt to Maintain Relations.* London and Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 2004.

Austro-Hungarian Monarchy under Franz Joseph, and thus taking the side of the progressive liberals in the early twentieth century, with some of his colleagues later going on to join the Radical Party or one of the socialist parties. Móric Kornfeld's path, however, was that of reversion and (re)integration into the elite in order to carry on his father's mission.

Kornfeld's writings are not particularly easy to read in their original Hungarian, with a striving for accuracy often making their sentence construction ponderous and involved (possibly it did not help that Móric's father had only learned Hungarian as a young man, and he himself was partly educated abroad), but the thoughts that the writings express are none the less valid and of more or less enduring merit: a belief in the general acceptance of public welfare, an identification with Hungary's historical role and with the stance espoused by the Horthy-era liberal-conservative elite, including a rejection of any form of totalitarian dictatorship. The letters and essays very strongly bring out this aspect of the portrait, making it easier to appreciate the frightful dilemma that he faced in 1944: incarcerated in the Mauthausen concentration camp, Kornfeld chose to save himself and the lives of his family, for which one can hardly blame him in retrospect. The deal reached with the SS meant that members of the Weiss, Mauthner, Chorin and Kornfeld families were allowed to leave for the safety of neutral Portugal. Kornfeld was making a decision not just for himself, but on behalf of a whole group of women, children and the elderly; he was a citizen, not a hero. The Kornfelds may not have spent centuries on Hungarian soil, but the benefits that they generated have been of inestimable value.

Some of the errors that occurred in the Hungarian edition have been corrected in the English version (though others have not), while the abridgement has meant that a few cross-references have simply vanished (e.g. a mention in the text of photographs that Ágnes Széchenyi took of Rakovice, none of which appear in the English version). The dust-jacket states that Kornfeld was hauled off to Mauthausen after Szálasi took power on 16 October 1944, whereas this actually happened six months earlier, in April 1944. Minor blemishes like that do not detract, however, from the overall picture any more than a slightly uneasy feeling that the reader may sense that once the editor leaves the familiar shores of literary and newspaper history she frequently links her statements with references to reputed historians. These references are quite unnecessary: what she has to say is sufficient unto itself and will stand without crutches. It would also have done no harm if in the Preface, which has been taken over intact from the Hungarian edition, she had used some of the space to cast light on the principles that guided the selection of texts and the distinctive aspects of the English version. These memoirs, articles and letters from Kornfeld present a monument to a man whom it was a mistake—indeed, a crime—to forget, so that the book, with its scholarly approach, meets the important goal of doing justice to a life that this country has previously chosen to deny.

At much the same time as the publication of Móric Kornfeld's memoirs, there also appeared a volume in which Katalin Kádár-Lynn has written up the years spent in America by Tibor Eckhardt (1888–1972). Like Ágnes Széchenyi's, this book (in the prestigious East European Monographs series) is distributed by Columbia University Press. (A Hungarian edition, translated by Péter Strausz, has been published by Harmattan Kiadó.) A biography of Eckhardt and an assessment of his political career is another of those long-standing debts owed by Hungary's historians, and it is not exactly to their

credit that an author living in the United States has taken the first basic steps. Eckhardt's career path, from a job as an official in county administration, through a period in the political extreme right, via leadership of the Independent Smallholders' Party to a life of exile in America, is interesting in its own right. Hungarian historians have not occupied themselves overly with him, seeking to treat him as merely a time-server or opportunist, whose lack of principle was eclipsed only by his careerism. That, however, is to grossly oversimplify the facts, and it betrays a distinctly gloomy view of an individual's capability for developing.

While mature reflection and the burden of family heritage persuaded Móric Kornfeld to move to an acceptance of the tradition of liberal conservatism, Eckhardt arrived there from a much more distant starting point. From decidedly extreme-right views (rabid anti-Semitism and racism) that he professed for the best part of a decade, from the late 1910s onwards, by 1941 he had come to embrace a clear pro-British orientation—a volte-face that was not altogether unparalleled in Hungarian public life at the time. The example of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, who likewise moved from the Right to join the Smallholders in 1939, then from mid-1941 protested about the treatment of Hungarian war resisters and Jews until his arrest and eventual execution by the Arrow Cross at the end of 1944, is quite widely known, but that of the publicist István Lendvai, for example, less so. Katalin Kádár-Lynn devotes a mere few lines to this phase of Eckhardt's life, and even these do not entirely correspond to the facts, though to be absolutely fair, a reader cannot expect to find here a full biography. Nevertheless, she might have given us more than just a few lines out of the twenty-five pages that concern Eckhardt's pre-1941 life in Hungary. One is also left at a bit of a loss that the book says virtually nothing about Eckhardt's politics, including the pact that he entered in 1935 with Gyula Gömbös, then the far right-wing prime minister of Hungary, and their fairly rapid parting of ways. Kádár-Lynn does not quote any of Eckhardt's parliamentary speeches, and in this context a reference to the relatively well-documented history of the Association of Awakening Hungarians and similar far-right groupings in the early 1920s would surely not have been out of place (Eckhardt was president of the Association).

Kádár-Lynn displays great empathy in her handling of her subject, and it is clear from the footnotes that she gained the confidence of Eckhardt's family and descendants, being given access to documents and being the recipient of their recollections. It is obviously difficult to strike a critical note from such a position of trust, but an effort to do so would have been worth making. Unless something of that background is sketched in, it is virtually incomprehensible why, when Horthy sent him to the United States in 1941 to explore the possibility of Hungarian withdrawal from the war, Eckhardt, ostensibly a leading opposition politician, should have been viewed with such profound suspicion, carefully nurtured by the Hungarian émigré community from territory that in 1920 had been awarded to Czechoslovakia. The views he espoused during the 1920s, and a documented meeting with Hitler fairly early on no less, were clearly grounds for raising hackles, even if by 1941 he could show that he had long put any such engagement behind him. The 1941 mission was a failure diplomatically speaking, but it offered him the personal chance to opt for exile. It would have been useful if, over and beyond a general description of the sadly all-too customary lethal in-fighting of émigré communities, we were granted some hard information on the anti-Soviet Eckhardt's Free Hungary Movement: who were its members, who funded it, and how did it try

to grapple with left-wingers among the émigrés. Despite these reservations, it would be wrong to deny that Katalin Kádár-Lynn has produced a serious and well-documented study which will take its place as an exemplar for researches concerned with the Hungarian diaspora. It presents the struggles that the newly arrived Eckhardt, already in his fifties, experienced in setting up his own political movement in America; his tooth-and-claw battles with Rusztem Vámbéry, the liberal lawyer who had fled to the United States from Budapest in 1938; with the left-wing adherents of Michael Károlyi; and Eckhardt's rapprochement with Otto von Habsburg, and the assistance he gave to refugees from Hungary after the crushing of the 1956 revolution. Of particular interest is the way the author discloses the ties that Eckhardt had to American intelligence agencies, including his involvement in the so-called Venona Project, which until recently has been shrouded in the deepest secrecy. (Even during the Second World War, the US and British security services set up a unit to maintain surveillance on the Soviet espionage network, primarily monitoring and decrypting radio messages.)

Backed up by its accompanying illustrations and contemporary documents, this volume provides an accurate impression of how someone who was considered an unquestionably talented politician, with a promising future ahead of him, struggled after a 1941 mission (whose precise aims have still not, to this day, been adequately explained) to carve out for himself a place in émigré politics and how, after encountering isolation and failure, his actions were finally constrained by his clashes with politicians from beyond Hungary's post-1919 borders and with his own countrymen.

The two fates, that of the philanthropist banker who converted to Christianity and that of the agrarian politician who started on the extreme right and shifted to become leader of the mainstream Smallholders' Party, exemplify how the fairly settled atmosphere of Horthy-era Hungary sustained the most diverse possible paths for someone to find a way to conservatism and the values of freedom. And the death of both in exile exemplifies how these careers typically ran into the buffers of Hungary's history during the twentieth century, dominated as it was by external totalitarian powers. ❧

John Batki

Alvinczi de Genere Szemere

In time to come Gyula Krúdy (1878–1933) will emerge (for English-language readers as well) as Hungarian letters' stellar contribution to world literature, and be seen among the stars of Shakespearean magnitude, very few of whom have showed up to accept a Nobel Prize. Krúdy's stature is vouchsafed by the scale and scope of his oeuvre, a vast and varied output of prose frequently steeped in a music that raises it to the level of poetry. The high drama of Krúdy's literary work stems from the interplay of its diverse "forms" and "contents", the complex shifts of narrative viewpoints in time and psychic space—richly rewarding for students of narratology—as well as the perennial tensions inherent in the uses and values of words in literary texts that meld fact and fiction. Journalism and entertainment—indeed, journalism as entertainment—was Krúdy's livelihood, a daily outpouring of artful prose whose depths, abundant in parody, merit and reward intertextual reading. Indeed, in retrospect, this oeuvre may be seen to anticipate not only recent trends in literary theory, but also the present-day state of affairs in the rapidly and desperately evolving mass media where a Hollywood movie or a work of pulp fiction can not only reflect but, surprisingly, predict the course and outcome of an upcoming presidential election, while Jon Stewart's absurdly parodistic "Daily Show" effectively replaces network news as the information source for many millions. Pound's dictum, "literature is news that stays news", takes on new meaning as we read Krúdy's accounts, fact and fiction, of a Hungary he viewed and reported on a hundred years ago.

As journalist, Krúdy often assumes the role of "chronicler", couching trenchant observations in the antiquated guise of a scribe who astutely seizes upon the present as the palpable continuation of a conjured past. Unafraid of sounding

---

John Batki

has been living in the USA since 1957. He is a short story writer (O. Henry award), translator (Attila József: Winter Sky*; Péter Lengyel:* Cobblestone*; Iván Mándy:* Fabulya's Wives, Left Behind*; Géza Ottlik:* Buda*; Gyula Krúdy:* Sunflower, Ladies Day; Krúdy's Chronicles*). He lives in Syracuse, New York.*

quaint, "old-fashioned" or out of touch, he delivers accurate assessments based on closely observed details that some would dismiss as trivial. His attention covers the entire panorama of Hungarian life available to him, rural and urban, high and low: the same thoughtfully observant eye appraises the ritualistic minutiae of a Habsburg funeral in Vienna, as well as the bride's finery at a three-day long Gypsy—today we might say Roma—wedding in Budapest. The participants of a million-dollar game of cards at the Jockey Club receive the same quality of attention as the attendants at the funeral of a newspaper vendor from the boulevard's pavements. These entertaining pieces, as the historian John Lukacs has also pointed out, will prove to be of inestimable value to historians unafraid of delving into literary works where genius marshals facts recollected through acts of the imagination.

The many facets of Krúdy's voluminous novelistic output reveal an astonishing variety of approaches to the dramatic possibilities that fascinate us in the unpredictable mix of fact and fiction on the page. A number of overtly "historical" novels, written in the 1920's, take as their subject the more or less thoroughly researched figures and events of Hungary's late medieval and Renaissance periods, such as King Louis II and his soon-to-be-widowed Queen Mary in *Mohács,* King John Zápolya in *Festett király* (Painted King) and King Ferdinand in *Az első Habsburg* (The First Habsburg). In these and several other works in a similar vein Krúdy does a creditable job of "presenting the past for future eyes" by way of fictional "re-imaginings" of well-known historical characters. In a different group of shorter novels, also written in the 1920's, Krúdy depicts iconic figures from the popular culture of the recent past, often in ways that seem to prefigure techniques and modes that came into vogue decades later, in the 1960's and '70's. An interesting monograph by László Sturm (*Hagyományok metszéspontján* [At the Intersection of Traditions], Budapest, 2000) is devoted to the analysis of the "sources, genre clichés and narrative modes" of these Krúdy novels, relating them to the much later developed genres of 'nonfiction novel' and 'documentary novel'. But the most intriguing, and arguably the most significant, as well as signifying, effort by Krúdy in melding fact and fiction is his lifelong, recurring and evolving portrayal of Miklós Szemere, most notably as "Eduard Alvinczi", the fictional counterpart "modelled upon him".

Szemere

Gyula Krúdy's 1913 bestseller *A vörös postakocsi* (The Crimson Coach) introduces the character "Eduard Alvinczi", the eccentric, broodingly mysterious and fabulously wealthy nobleman who was to reappear so many times in the author's oeuvre. Alvinczi stars, or appears in leading roles in a handful of other novels: *Őszi utazások a vörös postakocsin* (Autumn Journeys on the Crimson Coach, 1917), *Velszi herceg* (Prince of Wales, 1920), *Valakit elvisz az ördög* (The Devil Takes Someone,1928), and *Kékszalag hőse* (Knight of the Cordon Bleu,

1930). In addition, in the realm of nonfiction, Krúdy authored over the course of two decades more than a dozen journalistic pieces, articles, reminiscences, commemorations and evocations of Miklós Szemere, the flesh-and-blood personage he called in a 1932 article "friend, patron, mentor and ideal", on whom he based the fictional character Eduard Alvinczi in the above-mentioned novels.

A brief encyclopedia entry in *Révai Nagy Lexikon* (1925) identifies Miklós Szemere, politician and sportsman, born 21 April 1856 in the County of Zemplén in northeast Hungary (present-day Slovakia), educated in Geneva, Kolozsvár (Cluj), Oxford and Budapest, retired in his mid-thirties after serving in the Austro-Hungarian diplomatic corps attached to embassies in Paris, St. Petersburg and Rome; elected Member of Parliament, author of socio-political pamphlets (*Fair Play, Ideal, My Young Bloods, The Education of Youth, Modern Argonauts, Gentry,* etc.); owner of racing stables, promoter of target-shooting and other sports; died 19 August 1919. A biographical novel by Andor Kellér, *Zöld gyep, zöld asztal* (Green Turf, Green Baize, 1941, revised edition 1959) provides, predictably enough, a journalistic recital of Szemere's feats and coups as the free-spending grand seigneur, a legendary figure at racetracks and exclusive gambling casinos not only in the Dual Monarchy but all over Europe.

In his journalistic pieces, recollections about Szemere that include an obituary titled *"Szemere de genere Huba",* Krúdy offers other biographic details that are scattered and embedded in a burgeoning context of personal impressions and reflections that project the "setting", the ambience of the times. We gather the tidbits: Szemere died alone; a lifelong bachelor, "he was solitude personified". Soft-spoken, secretive, superstitious and eccentric, he liked to wear a white hat and a necktie sporting his racing colours, silver and gold. At home (meaning a variety of hotel apartments, especially his own suite at Sacher's in Vienna) he often wore a red flannel "Garibaldi" shirt and a pair of old trousers that was a palimpsest of patches (for good luck). He always had the best champagnes at hand but drank only moderate amounts. His favourite Cuban cigars, which he dispensed liberally, came sealed in glass tubes, from the same source that provided the Prince of Wales' cigars. "The turf was his salon" where he liked to chat with ladies of his acquaintance; in his bachelor quarters a whole crew of strange characters formed a court-like household of sorts, including a valet, footman, secretary, "personal trainer" (a retired sea captain) and a fencing coach—not to mention the genealogist whose task was tracing the Szemere family tree back to ancestors during the period of the Magyar Conquest in the 9th century.

Szemere's withdrawal from the foreign service was necessitated by a gambling loss of 100,000 forints at the noblemen's club in Rome—his entire maternal inheritance, which he soon recouped as a successful card player. Back in Budapest he stood for election, became a Member of Parliament, and led a delegation of Budapest university students to Istanbul, presenting a ceremonial sword to the Sultan in a symbolic gesture expressing hopes for a new Turkish–Hungarian alliance against the perceived common enemy, czarist Russia. However, as Krúdy

expressly states, Szemere "loathed politicking", and eventually turned to authoring idealistic social tracts that "nobody read". A speech Szemere delivered at a National Casino banquet in memory of Count István Széchenyi climaxed with the famous quip summing up the fin-de-siècle state of the Dual Monarchy: "The Magyars are not happy!" This was manna from heaven for the daily press, where it became an oft-quoted and much savoured byword.

In 1902 Szemere created an even greater sensation in the press when Emperor-King Franz Joseph ordered his expulsion from Vienna, after Szemere won a million and a half forints in a game of cards. The story had its antecedents: one evening at the Budapest National Casino Szemere lost a considerable sum to a visiting young Polish nobleman, Count Joseph Potocki, who soon after rose from the table and departed without offering the loser the customary chance to recoup his losses. Not long afterward, Szemere encountered Potocki at the Vienna Jockey Club, where they sat down to match their skills one more time. The game of écarte progressed in increments of a hundred thousand. The Polish count lost steadily, and eventually was down by eight hundred thousand, at which point Szemere took out his watch and announced he could only play for five more minutes. Count Potocki, pale as a sheet of paper, summoned all his strength to shout, "Double or nothing!" On the final hand, Szemere was dealt a face card and the seven of clubs. Potocki, with a four and an ace, had five points, and chose not to draw another card. He lost to Szemere's seven. When the kibitzers demanded to see the next card in the deck, it proved to be a four—which would have given Potocki a total of nine, and victory.

> Not even the oldest members of the Jockey Club could recall a loss in a card game that came close to this. The customary rule—payment within twenty-four hours—had to be suspended in view of the staggering sum, and Mr Szemere announced that Potocki could pay whenever he felt like it. But not so Potocki the elder, Governor of Galicia... He took the first train to Vienna, mustered all the credit at his disposal, paid for his brother's gambling debt, and filed a complaint to the Emperor against the Hungarian card player.

(The Galician governor was said to be worth over one hundred million.) Upon hearing about the extraordinarily high stakes the notoriously frugal Franz Joseph lost no time having the Viennese Chief of Police declare Miklós Szemere banned from Austrian territory as an "undesirable alien". This autocratic interference in the internal affairs of the exclusive Jockey Club provoked protests registered by eminent clubs and casinos in London, Paris, Rome and Budapest. Yet the expulsion order stood for nearly a year, when it was at last withdrawn under characteristically peculiar circumstances, described below.

Meanwhile Szemere invested his winnings by purchasing a vast estate in Pestszentlőrinc, and dedicated a sizeable tract to the construction of the largest target-shooting range in Hungary as part of his patriotic plans for the education of Hungarian youth in the martial arts. (Szemere also encouraged Hungarian saber fencing, and became the first European patron of Japanese martial arts when he

invited the Judo Master Kichisaburo Sasaki to Hungary in 1906.) Here is how Krúdy recalls a large-scale shooting competition held by Szemere at his estate:

> We must hand it to him, he really knew how to throw a party!
>
> There were about a thousand guests at Pestszentlőrinc when he held the first target-shooting competition for university students. Three different kitchens had been set up: the first one was Turkish, where a cook from Asia Minor prepared a mutton pilaf, the famous national dish of the Turks. Mr Szemere nurtured a deep affection for the Turkish people, ever since he had visited the country on the occasion of presenting, in the name of Hungarian youth, a ceremonial sword to Abdul Kerim, "The Lion". A second kitchen was assigned to the Parisian chef imported from Durand's, who concocted various specialties of French cuisine. The stuffed capons served at the Pestszentlőrinc shooting competition were of a size rarely seen before. They were accompanied by oysters, trout, pâtés from Holland, washed down by the wines of France dispensed from those oversized champagne bottles that have not been seen in Hungary since Pommery and Greno ceased to be our foremost suppliers. A third kitchen was staffed by the most famous cook from Zemplén County, who watched over her huge kettle of *gulyás* when not squabbling with Mrs Baló, the connoisseuse of fish soup from the River Tisza. Here only Hungarian wines were served, but these were Tokaj vintages from Franz Joseph's estates at Mád and Tarcal... And, as legend has it, when His Majesty the Emperor-King heard that it was his own wines that the banished Miklós Szemere served to his guests at Pestszentlőrinc, he relented toward the gambler and soon afterward pardoned him, so that Mr. Szemere, together with his secretary and all the odd specimens retained at the strange court he kept, could once again take up residence in his former quarters at his Viennese hotel.

Elsewhere, in a journalistic piece about the actress Katherine Schratt, Emperor Franz Joseph's "lady friend", Krúdy offers a different version of the imperial pardon. Rumour had it that it was Miklós Szemere who had taught Fräulein Schratt how to play the card game of piquet, in order to entertain His Majesty, who enjoyed playing for miniscule stakes. His Majesty's frugality also limited his largesse toward his "lady friend", who found herself in embarrassing financial circumstances due to her clandestine gambling(!) debts. These obligations were discreetly relieved by Miklós Szemere's generosity, which was capped by the gift of a luxurious set of chinaware. Not even the Emperor-King could ignore the resplendent tea service, which eventually led to Szemere's return to the turf at Freudenau and to the card tables at the Vienna Jockey Club.

Alvinczi

Even while the first chapters of *The Crimson Coach* were appearing in *A Hét,* the weekly edited by the poet József Kiss, another fictional figure based on Miklós Szemere (Miklós Merseházy) turned up in *Mákvirágok kertje* (The Orchard of Bad Apples), a novella possibly written previously but published in early 1913 in eight installments in another periodical. This Rococo idyll, light-hearted as a

precocious Mozart opera, relates the story of an asylum for broken-down gentlemen of the nobility, whom the philanthropic Merseházy deems worthy of a better fate, and invites to sojourn in the lavish surroundings of one of his chateaux by the Danube. The only catch is that his guests receive no pocket money to support their gambling addictions. A neighbouring chateau turns out to shelter a corresponding bevy of aristocratic ladies entertained by a Princess Schwarzenberg, a situation that leads to predictable imbroglios and is resolved by a wedding. The idealised, sketchy figure of Merseházy is an earlier version of the Eduard Alvinczi who is more roundly portrayed in *The Crimson Coach.*

In this, his best-selling novel, Krúdy sets the scene by offering a preliminary glimpse of his hero, as he appears on fashionable Andrássy Avenue in front of the amazed eyes of two young actresses, Sylvia and Clara, escorted by the author's alter-ego, Kazmer Rezeda:

> Six richly caparisoned, long-tailed bays thundered past them. An outrider, dressed in white breeches and a velvet cap, rode the tracer, the coachman sat enthroned almost a storey high atop the huge coach that was painted crimson; its lamps cast broad swaths of light a good distance ahead. Perhaps this was how British peers had once travelled from Wales to London, before the railways were built. The huge wheels turned solemnly and the footmen stood stiffly on the steps. The coach was lined in yellow and white; in the back sat a pensive gentleman with a bold visage, a sparse black beard and a Tatar cast to his features. His eyes that seemed to be blinking half closed lit up now like electric bulbs as he caught a glimpse of the actresses rolling past him.

For the benefit of the young ladies Kazmer Rezeda describes Eduard Alvinczi as

> scion of one of Hungary's most ancient families... the proudest man in all of Budapest... proud of the fact that if the nation once again were gathered in the traditional field of Rákos to elect a king, his descent would establish his clear title to the royal crown... According to a learned Moscow historian [he was] descended from the royal tribe which had ruled far in the east, over the lands of the River Don where the whole clan had lived on horseback.

Rezeda, who is hopelessly in love first with one, then with the other young actress, must watch helplessly their rapidly growing infatuation with Alvinczi, the man of their dreams. He accommodates Sylvia's request to meet the "man of mystery" by taking her to the "friendliest house in all of Budapest": Madame Louise's house of assignation in the Inner City, where Alvinczi turns up as if on cue,

> standing in the doorway in a winter coat, holding his hat, a bored and wry look in his eyes. His face was perhaps even more sallow than usual; each hair of his sparse beard stood out. He could have passed for a scarecrow of the Asian steppes, where the north wind is called *Dzhal*. He looked like he was forever cold, having just arrived from distant parts in a winter storm, in a freezing, driving rain that battered the rear and sides of the cart covered with woven rush mats. He had his winter coat lapel turned up over his ears, as if to hide the cardinal's vestments he liked to wear when venturing

forth in the Inner City like some prince of the Church. He bowed impassively, making sure that the dusty, cobweb-laden wine bottle did not slip from the crook of his arm. He seemed strangely embarrassed, finding himself in unexpected company at the house where he was usually received with a deference due to royalty travelling incognito.

Apologetic, Alvinczi stops only long enough to make the present of his bottle of wine, a Châteauneuf du Pape complete with a label signed and sealed by the Abbot, before strolling out of the room with soft and lazy steps, leaving a faint scent of Havana cigars in the room. In a subsequent scene, Rezeda takes the two young women on an outing to a rustic summer house hidden in the Buda hills, surrounded by an overgrown garden where rose bushes stand still wrapped in bundles of straw and last year's fallen leaves fill the ditch. As the interlopers watch from their hiding place behind the trees, Alvinczi appears on the garden path wearing a tail coat, top hat and white tie, escorting a slender young woman clad in a white bridal gown and veil, with orange blossoms in her golden blonde hair. Her hands, in long gloves reaching to her elbows, hold an old prayer book. After watching the couple wordlessly strolling side by side in the abandoned garden "as if they had arisen from an ancient crypt", Rezeda explains to his two companions that this was how Alvinczi celebrated every year the anniversary of his "engagement to 'Miss Montmorency'", the daughter of a humble family—in whom the young actresses think they recognise a former classmate from acting school.

This idealised, dreamlike scene from *The Crimson Coach* merits a footnote. The "real-life" equivalent of 'Miss Montmorency' was Adrienne Meszlényi (1872–1926), born Adel Meisslinger, a minor actress at the National Theatre about whom Krúdy wrote two journalistic pieces shortly after her death. It seems that Szemere had "discovered" her when she was still in her teens, and, falling in love with her, soon became the "Fräulein's" patron, practically adopting her from her parents who were caretakers of an apartment house in the Joseph Town district. The arrangement became formalised by Szemere's commitment to provide for the parents, and the distrustful "fiancé" went to no end of trouble to make sure his protégée stayed on the paths of virtue, having her watched by his private secretary, as well as a retired police officer, both required to report to him regularly. It took even more effort to obtain a contract at the National Theatre for Miss Meisslinger, who apparently had little else to recommend her as an actress beside her beauty. Her stage name was arrived at after repeated consultations with theatre critics... Szemere's attentions included acquiring a failed newspaper for his inamorata, who became the nominal publisher for a while. Eventually he also provided her with her own stable of racehorses.

The "Fräulein" passed away seven years after Szemere's death. At her funeral, an enormous wreath appeared with the inscription "Faithful beyond the grave, Miklós Szemere".

Three years after his best-seller, Krúdy wrote a sequel, *Autumn Journeys on the Crimson Coach.* Here Kazmer Rezeda is depicted as close to forty years old, about the same age as the author at the time. By now Rezeda's connection to Alvinczi has deepened, and he is invited by the nobleman on a new journey of the Crimson Coach, headed this time into the snow-bound forests of northeast Hungary where Alvinczi owns a large estate with a hunting lodge. We encounter our hero at the first stop on the road, in Pozsony (Bratislava) where he sojourns at his favorite inn, The White Horse, accompanied by his usual entourage that is now augmented by Mortimer, a fencing master of "French and Polish origins" and Algernon, Alvinczi's "legal counsel" whose pockets are full of yellowed, crumpled documents representing lawsuits, "some of which have been dragging out over three decades". However, the first envelope he pulls from his pockets and hands to Alvinczi as a most precious relic, contains a handful of brown sand—"brought by the Zichy expedition from Asia, from the land where your Excellency's ancestors were kings". The elaborate banquet served at the inn is also attended by a pair of elderly, impoverished countesses from Pozsony, toasted by the host with a small glass of five-*puttony* Tokaj *aszú*, and invited to partake of the lavish supper that begins with a "Polish soup from Queen Isabella's time" (prepared from "tidbits of pork" such as trotters, tail, liver and other innards) and progresses through various courses (eel in aspic, cheese pudding, pheasant in red wine, filet mignon and buttered pasta, salads and dessert, coffee and brandies). The feast is accompanied by a selection of wines including wines from Badacsony, Szerednye, and a Tokaj Szamorodni, followed by Mouton Rothschild and once again, Châteauneuf du Pape, concluding with "the pale, tart foam of double Pommery in crystal flutes". The next day, Alvinczi visits the two Zöldvári countesses at their home, and meets their young protégée and companion Maria Vecsera, a namesake and apparently also a look-alike of the baroness who was part of the double suicide pact that had ended the life of Crown Prince Rudolph.

In a subsequent chapter Krúdy resumes the ongoing tale of Kazmer Rezeda's many loves by telling the story of the "Kronprinz women" of Buda, a mother and daughter combination that has been wreaking havoc among the eligible bachelors of both Buda and Pest. Rezeda, to his misfortune, falls victim to the charms of both women, but ends up pledging his love to the daughter, Irma. He takes both ladies to a Budapest soirée given by Alvinczi for "the feminist cause", where the host expounds his support for women's suffrage, announcing that "...women are usually brainier than men. All of their demands must be met; this country will at last have law and order when it is governed by women". Inevitably, the mother and daughter join the travelling party, which, with the sudden appearance of a Mr Henry, a mysterious, taciturn "English gentleman", now needs two additional red post coaches for transport across the winter landscape to Medveháza (Bear Lodge) in northeasternmost "Upper-Hungary". Nearing their destination, at a memorable stopover in an ancient wine cellar in Ungvár, Alvinczi evinces his fastidious literary tastes by finding exception even with the heroic poet Sándor

Petőfi, who perished at the age of 26 in the Hungarian freedom fight of 1848–49. Alvinczi quotes an elder contemporary of Petőfi's, "Miklós, the poet of the Szemere clan, who loved Petőfi from a distance but could not stand him from up close, for in his opinion no poet should wear boots shined to such a degree of polish as did Petőfi". Assisted by the potions served at the wine tasting, Alvinczi makes a conquest of the bewitched Irma Kronprinz, repeating a motif from the earlier novel (Rezeda's loss of a lady-love to the irresistible Alvinczi mystique). However, not long afterward, in the snow outside the wine cellar, Rezeda consummates his affair with the fickle lady, achieving a new measure of both independence from and "identity-overlap" with his lord and master, host and ideal, to whom he is so deeply beholden. ("Ten years earlier, he would have shot himself on the following night.")

This novel features a peculiar subplot revolving around the "English gentleman", whose resemblance to the late Crown Prince Rudolph gradually becomes evident to Kazmer Rezeda as he at first by chance, then by design, observes the taciturn guest's encounters with Maria Vecsera. However, after the silent stranger (who is now perceived as having no shadow) hunts down and kills a wild bear, then apparently restores it to life, this resemblance turns into a ghostly identity with the defunct Crown Prince. Saying farewell to Maria, "Mr Henry" explains that he came back for her from the realm of the dead, before he disappears forever. This is one of the rare instances in Krúdy's oeuvre of an overtly supernatural event or phenomenon playing a significant role in a novel, by adding otherwise inexpressible dimensions to a fictional character. For surely the Crown Prince Rudolph is conjured up as a "projection" emanating from Alvinczi's own aura, a pathos-filled apparition evoking a favourite political fantasy of the visionary nobleman—the fantasy of a younger, more active and imaginatively talented Hungarian King arising from the House of Habsburg, in place of the antiquated and fossilised Franz Joseph, whose demise was soon to take the Monarchy to the brink of its inevitable grave. In any case, Alvinczi offers a mournful farewell toast: "Allow me to take this occasion to quote my noble compatriot Miklós Szemere: Gentlemen, let us drink, for the Magyars are unhappy."

In *Prince of Wales,* a short novel written in 1920 and published in 1925, Alvinczi appears throughout, nicknamed "Mr Traktarovich", as he hovers on the fringes of the much-celebrated Budapest sojourn of the Prince of Wales, whom we encounter at Madame Louise's (here "Auntie Róza's") fashionable house of assignation. "Alvinczi gives suppers every night at the National Casino—that is why they call him 'Traktarovich' these days," Auntie Róza explains to her lover, a young aspiring poet nicknamed Bimy, whom she presents to Alvinczi. This rather uncouth young man, who seemingly has so much in common with the early Kazmer Rezeda, is actually modelled after a contemporary of Krúdy's, the writer Gyula Pekár. Krúdy's portrait of him as Bimy is an unflattering caricature: Bimy takes up residence at the brothel, sponges off Auntie Róza's and Alvinczi's generosity, while conducting an affair with another older woman, Josephine, thus eventually driving his benefactress, Aunt Róza, to attempt suicide. The novel includes a recurring motif: Alvinczi preying on a

younger protégé's lady love. In this case, he offers Bimy the use of one of his villas for a rendezvous with Josephine, but he shows up in the middle of the romantic scene and disrupts the blossoming affair. In *Prince of Wales* Auntie Róza refers to Alvinczi as "the Devil himself" and states that nowadays "he lives to collect promissory notes"—sounding a theme that prefigures the next novel in the Alvinczi series.

In *The Devil Takes Someone* Alvinczi's crimson coach launches on its ultimate, Gogolian journey to visit the Nyírség (literally, The Birches), Krúdy's native region. His avowed mission is not unlike Chichikov's in *Dead Souls:* in hopes of redeeming the declining gentry of the region Alvinczi proposes to buy up their bad debts and forged promissory notes. Arriving at the county seat that resembles Krúdy's hometown Nyíregyháza, he enlists the help of the young and naïve Bandi Patkó ("Andy Horseshoe"), son of a well-to-do local attorney (as was Krúdy himself). Thus Bandi Patkó is the Kazmer Rezeda-figure of the novel, who in this instance happens to be courting a trio of females, the widowed Mrs. Regensburger and her comely daughters. However, Alvinczi by now has shed all of his former romantic attributes and has nothing to do with amatory conquest. He arrives on the provincial scene with the avowed intention of providing relief for the local gentry, a dying social class deemed worthy of salvation. The quixotic rationale for this campaign is the enlistment of support for his cause: the improbable claim to the Hungarian throne based on his ancient lineage. In the opening scene at a tavern, Alvinczi's imminent arrival is announced by Tinódi, the bigoted, nationalistic librarian of the local country club:

> The papers are always full of stories about Eduard Alvinczi. He was the one who took the ceremonial sword to Constantinople and presented it in the name of Hungarian youth to the Lion of Plevna, he was the first who dared to say, "The Magyars are not happy!" Defender of the purity of our race, patron of the decaying gentry class, promoter of every national endeavour. He's our ideal!

This foreshadows the inevitable denouement: Alvinczi's idealism attracts all sorts of undesirables, the worthless dregs of a social order whose time had passed. Soon enough Keszi turns up, "the most insolent man in all of Hungary", a dubious itinerant agent in real estate and used furniture, who literally "jumps on the bandwagon" and takes a seat next to the driver's box, immediately launching into boastful anti-Semitic remarks: "I was the first man around here who understood the slogan of our times, 'Exclude the Jews'. The exclusion must begin in the field of business matters." Hearing these words, "Alvinczi suddenly turned his distrustful dark eyes at the agitator:—The Jews are very powerful—he murmured." That said, he allows Keszi to mount the coach box, although soon enough he wishes he could get rid of this "disgusting character" and unceremoniously dumps him in the middle of the road. But like the proverbial bad penny Keszi returns, with a list of acquaintances whose bad debts he proposes to parlay into Alvinczi's hands—for a fee. After confronting a procession of prototypic wastrels, parasites, counterfeiters and common "white-collar"

criminals who disdainfully and self-righteously insist on selling their bad debts at a high price, Alvinczi realises the hopelessness of his crusade, asking himself,

> Could this be the Hungarian middle class I am trying to salvage? These notorious scoundrels?... Where are those beautiful, modest, taciturn men who would rather have had their tongue torn out than admit they had once been irresponsible, weak, human? Where are those deserving fathers with families, who spend sleepless nights worrying about how they can afford their children's schooling? Where are those lovely, sad men... those martyrs?... It was an ill wind that brought me to this region...

At the novel's end Alvinczi drives off after giving young Bandi Patkó his blessing—and buying up a bundle of the widow Regensburger's worthless papers from her husband's legacy.

At this point, to provide additional perspective on the above, I would like to interpose a passage about Miklós Szemere, written by Sándor Bródy in 1905, quoted in Andor Kellér's *Green Turf, Green Baize (1957)*:

> He [Miklós Szemere] is envied and hated by some, whereas we—although with a touch of skepticism—love him for three reasons. First, for being a most courageous and resolute man, as proven by the fact that luck dare not abandon him... Next, we sympathise with him for outdoing those who outrank him, for putting on princely airs that surpass any Austrian prince's, proving that this sort of rank is no great thing, does not need centuries of preparation; from one day to the next anyone may become whatever he has the talent for. This gentleman knows how to be a lord in a finer manner than anyone else in our country, and surpasses the greatest Catholic magnates in finding the most elegant political tone, a backward progression that is quiet and tasteful whereas theirs is so gaudy and blatant. If Hungarian nobility were to have a marshall, such as the Russians have, Szemere was born to that position. Our third reason for taking his side is the most decisive: Miklós Szemere is a passionate writer. He is not the best of stylists, but show me a great lord and politician who can write even at his level. And how gracious that he does not write better. That is, he does not have his pamphlets written by some professional whose pen can be had for hire at no great price. Yes, this player is serious at whatever he does. Only his anti-Semitism is funny. He tries very hard but is unable to detest Jews. Here he struggles. The most significant sin for which he reproaches us is a lack of taste. Against this charge the daily *Budapest Hírlap* undertakes to defend Jewish fellow citizens. We feel that they would do better taking to heart Szemere's charges than the defense by *B.H.* The first is amusing and innocent; the latter is ludicrous and not in good faith. But let us not get tangled in this fatuous debate and rest content that someone, such as Szemere, reminds Jews who switch to Magyar-sounding family names that not everyone needs to become a "Hunyady" or "Zrínyi" [translator's note: heroes of Hungarian history]. And possibly he is right in this. Moreover he would also be justified, were he to get fed up with Jews who furiously strive to metamorphose into ancient Magyar nobility. As if that were possible. As if the king had the power to change anyone's pedigrée.

Knight of the Cordon Bleu, the last and longest novel in Krúdy's "Alvinczi series" is, in my view, not only the magnum opus of the group, but one of the outstanding achievements of Krúdy's entire oeuvre. Set in Vienna, Budapest and a country estate near the Hungarian capital, the narrative establishes a nuanced, richly imagined account of an Alvinczi who achieves imposing stature, observed from multiple perspectives. The introductory chapter, set fifteen years earlier than the main action of the novel, describes his secret marriage to Ilona Sziromi, an impoverished young woman from a genteel family, who dies after giving birth to their daughter, also named Ilona. Next we see Alvinczi at the peak of his racing career, at the Freudenau racetrack in Vienna, where his horse Táblabíró wins the coveted Cordon Bleu at the "last peace-time Derby". (Miklós Szemere's horse Eltoli was winner of this race in May 1914.) Alvinczi's entourage this time includes the convincingly portrayed figure of Mr Regényi (the name might be translated as "Mr Novelish"), an outspoken little man from the horse- and card-playing night life of Budapest cafés, who is promoted from his function as good luck mascot to factotum, and serves as a solid anchor that connects the withdrawn nobleman to the realities of everyday life both in Vienna and in Budapest. Kazmer Rezeda also plays a prominent role, and rises in stature to a full-fledged confidant to whom Alvinczi makes his striking "confession" toward the end of the novel, which concludes with his death.

The early chapters take place in Vienna, in a variety of settings. Krúdy's expert eye produces wonderful descriptions of Alvinczi's lavish entertainment of the many guests he has invited to the Hotel Erzherzog Karl for the celebration of his victory. It would appear that half of Hungary's gentry is in attendance: landowners, county officials, hussar officers and prominent figures of the world of horse racing, all appearing under their actual names, a colourful montage of lively snapshot portraits. (A member of the Wesselényi family arrives after having driven a four-horse carriage all the way from Transylvania!) This is indeed a culminating moment of Alvinczi as "Traktarovich", the munificent host of multitudes. But the scene switches to Vienna's Kohlmarkt where Alvinczi has secreted away his delicate daughter Ilona in a dark old palace that had belonged, appropriately enough, to the tragic-fated Count István Széchenyi, the 19th-century reformer often referred to as "the greatest of Magyars". In this gloomy palazzo Ilona Alvinczi, surrounded by nurses and tutors but isolated from the world, has led a sheltered life enlivened only by the rare visits of her father. Seizing upon the afterglow of the Derby victory, she manages to persuade her father to retire from racing and move with her to their country estate at Kürt, just outside Budapest. There, under the proficient tutelage of Margit Rex, a graduate of Hungary's first teachers' college for women, Ilona continues her education until she passes the final examination for a pedagogical degree, administered by Janka Zirzen (an actual historical figure who pioneered women's education in Hungary). In *Autumn Journeys on the Crimson Coach* Alvinczi had hosted a soirée promoting women's rights; in *Knight of the Cordon Bleu* he lives to see his daughter Ilona become a veritable embodiment of the social changes he had envisioned. In fact his

daughter effectively helps him write and edit a long-postponed pamphlet—in the spirit of Széchenyi and the Age of Reform—addressed to the youth of Hungary, but the tract is generally misunderstood or ignored by the press.

At this late stage of the game Kazmer Rezeda's role is amplified to that of a near equal, when Alvinczi turns to him for help in publicising his cause, asking,

> Could it be true that in our day and age the young no longer believe in ideals? István Széchenyi himself would find no audience these days, perhaps even Sándor Petőfi's words would fall on deaf ears...

Rezeda replies,

> Well, at any rate fewer people would hear him out than back in 1848, because that particular Hungarian fight for freedom turned out to bear far fewer fruits than could have been expected... In fact we can't even be certain what the struggle for freedom would have brought about had it been successful. Probably Hungary would have split into several parts: Görgey country, Kossuth country, Szemere country, Perczel country... Only Petőfi country would have been missing, for they would have finished off the poet in any case! If no one else, his highly esteemed family would have done away with him...

Alvinczi persists:

> But where has the flame of enthusiasm flown from today's Hungarian youth who no longer listen to those who would lead the lost sheep back to the splendid realm of ideals? Instead, they prefer those who preach corruption and nepotism—even democracy! As if that was the way to prosperity. The only reason today's youth shrinks from socialism is that a socialist, to my knowledge, must also be ready to do physical labour...

Rezeda:

> Nor would I be a socialist, because this new-fangled Utopia is just as monotonous and monolithic as any. Its goal is to deliver humanity into a state of Great Ennui, as most religions aim to do, promoting salvation for everyone in the life to come, as long as they live out their ant-like existences here on earth according to the required rules. Hats off to the scientists who would turn people into identical ants or bees, but for one single stroke of genius I would sacrifice the entire realm of ants, if it were up to me... A stroke of genius such as the notion of a merry and long life here on earth without starvation or drudgery...

Alvinczi:

> Fortunately I hold a different viewpoint. I intend to unite my nation's youth in a solidarity of common effort and shared ideals...

Rezeda:

> Wise move! But do you really think that young people at the start of their career, at the dawning of their lives when they lay the foundations of their future, are going to squander their energies on ideals proposed by elderly retired gentlemen who view life from high seats? My dear sir, each and every young man has his own ideal regarding

the future. The only difference between them is that some are, at the most, able to attire their ideals in finer garb, a fancier outfit. One ideal would force on everyone the taste of the masses, like a musical craze or a new dance fad. Another ideal would wander solitary on the outskirts of town, seeking companions with a wreath of flowers in her dishevelled hair... But we cannot tell which ideal is more valuable or more human...

At this point the narrator goes on to observe,

Over the years Mr Alvinczi has had enough opportunity to get used to Rezeda not always obeying his will the way his hired employees did—it was perhaps for this very reason that he has always felt an "extraordinary attraction" to this adventurous young man—although not even Rezeda had pressed his boldness this far before...

("This man takes unfair advantage of his stint in the madhouse," thought Mr Alvinczi.

"This man thinks he is smarter than I am!" was Rezeda's secret thought.—"Whereas he's merely had better luck in his lifetime. But now we shall see if sheer good luck is sufficient for wielding the pen!")

Eventually Rezeda, after he is introduced to Alvinczi's charming daughter and her tutor Margit Rex, enthusiastically agrees to publicise Alvinczi's latest tract, a pamphlet calling upon Hungarian youth to take an interest in target-shooting. Toward this end Alvinczi organises a day-long festival at his country estate, the description of which becomes one of the great set pieces in the novel. Krúdy provides detailed observations about the cavalcade of guests transported to the event by special trains, carriages and even a Danube boat, and does not forget to elaborate upon the lavish catering at three different kitchens in the field, offering Turkish, Hungarian and French cuisines. For the grand occasion Alvinczi has also enlisted a shady character named Servatius C. Remete, a pseudo-scholarly genealogist clad in a monk's robe, to present the results of his researches into the ancient royal origins of the Alvinczi clan. The assembled listeners fail to be convinced by the mumbo-jumbo and in the end Alvinczi is persuaded by his daughter and Kazmer Rezeda to throw out the pretentious quack. By this point Alvinczi's failing heart compels him to lie down in the shade of a "princely tent" erected atop a grassy mound. Surveying the scene, he looks back upon his life and shares his thoughts with Rezeda, who has become his only confidant:

– I just want to say that one of the greatest feats in life is the ability to stay in one place until the end, without changing one's location, atmosphere, environment and viewpoint at least a dozen times, the way it's become habitual in this good-for-nothing Hungary of today!—Mr Alvinczi exclaimed as if he had found the starting point for his thoughts that he had hitherto sought in vain among the flock of ideas overburdened by the day's impressions.—The greatness of our ancestors happened to be (and this may be the secret of our thousand-year old nationhood) that they never changed their place and outlook without a compelling reason, simply on a whim. If a Magyar settled in the Highland or Lowland or even west of the Danube, it meant that his family, his descendants remained in the same location for at least a hundred years. Living in the same houses, lying down in

the same beds were forebears and their grandchildren who did not alter their way of life for centuries, eating the same foods, drinking the same drinks, and doing the same things as their grandparents—even their ailments were the same. They married at the same age as their fathers, and died the same, as long as they did not abandon the ancestral land. They attended the same fairs, nor did their views change about housekeeping, agriculture or politics from one generation to the next. Their travels, adventures, strengths and weaknesses remained the same. Even a person's cough at a certain stage of life sounded like grandfather's coughing, although that grandfather had long ago coughed his last.

– And I believe this is how it is with each and every tribe except for the expressly nomadic tribes such Gypsies and Jews.

– But that is what had been the strength of the Hungarian nation, for, let us admit, we were often thrashed in wars. What is more, there were rarely any Hungarian minds that helped the nation's power to resist by realising great ideals. Hardly anything idealistic has happened in Hungary since the introduction of Christianity. The revolutionary freedom fights were about power and revenge. In 1848 it wasn't the peasants but the lords who fought for the undeniable ideals of equality and fraternity—the nobility, who had the most to lose in case of victory. Well, fate once again saved Hungary from becoming a republic run by lawyers, Jews and serfs.

– Well, I am not quite sure that's how matters were conceived to be!—interjected Mr Rezeda.

– No matter how it was conceived to be: it was a most senseless act, for the nineteenth-century freedom movement was imported from abroad and was the reason that the Magyars, as a people, as a tribe, definitely lost the strength to maintain nationhood, their enduring, tranquil, hardy ancestral moral values, and have not been able to find their place in creation ever since. And ever since then, you cannot find a single contented, phlegmatic, dignified Magyar who consistently adheres to the ways of the ancestors in this country—since Kossuth pulled the armchairs from under everyone, took their ancient livelihoods from people's hands, placed an explosive fuse under the beds and trepanned skulls in order to pour his own ideas into every brain. ...

Thus spoke Eduard Alvinczi under the "princely tent" and Mr Rezeda was delighted to hear him out, for this vain man failed to notice that Alvinczi was regurgitating the ideas he had heard from Rezeda over the years. Like all true revolutionaries, Rezeda was a naïve man who attached significance to what people said, without realising that words are precisely what lies are made of. For people would never have learned to use language if they had truly meant to express what was on their minds. [...]

Alvinczi spoke again: – Even if I did not know Hungarian history as thoroughly as it was once taught in the Calvinist colleges, clarified at Oxford, and presented in the school of the foreign service: even then I would say, looking at my own life experience, that Hungarians in good part owe their grand past to the fact that they never rushed to anticipate history's events but waited until they arrived. Waiting and silence! These would have been our great national virtues had we lived the way we should have... Under giant trees centuries old, not rushing to meet destiny but waiting patiently, waiting until every thing comes in its own sweet time. When things are good and ripe...

There is something grand in Krúdy's account of Alvinczi's confession (partially quoted here), and Kazmer Rezeda's reception of it, including his responses and interjections. The interweaving of speaker(s), narrator, character (fictional and "meta-fictional") progresses as the layering becomes ever deeper as well as more translucent with each reading that keeps in mind earlier versions of Alvinczi in other texts by Krúdy, including the non-fiction accounts of Miklós Szemere's life. Toward the end of *Knight of the Cordon Bleu* the fictional character Kazmer Rezeda receives, but also adds to, so much of Alvinczi's "inner contents" that one cannot help but feel we are witnessing a rare act of creative alchemy. And there is more to come. The dying Alvinczi decides to return to the turf, and makes his comeback with his last horse, Vabanque, at the autumn meet of the Vienna racetrack. The scene shifts back to the abandoned Széchenyi palace on Vienna's Kohlmarkt:

> Alvinczi reposed on a settee in the Széchenyi mansion, all by himself among the alien-seeming furniture of the uninhabited domicile, with its covered paintings and lowered shutters, and he was overcome by a peculiar sensation: he did not feel strong enough to resume contact with the outside world, as the concierge put it in answer to inquiries in this regard. Servants at lordly houses arrive at peculiar expressions over the years, turns of phrase they pick up from each other at diverse tavern encounters. The elderly Princess Rohan had "felt disinclined to maintain contact with the outside world", and the gatekeeper at the Széchenyi mansion was so taken by this expression that he grabbed the first chance to use it.
>
> As he reclined on the couch all sorts of old acquaintances came to Alvinczi's mind, arising unexpectedly out of the past, mostly from graveyards, that in his surprise he had to press his hand to his heart, for he had never recalled these defunct personages before. His closed eyes saw the bent backs of ancient butlers now, whereas before, when they tiptoed around him at the Club or at the inn, they had remained invisible. Fiacre drivers of old emerged from the past, the way they were always driving, without ever turning around, as dictated by good manners. They descended from the box and disappeared without ever letting the customer know what they had been thinking all those times they spent looking at the tails of horses. Hotel doormen and footmen now greeted him, who had spent his life among them, as if even in the other world they had not forgotten the respect they owed their betters.
>
> "It seems I'll soon be needing them again," Alvinczi thought, feeling the first forebodings of death.

Alvinczi's last-moment scheme to evade death by asking Rezeda "to die in his stead" is the ultimate movement in the melding of the two fictional characters into a meta-fictional construct in the reader's mind. Rezeda plays along, explaining that his father suffered from a similar heart ailment, as he accompanies his friend after lunch on their way to the Freudenau race track. After placing his final bet, his last words in life, the pallid Alvinczi takes his seat as the race unfolds, and the novel arrives at its closing lines:

> It looks like we won the race—said Mr Rezeda, but his words were spoken to a dead man who slowly collapsed in his seat. ❧

John Pinfold

Foreign Devil Riders

The English and Horse Racing in Nineteenth-Century Hungary[1]

In 1899 one of England's leading steeplechase jockeys, George Williamson, won the Grand National at Aintree. At that time it was customary for the owners, trainers and jockeys to spend the evening following the race in Liverpool, celebrating in the city's hotels and bars, but Williamson did not do this. Immediately the race was over he caught the train for London and from there the overnight boat train for the Continent. By the Sunday he had reached Prague where he won the principal steeplechase of the day as well as finishing third in a flat race. He then travelled on to Budapest, winning the Hungarian Grand Steeplechase the following day, and by the end of the week he was in Turkey, winning a race there worth £2,000.

On other occasions Williamson is recorded as having ridden in Germany, Silesia, Poland and Russia. He was a regular visitor to Hungary for around fifteen years, so regular, in fact, that he had his own house in the Hungarian training centre at Alag. He was the champion jockey over jumps in Austria-Hungary no fewer than eight times between 1891 and 1901, and he won many of the country's most prestigious races, in many cases more than once. Perhaps his most significant wins of all were in the Velká Pardubická, Continental Europe's biggest steeplechase, which he won twice in 1890 and 1893. He remains the only jockey to have won both the Velká Pardubická and the Grand National.

1 ■ This article is a revised version of a talk given to the Oxford University Hungarian Society, on 29 May 2008. I owe a particular debt of thanks for their help to József Hesp, Géza Körmendi and György Száraz in Hungary and to Tim Cox and my wife, Judith Pinfold (Czigány), in England.

John Pinfold
was Librarian of the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies in the University of Oxford, 1993–2008.
He is now an independent historian and researcher.
His history of the Grand National, Gallant Sport, *was published in 1999, and he is currently working on a study of the links between English and Central European racing in the nineteenth century.*

His strike rate was phenomenal. In one week in 1898 he won seven races out of eleven at Budapest and Kottingbrunn. And in the 1901 season he had 33 rides over hurdles winning thirteen of them and coming second in six, and 18 rides over fences, winning eleven and finishing second in three.

George Williamson

Nor was racing Williamson's only connection with Austria-Hungary. He married an Austrian countess, only to divorce her later, after she had been observed entering a Parisian hotel with a "foreign-looking gentleman" who was clearly not her husband. Not that Williamson was entirely innocent himself. One season he appeared on the Budapest racecourse with an elegant new girlfriend on his arm. On seeing her, the crowd immediately started singing the well-known music hall song *Daisy Bell ("Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do...").* This was because she was Daisy, Countess of Warwick, the woman about whom the song was written and the former mistress of King Edward VII. However, Daisy Warwick also caught the eye of Count Elemér Batthyány, the President of the Hungarian Jockey Club, and it was not long before she had left Williamson to become Batthyány's mistress. Batthyány then disposed of Williamson, by ensuring that he was given no rides that season, so that he had to leave Hungary and return to England. He never married again, and died in his home town of Nottingham in 1937.[2]

At first sight Williamson's story appears a remarkable one, but in reality it was far from untypical. The returns from Hungarian race meetings, as reported in the annual racing calendars and the sporting press, reveal that they were almost wholly dominated by English jockeys. To take three examples: in July 1842 at Pest there were eight professional jockeys riding, all of them English; in June 1858 all nine professional jockeys were English; and in 1863, all fourteen professional jockeys were either English or Irish.[3] The same pattern can be seen in virtually every other race meeting of the time, not just at Pest but also at Pozsony (Bratislava); even at places such as Debrecen, Kassa (Košicé), or Kolozsvár (Cluj) there were English jockeys present. Generally speaking, local jockeys were only able to win at the smaller courses or in races restricted to amateurs, such as the Jockey Club steeplechases in which one finds aristocratic owners riding their own or their friends' horses.

In 1877 there were twenty-five professional jockeys listed as riding in Hungary. Of these at least twenty were English, and in the jockeys' table at the end of the

2 ■ *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle,* 17 July 1842, 27 June 1858, 21 June 1863.

3 ■ *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser,* 20 August 1898; *The Star,* 5 November 1904; *Nottingham Evening Post,* 19 August 1937; Aurél Föld & Tamás Sipos, *Fuss vagy fizess* [Run or Pay Up]. Dunakeszi: Föld Ottó–Sipos Tamás, 1996, pp.14–15.

season they filled at least the first ten places. Similarly, the list of leading trainers is composed entirely of English names.[4]

Between 1877, when records first began to be compiled, and 1903, the champion steeplechase jockey in Austria-Hungary was English in every year bar six. The Hungarian Derby was founded in 1868, but no Hungarian trainer won it until 1918.

The exact figure of the number of English trainers and jockeys who lived in Hungary on either a permanent or a semi-permanent basis during these years is not known, but it was certainly substantial. Indeed in 1906, the British Consul in Budapest reported that the only English people present in any numbers in Hungary were "trainers, jockeys, and governesses".[5]

This situation had arisen as a result of the wave of Anglophilia which swept over many of the Allied countries in the aftermath of the defeat of Napoleon. In 1815, English prestige on the Continent was extraordinarily high, and this led to the copying of English customs and manners, including the method of hunting and the breeding of horses. This trend was especially noticeable in Hungary.[6] Writing in 1869, Arthur Patterson in his well-known book *The Magyars* went so far as to call it Anglo-Mania which he described as

> ... a mark of *haut ton*, on the part both of real magnates and their would be imitators. Thus, not content with the introduction of the eminently British institutions of horse racing and fox hunting, some magnates have recently gone to Africa to hunt lions. Of another count, the wags of Pest say that when his servant was asked, after their return from England, if he had seen Englishmen, answered "I have seen many English, but not one so English as my master".[7]

In the years after the Napoleonic wars many of the Hungarian aristocracy visited England or took English institutions and customs as their model—József Hunyady, György Festetics, and the "Devil Rider", Móric Sándor, amongst them—but the key figure in this trend is István Széchenyi. It is striking that in all his plans for social and economic reform horse racing played a pivotal role, so much so that he wrote a whole book, *Lovakrul* (On Horses), which was devoted to the subject. This may seem surprising, but Széchenyi had noted both that the agrarian revolution had preceded the industrial revolution in England, and that

4 ■ *Évi jelentés a Pesti Lovaregylet munkálódásáról és a Magyar-Osztrák Birodalomban 1877-ben lefolyt lóversenyekről* [Annual Report of Work of the Pest Jockey Club and of Horse Races Run in Austria-Hungary in 1877]. Budapest: Athenaeum, 1877, pp.195–242.

5 ■ FO371/7, Clarke to Grey no. 1; 7 September 1906, quoted by F. R. Bridge, "British Official Opinion and the Domestic Situation in the Hapsburg Monarchy" in *Shadow and Substance in British Foreign Policy 1895–1939: Memorial Essays Honouring C. J. Lowe.* Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984, p. 89.

6 ■ An excellent overview is provided by Miklós Zeidler, "English Influences on Modern Sport in Hungary", *Hungarian Quarterly,* Spring 2006 (vol. 47, no. 181), pp. 36–54; see also Rob Gray, *A Very English Pursuit: Horse Racing in Nineteenth-century Hungary.* Unpublished MA dissertation, University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2005.

7 ■ Arthur J. Patterson, *The Magyars: Their Country and Institutions.* London: Smith, Elder, 1869, vol. 2, p. 31.

improvement in the breeding of not just horses but all animals had played a key role in that revolution. Moreover, he saw race meetings as a way of bringing together the Hungarian aristocracy and gentry, and creating a patriotic movement based on free association, such as he had witnessed in England.

Széchenyi first met English officers when he served in the cavalry during the Napoleonic wars. He then visited England in 1815 and brought back a number of English thoroughbreds to his estate at Nagycenk, where he established a stud on the English model with the aim of improving the stock of Hungarian horses, not just for racing, but also for the army, something which lay behind the motives of many of those who promoted thoroughbred breeding throughout Europe in the nineteenth century.

Széchenyi's principal ally in this campaign was Miklós Wesselényi, who also visited England during 1822. From the very beginning he fell in love with England. Even on his very first day, he wrote in his diary, "The road, the people, the air, the trees, the grass is so different from any other; everything is unique". As well as buying horses to take back to Hungary, he also examined stable design, training methods and the feeding of the horses, even analysing the different kinds of hay that were in use. Naturally, he went racing and loved that too. He wrote:

> You cannot imagine a sight more beautiful than the horses before the start. The most lively, the most vigorous health is shining from each of their tendons. I came home delighted but also quite benumbed.[8]

Széchenyi and Wesselényi devoted the next few years to persuading the government to allow horse racing in Hungary. This was not an easy task, for the authorities in Vienna were aware of the political motives underlying the request, but eventually agreement was reached and in 1826 race meetings were held at Pozsony, followed by the first meeting in Pest the following year.[9]

Significantly, Széchenyi noted that many of the winning jockeys at these races were "the disciplined and cool-headed English". One of these was John (or János) Boggis from Newmarket, who had ridden in the English Derby the year before; others are harder to identify—one was simply referred to as "*egy angoly* [sic] *gyerek*" (an English boy)—but this unquestionably set the pattern for most of the rest of the century.[10] Although the first Hungarian jockeys appeared in the 1830s, it was a long time before they were able to break the English domination. This was only partly due to the prestige with which the English were regarded; it is also a reflection of the fact that England, unlike Austria-Hungary, did not have military conscription. Thus promising apprentices from the Dual Monarchy "lost"

8 ■ Stephen Gál, "Wesselényi in England", *Hungarian Quarterly*, Winter 1939/40 (vol. 5, no. 4): pp. 667–674.

9 ■ A succinct overview of the establishment of horse racing in Hungary is provided in Zoltán Barcsay-Amant & Gyula Erdélyi, *A magyar lovassport története* [The History of Hungarian Equestrian Sport]. Budapest: A szerzők, 1932, pp. 32–38.

10 ■ *Pesti gyepen volt ló-futtatások: Juniusban 1827: első esztendei tudósítás* [Horse Races Run on the Pest Turf, June 1827: First Year's Report]. Pest: M. Trattner, 1827, pp. 3–11. Boggis' ride in the Epsom Derby is reported in the *Morning Chronicle,* 26 May 1826.

several years whilst they did their military service and were often seen as "spoilt" when they came back into civilian life, having missed the chance of improving their jockeyship skills at the right age.[11]

Similar trends can be seen with the trainers. Széchenyi himself employed "a first-rate English trainer", called Edmond Jones, and in 1837 John Nevin became the first person to establish a "public training institute" near to the racecourse in Pest. Jones started the trend of Hungarian aristocrats employing Englishmen as private trainers, and it was not long before these two pioneers were followed by others.

Who were these people, what was their background and how did they come to move to Austria or Hungary? The following examples may go some way to answering these questions.

Robert Hesp was one of the first wave of English trainers to go to Hungary, arriving there around 1844. Hesp was born in 1823 at Slingsby in North Yorkshire, where his father was a farmer. However, Slingsby is close both to a number of important stud farms and the major training centre at Malton, and no doubt this is how Hesp first got into racing.[12] He had a few rides in England in the early 1840s, but was then recruited by the Batthyány family to go out to Hungary as a huntsman and master of the horse. Hesp had quite an exciting time in his early years as he seems to have become involved in the Revolution of 1848 and may even have been some kind of double agent.

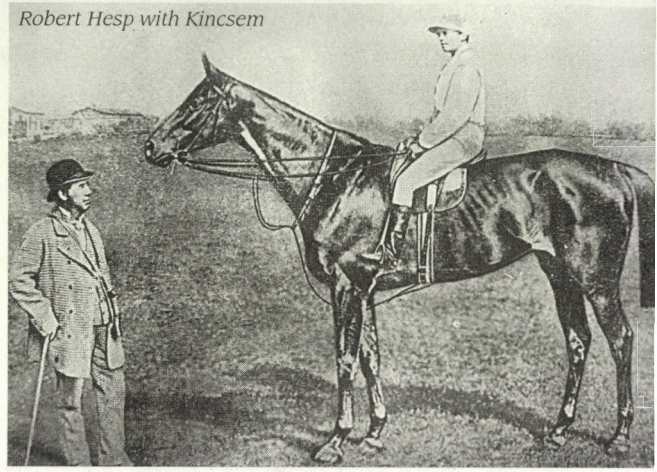
The details of this are shrouded in mystery, but according to family tradition Hesp was asked to organise the escape from Hungary of Ödön, the nephew of Count Lajos Batthyány, the Prime Minister. This he succeeded in doing, disguising himself as an English textile manufacturer with Ödön as his groom. They made it safely to England, and then the Batthyánys asked him to go back to Hungary to smuggle some compromising documents out of the country so that they would not be seized by the Austrians. Hesp took up the challenge. The police were suspicious and arrested him on his return journey, but he managed to talk his way out and make his escape. However, he still had to cross the Danube, where all the bridges and ferries were watched by Austrian troops. He tied the documents up in a bundle which he then carried on his head and swam across the river near Vác. The documents were saved, and Hesp is also said to have travelled subsequently to Turkey with some of the Hungarian exiles after the failure of the War of Independence.

Four years later, however, in 1853, he returned to Hungary, with the help of a mysterious high-ranking person who has never been identified; and this leads one to wonder whether he may not have been a double agent, for most of the political

11 ■ *Liverpool Mercury,* 11 January 1892.

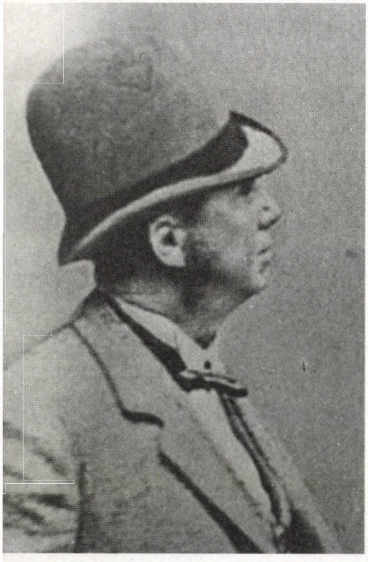
12 ■ Hesp may have had a connection with Sir Tatton Sykes, who was a leading breeder of thoroughbred racehorses on his estate at nearby Sledmere. In 1863 Hesp returned to Slingsby, specifically to present Sykes with a copy of Count Manó Andrássy's *Les chasses et le sport en Hongrie* [Hunting and Sport in Hungary] on behalf of Baron Andor Orczy, as reported in the *Daily News,* 14 April 1863.

émigrés who had been forced into exile after 1848 were only allowed back after 1867. How did Hesp therefore manage to return after only four years? Moreover, he was never prosecuted for his part in the Revolution, but was immediately allowed to return to training racehorses. It is also curious that he was never again employed by the Batthyány family.[13]



Robert Hesp with Kincsem

After his return to Hungary, he set up a new training establishment at Göd, just north of Dunakeszi, and was immediately successful.[14] There he trained the most famous horse in Hungarian history, Kincsem, who holds the extraordinary record of having raced fifty-four times and won on every occasion, although one of these was a dead heat. Nor were these unimportant races. In 1877, when she was a three-year-old, she won all five of the classic races in Austria-Hungary;[15] this is a very rare feat in any country, and is something that has never been achieved in England. Kincsem also won a succession of major races in Germany, and the following year she also ran in France and England, where she won the Goodwood Cup, despite a number of adventures along the way.[16]



Robert Hesp

Kincsem was later retired to stud, but she died relatively young in 1887. Hesp was so saddened that he lost the will to live, and died himself only just over a month later.

Hesp, known as "Csárdás Bob" in Hungary, founded a whole racing dynasty. His son Edward, who died in 1922, was also a leading trainer, first at Göd and then at

13 ■ Dezső Fehér & Imre Török, *A magyar lóversenyzés története, 1827–1977* [The History of Hungarian Horse Racing, 1827–1977]. Budapest: Natura, 1997, p. 53; Tivadar Farkasházy, *Zsokékrul: a lóverseny regénye* [On Jockeys: the Tale of Horse Racing]. Budapest: Gloria, 2006, pp. 155–159; Interview with József Hesp, August 2007.

14 ■ In 1878 Hesp had twenty-five horses in training at Göd, as reported in the *Sporting Gazette*, 9 February 1878. The stable still exists but is currently (2008) ruinous, a sad state of affairs for the home of the famous Kincsem.

15 ■ At that time the Classics in Austria-Hungary comprised the 2,000 Guineas, run in Pozsony, the 1,000 Guineas, Oaks and St Leger, run in Budapest, and the Derby, run in Vienna.

16 ■ For Kincsem's trip to England see Móric Hoeller, *Kincsem Goodwoodban, 1878. augusztus 1* [Kincsem at Goodwood, 1 August 1878]. Budapest: Franklin-Társulat Nyomdája, 1928.

Alag; his grandson Frank was a champion jockey over hurdles and later also trained in Alag; his great-grandson József Hesp fought on the Austrian side in the First World War, during which he was captured on the Eastern Front and only managed to return to Hungary in 1920; he too became a very successful public trainer winning many of the classics; and finally there is his great-great-grandson, also a József Hesp, who is still active in helping to run the races at Kincsem Park today.[17]

A second example is John Reeves, who was the leading English trainer in Hungary for around forty years. He was born at Filkins near Burford in Oxfordshire in 1846. His father was a groom at the Hall and his mother was the daughter of the local butcher. One source says that Reeves attended "the world-famous school of Oxford". However, he appears nowhere in the records of Oxford University, and another version of the story, which says his family wanted him to go to Oxford but he preferred to run away and become a jockey, seems more probable. In fact, many of the Reeves family were involved with horses, so it is perhaps no surprise that he too moved into this world. He became an apprentice jockey when he was only around thirteen or fourteen years old, and had his first victory at Epsom in 1858, but he was never very successful, and he seems to have drifted into horse dealing, as well as trying his hand at training in a small way, again not very successfully. It was horse dealing that first brought him to Europe. In the mid-1860s he bought a horse called Verbina, which he then sold in Italy. Then in 1867 he went to Austria-Hungary, initially as private trainer to Prince Liechtenstein at Eisgrub in Moravia. He immediately began to achieve good results, and this was the beginning of a long career during which he trained for some of the biggest aristocratic owners in the country before setting up as a public trainer in Alag. His was not a betting stable, and throughout his career he had a reputation for honesty and dedication.[18]

John Reeves

Reeves himself would probably have regarded his six Austrian and two German Derby wins as the pinnacle of his career, but he was also a successful trainer of steeplechasers. Amongst these was a horse called Brigand, which was unquestionably the leading continental steeplechaser of his generation. He won the Velká Pardubická three times, in 1875, 1877 and 1878; he also won the Grand Vienna Steeplechase and then went to Germany where he won the Old Baden Hunt

17 ■ Alexander Duschnitz, Joseph Löffler & Anton Prinz, *Das goldene Buch des Renn-, Reit-, und Traber-Sport* [The Golden Book of Racing, Equestrian Sports and Trotting]. Vienna: Selbstverlage, 1904, p. 77; Béla Bevilaqua-Borsody, *Magyar lósport és lótenyésztés* [Hungarian Horse Racing and Breeding]. Budapest, 1943, p. 492; Interview with József Hesp, August 2007.

18 ■ Duschnitz, Löffler & Prinz, *Das goldene Buch,* p. 58; Móric Hoeller, "John Reeves", unidentified magazine article in the author's possession.

Chase, the main steeplechase at Baden-Baden, in 1878. From there he went on to France where he won the Grand Steeple de Paris, and then he came to England where he was aimed at the 1879 Grand National. However, he could only finish ninth or tenth, and as a result, he is not remembered at all in England, in contrast to Hungary, where there is a fine bronze of him in the museum at Keszthely, the home of his owner, Count (later Prince) Tasziló Festetics. Festetics, one of the grandest of the Hungarian magnates, was married to an Englishwoman, his wife being the daughter of the Duke of Hamilton. He imported many horses from England and established an important stud farm at Fenék, now sadly derelict, on the Keszthely estate.[19]

Reeves continued training until 1922 when he retired and went to live with one of his daughters in Vienna. He died in 1930 and is buried in Alag. Like Hesp he founded a racing dynasty, his son Herbert being also a leading trainer in Hungary up until his death in 1936.

John Beeson was born in Lincolnshire in 1834. He was apprenticed to the Duke of Rutland's stable but went to Austria as a boy. After working for Counts Fürstenberg and Aladár Andrássy, he moved to work for Count Miklós Esterházy in Tata. When Esterházy's previous trainer, Mitchell, died in 1861, Beeson took over and trained successfully at Tata until his death in 1888, when the stable was taken over by his son, Alfred.[20]

These are just a few examples, but there are many others, whose life stories follow a generally similar pattern. It seems clear that in almost every case, at least in the early period, these were people who were not going to reach the top in English racing. They were thus open to offers from elsewhere. At the same time, the general Anglophilia of Hungarian aristocrats for much of the nineteenth century led them to want to import not just English horses and dogs, but also English people who could look after the horses and the dogs, and also act as some kind of trophy themselves. Many Hungarian aristocrats regularly visited England for the hunting season, and there is little doubt that they recruited Englishmen to work for them in Hungary on these trips.

There was also a further group of English horsemen in Hungary, and these were the amateur gentleman riders, generally members of the aristocracy or gentry on the lookout for sporting adventures overseas. Men such as these would go over for a season or two, or perhaps stay a few years in Hungary before returning home. One such was Captain Butler Brooke, who settled in Alag in 1896 and stayed there until 1906, gaining the reputation of knowing "every blade of grass and molehill on the Alag track". During that time he rode in 459 races, mostly restricted to amateur riders, winning a more than respectable total of 112 and coming second in another 93. Admiral Horthy's brother, Jenő, who was also an amateur steeplechase rider of note, called him "a charming little Irishman".[21]

19 ■ Zsolt Harsányi, "A Hungarian Magnate", *Hungarian Quarterly,* Spring 1939 (vol.5, no.1), pp. 90–98.
20 ■ In 1882 Beeson had fourteen horses in training for Esterházy. See *Bell's Life,* 21 January 1882.
21 ■ Charles A. Voigt, *Famous Gentleman Riders at Home and Abroad.* London: Hutchinson, 1925, pp. 111–116; Eugene Horthy, *The Sport of a Lifetime.* London: Arnold, 1939, p. 44.

The Festetics stud at Fenékpuszta as it is today

Trainers and jockeys were not the only English people to form part of the racing community. Racing has always been closely associated with hunting and many of the huntsmen on the great princely estates were English.[22]

There were also stud farm managers, vets, bookmakers and racing administrators and officials who were English. To take one fairly prominent example, Francis Cavaliero, who was the Secretary of the Austrian Jockey Club for forty-eight years up until 1881 came originally from Devon. He was also the leading importer of English thoroughbreds to the Dual Monarchy, had a hand in running the stud at Kisbér, was the starter of the races at Pest, and, for good measure, taught the Emperor and Crown Prince Rudolph to speak English.[23]

Throughout the Dual Monarchy the English tended to form little communities, or "commandos" as they themselves described them, with the greatest concentrations at Pardubice in Bohemia, Eisgrub (Lednice) in Moravia, and Tata and Alag in Hungary. During the race meetings, there was also a "little colony" of English trainers and jockeys in Pest.[24]

22 ■ The first huntsman imported from England appears to have been a man named Baldogh (possibly a misspelling of Baldock), who was brought to Hungary by Széchenyi and who was subsequently huntsman to the Károlyi family at Fót, the so-called "Melton of Hungary". By 1857 there were eight packs of hounds in the country comprising around 300 dogs, almost all of English origin. See Manó Andrássy (et al), *Les chasses et le sport en Hongrie* [Hunting and Sport in Hungary]. Pest: Armund Geibel, 1857, pp. [3–7].
23 ■ *The County Gentleman: Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Times,* 12 November 1881 and 1 July 1882. Cavaliero was also secretary and starter at Pozsony, Sopron and Nyitra in Hungary, as well as at Prague, Pardubice and Brno. He supplied most of the reports of Austro-Hungarian racing in the English sporting press.
24 ■ *Daily News,* 19 May 1873.

Tata was founded as a racing community in the 1860s by Count Miklós Esterházy. The location was chosen partly because of its accessibility, being on the main railway line between Vienna and Budapest, and secondly because the turf was reckoned to be amongst the best in the country. By 1878 it was regarded as "quite a sporting locality", with racehorses, foxhounds, stag-hounds and beagles. Esterházy laid out a racecourse, and began to attract leading owners and trainers to establish their training stables in and around the town.[25] Many of the latter were English, of whom the most notable initially were Alfred and John Beeson, Thomas Osborne, and John Metcalfe.[26] In 1887 they were joined by Harry Milne who rapidly became the leading trainer at Tata and remained there until he died in 1938. Like Reeves, Milne had spent some time in Italy before moving to Germany and then to Hungary, but unlike Reeves, his was a big betting stable, and he was noted for winning at many small handicaps and selling races as well as all the Classics.[27] Many of the jockeys retained by these stables were also English, although it is worth noting that towards the end of the century American jockeys began to arrive on the scene. Milne, for example, formed a highly effective partnership with the American Fred Taral.

It is difficult to know the exact size of the English community in Tata. A local historian has estimated that there were around ten to twelve families, perhaps rising to as many as twenty at one time;[28] but, however big it was, it was certainly large enough to attract the attention of one of the Anglican missionary societies. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel had a chaplain based in Budapest, and in 1898 he reported that he had visited Tata and met some of the trainers and jockeys and their families. It may be as a result of this visit that an Anglican chapel was established inside the grounds of the castle at Tata. This building still exists, but for how long it was in use is not clear. Certainly by 1903 the chaplain was reporting that "Things in Tata are not rosy"; it seems that when he went out to visit the little colony he found that most of the trainers and jockeys had gone off to the races rather than go to church. Moreover, many of them had married local women, and so had "fallen away". Although he tried to put a brave face on it, saying that the jockeys appeared to be "a very respectable set of young men", and that he hoped for better things, it is clear that this did not happen and the mission lost its impetus.[29]

In any case, by this time things were beginning to change in Tata. Miklós Esterházy died in 1897. His successor, Ferenc Esterházy, carried on the races, but he died in 1909 and his widow was uninterested in the sport. She allowed the racecourse to close in 1913, and most of the trainers subsequently moved to Alag. Training at Tata ceased altogether in 1922, although a few of the English, including Harry Milne, stayed on in retirement.

25 ■ Géza Körmendi, *Tata: a vizek és a malmok városa* [Tata: Town of Waters and Mills]. Tata: Augmentum, 2007, pp. 112–115; *Sporting Gazette,* 9 February 1878.
26 ■ By 1882 the Beeson stable contained fourteen horses, the Metcalfe stable had eighteen and that of Osborne thirty-one. See *Bell's Life,* 21 January 1882.
27 ■ "Harry Milne", unidentified magazine article in the author's possession; Information from József Hesp.
28 ■ Interview with Géza Körmendi, August 2007.
29 ■ Society for the Propagation of the Gospel: *Report,* 1898, pp. 198–199, and 1903, pp. 219–220.

At the same time as racing at Tata was going into decline, a new training centre and racecourse were being established at Alag, just north of Budapest. The moving spirit behind this was Count Elemér Batthyány, the President of the Hungarian Jockey Club, and the intention was to establish what was often called the "Hungarian Newmarket". In this they certainly succeeded. Even today, when it is clearly a shadow of its former self and the racecourse has closed down, Alag is an evocative place to visit, with a large training ground and many stables set in pine woods, and with many beautiful late-nineteenth-century villas which were homes for the trainers and jockeys.[30] One of the grandest is the Huxtable villa, which was a gift to them by one of their aristocratic patrons as a reward for winning the Derby. The Huxtables were another notable racing family who were in Hungary over two generations, the father, born in Manchester in 1849, starting out as a jockey before becoming a leading trainer, and his two sons, Harry and Robert, being jockeys. Harry's most notable win came in the 1906 Velká Pardubická on Tigra, whereas Robert, after a highly successful career on the flat, was accused of race fixing and banned from riding in Austria-Hungary. He subsequently rode in South Africa and Russia, before moving to India where he died in 1920.[31]

The Huxtable villa, Alag, ca. 1910

In the early years of the twentieth century the links between English and Hungarian racing appeared strong, well-established and durable. When and why did it all come to an end so completely that the story has been all but forgotten, certainly in England and perhaps to a lesser extent in Hungary?

The easy answer is the impact of the First World War, after which, in racing as in much else, things were never quite the same again, and the ties, having been effectively broken during the four years of the war, were never re-established. However, if we look at the question more deeply, it is clear that the

30 ■ For a succinct history of Alag see György Száraz, *Százéves az alagi lóversenypálya, 1896–1996* [One Hundred Years of Alag Racecourse, 1896–1996]. Dunakeszi: Magyar Lovaregylet & Magyar Lóverseny, 1996.

31 ■ Föld & Sipos, *Fuss vagy fizess,* pp. 85–89; Duschnitz, Löffler & Prinz, *Das goldene Buch,* p. 40; Information from József Hesp.

war was not so much a cause as a catalyst, speeding up trends which were already apparent.

It is, for example, evident that in the decade before the war the dominance of the English jockeys was already being eroded. One example of this is that for fourteen years, from 1888 to 1901, the Velká Pardubická was won exclusively by English riders, whereas from 1902 to 1913, it was won by English jockeys only twice.

The Grandstand of the new Budapest racecourse, opened in 1880 in the City Park. Photograph, Budapest Collection, Municipal Szabó Ervin Library

What was happening was that the trainers were beginning to find it easier, and, significantly, cheaper, to employ local riders, rather than import jockeys from England.[32] Interestingly, many of those who showed promise as apprentices, were sent to Newmarket to be trained as professional jockeys, and then returned to Hungary where they gradually monopolised all the leading rides and broke the former hegemony of the English. The two names that stand out here are Ferenc Bonta and Géza Janek, both of whom were apprenticed in England before returning to become leading riders in Hungary in the decade leading up to the First World War. Bonta was the first Hungarian to become champion jockey, which he achieved in 1902 with 96 winners during the season; and Janek became the first Hungarian jockey to win the Derby in 1910.

As for the trainers, the fathers were being succeeded by sons, and a gradual process of Magyarisation was occurring with each successive generation. It is interesting to track this process through the dominant language of each

32 ■ In 1892 it was reported that the English jockeys were demanding exorbitant wages. See *Liverpool Mercury*, 11 January 1892.

generation. Hesp's great-great-grandson, for example, speaks no English at all, although his father had a slight knowledge of it.

It is also worth recounting what happened to the English trainers and jockeys during the war. In Germany they were rounded up and interned in 1914, and although some of them were later released, many remained interned for the duration in the camp at Ruhleben, itself a former racecourse.[33]

The English trainers in Hungary dressed as jockeys for a charity race, 1918

In Austria-Hungary, it was quite different. The trainers were told that they could carry on as normal, and only needed to report to the police occasionally. At one point during the war, a commission of the Red Cross appeared in Hungary and asked to see the English trainers to check that they were being treated correctly. However, their first attempts to set up a meeting failed because the trainers were too busy going to the races. Eventually, a meeting was held in Alag, and the English were asked if they had any complaints. John Reeves acted as their spokesman, and he said that he did indeed have a serious complaint to make—that since the war he had been unable to get hold of any decent Scotch whisky![34]

In fact, the war was a good time for the English trainers in Hungary. Unlike in Germany or in England where racing was severely curtailed, in Austria-Hungary it seems to have flourished. Even as the Empire was collapsing in the autumn of 1918, racing was carrying on regardless. On November 17, 1918 the Vienna *Sports*

33 ■ *The Times,* 9 November 1914; Matthew Stibbe, *British Civilian Internees in Germany: the Ruhleben Camp, 1914–1918.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 124.
34 ■ Rudolf Erdődy, *Das Vollblutpferd im Wandel der Zeit* [The Thoroughbred Through the Ages]. Vienna: Rohrer, 1957, p. 162.

Zeitung reported that "the racing season of 1918 has been one of the most successful ever experienced", going on to report that the betting turnover in Hungary was well over three million crowns a day. Bookmakers, it was said, had made huge fortunes.[35]

The English shared in the good times the war brought to racing. John Reeves could well have afforded the whisky he missed, as he trained the winner of one of the wartime Derbies; in fact every single winner of the Austrian Derby during the war years was trained by an Englishman. Reeves himself celebrated his jubilee of fifty years as a trainer in Hungary during the war, and to mark the occasion the Hungarian Jockey Club held a gala dinner to which every English trainer and jockey, along with their families, were invited. To add to the fun the leading English trainers all dressed up as jockeys and took part in a charity race.[36] Had this been known in England there would have been a scandal, for at the same time as the Hungarian Jockey Club was holding gala dinners for the English racing community in Hungary, the English Jockey Club in Newmarket was busy stripping its Austrian and Hungarian members of their membership of the Club—and these were men such as Count Batthyány and Prince Festetics, who were well-known Anglophiles. Somehow the actions of the Austrians and Hungarians appear the more civilised.

After the war, of course, everything was different. Hungarian racing suffered under the Commune, when the old Budapest racecourse was dug up and used for growing potatoes. The new boundaries and the new passport regulations made travelling between England and Central Europe more difficult and it is noteworthy that although most of the English trainers already living in Hungary stayed on until they died, there were no new recruits. As for the jockeys, the war merely accentuated the trend already apparent beforehand. Unable to bring new jockeys out from England, the trainers were forced to employ locals and by the end of the war the links between English and Hungarian racing gradually withered away. There were still seven of the leading trainers who were English in the 1920s, but as they died or retired no one came to replace them. The last of the active trainers to have come from England was George Hitch, who settled first in Austria in 1892 before moving to Hungary and training first in Tata and then in Alag. After being champion trainer several times between the wars, he retired in 1938 and died in 1954. Then, of course, the Second World War, followed by forty years of communism, severed the ties completely.

Memories of the English racing community have not faded completely in Hungary. Indeed, some in today's racing community look back on that era as a kind of golden age, and perhaps, given the problems facing Hungarian racing at the present time, that assessment is not so wide of the mark. ❧

35 ■ This report was reprinted in *The Times,* 19 November 1918, under the headline "While Rome Burns".
36 ■ *New York Times,* 18 May 1919.

János M. Rainer

A Shock and its Aftermath

The Prague–Korčula–Budapest Triangle

The year 1968 started well for János Kádár, but ended badly. For the supporters of economic reform, the Prague Spring held the promise of allies next door. Moscow, on the other hand, was suspicious from the beginning, not just of Prague, but of Budapest as well. In July, Moscow opted for military intervention. Kádár was faced with some hard choices. Until mid-summer, he had tried to sweet-talk the Soviets out of intervening, even while attempting to persuade Alexander Dubček to be less outspoken in his public statements, and more prompt to reassure the Soviet leadership. Eventually, however, he agreed to Hungary taking part in the military intervention. On August 21, 1968, the armies of five members of the Warsaw Pact—600,000 soldiers from Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union—crossed the Czechoslovak borders, and put an end to the process of reform and liberalisation spearheaded by Alexander Dubček. The armies of four of the countries withdrew from Czechoslovak territory within a few weeks, but a treaty was signed legalising the presence of the Soviet forces of intervention: nearly 90,000 Soviet Army men were "temporarily" stationed in the country for the next 23 years.

A delicate balance

On the morrow of the intervention, the official Hungarian news agency MTI issued a short bulletin to the effect that the Hungarian government, acting at the request of unnamed Czechoslovak state and party officials, had, jointly with other allies, given "fraternal assistance"—including "armed assistance"—to the Czechoslovak people, who had been "concerned about the future of their socialist

---

János M. Rainer

heads the Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution. His publications include pioneering statistical accounts of the reprisals following the 1956 Revolution (in samizdat, 1986–89), a book on the 1953–59 debates in literary periodicals, a two-volume biography of Imre Nagy, and, most recently, a book-length study of the 1957–89 security service reports on József Antall, prime minister between 1990–93.

achievements". Except for this terse notice, no other news item referred to the event in the Hungarian press. A secret service informer preserved for posterity an unguarded comment by László Tabi, a well-known humourist. It was typical of the Hungarian press, Tabi noted, that *Népszabadság,* the party daily, reported at greater length on the Pop Song Contest than on the events in Czechoslovakia. The media silence had the result that, for the first time since 1956, the entire country was again glued to Radio Free Europe.

By 1968, the Kádár régime was in the midst of implementing the policy which, after the post-1956 years of reprisal and fear, would bring Hungary over two decades of stability and modestly rising standards of living. In respect of foreign policy, the Hungarian government faithfully followed the Soviet line when it came to the great conflict within international Communism, that between the Soviet leadership and Maoist China. Unlike Romania, which declared its independence of the Soviet model and demonstratively went its "own way" Hungary was not one for foreign policy initiatives.

On the domestic front, the primary goal was to preserve the delicate balance that had evolved by the early 1960s. The Kádár government, while it still considered Soviet-style socialism its long-term goal, in practice aimed at minimising coercion and rationalising socialist dogma. "Planned raising of living standards" was the slogan and the key consideration when political decisions were taken. As for the latitude allowed to the intelligentsia, that was a function of personal contacts between a few prestigious writers, artists and scholars and György Aczél, the cultural guru of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

As the years passed, Hungary—and János Kádár personally—got an ever better press in the West. "Goulash Communism" became the standard epithet for Hungary, which was dubbed the "merriest barracks in the socialist camp". The offer of political consolidation had come from above and Hungarian society, which had no political representation anyway, was relieved to get the chance to accept. Ultimately, the success of the Kádár régime and its recognition (legitimisation) rested on two conditions, namely the Soviet Union's stamp of approval and the performance of the economy. The party leadership most resembled the board of directors of a gigantic socialist company, concerned with production and productivity, but with a conspicuous amount of attention being paid to the workers' welfare.

With neither a private sector nor a market to build on, engineering this welfare was not easy. The early 1960s saw a slowdown in economic growth in Hungary and in the rest of the socialist camp as the further cooling of the Cold War in 1961–62 (the building of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban missile crisis) once again led to an increase in military spending. Given an economy based on the extensive development of heavy industry as it was forced through in the early Fifties, it seemed that the country's reserves—primarily its industrial manpower reserves—were close to exhaustion. Agricultural productivity indicators had barely moved since the introduction of collectivisation. In the circumstances, it was something of a comfort to Hungary's leaders to see that most of the Soviet satellite

countries were similarly compelled to contemplate corrections and reforms, primarily in the economic sphere.

In late 1964, the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party adopted a resolution calling for the critical re-evaluation of the economic mechanism as a whole. In November of 1966, the Central Committee endorsed the principles of the reform, and decided that the first set of measures would be introduced on January 1, 1968. The person at the helm was the secretary of the Central Committee, Rezső Nyers, who headed a team of economists, party officials and social scientists. The party leadership decided to back the reforms because of János Kádár's personal stand. Kádár himself was no reformer; he evaluated every proposal for change solely in terms of his personal Utopian vision of socialism, and in terms of its impact on standards of living. He would not let anyone touch the political foundations of the country's Soviet-type system, and always kept an anxious eye on the Soviet leadership's reaction to the initiatives. The reason why he gave the go-ahead to reforms in November 1966 was that he saw that without change, there would be no continued rise in living standards; that the reform would not lead to a fatal rift within the Party leadership; and that Moscow was not hostile to change at that moment in time.

But there was yet another factor. Chances for implementing reform measures as such hinged on the political climate in Eastern Europe as a whole. Initially it seemed that the prevailing winds favoured change. For a brief moment, the momentous changes taking place in Czechoslovakia in 1968 held the promise of a possible "reform axis" within the Soviet block. The vast majority of intellectuals were filled with optimism at the prospect of a Soviet-type system gradually acquiring a "human face". The invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21 marked the end of this illusion as well, but it took some time for this to sink in. Influential intellectuals in Hungary would continue to hope as they followed the reforms; the majority, however, stayed away from politics. In return, they were allowed to keep publishing their books, exhibiting their works, putting on their plays and making their films—without anyone ever expecting them to pledge their allegiance to the régime, or to adopt the socialist realist idiom. As for the social sciences (economics, sociology), there were times when the Kádár government expressly turned to their practitioners for "advice," even ideological questions were argued about in public, as long as the debate did not infringe on certain taboos.

Protests in Hungary

"The intellectuals are generally against it," Kádár noted on August 23, but did not wonder out loud whether they would do anything about Hungary's part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Any public protest would have been most uncomfortable for the Hungarian leadership. Moscow, East Berlin, Warsaw and Sofia already viewed Kádár with suspicion not just because of the reforms, but also because of his initial reluctance to join in the intervention.

The Hungarian Reform Communists of 1968 were of several hues. The pragmatists were primarily interested in the prospects of economic change after August 21. Those, on the other hand, who believed that economic reform and the future of socialism and its ideology were interlinked with the future of Marxism—i.e. the ideologically committed—viewed the intervention, too, in this broader context. Hence the public protest issued by the philosopher Georg Lukács, a minister in the 1956 revolutionary government, who was subsequently expelled from the Party, but who, to Kádár's great satisfaction, rejoined it in 1967 in recognition of the consolidation.

Lukács was not the only one to publicly protest. András Hegedüs, in 1955–56 still the Stalinist prime minister, but in 1968 the reformist director of the Sociology Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, condemned the invasion even at the briefing held on August 21 to inform the country's leading intellectuals of the ongoing intervention. He repeated his protest in a letter he made public a few days later. András Tömpe, Hungary's ambassador to East Berlin at the time (an Old Communist who in the 1950s was still a member of the Soviet Secret Service) sent a letter condemning the invasion, and resigned from his diplomatic post in protest.

The message from Korčula

The Dalmatian island of Korčula was the venue in August 1968 of a summer school attended by several hundred people. One event was the symposium "Marx and Revolution" run by *Praxis,* a critical Marxist periodical published in Zagreb. This drew almost 70 participants, Yugoslavs and Americans along with West and East Europeans, men such as Ernst Bloch, Lucien Goldman, Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Marcuse. When news came of the Soviet intervention in Prague, the discussions were broken off and the participants set about formulating a joint protest. They declared that the action by the Soviet state and Party was unlawful and ungrounded. The invasion had "delivered a terrible blow to all forces of international socialism and to the policy of peace and peaceful coexistence." The intervention would be seen to justify the United States' "aggression in Vietnam and will serve as a pretext for other acts of aggression." The signatories called on the citizens of all the countries participating in the invasion to demand that the troops be withdrawn and that the Dubček leadership be restored. The forces of the "international socialist movement" were urged to inform the Soviet leaders that if they failed to withdraw their troops, they would be responsible for "isolating themselves from the movement, which will never accept this policy." Finally, solidarity was expressed with the people of Czechoslovakia, its progressive and socialist forces, and its Communist Party, which "together had begun a splendid fight for the creation of true socialism."

The declaration was signed by five of the six Hungarian participants at the symposium: György Márkus, Vilmos Sós and Zádor Tordai of the Hungarian

Academy of Sciences' Institute of Philosophy, and Ágnes Heller and Mária Márkus of its Sociology Research Group. (The sixth Hungarian participant, Ferenc Tőkei, did not sign.) This in itself created a stir. The five Hungarian signatories also issued a separate declaration to the French news agency AFP stating, "We as Marxists and Communists responsible for the progress of the socialist system consider that the intervention by some member states of the Warsaw Treaty presents a serious danger to the future of socialism and the newly-begun renewal of Marxian theory. Whatever the consequences, we consider it our duty to do everything in our power to promote the development of authentic socialism and real socialist democracy."[1]

This protest went beyond the post-1956 bounds of what was permissible in two respects: it was open, and it was collective. Its signatories, as János Kis put it twenty years later, then saw themselves as socialists: "As they saw things, there was socialism here—a bureaucratic, dictatorial socialism burdened with the legacy of Stalinism, but socialism nevertheless. We saw this distorted socialism as opposed to the democratic, humanist ideal of socialism, and our Marxism as the 'real' Marxism, the philosophical and scientific-socialist foundation of democratic socialism."[2] For Lukács's disciples (the Budapest School) the aim was to reconstruct Marx's vision of socialism; the aim of the group of sociologists around András Hegedüs was to describe and criticise aspects of *existing* socialism, and thus help to create associations of self-managing free producers.

Korčula was a natural phase in their line of argument, but politically it marked a change of course, a milestone. Those thinking along these lines had assumed that a conjunction of international and Hungarian socialism would be arrived at. The direction of progress was thought to be an open question. It was stated in Korčula on August 21, 1968 that crushing the Prague Spring was a clear reversion towards bureaucratic, dictatorial socialism, a road along which the signatories did not wish to proceed. Their text even referred to possible consequences, and the consequences of the Korčula gesture depended on how the ruling system would react.

By the 1960s, dissent which stayed within the paradigm of the ruling ideology was no longer seen by the Hungarian regime as a straightforward matter for police action. There was also the option of a political approach, which ranged from critical partnership to real debate. The agreement struck with Georg Lukács in 1967 (re-admission to the party, with implicit acceptance of his right to hold his own opinions) extended also to his disciples and followers. This, of course,

1 ■ Open Society Archives, Radio Free Europe Background Reports, 134-1-91, 78-2-231. See Ervin Csizmadia, *A magyar demokratikus ellenzék* [The Hungarian Democratic Opposition]. 2. vols. Documents. Budapest: T-Twins, 1995, 13. Heller's recollections in Ágnes Heller–János Kőbányai, *Bicikliző majom* [Monkey on a Bicycle]. Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 1998, pp, 218–234.

2 ■ János Kis, "A Filozófiai Intézettől a *Beszélő* szerkesztőségéig" [From the Institute of Philosophy to the Editorial Office of *Beszélő*]. Ervin Csizmadia's interview. *Valóság,* 1988, No. 12, p. 93. Máté Szabó similarly defines their position in a recent work. See "A szocializmus kritikája a magyar ellenzék gondolkodásában (1968–1988)" [The Criticism of Socialism in the Thinking of the Hungarian Opposition, 1968–1988]. *Politikatudományi Szemle,* 2008, No. 1, especially pp. 15–18.

did not mean that the old methods were not resorted to when necessary. Though very few documents have survived, there is no doubt that dissenters were kept an eye on by the political police. Briefings were sent to Politburo members about the opinions of "persons kept under surveillance" because of "literary and artistic questions". After the mid-1960s, these reports generally began with references to Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György Márkus and Mihály Vajda.[3] From the early 1960s onwards, the Department (later, Directorate) for "the Prevention of Internal Reaction" recommended the initiation of proceedings against them for incitement on several occasions, rejected their passport applications, and so on. Official police warnings were given to Ferenc Fehér in 1961 and to Fehér and to Ágnes Heller in 1964, although there were times when the counterintelligence services' recommendations were rejected (e.g. in 1965), and in 1966 and 1968, they were given passports due to "a change in the operative situation".[4] In the summer of 1966, an intelligence officer compiled a synopsis of Fehér's file, calling him a "revisionist", just as he had been in 1950, when he had been suspended from university for two years. The report was probably referring to Fehér's own definition of himself when it described him as fighting for "true Marxism" and "true communism". He had also been a supporter of Imre Nagy in 1956, had taken part in a post-revolutionary organisation, had helped the family members of those condemned for 1956 offences ("White Aid", as the report put it), and had played an active part in propagating the "undermining policy" pursued by the West.[5] After such precedents, the Korčula signatories had little to hope for.

Kádár and the party factions

The Korčula declaration was first discussed by the Politburo of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on September 3, 1968. Béla Biszku spoke in his report of the "well-known declaration of five philosophers", and mentioned the Party meeting of the Sociology Research Group (which unanimously condemned the intervention), and letters by, among others, Lukács. He called on the departments of the Central Committee to "provide a precise analysis of the situation within the Party, as there are occurrences that merit close attention." But, he added, "There is a danger of organisational measures being taken where political work ought to be done." Biszku confined himself largely to outlining the situation. Kádár in his concluding address left every possibility wide open as regards the consequences:

3 ■ E.g. ÁBTL (Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security) 2. 7. 2. 20. 9. 1965 on "negative phenomena" noted at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest; loc. cit. 28. 10. 1965. Opinions on questions relating to politics, literature and the arts; 15. 6. 1966. Opinions relating to party and state policy on culture and the arts.

4 ■ The passports of Ferenc Fehér, Ágnes Heller, György Márkus and associates, ÁBTL 1. 11. 1. 178.822; Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér entries in the register, ÁBTL 2. 2. 1. (The files there summed up, including 19 volumes [!] reporting on Ferenc Fehér's activities, are not in ÁBTL.)

5 ■ Lieutenant István Róna's summary of Ferenc Fehér's file. 28. 6. 1966. ÁBTL 3. 2. 4. K–1967. 141–143.

According to our regular rules, we have to take action against such deeds in keeping with our rules of procedure. From a comradely, friendly word, through to the ultimate measures. Everyone should get an appropriate reply from us, including Lukács and Tömpe. In keeping with our regular position.

The "regular position" in 1968 was a contingent one. "All in all, the situation can be described as normal," said the relieved Central Committee Secretary, Biszku. If pragmatic reformers within the Party or the non-Party intelligentsia had followed the line of the ideologically committed reformers—the dissenters—that would have created an "abnormal" situation. But they had not. "For weeks, I was going madly round town asking what to do, but met only with dismissive gestures and forced smiles," János Kenedi recalled twenty years later. He was to become an opposition activist, but in 1968 he was a 21-year-old trainee journalist.[6] So the immediate outcome remained organisational, but without extending to the "ultimate measures" mentioned by Kádár.

The five signatories were called on to withdraw their signatures publicly, but none of them was prepared to do so. Mária Márkus (Party Secretary at the Sociology Research Group), György Márkus and Vilmos Sós were expelled from the Party. (Heller and Tordai were not members.) The same fate awaited Mihály Vajda. (After appealing, he was re-admitted to the Party until he quit it in 1973.) Tamás Földvári, a sociologist, gave back his Party card at the Party meeting mentioned by Biszku, and his resignation was accepted. The heads of their institutions banned the signatories from official trips abroad for a year. The III/III–4 department of the Interior Ministry (counter-intelligence in the cultural field) recommended that Heller, the Márkus couple and Sós have their passports withdrawn.

The Politburo spent a long time considering what further steps to take. On November 12, 1968, Miklós Óvári reported at length on how much attention the Party organisations responsible had given the two academy institutes *before* the events of August 21. He went on to discuss the views of Hegedüs and Lukács's disciples, especially those of their writings that were "theoretically and politically dubious and had political content", and pronounced them to contain "serious ideological/political errors and danger". But the report also concluded that there was "no question of an opposition political grouping". He even had some words of praise for the Márkus group: their efforts were "marked by an attempt to analyse present reality and raise questions in a new way."

Óvári's report endorsed, of course, disciplinary measures taken by the Party and the institute heads. "The act of signing the Korčula statement and the views of those opposing the position of the Central Committee constitute a right-wing revisionist intervention that has to be clearly condemned and effectively combated. This battle," the report added, "must be waged in a discriminating way." This is the key sentence in the report. Much of it was about how those in charge of the Institute of Philosophy, including its director, József Szigeti, had fallen into the error of "leftist

6 ■ "Emberekről, eszmékről, politikáról" [On Men, Ideals and Politics]. Ervin Csizmadia's 1989 interview. In János Kenedi, *A halál és a leányka* [Death and the Maiden]. Budapest: Századvég, 1992, p. 372.

distortion" by labelling the dissenters a "right-wing opposition political platform" and claiming that the "mild" disciplinary actions taken against the signatories gave them "objective encouragement". The Institute's Party secretary, János Sipos, even claimed that an "ideological counter-revolution" had broken out in Hungary. The denunciatory letters of Szigeti and his group were a godsend to the Kádárites. András Hegedüs was replaced as head of the Sociology Research Group and the same fate awaited Szigeti: a blow to the right and a blow to the left.

One important sentence in Óvári's report reads: "It is not advisable in this situation to take action against those whose reservations and views are expressed within the Party framework; political debate should be the means used to condemn such views." To which Károly Németh promptly and cautiously responded asking whether "our principle that a contrary opinion may be expressed within the Party framework is a correct one... It is not possible to go to extremes of opposition within the Party."[7] This prompted János Kádár to improvise some thoughts about principles and organisation. First he set Óvári straight: it was not the present situation that made him emphasise the primacy of political debate, for "this is the Party's position". He went on to say that

> The Organisation Rules are to be understood to say that a Party member may have his own views and has the right to express those views at the highest Party level. That's roughly the essence of the matter. Then the other points come into force, i. e. he's required to represent the policy of the Party... And then there's the nuance to the effect that if a new circumstance arises having to do with the question concerned, the Party member has the right to request another debate. But waving his views like a red flag at every intervening branch meeting is not allowed... To sum up: we combat views with arguments; on the other hand, we act on the basis of our official discipline, and administratively, if need be.

Epilogue

Twelve years after 1956, the *modus vivendi* reached with the intelligentsia at the beginning of the 1960s was important to the Party leadership. Before 1968, there were Marxists ideologically committed to reform among the intelligentsia. Korčula marked a breach in this thinking, as the Prague events took these pioneers off in a different direction. Initially, the sanctions used against them were mild. "A resolution of the Secretariat," said Kádár, thinking aloud in November 1968, "can be published in *Pártélet*, so that the whole thing is not given too much weight."[8]

The Party journal *Pártélet* duly carried the arguments—for internal Party use. Other methods, "administrative if need be", were kept in reserve for the time being, and the III/III Group Directorate of the Interior Ministry, the final reserve, was in no hurry to analyse the events. Not until the end of 1969 was a report completed: "Reconsideration of the activity of opposition persons and groups

7 ■ MOL (Hungarian National Archives) M–KS 288. f. 5/476. ő. e. 43.

8 ■ On the 18 November 1968 declaration of the Central Committee Secretariat see loc. cit. pp. 136–140. It finally amounted to five typed pages.

forming a revisionist political platform". A new colour had been identified in the spectrum, a group of philosophers that had "been active since 1958". The report emphasised that not one revisionist had been subjected to legal proceedings since 1959 (here, someone added by hand, "for political reasons"). As for the philosophers, they had already held revisionist political notions in 1956, but they had only become active "after the defeat of the armed counter-revolution". They disagreed with the assessment of 1956 and the condemnation of Imre Nagy. "They received a political reprimand for their behaviour at the time of the Czechoslovak events." But they revived their activity a couple of months later. Although "they act within the bounds of legality," they were clearly oppositionists, and were seeking a leading role in the Party. Their immediate purpose: to get their views recognised—pretending a middle way—as one line of pluralist Marxism. But their long-term purpose was comprehensive democratisation, beginning with the Party. Their objective was to obtain positions (for instance at Eötvös Loránd University) and to raise a new, young "elite".

The report noted with satisfaction that the operative surveillance of the philosophers had been "technically solved" (mainly by phone tapping and by intercepting their mail), but stated self-critically that "network observation" by informers was weak. The main reason was not inadequate police work, but "political and operative uncertainty" surrounding the group, though some professional factors played a part as well. It was hard to infiltrate a circle that was closed both in a personal, human sense and on political principle. The majority of the possible informers turned down the job, while those who did not were generally prejudiced in favour of the individuals targeted. Nor was the task a small one: they were dealing with 150 revisionists.[9]

One proposal put forward was to set up a "fictive revisionist group" that would operate "within and without"—perhaps to offset the infiltration difficulties. This innovative idea was rejected on the grounds that what was wanted was to break up a group of this kind. The security forces had also to adapt in other ways to the policy of kid-glove reprisals. If there was a report on the revisionists, there also had to be one on the sectarians, who were dubbed, with some conceptual uncertainty, "left-wing revisionists".[10] The Group Directorate proposed (obviously not of its own initiative) a new ministry directive in 1970 to regulate undercover work in the cultural field. This precluded monitoring or investigating those who took an active part in debates where the debates were "approved", and those who expressed preference for artistic styles and art criticism different from the official line; it also precluded monitoring or investigating the programming policies of cultural institutions (editorial offices and radio stations, television and film studios). With institutions under

9 ■ On the activities of hostile persons and groups based on the revisionist political platform see the report by Section III/III of the Ministry of the Interior (BM), 4 December 1969. ÁBTL 4. 1. A-1353/2.
10 ■ BM III/III. report on hostile activities by persons and groups belonging to the leftist revisionist platform, 4 May 1970. loc. cit.

investigation, according to the proposal, heed was to be paid not to general matters but to opposition activity and the persons involved. The order centralised most surveillance in the cultural field, and made such activity contingent on permission from the III/III group director.[11] The order was issued at the end of September 1970 by Interior Minister András Benkei.[12]

After the kid-glove reprisals, possible "fellow travellers" became suspected revisionists, and in the "field of vision" of the Interior Ministry, a closed (and thus dangerous) group of persons exhibiting opposition behaviour. But the "seeking of the way" by this group was, in a way, allowed to be continued: Hungary's reforming Marxists digested 1968, including the lessons of Prague (and Korčula). For a time the group committed to pragmatic reform became ever larger. Surveillance was kept on a tight leash but still supplied information obtained with its own methods.

"A new circumstance relevant to the question concerned" arose for all at the end of 1972, when the Hungarian reform was "frozen" at Moscow's behest, just as the pioneering reformers had arrived at a philosophically and sociologically sound critique of the system. Whether that critique would have continued to be considered Marxist or would have constituted a break with Marxism remains an open question. For János Kádár and his regime no longer condoned the post-Korčula "soft" approach—the "new circumstances" brought tougher administrative measures: loss of jobs, *Berufsverbot,* tight secret-police control, then marginalisation (or being forced out of the country, into exile). That, however, is another chapter in the story.[13]

Now, forty years after the historical moment that warrants our speaking of a Prague–Korčula–Budapest triangle, the reform-Marxists' "seeking of the way" is still a major unwritten chapter in the history of Hungarian philosophy and political thinking. Revisionists in the finest sense of the word, the reform-Marxists were in the philosophical mainstream of their time and made original contributions to influential schools of international thought.

The year 1968 was significant in the history of the Kádár era as well, though its true import became apparent only in 1972–3, when the barriers that had been erected against reform thinking began to block the paths to economic and political reform as well. Korčula, however, was important mainly as a gesture. A gesture of solidarity visible from afar. Freedom and democracy as we understand it today may not have been at the forefront of the signatories' minds. The Hungarian political milieu at which their gesture was, in part, directed, had perhaps never been as free, relatively speaking, as it was in 1968. What they did then and there, however, and were the first ones to do since 1956, has, nevertheless, to do with freedom for us today. If freedom is important to us, we cannot afford to ignore this story, nor neglect to discover all its details and significance. ❧

11 ■ BM III/III. report on hostile activities in the field of culture and on operative work. ÁBTL 4. 1. A-1353/3.

12 ■ Order No. 0022 issued by the Minister of the Interior of the Hungarian People's Republic on operative duties concerning hostile activities in the field of culture, 25 September 1970. ÁBTL 4. 2. 10-21/22/1970.

13 ■ Filozófus-per, 1973 [The 1973 Philosophy Trial]. *Világosság,* special edition, 1989.

György Dalos

1968 Tour d'Horizon

In the summer of 1967 I got back home from a five-year stint as a student in Moscow. I handed in my red service passport at the Ministry of Culture, not asking for a personal one in exchange as I supposed there would be plenty of time. As a result, I did not cross my homeland's borders in 1968; indeed, only once did I leave Budapest itself for any length of time, when I was got a temporary post as interpreter for the North Korean youth football team. Of course, I didn't speak a word of Korean, but luckily the Party Secretary of the Football Association in Pyongyang spoke Russian so through us it was possible to establish a dialogue between the appointed Hungarian coach and the eleven players. I spent two weeks with the lads of the Democratic Republic of North Korea at their training camp in Tata, and nothing better shows my lack of any sense of proportion than the attempt I made, after a signally calorie-rich lunch, to lift the weights that Imre Földi, the Hungarian weightlifter was using to prepare for his appearance at Mexico, where he won silver (he went on to win a gold at Munich in 1972). The contest the boys were featured in, incidentally, was an internationally recognised competition titled the Olympic Hopefuls' Tournament, with youth teams from ten socialist countries competing, and each match being played at a football ground in a different small town in Hungary. Since it was mid-August by then, one got sick of coming across the Warsaw Pact's impressive military hardware that was at the time being drawn up into order of battle as an intended fraternal gesture of support for the Czechoslovak people.

In that curious leap year, major events in my life flashed by as in high-speed cinematography: in February, the questioning of me got under way at the

---

György Dalos

writes novels, short stories and poems in Hungarian and in German.
He is best known to the English reading public for his novel 1985: What Happens after Big Brother Dies *(Pantheon, 1983), a sequel to Orwell's* 1984, *and* The Guest from the Future. Anna Akhmatova and Isaiah Berlin *(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).*
His latest novel translated into English is The Circumcision *(Brandl and Schlesinger, 2006).*
György Dalos headed the Institute for Hungarian Culture in Berlin from 1995 to 1999.

Gyorskocsi Street police station; in April, a charge of Maoist conspiracy was brought against our small group; in June, sentences were passed, in my own case, a prison term suspended to seven months on probation; in July, I was called up for military service, then after one week sent home as untrustworthy; in August, I was kicked out of my job and expelled from the Party—in short, I had good reason to be preoccupied with myself. Meanwhile the outside world ticked on—the first human heart transplant in South Africa; the Tet Offensive in Vietnam; the Prague Spring; student protests from Paris to Belgrade, from Warsaw to Rome; the US presidential election campaign; then back home in Hungary the unveiling of the New Economic Mechanism, i.e. reform measures in the economy. Yawning heights, the radiant future. To say nothing of János Kádár's speech at the Hosiery Works in Budapest, in October, in which, with regard to the intervention in Czechoslovakia, he declared that "the broad masses of the public accept and support the decision taken by the Party and the government."

I was going through pretty serious mood swings. On the one hand, there was the intoxicating, liberating feeling of having deviated from the career that had been laid down for me and drifted to the fringes of the world of the intelligentsia, while the conspiracy charge cast a Romantic aura around me. I felt as though Blanqui, Babeuf, Petrashevsky and Bakunin were waving to me from a materialist afterlife, that my co-conspirators were keeping an eye on my actions, and I was being warmly commended to the Black Panthers, the Tupamaros of Uruguay, the Philippine Marxist-Leninists. Light years away, I was pulled into Che and Fidel's field of attraction, which was obviously connected with the fact that, through the agency of a friend, I managed to arouse the interest of the Cuban ambassador to Hungary. That is how it came about that one Sunday afternoon a visit was paid to my grungy flat on the Lenin Boulevard, which lacked pretty well all basic mod cons, by Floreal Chomon Mediavilla, to whom, for want of anything better, I could only offer "Star" coke and nibbles. His Excellency plonked himself down on my carpet, from which, just the previous day, as a special distinction in his honour, I had beaten out the dust on the outside corridor, and he listened to my story. In that extraordinary gesture on his part there still lurked something of a naïve "revolutionary diplomacy": the ambassador had joined the anti-Batistá student movement in the Fifties, and it was he who, in January 1959, had announced on Havana radio the victory of the "bearded ones". The visit transpired to be the last as well as the first, on account of the stink that the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs kicked up about it, which I took to be a sign of the huge personal esteem in which I was held.

My encounter with Radovan Zogović in the Pest flat belonging to Gregor Lulić, a Slovenian emigrant who had been imprisoned on the island of Goli Otok, was more downbeat. Zogović was a supreme Montenegrin poet and before the Second World War a member of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's avant-garde, then leader of a group of resistance fighters during the war, a friend of Milovan Djilas. When tension arose between the USSR and Yugoslavia in 1948 he set himself up in opposition to

Tito—a contest that, let's face it, not many cared to join. Zogović was a diehard Communist of the Montenegrin variety whom Tito did not dare have locked up; he did, however, spend many years under house arrest, and a ban was placed on his publishing anything, though that had largely been lifted by 1968. This latter circumstance gave me some pause for thought: would I, I wondered, be up to enduring a 15-year ban on publication for the ideals for which I had only recently been convicted? And anyway, what do I, a 25-year-old, with a single volume of poetry to my name, think about the passing years, the prospect of having to spend the rest of my life living under a régime that is not to my liking and, on top of everything else, has expropriated from me the use of the attribute 'socialist'. Was it conceivable that I would be 40 years old before I got my second volume under my belt? That thought did not greatly appeal to me, though it is in fact what happened.

I was past the legally binding bit of my conviction and had paid the trial costs and the legal fees, borrowing money to do so, when at dawn one day I was roused from bed by a frantic ringing at the door (I didn't have a telephone in those days) from my mathematician friend Miklós Simonovits, who came to break the news that the mathematics professor Pál Erdős had heard of me and wanted to make my acquaintance, but the only time he could spare was that morning. I had no idea at all who he was, least of all what conceivable interest a déclassé Hungarian poet could be to a mathematician, but I duly turned up at the Institute of Mathematics at 11 a.m. It was a strange conversation that we had, though in truth I would not call it a discourse so much as two monologues. For his part, he first of all apologised for the fact that he had had to set up the meeting at such short notice, but he had only arrived in Budapest from New York the day before, and tomorrow he would be flying off to a big international symposium in Sydney. Could I tell him, though, briefly, how things stood with China, and also with me. Cautiously, in terms I hoped he would understand, I started to explain the Beijing version of the Sino-Soviet rift and my own reservations about socialism in Hungary. Erdős did not interrupt, but I had a feeling that he lost interest in what I had to say.

He then used a momentary gap in my recital to speak. He said that he thought highly of my interest in China, because it was a country from which much could be expected in the future, especially with regard to mathematics. He spoke about a colleague there who was involved with the theory of numbers, and in that connection he expounded in due detail on his own particular area of expertise, doing so just as pointlessly as I had attempted to initiate him into the mysteries of the Chinese Communist Party. Even so, I would not say that we came out quits. Even as my brain was reeling with theorems and equations, my hyperpoliticised being was virtually aghast at the spectacle of someone who could speak for half an hour in one go without letting the words "United States", "Soviet Union", "Vietnam" or "solidarity" pass his lips even once. Though I was far from being in any position to assess the greatness of this genius who flitted about between the continents, I was nevertheless touched for a moment by the magic of his

Television pop song jury at work in "the merriest barracks in the socialist camp". Budapest, 1968

exceptional quality, and all of a sudden I felt totally insignificant besides him in my attainments, thus far and yet to come, as a human being and as a writer, in my entire existence within the confines of the borders of Hungary.

For the record, the North Koreans came ninth out of the ten youth teams, maybe because, in the opinion of their Hungarian coach, they were incapable of striking a ball on the volley, though maybe because their centre-half, Chou Su Gil, was hacked down by the East Germans when they played in Kapuvár. At any event, on August 18th, following the closing banquet, I gloomily sipped ginseng brandies in company with the Party Secretary and the team captain. As best I recollect, they were mourning the decline in their chances of being sent on another assignment abroad, whereas I was mourning something quite different: not long before my trip to Tata, my sculptress friend, Zsuzsa Lóránt, had shown me a picture postcard from a mutual acquaintance, the young Danish far-leftist René Karner, which he had sent from the army barracks near Copenhagen where he was undergoing military training. Under his greetings and his name he had tacked on "Private in the lousy Danish army." Can you beat it! You could hardly get a bigger difference in the degree of freedom of two Maoists separated purely by geography, I thought to myself. Just think if I had risked sending a postcard like that from the barracks in Vác! By way of consolation, I sat with several of the Olympic squad watching the semifinal of a pop song contest on a black-and-white TV. "Never Let Your Head Ache" sang Teri Harangozó enticingly, as though she knew I could do with words of comfort. Later on, in my tiny room, before turning in for the night, I browsed through an essay about late stages of capitalism that Rudi Dutschke had recently published in a Rowohlt rororo paperback in Hamburg that had been smuggled into Hungary. In the event of an ebbing of revolutionary fervour, the student leader urged, with reference to something Georg Lukács had written in the 1920s, that the knot of the internal crisis of the proletariat had to be sliced in two by the sword of action. In response to that, it is highly likely that I said to myself: we shall see. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

János Szegő

From Short Story to Novel and Vice Versa

Éva Berniczky: *Méhe nélkül a bába* (Midwife Without Womb). Budapest, Magvető Kiadó, 2007, 203 pp.
László Márton: *Amit láttál, amit hallottál* (What You Saw, What You Heard). Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó, 2008, 359 pp.

Short story and novel: how often do we read a bulky short story as a novel and how often do we read a novel from which a long short story is trying to escape? Éva Berniczky provides us with good examples of the multiplicity of ways in which the two can approach each other on a narrative scale, and the multiplicity of ways in which they can interpret each other. She first attracted attention not long ago with a debut collection of short stories and has recently published this, her first, novel. László Márton, after a productive period as novelist, has returned to the short story of his starting days *(Nagy-budapesti rém-üldözés* [Greater-Budapest Monster Chase, 1983]), by bringing out the collection, *What You Saw, What You Heard.*

"This dark appendix of Europe" is how Berniczky, in her short story "In the Light of the Waning Moon" (see pp. 40–46 in this issue of *HQ*), characterises Transcarpathia, the strange region in which she herself lives and where her works are set, and which now lies within Ukraine and shares borders with Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Romania. It is customarily referred to as Europe's backyard, sustaining a wide gamut of different ethnic groups, languages and religious faiths. Diversity and poverty are the common lot of its inhabitants. It is the setting for a classic anecdote about the old fellow from Beregovo, who, in the course of the twentieth century, became a citizen of five countries without ever setting foot outside the street in which he was born. (The chance that people should be left to live wherever they wanted to live, without having history irrupt into their streets, was a blessing granted to very few in the region.)

A writer's experiences of a local society may become a dominant factor in organising text and shaping stories. Although Berniczky does not go quite as far as sketching that, she does rough it out. Every line she writes is permeated by the particular odour, the aroma, of that area, what the closing lines of "In the Light of the Waning Moon" refer to as "that inseparable composite of sick merriment and animated sadness". However, it is not the reality of the locality that interests her so much as its modes of presentation, which is why, real as it may be, the narrative world is at least as unimaginable. Both presuppose and reinforce the other: to the extent that the locality is real, it is at one and the same time surreal. At the village's railway station

János Szegő
is a young literary critic. He is currently working on his doctorate in Budapest.

the signalman waiting for the train may be dressed in men's clothes, but occasional flashes in the course of much effing and blinding suggest "he" is a woman. The pragmatic and perfectly logical reason to account for this is that the signalman is so drunk that his wife has to fill in for him. The wife only occupies the position, with an end-result that is perfectly absurd.

It is a special position—and we should not forget that this is at the geographical centre of the continent of Europe—that was evoked not so long ago in Hungarian writing, and with a similar set of devices, by *Sinistra körzet* (Sinistra District), the brilliant 1992 novel (or should one call it a short-story cycle?) by Ádám Bodor. Bodor used the northern tip of Transylvania, just across the border from Berniczky's locale, to portray what it is like to live in a world beyond borders, where the force of nature and the nature of force are maintaining an indifferent control over those living there, far from the culture of which they are, in principle, at the middle. If one attempts to give a geographical dimension to the craft that Berniczky and Bodor exhibit in their writing, then what becomes obvious is a tiny, but not immaterial, difference: while Transylvania is at the very edge of the historical and cultural region that used to be called Central Europe, Transcarpathia is more like the anteroom of Eastern Europe—a Slavic culture. (Whether it is seen as a backyard or anteroom, like much else, is simply a matter of perspective.)

Midwife Without Womb has a very carefully composed and narrated plot. A history teacher and book collector by the name of Svitelski persuades the novel's narrator, a woman, to translate a diary written by another woman whom Svitelski would like to track down. (From and into which language is not made explicit.) His reasons for wishing to do so will shortly become clear. One quarter of the book is taken up by her mysterious diary entries, and the remainder by the novel itself, with each short chapter followed by two or three excerpts from the diary. The two texts differ not just in style but also in typesetting and function. The protagonist aptly describes the diary as "the maddening poetry of simplicity." Each a page or a page and a half in length, the entries are, in point of fact, prose poems. By dropping punctuation and permitting herself looser grammar, the diary writer breaks language down to its elements; then, on coming across something significant in that process, sticks it back together again. It is a malleable text, one in which dreams, memories and sensual impressions run throughout. Not to mention the indefinable freedom that emanates, alongside the musty smell, from the yellowed and battered notebooks mesmerising the diary's translator. She begins to sense the existence of that mysterious other person alongside her own life (and this gives us one explanation for the novel's title). Translators are midwives, helping to bring already existing work into the world, even though they lack the resources required to be creators in their own right. The woman calls herself a medium, whose job it is to relay, though too literal an interpretation of that is belied by the body of work of the narrator, who is translating the diary and, at the same time, relating the story of her predecessor and, under the influence of the pre-existing text, also her own story.

The story is not just hers, though. One of the tautest dualities of *Midwife Without Womb* is the dialectic between vegetating and investigating, with the one having the attribute of eternal sameness, the other that of continuous change. The time of the village is that of circling monotony: "every end runs into the same deceitful beginning" (p. 10), as though time has not just stood still but somehow escaped. A graphic metaphor is provided by the history teacher Svitelski, who

> undid the heavy metal strap from his wrist all right, but of course they did not see that he placed the digital watch on the right-hand corner of the teacher's desk. For the forty-five minutes that it was not on his hand he was able to believe that the ungainly contraption was not pulling him down, at those times he could separate from the times that were crammed into it.

This timeless vacuum is tellingly expressed by the railway train carrying the heroine to the village at the opening of the novel: at first it does not halt but brakes to a stop in open country only after passing through the station. During the translation of the diary, and the investigation that stems from this, time planes pile up on each other, running concurrently, even if in the village, in practice, there is no present and no influence of the present. This alternating, dual narration produces an interesting response in the reader, with a grey or faded earlier aspect of the story suddenly acquiring colour and becoming one of the chief pieces of evidence in reading the clues. The stories imbedded in the stripped-down chapters deal with Svitelski's ambivalent links to the diary; they also sketch out in bold strokes and stunning colour the ambit of the village. To this extent the novel reverts to a short-story cycle, with any single chapter also being interpretable in its own separate context as a short story. (This duplexity of genre is another possible link between Bodor and Berniczky, and to György Dragomán's *The White King,* one of the most important Hungarian novels of recent years, which, although it has a quite different narrative style and rhythm, can likewise be read in several different ways.) The characters: deadpan Svitelski, his wan, illiterate spouse, Mokrinka, who is gladdened by unending monotony, Mrs Havatsko's little son, Dwarf Giraffe (a diminutive child who wears a pullover with a giraffe pattern), the alcoholic school inspector, Ernestovich, who drops in on the village from time to time for no obvious reason, or the half-witted post-girl, who deliberately makes the inscriptions on letters and parcels unreadable, so that they will never reach the person to whom they were destined—each provides a well-chosen subject for a story. As they accumulate, the realm of the short story is rocked by the grave breath of eternity. The way breathing acquires weight, is, perhaps, the most poignant sensation the book leaves us with.

The mystery surrounding the diary, the information and events that throw light on it, provide the arc onto which one can thread the pieces that make up the string of short stories. An epic richness fleshes it out and its energy enhances the whole into a novel. The true stake of the detective work around the text, how to read it and how to translate it, is self-understanding, and in this context *Midwife Without Womb* is a novel about the loss of and search for identity. On a single occasion Svitelski sees a photograph of the diarist, after which it becomes his *idée fixe* to find her. He seeks to expropriate the text through translation, so there will be no chance that his retarded wife will be able to understand it. (Illiterate in any case, she cannot see that a jacket is wrongly buttoned up, seeing only separate buttons.) Also trying to track down the diarist is Odarka, a midwife of ill repute, who once seduced Svitelski's father, who has shrivelled up as a result. The experienced midwife paid no attention for years to the fact that she was herself pregnant. She was simply unwilling to give birth to her daughter, who thus "grew inside her body"—a final piece of information that we glean from the girl's diary. In this manner the circle of the story closes: the girl is waiting for the man whose father was seduced by her mother.

What the heroine is engaged in, the attempt to transmit the meaning of a text to

its addressee, is exactly the opposite of what the crazy post-girl is up to. The series of mirrorings, inversions, reversals and oppositions might be regarded as some of the main devices by which story and text are organised and shaped. A more extensive analysis than can be offered here would perhaps be able to dissect exactly how Berniczky demonstrates the fragmentation of this particular world through her use of analogies, addenda, parallels and, indeed, contrasts. Svitelski, in order to fall in love with the mysterious woman's colours, deliberately sucks them out of the sunbathing Mokrinka, who from that point becomes just a pale negative of herself.

This is a closed world from which there is no escape. Just as letters do not get past the borders of the "village, growing like an excrescence," so its vegetating inhabitants have little chance. That leaves essentially two ways: either the state of fading away, with the mind and consciousness abandoning the body, as is brought out by the many descriptions of animal bodies (beetles, flies, birds, or the shrinking of Svitelski's father to dwarf size), or else the opportunity for self-understanding, the road to which lies in a reading of the texts, mystical as they may seem at first, but, in truth, quite trite.

László Márton is among the most gifted story-spinners in Hungary today. Of formidable literary learning, he has made a mark not only in fiction but also as a playwright, translator (from German) and essayist of major importance. Born in 1959, he has published eight novels to date, which are widely regarded not just as novels but as penetrating critiques of the novel as such. In them he, as narrator, employs much wit and erudition to examine the many questions raised by the novel as a genre and as aesthetic convention, and particularly, in recent years, the opportunities still offered by the historical novel as a genre. Having begun his career with the post-modern short prose pieces of *Greater-Budapest Monster Chase* (an expanded new edition came out in 1995), he spent the next twenty years exploring the possibilities of the larger form, before returning in the last couple of years to shorter fiction. First came a shortish novel, *Minerva búvóhelye* (Minerva's Hiding Place, 2006, see review in *HQ* 184), last year saw *Ne bánts, Virág!* (Touch Me Not, Blossom!), a novella which has as its subject a provincial Hungarian production of Hervé's 1883 operetta *Mam'zelle Nitouche.* This new book brings him full circle, although it has to be said that the short stories here are still experimental.

If his novels can be characterised as critiques of the novel, the pieces that make up *What You Saw, What You Heard* can be seen as pieces that examine the theory of the short story. One of the sentences—"can a hero or heroine, indeed, know any more than, or differently from, the author who brought them, along with their story, into being"—might just as easily have come from the pages of a handbook on narrative. This is a question that is not left unanswered, as Márton seeks to build up various models of the dialogic imagination and, in the process, provides more than single responses to speculative questions of that kind.

As a narrator, Márton is fond of playing games, but occasionally these can tip, within the space of a few sentences, into something deadly earnest. He manages to jest with language and story simultaneously. In his plays on words, translations and the identical or similar sense or sound of different words are the prime sources of confusion; his instances are frequently, by their nature, nearly impossible to translate. Names, mishearings, translation slips and other linguistic accidents all complicate and shape this stories. Strands get muddled or, for that matter, cut off other strands; behind the

scenes of one story more stories come to light. Just when one supposes that one has hit the buffers of a story, the omniscient though tight-lipped narrator slips out another set of rails, which however are not rails but scenery, and therefore part of the game. The scene that has just passed can be transplanted by the narrator, at any time, into another space and/or time, and he takes care that the story will stand up in this new space-time continuum. Márton takes great trouble, in most cases successfully, to build up a process for a story before moving the whole thing on to start building all over again, from the beginning, It is not so much a travelling circus, more a magician on his day off, who, for all that he is taking a holiday, cannot go without playing a trick or two, such as, let us suppose, turning grandma into a tram. "In reality I cannot sort out anything, though in this story all it takes is a word from me, at most a sentence, and already, if you please, a grant has been awarded."

It is spellbinding to watch, and there is no limit to it, which can give the impression that he is asking the reader to meet at a rendezvous a little too often, a meeting—and the chance to play a part in the story—that might at first give readers the pleasant feeling that the author is thinking of them, and only then notice that they may still be in the story but have lost track of exactly how or why. On the other hand, Márton counterbalances that gasbagging, hyperactive presence of the narrator with a fine sense of proportion in pieces where some unspoken matter, an indefinable phenomenon, becomes the focus of attention. To ring the changes on the title of the collection, the stories portray what it is like when we *don't* see and *don't* hear something, when we have to create a skeletal structure for a story out of unsaid or stifled words, out of conjectures. These more tightly composed writings have a sharp edge, a bitterness, in contrast to the earlier type, where good humour and an unconquerable love of storytelling are in the driving seat. In Márton's fictive world good humour and horror coexist, with neither needing to look far to find the other.

One possible way of classifying the stories would be according to whether or not the narrator takes an explicit role in them. If he does, then it is generally to evoke, and then embroider, some reminiscence from childhood or school days. These tend to be depressing, fearful memories which stamp their mark on the rest of the character's life or, in the happier cases, exert an influence even into adulthood: one summons the other, for the recollections then to be rounded off with imagined moments. The "what if" questions of the fiction are more than once answered by the hammer blows of reality. Just as errors not infrequently creep into the workings of our memory, so too are the memories of the characters in these short stories sometimes led astray, by their mistaking or confusing a name or place, as a result of which they land in the thick of some completely different story—one in which they may even feel more at home than they had done previously, in their own biography. Here the literary game closely follows the factors of chance and forgetting.

Márton's stories are set in the Hungary of recent decades or the present day, maybe not explicitly so (though one readily discerns the dominant presence of the topography of metropolitan Budapest, with its street network so surpassingly suited for losing one's way or unexpected encounters), but certainly within the bounds of the familiar. Clothes, furniture, tools, references, means of transport—all reflect a culture and lifestyle endeavouring to step out of the Kádárism of the recent past and enter modern-day Europe. The long short story or near-novella "Long-distance Service", with which the volume closes, appropriately follows the trail of a

young man who is searching for his identity, from the Sixties until the present day. The narrative perspective that Márton employs is reminiscent of a camera with a zoom lens that now switches to close-up, now pans back, with a steady flow of ironic remarks, flashes of linguistic wit and tart reflections as subtitles.

The story which gives the title to the collection (a translation of which can be read on pp. 10–27) is an auspicious blend of the above-outlined species. At one and the same time, it is a case study, tangibly laying out the problems that have to be tackled in moulding and driving the plot forward, and yet it still manages to land in the realm of mystery. Like the other pieces here, it too conjures up recollections of schooldays. Alongside the writer-narrator at the *gimnázium* (in these stories the omniscient narrator always plays a primary role as writer in the text in question) is a second character who is himself a writer (at least initially). He goes by the name of Jenő Bazsinka, "whose chief claim to fame was that he did not become a writer. I did in his place," as the narrator tells us. Having been up to this point the most diligent (in fact the only) writer among his classmates, Bazsinka suddenly asks the narrator to help him out by writing in his place a story about another classmate, Katie, who by accident went into the boys' changing room with the class diary to leave after a short while. A trivial incident, as minimal as verses of a ballad, provides the narrato-poetic problem that the short story—and the reader—have to address. As the writing career that Bazsinka has pursued with such relish goes down in flames before our eyes, we cannot escape the knowledge that we are reading about the unravelling of the writing career of someone who indeed did not become a writer. Before opting for silence, though, the experimentally minded Bazsinka tries out his literary wings in various flights until he lands himself in real trouble. Trying his hand at a humorous true-to-life sketch, he writes about how Katie came to see Dezső naked in the shower. He publishes this on the class's wall newspaper, where all his writing so far has been published. Katie's jealous and deeply offended boyfriend, Attila, demands a correction in the form of a revised edition, and tears up the first effort. This is when Bazsinka hits real trouble, because Attila also takes over editorship of the wall newspaper and is unwilling to accept any more of his work until he has corrected his mistake. At this point the story gently turns into an allegory of writing and literature, in which editor and censor spring to life alongside the author—an allegory that is pointedly underlined by the fact that as long as the wall newspaper gapes emptily the classmates read the most fanciful stories into its space. The absence of the story and the fictionality of the empty text are even more pernicious than the true story. In the end, Bazsinka calls it a day and hands the assignment over to the narrator, so that the story about one person not becoming a writer is also the occasion for another to become a writer. ❧

Katalin Szabó

The Long Journey

János Kornai: *From Socialism to Capitalism. Eight Essays.* Budapest–New York, Central European University Press, 2008, 240 pp.
János Kornai: *Szocializmus, kapitalizmus, demokrácia és rendszerváltás. Nyolc tanulmány* (Socialism, Capitalism, Democracy and Regime Change. Eight Essays). Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2007, 208 pp.

The publication of a new book by János Kornai is always an event, and not merely in professional circles. Indeed, this collection of essays—now available also in English—should be read by everyone who wishes to understand what is happening in Hungary and in the wider region. The eight essays each stand for a milestone in the author's thinking. János Kornai published the earliest one in 1990 and the most recent in 2007. The reader retracing the road taken by Kornai may find a resonance in Kavafis' "Ithaca":

When you set out on your journey to Ithaca,
pray that the road is long,
full of adventure, full of knowledge [...]

visit many Egyptian cities,
to learn and learn from scholars.

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better to let it last for many years;
and to anchor at the island when you are old,
rich with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting that Ithaca will offer you riches.[1]

János Kornai's journey was truly long and full of adventure. He didn't hurry the voyage and achieved his ultimate goal. His Ithaca, which he always kept in mind, has been the socialist system, or to be more exact, the understanding of the emergence, development and collapse of the system and its transformation into a capitalist one. The understanding of a system in which we have lived, and which supposedly will significantly affect even the lives of our grandchildren. From his Ithaca, Kornai distanced himself in space and in time, so as to be able to understand the main causes of its collapse or—possibly even more important today—to understand what is to follow.

The first essays of the volume appear to have been written in the United States, and nearly twenty years have now passed since the changes in Hungary. Only from due distance could he answer the other question: how the system was able to survive so much that common sense tells us should have led to its swift demise. (The story is now being repeated in North Korea.)

1 ■ Translated by Edmund Keely.

Katalin Szabó
has been Professor of Economics at the Corvinus University of Budapest and is Editor-in-Chief of the economic review Közgazdasági Szemle. *She has published thirteen books.*

Western economists rarely asked their East European colleagues how and why the system had collapsed. This was obvious to them. What really excited them was to know how it had been able to survive at all for so long. I think no one has given a better answer to this question than Kornai.

> As the classical system consolidates, its elements develop a coherence. The various behavioral forms, conventions, and norms rub off on one another. To apply a chemical analogy, the phenomena exhibit affinity: they attract and require each other. The monolithic structure of power, petrified ideological doctrines, almost total domination by state ownership, direct bureaucratic control, forced growth, shortage, and distrustful withdrawal from most of the world (to mention just the main groups of phenomena) all belong together and strengthen each other. (p. 8)

The approach the book adopts is one of looking at the system as a whole. The whole spectrum of social life is embraced—from the exercise of power to co-ordinating mechanisms; from economic policy to social structure—placing all these into the perspective of the "great transformation", as envisaged by Karl Polanyi. The title of the Hungarian edition itself is a challenge: *Socialism, Capitalism, Democracy and Regime Change*. The difference between Kornai's economic (or rather social science) approach and other concurrent paradigms is illustrated in the eighth, the last chapter.

> What distinguishes the thinking of those working within the system paradigm from that of their colleagues outside it is that their interest lies in the big changes, the great transformations. For instance, they enquire into what processes of decay are going on within a system, so that it will come to an end and give way to another system. They ask how there occurs a transition from one system to another system, or from one typical version of a great system to another. (p. 192)

These questions can only be answered by a study of the system as a whole, to focus on the economy would not be enough. Kornai dissolves disciplinary boundaries which are not so much boundaries but traces of narrow-minded thinking. His approach is close to that of the late Jack Hirshleifer, Professor of Political Science and Economy at UCLA.

> There is only one social science. What gives economics its imperialist invasive power is that our analytical categories—scarcity, cost, preferences, opportunities, etc.—are truly universal in applicability. [...] Thus economics really does constitute the universal grammar of social science. But there is a flip side to this. While scientific work in anthropology and sociology and political science and the like will become increasingly indistinguishable from economics, economists will reciprocally have to become aware of how constraining has been their tunnel vision about the nature of man and social interactions. [2]

The various social sciences, and especially economics, have locked themselves up in their own little pigeon-holes. (As the intriguing glossary tells us, sociologists only feature in about one per cent of all references cited in articles on economics, legal scholars in about 1.2 per cent and political scientists in 2.2 per cent.)[3] Kornai opens the door to the work of other disciplines, taking in the work of the historians Braudel and Gerschenkron, the sociologists Zsuzsa Ferge and Ákos Róna-Tas, the professor of law András Sajó and the philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás.

2 ■ Jack Hirshleifer, "The Expanding Domain of Economics". *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 75. No. 6. December 1985, p. 53.
3 ■ See Kornai, op. cit., p. 182.

Yet, for all the broadness of the approach, Kornai's method of discussion is that of an economist, characterised by a clear-cut and consistent use of concepts. Though written at different times the various essays form a coherent whole, as if they had spontaneously organised themselves into a volume.

> The arch determining the order was created by history. The starting point is the "classical" socialist system before the reforms (study 1). That is followed by discussion of reforms that remained within the frames of the socialist system (studies 2–3). Then comes consideration of the change of system (studies 4–7). (p. x)

In the words of the Polish-British mathematician, Joseph Bronowski: "Science is nothing else than the search to discover unity in the wild variety of nature—or more exactly, in the variety of our experience."[4] If there is a place at all where one is entitled to speak of wild variety, then it will be in the East-Central Europe of the post-democratic changes, where even the most clear-minded and sensitive can for the most time apprehend only chaos. Lamartine's comment on his own time, revolutionary and post-revolutionary France, gives a vivid description of the present situation too:

> These [...] are years of chaos, opinions are a scramble, parties are a jumble; the language of new ideas has not been created; nothing is more difficult than to give a good definition of oneself. [...] The world has jumbled its catalogue.[5]

Some social scientists—once considered idols—may be erring about amidst the political phantoms of shifting illusions. However, János Kornai—in line with Bronowski—systematically searches for and finds unity amidst all the discord and confusion. In Chapter 5, he attempts to outline a trend valid for eight very different East European countries taking paths that are winding, moving towards and away from each other. What can possibly be common in the paths taken by the Poland of the Kaczyński twins and the smoothly and evenly transforming Slovenia, the suddenly fast-developing Slovakia and stagnating Hungary, or the Czech Republic and the post-Soviet states of Lithuania and Estonia? Kornai distinguishes six such traits in the Central European transformations at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries:

> 1) and 2) The changes followed the *main directions* of development of Western civilization: in the economic sphere in the direction of the *capitalist* economic system, and in the political structure in the direction of *democracy.*
> 3) There has been a *complete* transformation, *parallel in all spheres:* in the economy, in the political structure, in political ideology, in the legal system and in the stratification of society.
> 4) The transformation has been *non-violent.* Transformation has not been accompanied by blood, armed street fights, murders, or the sacrifice of human lives.
> 5) The process of transformation has taken place under *peaceful* circumstances. It was not preceded by war. The changes were not forced upon society as a result of foreign intervention.
> 6) The transformation has taken place at *incredible speed,* within a time frame of 10–15 years. (pp. 92–93)

Although many would question that transition is now a closed chapter in the history of this region, it is not disputed that a capitalist economy has emerged very quickly. Hungary has gone through several structural transformations which appear to

4 ■ Joseph Bronowski, *Science and Human Values,* revised edition. New York: Harper&Row, 1965. p. 16.
5 ■ Quoted in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books, 1973. p. 221.

be irreversible—from privatisation to the development of democratic institutions. János Kornai goes against general opinion with his unequivocal claim that this great transformation is a success story. However, he also tries to understand why so many people feel it to be a failure. Alongside his own method of interpretation, he also offers an empathic analysis of viewpoints and opinions opposed to his.

A few days ago I talked to an old peasant woman who likened recent developments to the invasion of the Mongols and the catastrophic aftermath of the Battle of Mohács. More prominent public figures, such as Gáspár Miklós Tamás or Erzsébet Szalai, have also questioned Kornai's claim, and consider that success has only touched a very narrow segment of society. János Kornai does not sweep aside these opinions, he merely places them into context.

> The capitalist economy, competition, market is not the ideal dreamworld. Capitalism, like every system, has certain inborn, system-specific drawbacks. As long as capitalism is what it is, there will be unemployment, great income inequality, losers in the competition, excessive advertising, and so on. [...] Serious, level-headed believers in the capitalist system accept these problems because they find the overall package more palatable than the socialist system, despite its shortcomings.
>
> The same can be said of democracy. Great multitudes of Central-Eastern Europeans are becoming as disenchanted with democracy as disillusioned lovers. They are irritated by the often barren verbal tirades in Parliament, by the mutual accusations of the various political parties, by the lying promises, and by the scandalous affairs being swept under the carpet. Yet these are anomalies associated with democracy! (p. 117)

Kornai champions the idea that the East European countries (including even China) are capitalist countries—for despite all their defects, they bear the most important characteristics of capitalism: the dominance of private property and market co-ordination. There is a third criterion which Kornai considers important: there is no political power expressing hostility to capitalism, private property and the market. In Chapter 5, he claims that labelling something capitalism or socialism is not a matter of taste.

> There are a great many breeds of dog. It seems almost incredible and unacceptable that a tiny Pekinese and a giant St. Bernard, so different in build, gait, coat, look, and character, should both be classed as domestic dogs *(Canis familiaris)*. But it does not depend on the tastes of dog lovers or dog haters what breeds can or cannot be classed as dogs. [...] Not the sympathy or antipathy for dogs and cats, but the positive criteria are the deciding factor whether they belong to dog or to cat species. (p. 126)

Thus Kornai calls the Polish and the Hungarian, the Slovenian and the Chinese systems capitalist. He provides some fundamental statistical tables to argue convincingly that while in 1989 there had been no capitalism, say, in Slovenia, quite the contrary is true today—for while the share of the private sector was 10 per cent in 1989, it had risen to 65 per cent by 2004. (p. 118) He follows the same procedure when comparing the performance of the two types of regime listing growth and productivity data. He lets the numbers speak for themselves, yet warns against jumping into ready conclusions based on statistical data drawn from such a relatively short period.

It might be due to his long journey that the book radiates a tolerant attitude throughout, sensitive to counter-arguments—a rarity in the world of scholarship and in the world itself. Long-term investigation, fair comparison of the great systems and an unbiased approach lead us to accept those explanations which we might have

initially resisted. Kornai's method is to strike out counter-arguments that may be in our head, answering even those which might have emerged only vaguely in the reader.

Thinking in a historical perspective has become uncommon in the domestic academic sphere. As Kornai writes:

> Perhaps we have gone too far in accepting the famous comment of Keynes: "In the long run, we are all dead." [...] Nowadays many PhD programs do not require economists to study any history. One reason for the overly negative judgment of the current great transformation that is prevalent among the Central East European public is that social scientists have neglected to analyze and evaluate their results within the requisite historical framework. (p. 120)

A few social scientists, fanatic critics of the existing capitalist systems in the name of some imagined perfect social system, might gain a lot from the admonishment in Chapter 6:

> Professional responsibility and intellectual honesty require them, having urged people to reject capitalism, after carefully studying the historical lessons, to say what system to put in capitalism's place. Let them come forward constructively with alternative plans for society, and examine conscientiously the feasibility of the system recommended. Have they accounted realistically for human nature? Have they reckoned with the present state of technology? (p. 137)

It is not only by supplying accurate proposals for economic policy that we can enhance the success of great transformations, but also by contributing to a well-balanced processing of the experiences, by helping to place the evaluation of the changes into their proper place in people's minds. To this end few economists have done as much as Kornai.

János Kornai's stipulations regarding the Chinese transformation are intriguing. He categorises China clearly as a capitalist country; however, China poses an enigma for him. Here, just as in his 1992 book *The Socialist System,* the author explains the genesis of the system by the undivided rule of the Communist Party, saturated with Marxist-Leninist ideology. He also emphasises that the organisational presence of the party and its ideology may be separated on the plane of theoretical analysis only. The undivided rule of the party still continues to predominate in a China treading the path towards capitalism, where "the minimum conditions for democracy do not apply [...]. There is nothing like a multiparty system, with competition and free elections between rival ideological and political trends." (p. 150) But the consequence of a monolithic power structure, the socialist system, still fails to establish itself.

The nomenclatura of the one-party Chinese dictatorship today has maintained its Marxism only verbally; they are intertwined with the new bourgeois elite, thus opening the way towards a capitalist-type transformation. But why has the Chinese monolithic one-party system changed, and why have the Cuban or the North Korean not? Could the transformation of a system depend on the degree of flexibility possessed by the elite in power, or the ideological ground on which it stands? Why does the structural presence and ideology of the party entwine in the post-Soviet states, in present-day Korea and Cuba in such a way that it leads to a command economy; and why does the same political structure lead to an entirely different outcome in present-day China? There must be some hidden reason which explains how the Chinese elite is able to "build capitalism" with such pliancy. Ideological flexibility is evidently decisive when it comes to taking control over something which would in any case be inevitable. But why now this flexibility? Kornai's book convinces me that we are

dealing with a capitalist market economy in China. However, the reason why this became possible is still a mystery to me and a great many others.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a premise emphasised throughout the book. There are convincing arguments that there is no single redeeming solution regarding either the change of system, the capitalist structure, or the particular institutional structures themselves. János Kornai, in this respect, is an evolutionist economist, who trusts in competition and in the natural selection of solutions more than the "constructive rationalism"[6] of advisers, researchers or politicians. He does not believe in reforms exported from one country to another, nor does he believe in models adopted without thinking. He is against haste, for natural solutions need their time to mature, and reporting to international organisations that we have completed the change of regime will not take us forward. History has confirmed the author's disapproval of such artificial tools as privatisation by voucher or even—in a wider historical perspective—the various popular "Third Ways". It might even be said that all centrally and artificially constructed models —no matter how rational they might seem to be—are bound to collapse sooner or later, but green is the golden tree of solutions brought to the surface by life itself.

Nowadays not even a reaper is developed using "constructive rationalism", let alone social systems[7]. Models are largely developed employing a combination of different partial solutions, based on the principle of natural selection, with the help of so-called genetic algorithms. Many people, though, are still keen on "inventing" new social systems. Not even the blatant failure of the "Great Experiment" will discourage them from their passionate constructive rationalism, which has only brought suffering to this day. The "syncretic socialism" of Hugo Chavez (combining Gramsci's tenets with the worship of the Holy Virgin of Chiquinquirá, the patroness of Columbia) or Hungary's recent attempt at a healthcare reform both show ominous signs of rational constructivism. It is usually wise to listen to János Kornai's warnings, but when it comes to avoiding further invented models, "great social experiments", his warnings are simply vital.

The intellectual honesty Kornai applies to his own research is exemplary, not least his attitude towards ideas of his which have turned out to be mistaken. He makes his premises clear and states that

> I see no problem in people altering their position, having learned from subsequent information, experience, or literature. [...] But let the author have the intellectual honesty to inform readers of the change. I for one am averse to the far-from-rare practice of imperceptibly abandoning the initial principles of one's thinking so that readers will fail to notice. (p. XV)

He does not hide his doubts, nor the debatability or limitations of the solutions he offers.

> Although I try to answer the *questions* I have put, I find the questions themselves more important than the answers. The answers are questionable. The least I would like to achieve is to arouse curiosity in readers about the puzzles that concern me. (p. XII)

In that he has managed to succeed perfectly. ❧

6 ■ Hayek's term for the creation of artificial, invented social constructs.

7 ■ The American authors, Davis & Meyer have given a vivid account of the competition of different solutions in the development of a John Deere machine (Stan Davis–Christopher Meyer, *Blur: The Speed of Change in the Connected Economy*. Capstone Publishers, 1999, p. 135).

Tamás Koltai

Alternatives

Krétakör Theatre–Le Phun Street Theatre: *Le Père Courage*
Viktor Bodó: *Tokhal vonóval* (Sturgeon With Fiddlestick)
Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* • László Garaczi: *Plazma*

There are several ways of rising above the routine in the arts, one being to abandon areas that have already been marked out. Alternatives have to be sought if one wishes to shuck off the risk-free means of making a livelihood. To want something else, to cut free, become independent. To go into the jungle, like Willy Loman's brother in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. But to come out of the jungle intact, that can be harder.

At the beginning of the Seventies, Peter Brook, at the peak of his success as a superstar director, abandoned repetitive, automatic and tourist-driven institutionalised perfectionism for the alternative. "A performance can only be a one-off event", he said at the time, "and if that is unrealisable in practice, the continuous work that is put in under workshop conditions after the 'premiere', is not." ("Premiere", because this is not a recognised artistic category, merely a business designation.) Every performance is a premiere for the person who is seeing it for the first time; and every performance is different from any other, even during a long run in which no changes are made.

Alternative theatre is not at all a clear-cut concept and it can mean different things from one country to another. There are some countries where "institutional" permanent companies are sharply differentiated from occasional ensembles. This was the case in Hungary until not so long ago. Even though both ran on state money, a hierarchy was maintained for a long time. Those who played in a permanent home felt themselves a cut or two above those who got together for an ad hoc production. For a long time actors in the two camps did not even mix; those who regarded themselves as professionals looked down on the "amateurs" (yet just as many among the first had no professional qualifications as there were fully qualified actors among the second). Although there is now some traffic both ways, for many the alternative theatre sill suggests the satisfying of the needs of decidedly limited constituencies or subcultures, as against the big-theatre mode of existence that "speaks to everybody." That the latter is now an outworn approach has been demonstrated by the recently established Scottish National Theatre, which has a number of "pick-up" companies permanently on tour and is thus able to offer a wide variety of genres, approaches and acting alternatives to audiences diverse in their make-up and expectations. Signi-

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

ficantly, an applicant for the post of chief intendant of Hungary's National Theatre who put forward a not wildly dissimilar proposal (the current edifice would remain, but not the permanent company), was rejected out of hand.

The younger theatre-making generation here is choosing the alternative route, whether out of their own free will, on principle, out of sheer devilment—or under

© Zsuzsa Koncz

Le Père Courage

compulsion, being squeezed out of the "overcrowded" official set-up. The consequences are the same: they have to struggle for survival because the present structure favours those who are on the inside, for whom ongoing support is provided for in the state budget. For the rest, there are lines of finance, both regionally and from foundations, but there is a real battle to lay hands on these.

One of the most distinguished alternative companies is the Krétakör Theatre (under the direction of Árpád Schilling), about which, right at the present, one has to speak in the past tense. Their name has appeared more than a few times in this column, and they acquired something of an international reputation; their last mention here was for their production of the Hungarian classic, *Bánk bán* by József Katona (see *HQ* No. 186), when I wrote:

> This is far from the only such morsel that hints at the company's nonconformist credentials; indeed, it is hard to say now whether they actually want a permanent home of their own. One plan prepared some while ago proposed that they would operate such a "base" as a platform for visiting foreign companies, but nothing materialised and the plan seems to have been abandoned. Currently, part of their financing necessarily derives from continual appearances outside Hungary and the larger-scale shared productions.

Since then, the Krétakör, although it sill formally exists, with productions still coming on stream, has effectively broken up. Those productions may be listed as stemming from Árpád Schilling or some other member of the former company, but by now their constituency has disappeared. The reasons for the break-up may be complex, and not primarily financial, as commercial support for them was growing, rather than dwindling, and they made full use of their freedom to move around by expanding the ambit of their operations. Most probably some discord arose within the group that people are unwilling to speak about in public, but most of the members of the acting ensemble have dispersed. Schilling and his producer, Máté

© Zsuzsa Koncz

Sturgeon with Fiddlestick

Gáspár, will continue to put together ad hoc projects. One such was the joint production entitled *Le Père Courage* that they presented this summer with the French street theatre troupe Le Phun.

The performance was devised to take place in picturesque Szentendre, on the Danube, fifteen miles upstream from Budapest, specifically on an island there to which the audience was ferried across by small boat. The story is that there has been a war, which ends with a peace treaty whereby two states are brought into existence on opposite sides of the river: The Men's and the Women's. The island represents neutral territory, from which Andrei, "a mute painter who has tired of the din of battle," sends his travelling companion and trusty iron steed, Father Courage by name, on a recruiting drive to the two banks of Buda and Pest so that, on his return, they may set up camp and populate the land. The horse was a life-size metallic installation, with mechanical components, so its hoofs galloped along without ever touching the ground. This was a quite spellbinding contraption, which clattered along with Schilling himself in the saddle. The "recruitment" was shown on film, and the new inhabitants, referred to as "the betrothed of Budapest"—young women dressed in white bridal gowns and men—make a "live" appearance when they arrive at the island. They then scatter into the houses of the camp, which members of the audience can then visit in turn to watch and hear them (they speak French or Hungarian) as they live out their lives. The spectacle lies closer to performance art and art installation than it does to traditional theatre. Andrei finally releases a girl from her cage, they stride into the Danube, and they drift downstream on Father Courage's back. The whole is an example of what is now internationally fashionable: in situ theatre staged in some natural location.

Schilling has defected from institutionalised theatre, given that he achieved his early successes as a member of Hungary's best ensemble, the Katona József. Viktor Bodó, who is younger than him, likewise got his start there, with a widely acclaimed adaption of Kafka, which

did the rounds of international festivals. Since then he too has opted for the alternative theatre. He has bestowed on his company—somewhat tongue-in-cheek—the name of Sputnik Shipping Company, Research Institute and Laboratory for Modern Theatre & Behaviour. Their first production, which bears the untranslatably punning title of *Sturgeon With Fiddlestick,* is based on Nikolai Gogol's novel, *Dead Souls*. What we had was a typical avant-garde production: a sprawling, impromptu, unfocused series of études. The human race is crazy, the world is a madhouse, Bodó agrees with Gogol. Why Chichikov is buying up dead souls never transpired from the performance I saw; the whole point is the grotesquely nonsensical farce. Madness is madness precisely because there is no accounting for it. The picaresque story could just be kept track of, Chichikov travelling in an empty, half-built room on the conversion of which the actors themselves have laboured as construction workers. There is one point at which a few of the audience are led across into another room, and come back as tourists, herded by a guide. En route, in the course of the play, we pay visits to a farm, a hunt, a ball and a courtroom; go to the circus for a moment, encounter a gentleman, a muzhik, a halfwit servant, a rabbit that plops droppings; there is a card game, a bun fight, a spitting contest—the roles and the incidents blur into one another in a continuous process of transformation and costume changes; only the craziness remains the same.

Bodó has a feel for life, and that's all he wants to express here. His way of making theatre is not to choose a play, a short story or novel, but a starting point. He wants nothing of the old world, accepted forms, structures or logic, nor of well-chewed ideologies, thinking or lessons. His rejection, both aesthetically and philosophically, is, in effect, total. But even if the world can be upended or denied by a committed counterideology or counter-culture, Bodó is not an *agent provocateur,* more of an unbridled trickster, a sorcerer's apprentice on the loose, a sly prankster. His alternative take on the world was also seen in his direction of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* He takes the audience into the (Athenian) forest, the forest of dreams in which everything becomes chaos and confusion prevails, just as in Shakespeare. For a while the pretence is maintained that Bodó wishes to turn the play into a serious production, speaking as he does of "the canonical text" and a "classical experiment", though even initially the impression is given that he has no idea how it will go on, or how it will end.

The opening seems pretty well standard, with Theseus announcing his betrothal to Hippolyta, the snippy Queen of the Amazons, to the crowd beyond the footlights. In fact, the two cannot stand each other—to the point that they are reluctant to exchange kisses in public, so even the frustrated love interests of the two pairs of young women and men fails to move them. The fairies are earthly mortals, bored stiff, mixing sluggishly in company, with hard-set expressions, rather like human-sized ghosts of the other world. Puck is a young woman, but more an impassive servant than a spry mischief-maker. The only time she livens up is when Oberon summons her and she, misunderstanding his intentions, starts to loosen her clothes, whereupon it turns out that sex is not on the menu. The "rude mechanicals" are delighted to find themselves in this setting, with one of them taking a cell-phone call to discuss with the secretary of the village council a cultural show. The spat between Oberon and Titania is just a dialogue that is rattled through. Events now begin to degenerate, with the performers singing a hit-tune from the Fifties, Oberon donning frogman's flippers and

having a knees-up with Puck. Thisbe's soprano makes a finger that has been severed from the hand of one of the mechanicals only to grow again, and an amateur women's choir chugs up in a minibus. The four young lovers are swallowed up by the forest and the rest of their part is scrubbed.

At the very end, Puck improvises a few lines of verse to go with her closing soliloqui, rather as though she didn't quite know how to close the performance. She spreads her arms in apology and so, in effect, does Viktor Bodó. As if he were admitting that, for the time being, he only knows that he doesn't want something, which in itself is more than what many others want, not that being enough for any major revelations.

Some defectors did not emerge from the mainstream set-up, as they were never in it, being alternative artists from the very start. The KoMa (CoMa) Company, a group of young actors who graduated not long ago from the University for Dramatic Arts, as the letters of their name are meant to suggest, performs only contemporary Hungarian work. László Garaczi's *Plasma* depicts mundane moods, the stunting of human relationships, intellectual erosion: a mirror to the demented mentality of ours as turned into a vulgar form of life. For all its hyperbole, exaggeration, satirical intensification, it holds true on the whole. It cannot for one moment be taken seriously, which is why it is set on April 1st, but the joke, if one stops to think about it, is blood-chilling.

The devastatingly successful DJ twins of "Radio Cinch" are a pair of media-savvy chatterboxes. These two presenters, who suffer from the present-day affliction of verbal diarrhoea, are hosting the programme on April 1st, and this supplies a skeleton for the mosaic of ingredients. Phone-ins and off-air episodes intertwine. Aggressive joke calls eerily evoke aggressive reality. The question is which is the more absurd: a campaign to swap back new-born babies who were mixed up at birth using the secret password of "we've brought the pole wax", or the girl who announces to her father that she has arrived from a foreign planet? The burglar who is registered as being a removal man and robs the totally empty home of one of Radio Cinch's presenters while he is on air, or the hidden CCTV camera which records this during the day to broadcast the whole thing that very evening? A bird who gives the price of luminous artificial nails in terms of the light given by a glow-worm, or an entrepreneur who, in answer to the radio-show presenter's prying into a corruption scandal, responds with a stream of obscenities that have to be bleeped out in transmission? Nothing but shoddy language, topped off with appropriate snatches of nonsense jingles. Garaczi scarcely works with refined literary tools, casting a glance down from the intellectual heights into the depths, but it is precisely his text's chilly resemblance to the kind of guff that can be heard every day in the real-world media that makes his parody irresistible.

The KoMa Company create a sovereign world on their acting skills alone, without resorting to scenery or costumes. Five actors jockey in the tiny space that is left among the stacks of the audience's seats (the play could be performed just about anywhere with a bit of room). With their own physical presence, and also by changing roles, through sound effects and music, they manage to conjure up a witty facsimile of reality. Alienation by parody is all the more intense for being experienced when the action is right on top of you. It is the acting that is virtuoso, there is no need for extravagant stage props as in so many other productions. One alternative, and worth catching. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Strong Statements

The Films of Kornél Mundruczó

This I Wish and Nothing More • *Day After Day* • *Pleasant Days* • *Joan of Arc of the Night Bus* • *Johanna* • *Delta*

Many see Kornél Mundruczó as *the* young director carrying on in the tradition of the "Hungarian school".

His career start recalls that of the young Béla Tarr. In the latter's time, aspiring directors would finish the Academy and then wait patiently in line to be given the green light for their first feature film. Or not. Since then a market economy has arrived, censorship has ended, and anyone can make a film about anything with no need for any official go-ahead or even a film school diploma, yet the old way of starting a career has barely changed. Tarr broke into the jealously guarded domain of feature filmmaking in 1977 in a highly irregular fashion, making his first film, Family Nest, without anything by way of a permit or certificate, without a diploma in film direction, and instantly snapped up the Grand Prix at Mannheim. He was 22. He had been making amateur films while working as a labourer at the shipbuilding yard before being discovered by István Dárday, who pulled him into the Balázs Béla Studio, founded originally to promote the young titans graduating from the Academy but, in the late Seventies, willing to open a back door to outsiders. Tarr set to work immediately, shooting a documentary about the eviction of a working-class family from their home. The police, to no one's surprise, would not allow him anywhere near the scene of the eviction. So he became a director of feature films instead.

Mundruczó trained as an actor at the Academy of Dramatic Arts, went on to attend the directorial section until "someone let on that he had some raw film stock that was past its expiry date and something should be shot with it." That was how *This I Wish and Nothing More* (2000) came to be made; it took the award for best first film in that year's Hungarian Film Week (see *HQ* 160), had a fairly successful domestic release and made the director's name.

Though some of the audience's interest was caught by the subject of the film, most industry insiders paid more attention to Mundruczó's shaping of the action and his sense of form. The film is set in the secretive world of Budapest's rent boys. The novelty lies in the approach, dealing with the milieu in a matter-of-fact way and with no hint of horror or pity, let alone moralising.

Bruno, the protagonist, lives with his wife in the country in a house that he has inherited from his parents, and regularly

---

Erzsébet Bori
is The Hungarian Quarterly*'s regular film critic.*

comes up to the capital with his brother-in-law to make money. His wife, Marika, knowing nothing about Bruno's double life, practises their "world famous" act in which her husband, dressed up as Batman, plucks her up as he swoops down in a hang glider. She lives in a dream world, unaware that Ringo, her younger brother, is in love with Bruno. Bruno and Ringo work the gay end of the Danube promenade on the Pest bank, where their clients pick them up, sometimes to take them home, but more usually to a nearby public convenience. It is a risky life, attended by frequent humiliation on both sides: the clients and their service providers are vulnerable, exposed to general contempt and police harassment. Physical violence, theft and robbery are everyday occurrences, but there can be the occasional funny or entertaining incident. Successive scenes sustain the high tension, one switching to the next almost without any lead-up; there is no idling to give the spectator relief, no exegetic or descriptive bridging scenes: at best, release is offered through episodes that tend to the grotesque or the surreal. The director drives his characters (and the audience) at a relentless pace to a bloody and tragic denouement. By the time we start to catch our breath, the credits are running behind the alternative rock group Második műsor (Channel 2) with a number that provides the title *("I'd like to be Alain Delon, / Wearing shades night and day. / This I wish and nothing more...").* Only then do we realise that we have been given no explanation, that it is up to us to piece it all together, to interpret and respond. Although his approach to the storyline has changed a lot since then, Mundruczó has stuck to the admirable principle of making his viewers work.

Then came a short feature, *Day After Day* (2001), which lived up to the expectations created by such a promising start. *This I Wish and Nothing More*, for all its virtues—well-chosen locations, strong and authentic characters, a gift for speedy and frugal sketching of situations and relationships—was not flawless. Some of its defects were minor, others not: a pronounced straining for effect and breaks in the continuity in style, which made some episodes stick out. In *Day After Day* Mundruczó got it completely right and deservedly took the main prize, in an unusually strong field, at the 2001 Film Week, the Hungarian Critics' Prize in 2002, as well as awards at a number of international festivals (Cottbus, Cracow, Oberhausen).

A bleak housing estate on the outskirts of town, a labyrinth of garages, loafing, bored teenagers. The film is brutal in showing us what the young of today can or could get up to—brutal perhaps, but too convincing to be brushed off. Mundruczó's version is more powerful than the American-made *Kids,* with its neatly rounded story and well-wrapped take-home messages, which ultimately invalidate the authenticity for which its makers have striven so hard. The young in *Day After Day* are sensitive and they are also yobs, curious yet also viciously uncaring all at once. There is monstrous energy straining inside them and it takes a monstrous effort on their part to fill up the vast amount of time they have to kill. Games, music, sex, anything that's on offer, just as long as something turns up, because it is unbearable if nothing at all happens. And if they manage to survive an adolescence in which they are a danger both to themselves and to the world, what follows will be no better. Everything will remain dreadful, with the difference that in adulthood there is a tendency to hope that there is no chance of anything at all happening. By the end of the film it is not so much a matter of violence erupting as of its happening, as unexpected as it is logical.

Mundruczó lacks any educational intent: he does not seek to frighten or shock so much as to make a strong statement. The sense of drama and rhythm in *This I Wish and Nothing More* is all the more conspicuous in the short feature: the pace is impeccable and the setting just right, the characters are marvellous.

Mundruczó claims *Day After Day* was a preliminary study for his second long feature, *Pleasant Days* (2002), which reveals a further striking facet to his work. Early on he very deliberately set about building up an oeuvre in which film and theatre are interconnected. Part of that, over and beyond transferring film solutions, motifs and characters onto the stage, is his formation of a more or less stable team involving Viktória Petrányi as producer and scriptwriter, Zsófia Tallér as composer and Orsi Tóth, his favourite actress. The latter made her first appearance in *Pleasant Days* at the age of 16, a second-year student at the academy, with Tamás Polgár, Kata Wéber and other actors who take a number of smaller roles having already appeared in the short film. One might put it the other way round and suggest that *Pleasant Days* was an experiment to see whether the immaculate short-film structure of *Day After Day* was transferable to a full-length feature film.

Pleasant Days is set off by Mundruczó with a quick series of abrupt cuts, brashly opening, rather like a Zola novel, in a laundry, with a young girl giving birth to a baby on a sheet spread out among bales of dirty washing and coat hangers, the voices being drowned by the roar and clatter of huge industrial washing machines. The umbilical cord of the newborn baby is cut with a pair of tailor's scissors. We are made eyewitnesses to a dramatic transgression, and we must surrender ourselves to being helplessly carried along by events. The very next thing is that we find ourselves participating in a bumpkin idyll enacted at the same spot, with Maria, who has just been assisting as a midwife, placing her younger brother, Péter, who is just out of a young offenders' institution (and who has witnessed the birth) into a washing machine and rubbing him down. The siblings have grown up parentless and are very close, each being all the other has. Maria has found a niche, a job, a home, a husband (who works abroad) and now a child of her own—she has purchased the unwanted baby for hard cash and is passing it off as her own. Through his pals, Péter gets a job in a car-breakers yard, where he again sees something he is not supposed to: the yard's boss with his lover, Maya, the child-mother of the baby. Péter's passport is arriving within a couple of weeks and he is putting together money to finance a trip to the sea. What had seemed simple and straightforward has now become a tangled knot. Maria asks her brother to baby-sit, and Péter, wittingly or not (with him it comes to the same thing), takes Maya to see it. She has second thoughts and wants the child back, but Maria is unwilling and unable to comply, so Péter finds himself caught between the two. He is in love with Maya, but the ties that bind him to his sister are too strong to break. He has to choose and the confusion of conflicting urges and demands, the frustration, the unarticulated feelings, explode in the crudest violence.

The essence of this kind of filmmaking is that the story behind it has to be concealed. Everything has to derive from the personality, from the temperament and instincts of the actors, and with the inevitability of natural occurrences. Here casting is crucial: the actors have to identify totally with the characters they are portraying for they are given no chance of taking a leisurely step back to sketch in motivations, no time for reflection. (Audiences will only have a chance to think

Orsi Tóth in Johanna

once the film is over.) If this works, it makes a huge impact, but it is virtually impossible to bring off. The director re-cut *Pleasant Days* a year after releasing it, throwing out the not entirely successful original ending and, after shortening it by ten minutes, made it even tauter and tenser.

The next stage was *A Bus Came...* (2002), a loosely linked sequence of sketches by five young directors. The 24-minute episode that Mundruczó contributed came out as *Joan of Arc of the Night Bus* (2003) and was expanded into a full-length feature, *Johanna,* two years later. In the intervening period, though, there was theatre work in the shape of *The Respectable Prostitute,* a one-act opera by Kamilló Lendvay, based on the Sartre play.

The opera feature *Johanna* (2005) opens by showing the aftermath of a major road pile-up, with one of the injured taken to hospital being a girl junkie who, on seeing the drugs cabinet there, comes to the conclusion she has ended up in junkie paradise. She proceeds to overdose, but if that was indeed her aim, her timing and choice of place were off because the doctors resuscitate her. She comes back from clinical death, but has lost her memory: she no longer has a name or past, "no address, no clothes, no acquaintances, no relatives, no ancestors," in the words of a young doctor who has fallen in love with her and wants to keep her on at the hospital as a nurse. Johanna now sacrifices her second life to the patients, working in the paediatric ward and at night healing by the laying-on of hands, using touch and sexual arousal. The patients attribute to her miracle-working powers, worship her as a saint. Because of her success in healing, she has to contend with the jealousy of her colleagues, headed by a tough matron and by the doctor, whose affections have been rebuffed. They in turn treat her as a trouble-making trollop and get her dismissed. When the patients rebel, they send her back where she came from, injecting her with morphine, before bagging and cremating her body.

The story, which Mundruczó co-authored with Viktória Petrányi and Yvette Bíró, might sound like an erotic thriller, but instead *Johanna* tries to galvanise the eclectic genre of contemporary opera. András Nagy and Mátyás Erdély, the cinematographers, firmly root us in Hungary; their work recalls Miklós Jancsó and Tarr's spatial organisation and very long takes, but this is coupled with a radical approach to lighting, which seeks to replicate in colour the strong chiaroscuro effects of early black-and-white Expressionist films. Zsófia Tallér, who has been a member of the Mundruczó team from the very beginning, brilliantly solves the near-impossible task of providing a musical score. *Johanna* may not revolutionise contemporary opera, but the music gives us a slightly conservative accompaniment to underpin the story and spectacle. The libretto, which makes bold use of quotations and allusions in its mix of the sacred and the profane, is by the poets János Térey and Bálint Harcos.

The hospital is a valid setting for this retelling of the story of a modern-day St Joan. The film was shot within the grounds of the National Institute for Nervous and Psychiatric Diseases, a cluster of ornate edifices in a huge park built in the nineteenth century. At once surreal, ageless and antique, the location could be any hospital in the country: the wall-tiles, the flagstone floors, the backstairs flights of steps, the crowded wards, the rambling basement and its warren of corridors, the sputtering strip-lighting, the forest of gurgling and humming pipes... The building is exhausted and overpoweringly gloomy: washbasins dotted about to catch leaks, what look like old German fairy-tale illustrations, instead of the usual cartoon-film characters, decorating the walls of the paediatric ward. The denizens of this locality, of course, are the members of the order of white-coated professionals (comparable in all respects to the priesthood of the original story) and the host of those beyond help, beyond hope and awaiting salvation. All that is lacking is a saint.

Delta (2008) also had a dry run in the shape of the short *Little Apocrypha No. 2.* This simple tale of three fishermen and a girl-cum-angel again blends the sacred and the profane. The risk in this blend is that both must hold their own if there is to be any scope for them to interplay and relate to one another. That is what I miss in *Delta.* In its highly pared-down narrative, the film refers back to some ancient, elemental fables—more often than necessary. Distraught critics have had a hard time at having to plunge into Biblical archaeology. From Sophocles to Shakespeare, any number of motifs and thematic elements crop up, from the Prodigal Son to Christ crucified, but none of these are followed through on—each is picked up, turned over and discarded before the next is reached for.

The opening evokes a Greek tragedy: a girl (Elektra) who is living with her mother and her mother's lover might be able to escape her desperate position with the help of her younger brother (Orestes), who is due to return from abroad. The young man duly turns up, the girl goes with him, but this is where any parallels end. Our Clytemnestra frets, but she does not stand in her children's way; Aegisthus is opposed, but when he is unable to stop the girl he goes after her and rapes her. The siblings build a wooden hut for themselves that can only be reached across an immensely long jetty over the water. The boy nurses his sick sister; they cut and nail together planks, put out fishing nets, all the while mutual feelings of tenderness are awakening. An incestuous passion. From snatches of what the local community say, trouble can be predicted, their withdrawal from the world is looked askance on. When the roofbeams of the house are in place and the time for

the house to be blessed comes round, the net miraculously fills with fish. All that is needed now is bread and a barrel of *pálinka*—and, naturally, guests. They invite everybody to come, and when the drunken yokels start assaulting the girl, her brother rushes to her defence. Next morning all that is left is the boy's orange life-jacket, carried along on an arm of the Danube towards the Black Sea.

Orsi Tóth and Félix Lajkó in Delta

There is no real story to *Delta,* merely a web of allusions to circumstances that exist or once existed but are now no more. In its mood and in some of its elements, *Delta* is perhaps a sort of ballad; but here it has to be said that the ballad is a self-contained genre and is only used effectively when whoever uses it knows what they want from it and exercise a high level of self-restraint. That could not be said of *Delta,* however. When the elements of Greek tragedy peter out, biblical devices and images replace them; when those in turn are exhausted and it is still unclear which way the film is headed, we are left searching for an explanation outside, in society at large. A closed community will not tolerate anyone who is different; it destroys them. That is a familiar story, an elemental fable, but the trouble is that *Delta* does not feature any community at all, either closed or open. We are somewhere in the back-of-beyond: the sole public area is the mother's tavern, and those who congregate in it are the sleazy remnants of human beings. For them the very least of their problems is to worry about who lives with whom, and how; incest is no more of an infraction of norms than sexual assault—none at all, that is to say, because social degradation here has long passed the point where any norms survive. There is simply no community (or if there is, then the film fails to provide even a symbolic indication of it). One

cannot imagine for a second that the drunken stripling who slags the girl off as a whore and roughly handles her—a character previously not encountered and about whom we are given not the least bit of information—could be acting out of the strict moral codes of an archaic peasant or Church-ridden society. More epic credibility would attach to having the boy murdered because the half-mile-long jetty or the competing fishermen are disturbing the established life of that section of the delta. The landscape is empty when there are no people in it. The four figures whom we do see—the boy, the girl, the mother, her lover—and maybe a fifth in the shape of the siblings' uncle, would be enough to provide drama: they would not even have to speak, because people here are not very talkative, and we know who they are, we know what thoughts and feelings motivate them. The relations between the four are limned out, the relationship between the girl and the boy is shown on the screen through visual treats and the stiff lyricism of the everyday. It is disappointing, then, that the film shows no real sign of knowing what to do with them and, in the end, settles with them in the way that the Mafia settles a family dispute: by bringing in an outside hired assassin. That is how the Danube delta takes over—not as an agent of equal rank but one that has come to overarch everything else.

A word should be said here about something which derailed the film from its original track. This was the death, while the film was actually shooting, of Lajos Bertók, who was due to play the boy. The reliance that Mundruczó places on his actors is widely known, and it speaks volumes that he did not look for another actor to take over the role but turned to an "insider" who was already part of the team, the brilliant violinist-composer Félix Lajkó.

I must not let things get out of proportion: there is no question that *Delta* has many virtues and passages of considerable beauty, from Mátyás Erdély's camerawork through the subtle use of colour to its actual casting. Not without justification did it get noticed and received some prestigious awards. Nor would I dispute that it may yet prove to be an important step in Mundruczó's career. Some fear that he is in danger of remaining too much under the stylistic influence of Béla Tarr, others fear that he is too attuned to the festival circuit—making cinema for the singular tastes and needs of the frequently inbred audiences at international festivals. From my knowledge of his work so far, I do not think there is much risk of that: Kornél Mundruczó is too young and has too healthy an appetite to entertain the idea of sitting back and making do with the tepid waters of European art films. He has a taste for experiment and taking risks and, for him, deliberate construction is not irreconcilable with a willingness to place his trust in his filmmaking instinct. Given the brilliance of *Day After Day* and *Pleasant Days,* there will undoubtedly be more strong statements to come. ❧

Klára Hamburger

Liszt's Tours in France

Nicolas Dufetel and Malou Haine: *Franz Liszt, un Saltimbanque en Province.* Collection Perpetuum Mobile, Lyon, Symétrie, 2007, 424 pp.

Franz Liszt (1811–1886), the incomparable pianist who toured all Europe, the great Hungarian composer and thinker, was a quintessentially European artist. Many countries seem to be taking recognizance of this as the bicentennial of his birth approaches. Two dedicated scholars have now taken on the task of documenting Liszt's tours in France. Malou Haine, director of the Musée des Instruments de Musique (MIM) in Brussels is a scholar and university teacher. Nicolas Dufetel was in the process of gaining his doctoral degree at the François Rabelais University in Tours. Together they have compiled and edited the present handsomely produced paperback volume.

The title is an expression Liszt had applied to himself, with more than a pinch of irony. Liszt was the object of a star cult of modern proportions; he was fabulously successful and commanded legendary fees. By his own admission, Liszt undertook the often loathsome role of a saltimbanque (itinerant circus performer) because he needed to gain publicity and to earn money. In France in particular, he undertook the tours covered in this volume in order to get back at his beloved Paris, a city that had grown hostile to him largely owing to his abandoned lover, the Countess Marie d'Agoult.

Haine and Dufetel have co-authored the in-depth introduction and contributed two excellent essays each. In addition, they have included articles by eleven other writers, mostly commissioned with this special volume in mind. The articles present Liszt's French concert tours from 1823 to 1845 in great detail, arranged by regions: Southern, Southwestern, Central, Northern and Eastern France, as well as Belgium. They familiarise the reader with the musical life of each city or region, they survey the publicity given to the concerts, the venues, the programmes and the character of each event. We are told whether Liszt played in public or at a private residence, what instrument he used, the purpose of the performance (as a source of income, or in support of a cause), the size of the audience, the price of tickets, and more. If there were other artists performing, they are named. In those days, *concerts panachés* with a

---

Klára Hamburger

a musicologist, was Secretary General of the Hungarian Liszt Society (1991–2005). Her many publications on Liszt include a biography in English, published by Corvina Books (1987).

The early years documented

Liszt's early years, spent mostly as a travelling virtuoso, have long been well documented. The Hungarian scholars Zsuzsa Dömötör, Mária Kovács[1] and, above all, Dezső Legány[2] have reliably covered his early concerts in Hungary and Vienna. Volume I of Alan Walker's biography[3] is of fundamental importance. Since the centennial of Liszt's death (1886), there has been an increase in publications about his entire career, and the pre-1848 period in particular. I have in mind the relevant chapters in Prof. Serge Gut's book[4]. In 1979, Robert Stevenson published a paper on Liszt's concerts in Madrid and Lisbon.[5] A volume of essays by Pierre-Antoine Huré and Claude Knepper contains a great deal of information on the young Liszt's activities and contacts in France.[6] The works of the American scholar Charles Suttoni[7] are particularly valuable. Liszt's childhood diary has been edited by Detlef Altenburg and Rainer Kleinertz.[8] The late Pauline Pocknell presented Liszt's 1832 appointment book in the proceedings of a Budapest conference.[9] The Belgian musicologist Malou Haine has published several articles on Liszt's concerts in Belgium.[10] Gerhard Winkler (Austria) has written on the young Liszt,[11] William Wright (Scotland) on the English tours,[12] Christo Lelie and Peter Scholcz (Holland) on the 1842 sojourn in the Netherlands.[13] Liszt's early essays, written in French, have been issued in a bilingual edition, with German translations, as part of his collected writings edited by Prof. Altenburg.[14] In the United States, Prof. Michael Saffle completed a major work on Liszt's concert tours in Germany.[15] Three volumes of letters in modern critical editions and in their original languages cover longer periods in Liszt's life: the correspondence with Marie d'Agoult edited by Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas,[16] the letters to his mother, Maria Anna Liszt, and to his daughter Cosima and granddauther Daniela, edited by the present writer,[17] and letters from the holdings of the Library of Congress, edited by Michael Short.[18] In Italy, Liszt research has received new impulses thanks to the work of Luciano Chiappari[19] and Rossana Dalmonte, in particular through the publications of the Istituto Liszt, founded and directed by Dalmonte in Bologna.[20] ❧

miscellany of items on the programme, were frequently offered both at private and public venues; in fact, Liszt was personally responsible for the "unheard-of audacity" of appearing on a platform all by himself (Rome, 1839), playing his own works or music by other composers, thereby single-handedly creating the institution of the public recital. Finally, the volume quotes abundantly from press notices. The essays are followed by a tabulated survey of Liszt's repertory. Another useful chart, at the beginning of the volume, shows each city where Liszt appeared, the year of his visit, and other important information. The volume is completed by biographical notes on the contributors and an index.

Three excellent essays, previously published but hard to find, are included. "Liszt à Marseille", by Mária Eckhardt, deals with Liszt's visits to that city in 1825–26, 1844 and 1845, and details his programmes and their reception. Liszt made some new friends in Marseille, such as the piano manufacturer Jean-Louis Boisselot (before 1811–1850) who accompanied him on his tour of Southern France, and the poet Joseph Autran (1813–1877) who wrote laudatory articles, including a poetic greeting for one of the concerts. Liszt set Autran's poem *Les Aquilons* to music, and his setting was performed by the Marseille choral society. During the following years, Liszt composed three more choral works to Autran's texts, and he planned to publish the four works together as *Les quatre élémens*. These compositions, which have only been published and recorded recently,

were preceded by an instrumental introduction, which, after several transformations, ultimately became the symphonic poem *Les Préludes.* Its title was inspired by that of a well-known long poem by Alphonse de Lamartine, which became the preface of the score.

A particularly interesting fact emerges from Jacqueline Bellas' study ("Franz Liszt en tournée dans le Sud-Ouest en 1844"): in Toulouse, Liszt gave a concert for workers (p. 179) who reciprocated by a choral serenade (p. 182).

The volume is dedicated to the memory of Pauline Pocknell, whose article, "Franz Liszt à Bourges", goes back further in time. The young Liszt, who had yet to meet Marie d'Agoult, gave concerts in Bourges as the guest of General Petit and his family. Pocknell tracked down the history of this family, and described Liszt's 1837 visit to Bourges.

Serge Gut, professor at the Sorbonne, discusses the programmes of the 1844–45 season, and Guy Gosselin, from the François Rabelais University, writes on the audiences and reviews in the year 1846, two essays especially written for this volume.

Along with the social background, practical matters such as transportation are discussed. Liszt covered an astounding number of miles in a relatively short time by coach, by boat and, where already available, by rail. The geographical dimensions are indicated by maps and schedules, as well as by illustrations of coaches, ships and trains.

The most valuable part of the volume are the thirteen essays, all meticulously researched and documented, by the above-mentioned authors, as well as by Geneviève Honegger, Corinne Schneider and Florence Doé de Maindreville. Honegger's study "Franz Liszt en Alsace" discusses the criticisms levelled at the King of the Piano in that region. After the concert in Metz on 24 June, 1845, *L'industriel alsacien* found that his playing lacked the charm of Sigismund Thalberg or Hervé Lacombe. "His playing falls short in that he fails to observe rhythm and metre in a regular manner that would allow the audience to follow him... Not to mention other flaws such as overly fast tempi, resulting in unequal trills and some uncertain notes..." Above all, Liszt's compositions lacked "consistency".

In Brittany they were often no more charitable, as Dufetel's chapter "Liszt à la conquète de l'Ouest" points out. According to *Le Breton,* Liszt "unpleasantly modified the nature of the piano's sound" and "sacrificed musical feeling in favour of a dazzling virtuosity" (p. 310). Most reviews, however, were glowing and celebrated Liszt as the high priest of the art, which is also how he saw himself. Dufetel quotes *Le précurseur de l'Ouest* after a performance in Angers in December 1845:

> O, power of Art! O, miracle of genius! This gloomy fortress, this prosaic abode, these walls exuding humidity and filth, M. Liszt's magical hands filled them with the sweetest melodies for two hours. No sooner did the great artist sit down before the piano, the hall was transformed... The enthusiastic outbursts of the crowd, the frenetical applause erupting time and time again, made one forget how uncomfortable and run-down the venue was; the power of a single man achieved a true transfiguration: the god of music made his presence known and the stable turned into a temple!

The last fifty pages of the book are devoted to miscellaneous studies. The most interesting among these is Bruno Moysan's article on Liszt's transcriptions and paraphrases. It is strange, though, that he makes no reference to the literature. Claude Knepper's general survey offers little new information. Cécile Reynaud discusses the concept of "virtuosity" based on Liszt's writings. (Unfortunately, she fails to mention the important fact that Liszt

only sketched out many of these writings, which were mostly the work of his lady friends Marie d'Agoult and later Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein.) I missed the reference to the Paganini obituary, where Liszt (or his ghostwriter) clearly states: "For him, virtuosity was a means and not an end; and he always remembered that if it is true that *noblesse oblige,* than, to an even greater degree, it is true that *GÉNIE OBLIGE"* (*Sämtliche Schriften,* I:388). Nor does Reynaud mention the book *The Gypsies and their Music in Hungary,* where Liszt (or his ghostwriter) expands upon the derivation of the word "virtuoso" from the Latin *vir* and *virtus* in a long passage on the *virtuose créateur,* partly contradicting opinions he expressed elsewhere.[21]

Michelle Biget-Mainfort's study "Le virtuose en son atelier: du 'puff' à l'écriture" offers a number of arbitrary musical comparisons and does not reach the scholarly standard of the other articles. Florence Guétreau's otherwise interesting description of an unknown portrait of the young Liszt, reproduced in the book, does not really fit the concept of the book ("Un portrait oublié de Liszt par Calamatta").

As illustrations, the editors included caricatures from the 19th-century Hungarian satirical paper *Bolond Istók,* with captions in the original Hungarian and in translation. These illustrations, which depict the old Abbé Liszt in his cassock, have little to do with the book's subject matter and should not have been included. The colour plates, on the other hand, were extremely well chosen. The editors deserve praise for their selection of images, portraits and caricatures from the period, and in particular for the four beautiful Turner watercolours of places in the Loire valley visited by Liszt.

All in all, the literature on Liszt has been enriched by this fine, informative, reliable and user-friendly volume. Nicolas Dufetel, Malou Haine and the Symétrie publishing house deserve our thanks. It would be wonderful to have a similar volume about Liszt's concerts in Paris, as well as on his Russian tours.[22]

NOTES

1 ■ Zsuzsa Dömötör and Mária Kovács, *Liszt Ferenc magyarországi hangversenyei 1839–40-ben* [Franz Liszt's Concerts in Hungary, 1839–40]. *Liszt tanulmányok I.* Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Társaság, 1980.

2 ■ Dezső Legány, *Franz Liszt: Unbekannte Presse und Briefe aus Wien 1822–1886.* Budapest: Corvina, 1984; *Liszt and His Country 1869–1873.* Tr. Gyula Gulyás. Budapest: Corvina, 1983; *Liszt and His Country, 1874–1886.* Tr. Elizabeth Smith-Csicsery-Rónay. Budapest: Occidental Press, 1992; "Liszt in Hungary 1848–1867", *New Lights on Liszt and His Music. Festschrift Alan Walker,* ed. Michael Saffle and James Deaville. *Analecta Lisztiana II: Franz Liszt Studies Series No. 6.* Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1997, pp. 3–15.

3 ■ Alan Walker, *Franz Liszt. Vol. I: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847.* London: Faber&Faber, 1983.

4 ■ Serge Gut, *Franz Liszt.* Paris: Fallois/L'Age d'Homme, 1989.

5 ■ Robert Stevenson, "Liszt at Madrid and Lisbon 1844–45", *The Musical Quarterly* LXV/4 (Oct. 1979), pp. 493–512.

6 ■ Pierre-Antoine Huré and Claude Knepper, *Liszt en son temps. Documents choisis, présentés et annotés. Collection Pluriel,* dir. Georges Liébert. Paris: Hachette, 1987.

7 ■ Charles Suttoni, "Liszt à Milan", *Actes du colloque international Franz Liszt,* ed. Serge Gut. *Revue musicale, No. spécial 405–06–07.* Paris 1986, pp. 177–187; "Young Liszt, Beethoven and Madame Montgolfier", *Studia Musicologica* XXVIII (1986), pp. 21–34; "Liszt the Writer", *Liszt & the Arts: A Collection of Papers Presented at a Liszt Centennial Celebration Sponsored by the Heyman Center of Columbia University* n.d. [1996], pp. 64–74; "Liszt and Madame d'Agoult: A Reappraisal", *Liszt and His World. Proceedings of the International Liszt Conference Held at Virginia Polytechnic Institute 20–23 May 1993. Analecta Lisztiana I: Franz Liszt Studies Series, No. 5,* ed. Michael Saffle. Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1998; "Liszt's Writing and Correspondence", *The Liszt Companion,* ed. Ben Arnold. Westport, Conn.–London: Greenwood Press, 2002, pp. 29–40.

8 ■ *Franz Liszt Tagebuch 1827.* Ed. Detlef Altenburg and Rainer Kleinertz. Vienna: Paul Neff, 1986.
9 ■ *Liszt 2000: The Great Hungarian and European Master at the Threshold of the 21st Century.* Ed. Klára Hamburger. Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Társaság, 2000, pp. 52–77.
10 ■ Malou Haine, "Liszt à Dinant, le 21 octobre 1840—réalité ou fiction?", *Liszt 2000* (see n. 9), pp. 78–99; "La première tournée de concerts de Franz Liszt en Belgique en 1841", *Revue belge de musicologie,* LVI (2002), pp. 241–278; "Franz Liszt's concerts in Belgium in 1846", *Journal of the American Liszt Society [JALS]. Flores Musicales: A Festschrift in Honor of Fernando Laires upon his 80th Birthday.* Ed. David Butler Cannata. Vol. LIV/LV/LVI, 2003–2005, pp. 57–74.
11 ■ Gerhard J. Winkler, *Franz Liszt, ein Genie aus dem Pannonischen Raum. Kindheit und Jugend. Katalog der Landesausstellung aus dem Anlaß des Liszt-Jahres 1986.* Eisenstadt: Burgenländisches Landesmuseum, 1986; "Franz Liszt: Unbekannte Presse aus Wien, 1838–40: Eine Nachlese", *Forscher-Gestalter-Vermittler: Festschrift Gerald Schlag. Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten aus dem Burgenland,* vol. 105. Eisenstadt, 2001.
12 ■ William Wright, "More Light on Young Liszt—London 1824–25. "*Liszt 2000* (see n. 9), pp. 35–51; "Master Liszt in England," *JALS* (see n. 10), pp. 24–44.
13 ■ Christo Lelie and Peter Scholcz, "Liszt's Hollandse tournée en 1842", *Franz Liszt Kring,* 1991, pp. 16–21. English adaptation in Christo Lelie, "Liszt's Dutch Concerts in 1842: Contemporary Press Reports." *Liszt Saeculum 53,* ed. Lennart Rabes. Stockholm, 1994, pp. 27–30.
14 ■ Franz Liszt, *Sämtliche Schriften.* Ed. Detlef Altenburg. Bd. I: *Frühe Schriften,* ed. Rainer Kleinertz and Serge Gut. Wiesbaden–Leipzig–Paris: Breitkopf&Härtel, 2000.
15 ■ Michael Saffle, *Liszt in Germany 1840–45. A Study in Sources, Documents, and the History of Reception. Franz Liszt Studies,* Series 2. Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1994.
16 ■ Serge Gut and Jacqueline Bellas, *Correspondence Franz Liszt–Marie d'Agoult.* Paris: Fayard, 2001.
17 ■ Klára Hamburger, *Franz Liszt: Lettres à Cosima et à Daniela.* Mardaga: Sprimont, 1996; Franz Liszt, *Briefwechsel mit seiner Mutter.* Eisenstadt: Amt der Burgenländischen Landesregierung, 2000.
18 ■ Michael Short, *Liszt Letters in the Library of Congress. Franz Liszt Studies Series 10.* Hillsdale, New York: Pendragon Press, 2003.
19 ■ Luciano Chiappari, *Liszt a Firenze, Pisa e Lucca.* Pisa 1989; *La Cinquecentesca Villa abitata da Liszt a Monte S. Quirico di Lucca.* Pisa 1991; *Liszt a Como e Milano.* Pisa: Pacini, 1997; "Liszt a Venezia," *Liszt 2000* (see n. 9), pp. 100–107.
20 ■ *Quaderni dell'Istituto Liszt.* Milan: Ruggimenti.
21 ■ Franz Liszt, *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie.* Paris: Éditions d'aujourd'hui, 1859, p. 280–81.
22 ■ My critical comments concern only minor details. "Budapest" on p. 42 and p. 399 (a frequent error in foreign publications) should be Pest until the three cities Pest, Buda and Óbuda were merged in 1873.

- The name of the baritone mentioned on p. 106 is Ciabatta, not Ciabatto. He served as Liszt's secretary during his tour of Southern France, Spain and Portugal.
- Liszt sometimes referred to himself as "Frater", and on p. 132, this is explained as an ecclesiastical usage. Yet the word means something quite different: as we learn from his letters to his mother, she used to call him "ungeschickter Frater" ("awkward fellow"), employing a colloquial expression.
- With the help of the letters to Anna Liszt, we may supply the missing first name of Miss Molina, a Spanish pupil of Liszt's—Rosario.
- The "quasi una fantasia" by Beethoven mentioned on p. 248 is op. 27, not 23.
- On p. 312, I would exercise more caution in identifying the Liszt compositions on the programme, as Michael Saffle has also done when working on the German tours. The *Grande Marche hongroise* is an ambiguous designation. The arrangement of the *Rákóczi March* (R. 107, S. 241) is an improbable candidate; it is more likely that Liszt played the *Heroischer Marsch im ungarischen Styl* (R. 53, S. 231) or perhaps the *Seconde marche hongroise,* also known as *Ungarischer Sturmmarsch* (R. 54/a, S. 232). *Mélodies hongroises* (see also p. 345) most probably refers to *Mélodies hongroises d'après Schubert* (R. 250, S. 425).
- I suspect that the *Andante con variazioni* by Beethoven mentioned on p. 345 is the first movement of the Sonata in A-flat major, op. 26.

OBITUARY

Peter Sherwood

"Rage, rage against the dying of the light":

Lóránt Czigány, 1935–2008

Lóránt Czigány will be best remembered as a lifelong chronicler and champion of the distinctive but integral and essential contribution of the Hungarian diaspora's writers to the body of Hungarian literature as a whole. A pungently witty and often waspish critic, he used his London base to survey, in particular, what was impossible for his coevals in Hungary, the "nationalisation" of Hungary's literature under communism: *Nézz vissza haraggal!* (Look Back in Anger), an entirely characteristic title, came out as soon as the regime changed in Budapest, in 1990. Many more competent than I should and doubtless will pay due tribute to these of his achievements; what follows here is a brief, personal view of his other major role, as scholar-at-large of Hungarian literature in the English-speaking world.

It was the autumn of 1967 and I found myself with a score or more of mostly young folk crammed into George Cushing's tiny room in 22 Russell Square, an annexe of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, at that time still an institute of the federal University of London. Never before or since have so many people at any one time expressed an interest in some aspect of Hungarian studies at SSEES (I still have no idea why), and the very English, very private George Cushing was overwhelmed and reduced to making notes of the many and varied demands upon him in what I could just see out of the corner of my eye was, yes, clearly: Arabic script. It was here, amid the excited and exciting chatter, as a teaching timetable of sorts was eventually hammered out, that I first heard the name of Lóránt Czigány, as someone who had completed his doctorate at SSEES only a couple of years earlier. I couldn't believe my ears. There I was, knowing little of Hungarian literature and even less about translation, but already with dreams of translating Hungarian literature into English—and I learn that there is an entire dissertation on the reception of Hungarian literature in Victorian England! The very idea was stunning and I immediately ran over to the Senate House Library, where University of London PhDs

Peter Sherwood
is László Birinyi Sr. Distinguished Professor of Hungarian Language and Culture, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

are kept. It was true: hundreds of pages, including works by Petőfi, Eötvös, Jókai (more than 20 Jókai novels!) and many others, had all been translated into English, read by, and even critically commented on, by those indefatigably curious Victorians. Evidence of years, decades of literary contact between the English and Hungarian worlds, proof that my dream had a history, a tradition... Of course, by the time I read it again in book form, in Bálint Rozsnyai's excellent Hungarian translation as *A magyar irodalom fogadtatása a viktoriánius Angliában, 1830–1914* (Budapest, 1976), what struck me about Lóránt Czigány's monumental labour was that the only English writer of any distinction who had ever been really interested in Hungary was George Borrow—and he was interested only in its Gypsies. And as a young lecturer I could now see that it was one thing for the Victorians to have translated their contemporaries and quite another trying to do something similar in the 20th century. None the less, Lóránt Czigány's work was, in every respect, an important source of strength to me in what turned out to be a career in Hungarian studies in the English-speaking world, and looking at it again, decades later, yet another aspect of it comes to the fore: the amount of careful, old-fashioned, and, for that reason, enduring scholarship that it contains. To illustrate with a small but telling example: Lóránt Czigány had tracked down the enduring but symptomatically self-deluding piece of Hungarian literary folklore that "Petőfi was one of the five greatest poets in world" to its source in a book-review by Hermann Grimm, a nephew of the much better-known Jakob; and there the precise reference is still, in footnote 197 of the Hungarian edition, for anyone who remains (rightly) unconvinced by the distortions of the quotation churned up by Google: one of many miniature monuments to the philologist Lóránt Czigány.

In his long-gestating *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature* (1984, second edition 1986), too, while opinions might be divided on the work's language and conceptual framework, it is the overall meticulousness of the research, the thoroughness of its English and Hungarian bibliographies, and, indeed, the whole vast (and indexed!) scale of the erudite enterprise that make it still an indispensable reference in English for the period up to the late 1970s. Though even 25 or 30 years ago the days of the one-man encyclopædist were long gone, it can justly be said of this compilation, as Dr. Johnson said of his Dictionary, that "in this work, when it shall be found that much is omitted, let it not be forgotten that much likewise is performed". Not least, it was here that the writers of the Hungarian diaspora were first given their due alongside those who remained all their life in the Danube basin. And it is pleasing to be able to record that to my privately-communicated comments on the book the response of Lóránt Czigány—a monument to the unminced word—was not just courteous but so gracious that I pasted it into my own copy.

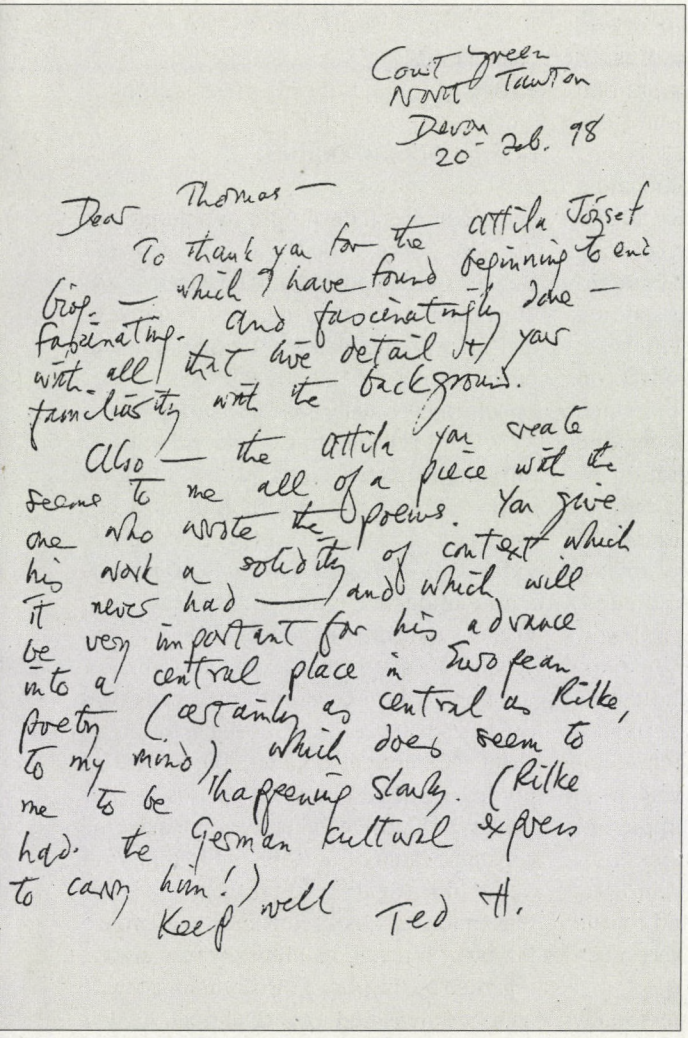
This is also the right place to recall some of his many tributes to those in the "West" who were his friends and shared his devotion to Hungarian culture, particularly his fellow-Londoners. For instance, his scrupulous catalogue of the Iványi-Grünwald collection of Hungarica (the first English publication, under his co-

editorship, of the Szepsi Csombor Literary Circle in London, 1967) includes a warm and detailed memoir and bibliography of the historian and book-collector Béla Iványi-Grünwald, Jr. himself. And he honoured his erstwhile and temperamentally very different supervisor, George Cushing, by collecting a number of his highly readable English-language articles on Hungarian literature and publishing them with (again) a memoir—first written for this journal—and a select bibliography (*The Passionate Outsider,* Budapest, 2000). His own death, following hard upon that of his intellectual sparring-partner and fellow émigré of the "1956 generation", the historian László Péter, leaves a gap that it will be hard to fill, not only in London but wherever Hungarian literature continues to be read and to matter. ❧

Ted Hughes and his Hungarian Connections: an Exchange

To the Editor:

To George Gömöri's review "Ted Hughes: Hungarian Connections" (*HQ* 191) I would like to add a few more facts. I met Hughes and corresponded with him and Weissbort in the Sixties in London relating to the "indefinitely postponed" Hungarian edition of *Modern Poetry in Translation*. They received the bulk of the Hungarian translations from Paul Tabori and me, who were, at the time, preparing a huge Hungarian poetry anthology in English translation. I do not know where the objections came from. Ted and I met again in Manchester at the launch of the Pilinszky translation volume and finally in London in the late Sixties. It was Ted who had advised me to use several translators for my then forthcoming Attila József poetry book and gave me a ms volume of the Myers translations. In 1996/1997 we exchanged letters in one of which he encouraged me to translate (retranslate) "The Seventh". His last letter came dated 20th February 1998 on receiving not the poetry book but my biography of Attila József, which he said will be very important for his advance into a central place in European poetry (certainly as central as Rilke to my mind) which does seem to me to be happening slowly. (Rilke had the German cultural express to carry him!)



Court Green
North Tawton
Devon
20 Feb. 98

Dear Thomas —

To thank you for the Attila József — which I have found beginning to end fascinating. And fascinatingly done — with all that live detail of your familiarity with the background.

Also — the Attila you create seems to me all of a piece with the one who wrote the poems. You give his work a solidity of context which it never had — and which will be very important for his advance into a central place in European poetry (certainly as central as Rilke, to my mind) which does seem to me to be happening slowly. (Rilke had the German cultural express to carry him!)

Keep well Ted H.

Letter by Ted Hughes to Lorand Kabdebo, 20 February, 1998.

Lorand Kabdebo
Dublin

To the Editor:

There are several inaccuracies in George Gömöri's article "Ted Hughes: Hungarian Connections" (*HQ* 191) regarding János Csokits.

Gömöri writes: "...the Hungarian poet János Pilinszky first visited London [1967] and the idea of the 'Pilinszky project' [with Ted Hughes] was born". Correction: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath met Csokits in 1960. In a letter from 1964 Hughes asked Csokits for translations of contemporary Hungarian poetry for a planned issue of *Modern Poetry in Translation*. Hughes also asked Csokits to be the editor of this issue. Csokits started this "project" by translating and sending Hughes two poems by János Pilinszky. Around this time, Csokits met Pilinszky in Paris and told him about the planned anthology. Csokits then urged Olwyn and Ted Hughes to arrange an invitation by Poetry International for Pilinszky to come to London. (Hughes was one of the directors of Poetry International.) Pilinszky was invited and Hughes and Pilinszky met for the first time in London in 1967. Thus the "Pilinszky project" was "born" much earlier, in 1964, through Csokits' collaboration with Hughes. Thus the statement by Gömöri that "Hughes had heard about Pilinszky long before co-operating with Csokits" is also incorrect.

Gömöri also writes: "[Csokits] did not entirely fulfil Hughes's expectations" as a translator. In his letter to me (L.K.) in 1975, Hughes wrote: "[Csokits] insisted on the closest verbal accuracy. This was very much to my own taste" (*HQ*, Autumn 2003).

I have known János Csokits personally and corresponded with him for several years. As a physician I can assure the readers of Gömöri's article that Csokits definitely had no "mania of persecution", advanced or otherwise. To say so is mean-spirited. I can only wonder at this effort to minimise the relationship of Csokits with Hughes and Pilinszky and Csokits's participation in an important breakthrough in bringing Hungarian poetry into the mainstream of English literature, with the collaboration of the greatest English poet of his time. The 49 letters written by Hughes to Csokits between 1960–1984 (Emory Manuscript Library) attest to their relationship.

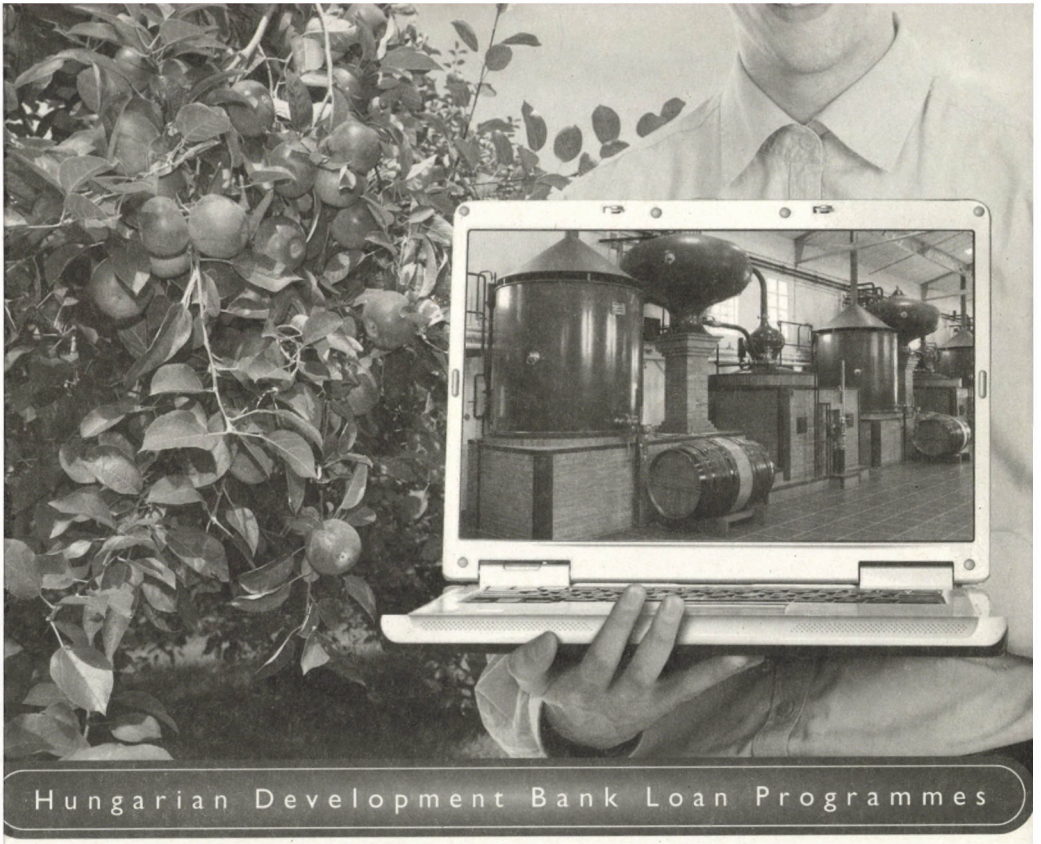
Lajos Koncz
Boston

George Gömöri replies:

Lajos Koncz is indeed right in pointing out that János Csokits began to work with Ted Hughes on two poems of Pilinszky in 1964, The project I was referring to as being born in 1967 was the idea for the planning and publication of the *Selected Poems* of Pilinszky, which eventually appeared in 1976.

When I referred to Csokits not entirely fulfilling Hughes's expectations, I did not mean his expectations of him as a co-translator, and indeed earlier in the review I praise his draft versions. I was referring to a note under the letter of 28th May 1974, made by the editor of *Letters of Ted Hughes*, in which he states, that Csokits was "unable to supply [the expected] answers to Ted Hughes's [12] questions" posed in the above letter. The note also states, though we do not know for certain whether it is Reid or Csokits's view, that Pilinszky was "under the constant watch of censors and informers at home in Hungary", and that this was the reason for Csokits's reluctance to approach Pilinszky himself. As Pilinszky was always regarded by the post-1956 Communist State as a harmless and apolitical poet, he was not watched by the security police, Csokits would have needed at least to have been somewhat paranoid, if not quite in the medical sense of being in an "advanced state of mania of persecution".

George Gömöri
London



There is someone in Hungary to help your plans come true

The mission of the state-owned MFB is to promote the development of enterprise operating in Hungary by means of long-term preferential loans. When you have a goo plan to establish or develop your business activities in Hungary MFB will offer the bes solution to you!

Make use of professional services rendered by the development bank of Hungar

For more information, please visit www.mfb.hu
Call Center: 06 40 555 555 From abroad: +36 1 453 5332

MFB

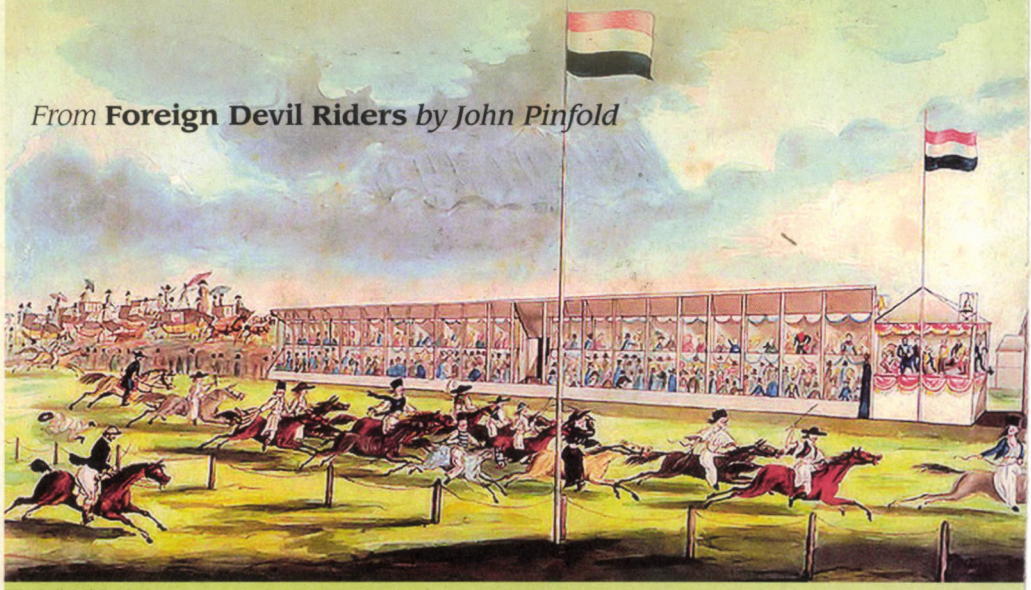
Hungarian Development Bank Plc.

The Development Bank of Hunga

It is also worth recounting what happened to the English trainers and jockeys during the War. In Germany they were rounded up and interned i 1914, and although some of them were later released, many remained interned for the duration in the camp at Ruhleben, itself a former racecou In Austria-Hungary, it was quite different.

The Hungarian Jockey Club held a gala dinner to which every English trainer and jockey, along with their families, were invited. To add to the fu the leading English trainers all dressed up as jockeys and took part in a charity race. Had this been known in England there would have been scandal, for at the same time as the Hungarian Jockey Club was holding g dinners for the English racing community in Hungary, the English Jockey Club in Newmarket was busy stripping its Austrian and Hungarian memb of their membership of the Club – and these were men such as Count Batthyány and Prince Festetics, who were well-known Anglophiles.

From **Foreign Devil Riders** *by John Pinfold*



HU ISSN 1217-2545